

CHAPTER 3: DOMINANT WESTERN DISCOURSES ON AFRICA

3.1 WESTERN DISCOURSES ON THE AFRICAN SITUATION

Western discourses identify Africa's problems, diagnose the nature of these problems and suggest solutions to these problems. The approach adopted is analogous to a doctor visiting an ailing patient and from a position of authority and superior knowledge, diagnosing an illness and recommending a remedy for the illness. The previous Chapter argued that Western discourses ought to be challenged by the African Renaissance. In order to be able to assess the extent to which the African Renaissance challenges Western discourses, it is necessary to briefly examine various selected Western discourses on Africa. This needs to be done in order to illustrate why these discourses need to be challenged and to provide an overview of the type of discourses that need challenging. This Chapter provides the necessary overview of Western discourses. While it is impossible to comprehensively examine all (or even a significant number of) Western discourses on Africa, an attempt will be made to briefly sketch a few of these discourses and to closely examine them to determine why it is that these discourses in particular, and Western discourses on Africa in general, should be challenged by the African Renaissance. Firstly, the dominant Western discourses regarding the African situation are sketched - the diagnosis of Africa's 'illness'. Subsequent to this, the implications of these discourses are analysed from the perspective of postmodernist critical theory. Secondly, this discussion of the Western diagnosis of Africa's 'illness' leads to the description and analysis of Western discourses regarding the West's proposed remedy for Africa's 'illness'.

3.1.1 Ailing Africa

There is consensus in the West that something is wrong with Africa. While there may be disagreement regarding the exact nature of Africa's 'illness' or the way to remedy this 'illness', Western writers such as those discussed below have no doubt that the current situation in Africa is not a model of healthy political, economic or social conditions.

Many Western writers clearly draw a parallel between illness and the African situation. An overview of a variety of articles written in dominant Western publications illustrates this. For example, Salopek (2000) describes Africa as the 'ailing continent' and speaks of the 'sickening of Africa'. Baker (2000:9) declares that many young democracies in Africa

'show signs of ill health' with some 'hav[ing] been wounded, perhaps fatally ...'. Simon (1995:319) speaks about 'diagnosis and prescriptions for Africa's ills', and Minney (1996) refers to Africa as a 'patient' whose 'economic health' is 'grim'. Sada (2000) speaks of '*cette Afrique qui meurt*' - this dying Africa, and Anderson (1997) describes Africa as a continent which seems 'to be dying from a combination of disease, ethnic hatred and corruption'. Africa is described by Westerners as suffering from 'economic malaise' (May 2000:178) and corruption in Africa is said to be 'like an advanced form of cancer, [which] has taken over the whole body' (The Economist 2000a:25). Africa is described as suffering from a 'continent-wide plague of economic crisis, political decay and incipient "anarchy"' (Green 1998:185). This type of description clearly shows the African situation to be one of serious ill-health.

The frequent use of the term 'basket case' in recent analyses of Africa adds to the impression of Africa being sick. The term basket case is a slang term that originally was used to describe someone who had lost all four limbs (Oxford English Dictionary 1989:987). The term developed the connotation of one unable to function as a result of stress or anxiety (Random House 1983:174) or one who was in a state of emotional or mental ill-health (Oxford English Dictionary 1989:987). Clearly the use of the term by Western writers commenting on Africa creates the impression of a continent which is incapacitated in every way. Examples of Western writers using the term 'basket case' to describe Africa include Morrow (1992:26) who speaks of Africa as having become 'the basket case of the planet' and says that Africa is 'hurting' and that mystical powers will be needed if Africa is to recover; Russel (1996) who speaks of Africa as 'a basket case of civil wars and suffering' and DeYoung (1999) who warns that Africa's basket cases must not 'be allowed to fester'. These and other writers clearly view Africa as being in a serious condition, in need of much assistance in order to recover from its serious physical and psychological malady.

Another word frequently used when describing Africa is 'nightmare'. Michaels (1993:93) says that a 'nightmare scenario may be building' in Africa and Westlake (1989:10) argues that Africa has to try to avert the 'nightmare scenario'. Robert (1999a) speaks about an '*Afrique-cauchemar*' - a nightmare Africa. These allusions to Africa as a nightmare call to mind the now discredited idea of the 'Dark Continent' or the 'Heart of Darkness' - a place of darkness and horror.

There are a number of related Western discourses of Africa which also imply that Africa is stricken with some terrible disorder and needs to be doctored to good health. Such discourses describe Africa as being 'Job's continent' (Michaels 1993:94), a 'voracious sinkhole' (Callaghy 1994:209), the 'festering ghetto' of the global village (Shillinger 2000), and as the *'laissée-pour-compte de la globalisation'* - the misfit or reject of globalisation (Robert 1999b). Africa is seen as 'a sort of neo-post-colonial breakdown' (Morrow 1992:26). It is a *'continent ravagé'* - a ravaged continent (Marin & Rekacevicz 2000), and a 'shattered continent' (Apter & Rosberg 1994:43) with 'battered states' (Clapham 1993:434). Western discourses further describe Africa as an 'unhappy continent' (Hoar 1992:48), the most miserable continent (Morrow 1992:25), a continent which is 'losing the battle' (The Economist 2000a:23), and a continent descending into 'hell and squalor' (Fatton 1990:455) or sinking into an 'abyss' (Dynes 2000). These descriptions add to the impression that Africa is stricken with some terrible debility.

3.1.2 The Continent of Chaos

Western writers paint a picture of chaos, turmoil and anarchy when describing Africa. Rather than describing the changes taking place in Africa as dynamic or exciting, change in Africa is seen as chaotic, uncontrolled and terrifying. Consider Morrow (1992:25) who declares that Africa 'has begun to look like an immense illustration of chaos theory'. Descriptions of Africa as being chaotic or in turmoil crop up all over Western sources commenting on Africa. The IISS (1999:244) declares Africa to be 'in turmoil' and Santoro (1999) speaks about 'churning Africa'. Deedes (1999) speaks about Africa 'slip[ping] into anarchy' and the *Electronic Telegraph* (1997) observes that recent news out of Africa paints 'a familiar picture of a continent in chaos'. Kent (1999:8) speaks about the 'disaster theme park image' of Africa and the 'perpetual turmoil and uncertainties that are Africa'. Van de Walle (1995:128) notes that recent commentaries on Africa are profoundly pessimistic and describes thinkers such as Thomas Callaghy as suggesting that Africa will be haunted indefinitely by anarchy and that many African states will ultimately succumb to chaos.

3.1.3 The Continent where Hope is Shattered by Despair

According to the West, in Africa for every glimmer of hope, there is an ocean of despair. Western discourses generally (although there are exceptions) stop short of labelling the

continent as completely hopeless, but imply that what little hope there is, is likely to be overwhelmed with despair.

Some Western writers see no hope for Africa. *The Economist* (2000b:17) recently ran the headline 'Hopeless Africa'. The article focuses on Sierra Leone, describing it as manifesting all of Africa's worst characteristics and declares that 'the world might just give up on the entire continent'. Dowden (1993:611) speaks of how Western writers such as Patrick Marnham have described Africa as 'a hopeless and inexplicable disaster area without a glimmer of hope'. Dynes (2000) also provides a bleak picture of Africa's future declaring that 'the entire continent is drifting into perdition — if it isn't already irredeemable.'

Many Western writers speak about the battle between hope and despair on the continent. It is suggested that hopeful signs in Africa have to fight their way through the overwhelming despair experienced on the continent. Generally, the conclusion is that currently despair is winning the battle. For example, an article by David Fox (2000) is headed '*Conflict, despair linger in Africa*' and reports that 'the continent remains a brutal, dangerous place that is frequently the scene of conflict and despair and rarely one of peace or hope.' Similarly, an article by Gilbert Lewthwaite (2000) in *The Sun (Baltimore)* is headed '*In Africa, perils threaten gains; Challenges: Natural disasters, AIDS and political problems deepen the continent's long struggle between hope and despair.*'

Most Western writers stop short of condemning Africa to a future of complete despair. Western analyses of Africa spend much time on Africa's problems, but several do suggest that there is some hope for Africa. For example Wright (1996) comments that '[s]ome people even think that Africa - at least parts of it - may be getting its act together and starting to pull itself off the mat'. He tempers this statement with a warning, noting that '[w]ith Africa, however, little is certain.' Morrow (1992:25) argues that while Africa has become a 'battleground for contending dooms', there is 'some hope forming on the margins'. Pythian (1998) analyses the African situation on the verge of the new millennium and comments that 'despite the setbacks, 1998 brought hope as well as horror' to the African continent. In a similar vein, Oliver and Atmore (1994:289) comment that at the beginning of the 90s the situation in Africa 'though still full of difficulties and dangers, did not quite respond with the pictures of unalloyed disaster fed by the aid charities to the media of the developed countries'. The *Chicago Tribune's* foreign correspondent, Hugh

Dellios (1998) heads his analysis of Africa at the time of former US President Bill Clinton's visit to Africa with '*In Africa, seeds of hope take root*'. Evidently, Western writers feel that the African situation is not without hope, but that the overall picture is still one of gloom - '[t]here are some bright spots, no doubt ... but in general the picture today is a gloomy one' (Hodder 1992:347).

3.1.4 Africa's 'Problems'

As demonstrated above, Western writers agree that there is something seriously wrong with Africa. In terms of exactly what Africa's 'problems' are, there is less consensus. However, there are recurring themes in Western discourses discussing the African situation. These themes draw up a list of the nature of Africa's 'illness' as diagnosed by the West.

Firstly, it should be noted that many Western writers regard Africa's problems as being inherent rather than a result of external pressures or situations. Western writers tend to acknowledge external factors influencing Africa's situation, but lay most of the 'blame' for Africa's situation on Africa or Africans. Consider *The Economist* (2000a:23) which asks 'Does Africa have some inherent flaw that keeps it backward and incapable of development? Some think so.' The article continues on this theme commenting that 'Africa was weak before the Europeans touched its coasts' and that African societies 'are distrustful and bad at organisation'. Another *The Economist* (2000b:17) article also implies that Africa has an inherent flaw by saying 'brutality, despotism and corruption exist everywhere - but African societies, for reasons buried in their cultures seem especially susceptible to them'. In a similar line of thinking, Hodder (1992:351) notes that 'there is much in the nature of African ethnicity and social structure which, according to some writers, makes any adaptation to modern economic activity particularly difficult'. Simpson (2000) comments:

[W]e [Westerners] are often tempted to assume that all these things are in some way linked: that Africa is inherently incapable of running its own affairs in peace and prosperity, that it is a continent-wide basket case; and that the only answer to its problems is for us to dig deeper into our pockets and bail it out yet again.

This idea that Africa is somehow inherently weaker or inferior is usually implied rather than said outright, possibly because this once popular idea has been discredited by other writers. Recent pessimism regarding South Africa's prospects for 'success' (as defined by the West) can be considered as an example of this inference that Africa is inherently inferior to the West. Post-apartheid South Africa is now considered by the West to be a truly African state as it is now ruled by black African rulers. This has led several Western writers to begin questioning whether or not South Africa will become 'just like the rest of Africa'. It is very difficult to avoid the implication that now that South Africa is ruled by black Africans, it must follow the same route (one seen as undesirable) as other African states because all African states are inherently the same. An example of this type of thinking is Thompson (1999:94) who describes South Africa's future as uncertain and warns that 'the country may be following the downward trajectory of tropical Africa'. *The Economist* (1996:21) has a very similar comment to make with regard to South Africa. In an article headed *South Africa: how wrong is it going?*, the writer describes some of the problems in South Africa and asks if these problems represent a 'blip' or if they 'represent the first skid down the slippery African slope, one which has oiled the failure of so many other countries ...'. Kenny (1999) speaks about South Africa 'going down the drain like the rest of Africa'. Such ideas imply that there is something inherently wrong with Africa and that all African states appear to have the same awful and unavoidable destiny.

It is important that this implication that Africa is inherently inferior is kept in mind when examining Western discourses on Africa's problems. Western discourses identify several problems in Africa. Three of these problems will be focused upon here: poverty, war and poor leadership. According to the West, poverty is one of the most serious problems in Africa. Africa is portrayed as suffering from abject and debilitating poverty. Wiseman (1990:13) comments that '[m]ost of the world's poor states are African and the bulk of its people are among the most poverty stricken. Standards of living ... are extremely low.' Pfaff (1995:2) speaks of the 'destitution of Africa' and Wright (1996) describes Africa as '[m]ired in poverty'. Almost every article examining the African situation mentions poverty as one of Africa's most serious problems.

A second problem in Africa as identified by the West is war. Western discourses suggest that in contrast to the peaceful West, Africa is ravaged by war. *The Economist* (1998:51-52) comments that Africa is a 'fiery continent' and that '[w]ar now consumes Africa from the Horn to Namibia'. In describing Africa, Carter (2000) says that '[t]here are wars and

rumors of wars in at least 20 countries. And much of the population - as many as 3.5 million people - are refugees fleeing famine, disease or armed conflict'. Fletcher and Mufson (2000) point out that Africa is 'is home to half of the world's civil wars' and Jensen (1999) says that '[m]ore than a third of the continent is in constant conflict'.

Africa's leaders are a third 'problem' frequently found in Western discourses of Africa. It is felt that African leaders are 'big men' presiding over 'little people' and exploiting these 'little people' as well as well-meaning Western donors in order to enrich themselves. There is an idea that all African leaders are similar and that leaders in Africa too easily become 'African leaders' even when they show promise of being different. Rotberg (2000:47) says that '[v]enial leaders are the curse of Africa' and Johnson (2001) says that 'the failure of political leadership is, in Africa, a phenomenon of continental proportions' and that African leaders are 'Lords of misrule who condemn Africa to war, famine and tyranny'. Buckley (1998) describes Africa's leaders saying that earlier African leaders such as Nkrumah and Nyerere were 'Cold War pawns who masterfully manipulated their suitors' and says that new African leaders are not much different - they 'have close relations with their major donors, drawing hundreds of millions of dollars in aid annually. They say they despise corruption. They woo the Western media, using grace and charm to spin reporters relentlessly'.

Western discourses suggest that leadership in Africa is different from the leadership in the West. African leaders are selfish and tyrannical unlike Western leaders who are presumably wise and benevolent.

A further theme with regard to Western discourses on the African situation is that of the intersection of problems on the African continent. Africa's problem is not so much that there is war or poverty or bad leadership, but that all of these and other negative situations co-exist in Africa. Their joint impact is what is most worrying. Many Western discourses give depressing lists of these intersecting problems. For example, the IISS (2000:242) speaks of Africa's 'unending litany of political upheaval, ethnic resentment, social breakdown, economic deprivation and warfare' and Clark (1993:529) tells of Africa's 'unspeakable poverty, ethnic strife, corrupt political classes, deeply-rooted authoritarian habits, and so on'. Gordon (1996:84) says that in Africa '[i]lliteracy and disease abound, unemployment and poverty continue unabated, and inequalities between classes are worse than at independence'. Salopek (2000) lists '[c]hronic wars, unrelieved poverty,

rapid urbanization and corruption' as some of Africa's problems and Sada (2000) tells of *'L'Afrique des guerres et des massacres, des dictateurs et de la corruption, de la famine et du sous-développement'* (the Africa of wars and massacres, of dictators and corruption, of famine and under-development). By listing all of these afflictions, the picture painted of Africa is certainly a dismal one.

3.1.5 The West Reluctantly to the Rescue

According to Western discourses, healing for Africa will only come about if Africa takes the medicine prescribed by the West. As demonstrated above, Western discourses clearly diagnose Africa as being 'ill'. In addition to this, Western discourses suggest that Africa needs help and that the only way that Africa will be able to be 'healed' is through help from the West.

Discourses discussing Africa's need for help are numerous and various. Consider Westlake (1989:10) who insists: 'Help will be needed [in Africa] from the international community on a large scale' and Jaycox (1992:94) who says that Africa 'needs increased support from the international community'. Spence (1997:7) says that Western governments 'have a role to play in helping Africa' and Wright (1996) states that 'with some help, Africa looks to a better future' and discusses the role of international institutions in efforts to 'aid Africa on the long journey to peace and prosperity'. Rotberg (2000:61) says that it is 'now more necessary than ever to help elected African leaders'. Spence (1997:7-11) lists various ways in which the West can help Africa: the West can help build institutional capacity, train technocrats and peacekeepers, and provide logistic support and appropriate weapons systems. Morrow (1992:28) asks: 'What are we to do with black Africa ... Should the industrialized, moneyed nations allow Africa to drift further and further into the margins, into poverty, starvation, disease, war...?' The implication is that Africa will indeed drift further into poverty, starvation and all sorts of other atrocities, if the West does not step in and help. Africa is seen as lacking the expertise to doctor itself back to health and Western help is seen as essential if Africa is to be healed.

Many journalistic discourses on Africa include reports of leaders of Western countries expressing views along the line that Africa needs the West's help. The arrogance reflected in many of the statements of Western leaders is astounding. Former US President Bill Clinton is reported by Russel (1998) as having said: 'It is time for Americans

to put a new Africa on our map'. Clinton adds: 'By coming and going, a bird builds a nest. We will come and go and do all we can to help you build a new Africa'. It would seem that the project of transforming Africa is a benevolent American hobby. Jensen (1999) reports Clinton as also having promised to forge 'a new partnership with Africa, one that will establish lifelines of commerce and investment to reduce poverty, raise living standards and equip Africans with 21st-century skills'. French prime minister, Jospin, is apparently also interested in this project - he pledged that France 'would remain the "advocate for Africa" on the world stage' (Maligorne 1997).

The extracts above overtly illustrate the idea that a solution to Africa's problems can only come about with Western help. This idea is subtly supported by other discourses that indicate that Africa is 'worse off' than it was at independence - implying that Africa would be a better place if ruled by outsiders. Examples of this kind of discourse include Jensen (1999) who says that 'Africa is the only continent that will enter the new millennium worse off than it was in colonial times' and that 'black Africa is worse off today than it was under European colonial rule'. What exactly he means by 'worse off' he does not say. Kenny (1999) implies the same idea of Africa being 'worse off' than before independence when he informs his readers that 'African countries go through three phases after white rule: euphoria, silence, destitution'. Hoar (1992:41) says that after three decades of independence, 'Africa is worse off economically than ever' and Dynes (2000) says that if Africa continues its 'downward spiral' it will soon be poorer than it was 'in David Livingstone's time'. Simpson (2000) says that Africa 'is living up to the worst expectations Europeans habitually have of it' and that this negative picture has been building up throughout the post-colonial era. Simpson (2000) blames Africa's problems on either 'bad and irresponsible government' or 'ethnic ferocities that were only silenced, not ended, by a few decades of occasionally perfunctory colonial rule' - he seems to see colonialism as having temporarily subdued African savagery only to have it gradually return after colonialism! Such statements dismiss the suffering of African people under colonialism and suggest that Africa would be better off if it were still colonised and thus that the best solution to Africa's problems can come from outside.

Some such discourses go so far as to suggest that Africa should be recolonised. In an article entitled "A New Colonialism: Europe must go back into Africa", Pfaff (1995:2) insists that what Africa needs is what he calls a 'disinterested neo-colonialism'. He describes Africa's current situation as one of 'destitution' and blames this on the colonisers

having not 'stay[ed] in Africa long enough' resulting in the failure of their project which involved attempts at the 'salvation' of Africans so that 'they could be remade culturally as European'. Pfaff theorises that the European colonisers destroyed African institutions and systems, but did not stay long enough to put anything in their place. He suggests that Africa should be recolonised in order to finish this project off. Michaels (1993:104) provides a less extreme version of this argument saying that some policymakers have out of frustration suggested that the best solution would be 'to fence off Africa, regionalize its various economies, and oversee its government structures for the next fifty years'. He records an American diplomat as having said 'In five years time, Africans will be begging to be recolonised'. This comment is ironic when read today given that it was made almost a decade ago.

Western discourses openly advocating recolonisation are not common, but many Western discourses suggest that the West should place pressure on Africa to make certain changes and to move in a particular direction. Thus the West should exert influence in Africa in order to strongly encourage (some might say coerce) Africans to move in a specified direction. Recently, many Western donors have decided to tie aid to certain political and economic conditions. Wiseman (1993:441) says that major Western donors have now decided that future aid 'will be tied to issues of human rights, civil rights, "good governance", political pluralism, and democracy'. Dowden (1993:610) notes that new United States foreign aid guidelines suggest that foreign aid will be given in accordance with political and economic reform and Riley (1992:542) also informs his readers that since the early 1990s political reform has been a necessary condition for assistance to Africa. The idea of tying aid to economic and political conditions has been supported by many academics and journalists. Rotberg (2000:61) says that good leadership in Africa 'should be rewarded'. Simpson (2000) reports that the West should put pressure on African autocrats 'to make them fall into line with the dictates of good government' and Diamond (1999:277) advises that aid should be conditioned on 'economic liberalization, political freedom and accountability, and redirection of budgetary priorities'. Mair (1996:185) says that the international community 'continues to play an important role in Africa's search for its own identity' and says that the international community should discourage non-democratic regimes through the 'discontinuation of development aid, diplomatic isolation, economic sanctions, and the freezing of foreign assets'. The idea appears to be that Africa should be helped to find its own identity by being coerced into a particular direction by Western donors. All these statements imply the same thing: the

West should help Africa in a particular direction – towards becoming more like the West. Aid should be given only if the current political and economic policies and trends meet with the West's approval.

At the same time, it is widely recognised that aid to Africa is decreasing. Van de Walle (1996:232) notes this decrease and blames the decline in aid to Africa on the end of the Cold War and economic recession. DeYoung (1999) reports:

While America has enjoyed one of its most prosperous decades ever in the 1990s, it also has set a record for stinginess. For as long as people have kept track, never has the United States given a smaller share of its money to the world's poorest.

Shearer (1999:98) speaks of 'the West's growing indifference to Africa' and Wright (1996) speaks about African countries as having 'dropped off the map' and as Africa being the 'forgotten continent' because the international community no longer has any interest in it. Wiseman (1993:441) quotes Samuel Decalo as having commented 'African states were transformed from Cold War pawns into irrelevant international clutter'. This decline in Western interest in Africa is not only reflected by a decline in aid, but also a decline in military intervention in Africa.

Thus while Western discourses insist that Africa needs the West's help, they also acknowledge that the West is increasingly reluctant to be involved in Africa. Putting together the various Western discourses on Africa described above, a disturbing picture is created: one of a seriously ill, chaotic, despairing and desperate continent which cannot be saved without the help of a set of countries who give hardly any of this much needed help and who attach many conditions to the little assistance they give. This is the African situation according to Western discourses. The following quote from an article by Randolph Kent (1999:8) in *The World Today* sums up this picture:

... the policy assumptions that underlie the prescriptions of many major governments spell one grim message: international disengagement. There is growing concern that ... non-African governments and international organisations-[may] abandon any commitment to the seemingly perpetual turmoil and uncertainties that are Africa. To that extent, some suggest, African will be abandoned to its forlorn fate, and with the decline of international interest, millions will have only emergency assistance to define their futures.

Clearly, Western writers see no hope for the ailing continent of Africa if the West 'abandons' Africa, and this abandonment is seen as a likely scenario.

3.1.6 An Analysis of Western Discourses on the African Situation

The Western discourses on the African situation have been summarised above. When they are examined from the perspective of postmodernist critical theory, some interesting observations can be made.

3.1.6.1 Examining words and phrases from the perspective of postmodernist critical theory

According to postmodernist critical theory as previously discussed discourses are not neutral reflections of an objective reality. Rather discourses form part of reality and even function to construct a reality to a certain extent. Words are not impartial labels attached to real objects, but rather words form part of a system of value and meaning and help to constitute reality. Given this approach, of what system of value and meaning do the words and discourses used by Western writers form part? When examining Western discourses regarding the African situation certain words and phrases cropped up time and again. One discourse that appeared in several articles and books by Western writers is the idea of illness and how Africa as a continent is ill. Illness is always seen as being contrasted with wellness and thus the description of Africa as being ill, carries with it an implied description of the West as well and healthy. In discourses of illness and health, health is seen as the usual and desired state and illness as an undesirable state that must as quickly as possible be replaced by health. Thus Western discourses labelling Africa as sick, suggest that Africa must become more like the West in order to be considered well, in order to be considered normal and healthy. In aspiring to be healthy, Africa must aspire to be Westernised as the West is healthy and Africa not. The labelling of Africa as sick forms part of a value system which sees the characteristics of the West as being the characteristics of health. Descriptions of Africa as sick are not neutral reflections of an African reality, but rather reflect a system of value that views the Western lifestyle and situation as ideal.

The word chaotic and words associated with the idea of chaos, such as turmoil, upheaval, and anarchy are also frequently used in Western descriptions of Africa. Chaotic means

confused, disordered, out of control. When looking at the West it is clear that the values of order, control, and predictability are seen as being of the utmost importance. From a Western perspective, Africa does not conform to this value as it lacks control and predictability. Thus the description of Africa as chaotic must be seen in the context of a Western value system which places much importance upon order, control and predictability.

The labelling of Africa as hopeless and despairing is indicative of Western pessimism regarding the African situation. From a Western perspective the African situation is one of misery and Africa's future is bleak. As previously discussed, discourses function in part to construct a reality. By declaring Africa hopeless, the West excuses itself from any blame for the African situation and implies cynicism for any African attempt to change the African situation. If Africa is understood to be hopeless then African attempts to end Africa's domination will be viewed by the West as futile, allowing the West to dismiss these attempts and thereby obstruct the realisation of change in Africa.

When Western writers discuss Africa's problems, they describe Africa as being a victim of poverty, war, and poor leadership. On the surface, these claims appear to be accurate descriptions of an undeniable reality, but on closer inspection several Western assumptions can be shown to be active in applying these labels to Africa. The empirical bias in Western thought allows for these concepts to seem unable to be challenged - who can deny that Africa is a victim of poverty, war, ethnic conflict and poor leadership? Yet, there are some problems with the automatic acceptance of the applicability of these concepts to the African situation.

Africa is poor. This statement appears to be indisputable. And yet what is poverty? Poverty, of course, is poverty as defined by the West. According to a Western dictionary, poverty is a lack or deficiency of something (Kirkpatrick 1981:125). Poverty is considered by the West to be a case of economic deficiency - for the West the word poverty is rarely used to describe a deficiency in the social or spiritual realm. Western writers tend to define poverty using empirical measures. Poverty is having to live on less than a certain number of dollars a day, it is not having running water and electricity, it is living in houses considered inferior by Western standards. Escobar (1995:21-54) speaks about what he calls the 'problematization of poverty'. He analyses the origin of the conception of poverty as a measurable entity, tracing it back to the 1940s and sees the conceptualisation of

poverty as taking place within a particular context of capitalism and consumerism. Escobar (1995:24) notes that in 1948 the World Bank defined as poor all countries with an annual *per capita* income that fell below US\$100. More recently the World Bank (in Hanmer et al. 1999:797) has defined poor people as being those whose 'standard of living falls below the poverty line, that is the amount of income (or consumption) associated with a minimum acceptable level of nutrition and other necessities of everyday life'.

What an 'acceptable level of nutrition' and a 'necessity' are, is also defined by the West. Various empirical measures of poverty have been constructed. These range from very simplistic measures which look at *per capita* income, to more complicated indicators which take into account basic needs, political rights, assets and calorie consumption (Hanmer et al. 1999:798-801). A Human Poverty Index (HPI) has been developed in order to 'measure' poverty and rank countries in accordance with their scores on the index (UNDP 1998:25-26). While it cannot be disputed that there are people in Africa who are starving and who live in conditions they themselves describe as unacceptable, the idea that poverty in Africa is nothing more than the lack of something the West sees as vital, must be challenged. When the West labels Africa as poor, it is describing certain empirical, material conditions, but it does not take into account other understandings of poverty. In addition, the emphasis placed on deficiency in terms of material things as being a serious problem in Africa, reflects Western materialistic bias. A lack of material wealth is automatically assumed to be a serious problem, whereas deficiency or abundance in terms of the social, spiritual, cultural or emotional do not even enter the discussion (possibly because it may then be the West which would be described as poor).

In terms of war, there are some similar problems. When Africa is described as war-torn there is an implicit comparison with the peaceful West. War is generally understood to mean some kind of militant armed conflict. Such conflict is viewed as undesirable and the West is held up as a group of peaceful countries, in contrast to war-torn Africa. There is much pride in what has been labelled the democratic peace - the idea that democratic countries do not go to war with each other, making them more peaceful than the rest of the world (Lynn-Jones 1996:ix). But the Western understanding of peace and war has empirical biases. Is peace nothing more than the absence of armed conflict? The Cold War has shown that war can be fought without the exchange of any gunfire and that the silence of weapons does not in itself mean peace. Armed conflict can be measured and empirically observed, while silent hostilities and oppression through subtle exclusion

cannot. If the hostilities of the Cold War are included in the definition of war, then the West has been at war for much of the last century, and has little to teach Africa about peace.

Western discourses on Africa's other problem, that of poor leadership, also include Western assumptions. What makes a good leader? What is poor leadership? The history of relations between Western and African leaders illustrates the arbitrary nature of this labelling of some leaders as good and others as bad. Leaders described by current discourses as being despotic and tyrannical, were praised and protected by the West during the Cold War. Mobutu Sese Seko of the former Zaire serves as an excellent example here. Very few recent and contemporary African leaders are portrayed in Western discourses as being good leaders - former South African president Nelson Mandela being a notable exception. It seems that it is impossible for African rulers to maintain the respect and approval of Westerners, and that those who lose Western approval face dire consequences.

3.1.6.2 How do these discourses reflect and perpetuate power relations?

According to postmodernist critical theory, discourses both reflect and perpetuate existing power relations. An examination of the discourses on the African situation described above illustrates this. Broadly, the discourses on the African situation present the reader with a continent with several serious problems and suggest a saviour for this continent - the West, and a route to salvation - Western prescriptions. Clearly, this idea reflects current power relations. The West is powerful, and Africa is weak. Western discourses describe the West as occupying an advantageous position in comparison to the ailing, disadvantaged and despairing Africa.

Not only do Western discourses reflect current power relations between the West and Africa, but they also serve to perpetuate them. By indicating that Africa's only hope for an acceptable future, will be through Western aid and through following Western prescriptions, these discourses clearly present a future where Africa (depicted as lowly and humble) learns from the West (depicted as almighty and knowledgeable). Such discourses obviously perpetuate the current power relations between Africa and the West.

3.1.6.3 Helping as an elegant exercise of power

Western discourses on the African situation sketch a picture of an ailing Africa in need of doctoring by the West. Western discourses suggest that Africa cannot be healed without Western help, although it is also acknowledged that aid from the West to Africa is currently declining. This illustration of Africa being in dire need of Western help appears at first glance to have to do with charity rather than power relations. But a closer examination reveals that charity is not always altruistic and that helping can also be an exercise of power.

The motivation for 'helping' Africa does not originate solely in a humanitarian desire to reduce human misery, but is often rooted in a self-interested desire to prevent Africa's problems from having serious global implications. While many Western writers focus on Africa's need for help and the West's moral duty to provide this help, some discourses do acknowledge that 'helping' Africa may have more to do with protecting the West. For example, Hempstone (1998:89-90) says that aid is vital and supports this statement by saying that aid:

may not encourage development, [but it] enables us [Americans] to dispense food surpluses, salve our consciences, and provide some employment for Americans, while also saving lives. Development aid can help to create healthier societies abroad, contribute to the overseas sale of American products, and again create at least a few jobs at home.

Spence (1997:11) also highlights Western interests in aiding Africa, speaking of how Africa is a potential emerging market and has valuable fossil fuels and minerals. Such statements suggest that aid is more beneficial for the helper than the recipient of help. Thus helping Africa is sometimes more focused on helping the West.

Even where this is not the case, there are certain implications that accompany helping, especially the kind of help the West is eager to provide to Africa. Gronemeyer (1992:53-69) draws attention to the way that helping can sometimes be an exercise of what she calls 'elegant power'. This kind of power is inconspicuous and unrecognisable, making it the perfect exercise of power. Traditionally, help was an unconditional response to a stated need (Gronemeyer 1992:53-54). However, the kind of help given today by the

West to Africa, is tied to many conditions and is often a result of the Western identification of a particular deficit, rather than a response to a need first articulated by Africans themselves. This kind of help becomes a strategy rather than charitable response. When Western powers help Africa to become more like the West, the West maintains its position of dominance and perpetuates the existing power relations between the West and Africa. This kind of helping turns Africa into a humble patient, reliant on the doctor to aid it to the position of health that the doctor already enjoys. Both the health that is aspired to and the medicine that must be taken to reach this goal are decided upon by the doctor. Thus the West presents itself as a model on which Africa must try to base itself, and provides suggestions as to how Africa can do this. This practice obviously maintains the West's position of dominance.

3.2 WESTERN PRESCRIPTIONS FOR AFRICA'S ILLNESS

In addition to diagnosing Africa as suffering from a serious debility, the West provides several suggestions on what Africa needs to do if it is to have at least some chance of ending its situation of ill-health. These Western prescriptions include suggestions regarding state-building, democratisation, development, the strengthening of civil society, integration into the global economy and many more. It would not be possible here to closely analyse all of these, but the rest of this Chapter will devote some attention to Western prescriptions for the African situation with regard to democratisation and development. Discourses on democratisation and development dominate many discussions on how the African situation can be improved, and an examination of these discourses from the perspective of postmodernist critical theory is useful.

3.2.1 Africa must Democratis

Democracy must be one of the most popular concepts today. It has hardly any negative connotations and is used by almost every politician in trying to defend his or her policies. Democracy is hailed as the solution to an astounding variety of ills and is used to mean all sorts of often-incompatible things. Western discourses on the African situation almost all promote democratisation as a solution to Africa's problems.

3.2.1.1 Democracy as the cure for Africa's ills

Western discourses present democracy as the way to cure Africa of its poor leadership and ineffective governance. Democracy is shown to be an undoubtedly good and desirable form of government for Africa. Consider, for example, the promotion of democracy by Larry Diamond, one of the most prominent Western authors on democratisation in Africa. Diamond (1999:2) argues that 'democratisation is generally a good thing and that democracy is the best form of government'. Wiseman (1996:130) concurs saying that there is no alternative to democracy in Africa. He argues that while this does not mean that no other forms of government are likely to come about in Africa's future, only democracy can provide the basis for sustainable government in Africa. Clapham (1993:429) argues that while democracy in Africa has 'survived only in somewhat attenuated forms', it is necessary for African governments to become progressively more democratic. He argues that 'any effective system of government [in Africa] must be more democratic than in the past' saying that the ability for alternative forms of government to exist has been eroded because of changes in internal aspirations and in the policies of external powers. Van de Walle (1995:128-131) describes democratisation in Africa as a 'golden opportunity to break out of persistent patterns of stagnation and crisis', and says that it leads to improved governmental accountability and transparency which in turn should have a positive effect on policy-making in Africa. While acknowledging that democracy carries with it certain costs, he concludes that 'on balance, the benefits of democratisation in Africa will outweigh the costs'.

3.2.1.2 Democracy according to the West

Western discourses clearly portray democracy as the ideal form of government for Africa. But what exactly is democracy? The concept of democracy can be disputed, and different ideas can be attached to this popular concept. The word democracy comes from the Greek language. In Greek *demos* means 'the people' and *kratos* means 'rule' or 'authority' (Magill 1996:355). Thus democracy is 'rule by the people'. The term was first used to describe the form of government in Athens. In the Athenian system, the citizens of the state (excluding women and slaves) gathered in the plains or in the city squares in order to make decisions collectively with regard to how the city-state would be run.

Obviously, the concept democracy no longer has the same meaning as it did in Athens. When Western writers promote democracy as the cure for Africa's ills, they do not mean to suggest that all the male citizens, excluding slaves, should regularly meet in order to collectively make decisions regarding the running of the state! What do Western writers mean then, when they speak about democratisation in Africa?

Democracy as promoted by the West, is clearly representative rather than direct democracy. Wiseman (1990:1) states this clearly, saying 'representative democracy, where the state is governed by the representatives of the people at large, is the only realistically applicable notion of democracy for the large-scale states of modern Africa'. Western writers promoting democracy are thus promoting a particular form of democracy - representative democracy.

In addition to being representative democracy, rather than direct democracy, the type of democracy promoted by the West also has other characteristics. It is a democracy that includes multiparty elections and that holds to certain liberal principles. While there is some dispute among Western writers regarding these additional characteristics, most Western discourses on democracy in Africa promote a form of democracy that includes these characteristics.

In terms of elections, there is agreement among Western writers that elections are vital for democracy in Africa. Bratton (1997:69) says that 'the most basic requirement for democracy is that citizens are empowered to choose and remove leaders' and that:

no other democratic institution precedes elections, either in timing or importance, they are the sine qua non of democracy, a necessary condition without which democracy cannot otherwise be born.

Gasionorowski and Power (1998:742-743) also support the necessity of elections for democracy, arguing that the conditions needed for democracy to exist 'can only be met through the regular conduct of free, fair, universal elections'. Discussions on democratisation in Africa tend to focus on elections - when they are being held, what their outcome is, and what the consequences of the elections will be. Connected with the discussion on elections, is the promotion of multiparty competitions. Elections where competition is intra-party or where there is little real competition as the one party

dominates, are not considered to be truly democratic. An article in *The Economist* (2000a:24) speaks about elections in Africa, noting the lack of multiparty competition in many African states, and concluding that 'there are elections in Africa, but little democracy'. The multiparty nature of elections is seen as vitally important. There is debate among Western writers on Africa regarding whether or not multiparty elections are a sufficient condition for democracy, but their necessity is not disputed.

While some Western writers see African countries which hold regular, relatively fair elections, as being democratic, other writers suggest that there are other conditions that must be met before such countries can truly be seen as democratic. One of the common concepts associated with the type of democracy promoted by the West, is that of liberalism. When Western writers promote democracy, they tend to mean liberal democracy. Diamond (1999:2) argues that democracy is the best form of government, but that the freedom associated with democracy must be constrained to some extent and that this constraint takes place through liberalism. Plattner (1998:171-180) entitles his article on democracy in Africa 'Liberalism and democracy: can't have one without the other', and Spence (1997:6) says that an African version of democracy should include 'values which are - by and large - "deemed to be self-evident"' after which he lists a number of liberal values. Clearly, liberal values are viewed by many Western writers to be an essential ingredient in African democracies.

The linking of liberalism and multiparty competition with democracy by Western writers is often subtle rather than direct. While writers may not blatantly declare that the absence of liberalism or multiparty competition suggests the absence of democracy, Western discourses imply this in several ways. For example Mair (1996:179) speaks about setbacks for democratisation in Africa and identifies the cause of these setbacks as being the inability of African states to develop the social differentiation upon which the Western liberal party-political system is based - thus democracy in Africa is seen as failing because of the absence of Western style liberalism and party competition. Apter and Rosberg (1994:28) speak about Africa's democratisation as being characterised by 'greater openness and market-driven growth, liberalization of trade, and multiparty elections'. Schuettler (1999) warns about a 'worrying trend' in African elections - 'ruling parties scored bigger parliamentary majorities in four of five polls, while the opposition either treaded water or sank into political oblivion'. Shattuck and Atwood (1998:170) speak about Western promotion of democracy arguing that it should include attempts to promote 'basic

freedoms' and 'the rule of law'. Such discourses imply that multiparty competition and liberalism are essential for African democracy. Some Western writers have, however, cautioned against this. For example, Jeffries (1993:20) calls the identification of good government as being multiparty democracy as being 'questionable' and Richard Joseph (1997:377) cautions that democracy has become 'overwhelmed by liberalism'.

The association of democratisation in Africa with multiparty competition and liberalism, leads into a further debate. Western forms of democracy are characterised by liberal representative democracy with multiparty competition. This same form of democracy is being promoted by the West as a solution for Africa's ills. It is also being promoted as the solution to the political problems in other regions of the world. The West presents its own form of democracy as a universal cure-all. This Western-style democracy is displayed as an ideal to which the whole world should aspire and the principles implicit to it are used to assess how democratic other systems are. This promotion of Western-style democracy as universally desirable is open to accusations of cultural imperialism. Van Binsbergen (1995:4) speaks about the issue of culture imperialism posing two alternatives related to the universality of Western-style democracy. Western-style democracy can be considered to be a cultural import and its spread in Africa a submission to an alien form of government; or alternatively Western-style democracy can be considered to be a universal construct and its increased popularity in Africa the result of 'the awakening to the universal heritage of mankind' - Africans adopting this form of democracy are then 'coming into their own' rather than submitting to foreign domination.

Western discourses on democratisation in Africa reflect both of these perspectives to some extent. Samuel Huntington and his supporters agree with the first option - that Western-style democracy is a cultural import, but believe that this does not mean that it should not be adopted in Africa. Huntington (1997:6-9) calls modern democracy 'a product of the West' and gives support to Arthur Schlesinger's argument that the West is the unique source of liberal democracy, and that these ideas are not African except by adoption. He nevertheless does not decry the increasing popularity of liberal democracy in Africa, but rather sees the success of the Third Wave of democratisation as being the way in which it has ensured the universality of democracy in the Western world and the way it has promoted the development of democracy elsewhere in the world. According to him, the extent to which non-Western societies are receptive to democracy is dependent upon the extent to which they have been influenced by the West. From this perspective,

democracy is a Western product, which can be adopted throughout the world only through the adaptation of other cultures to the Western culture that produced liberal democracy in the first place.

Other Western writers promote the idea of Western-style democracy being universally applicable whether or not it is a cultural import. Oliver and Atmore (1994:297) speak about how democratisation and market-orientated economies have been the 'prevailing ideology of the last decade of the twentieth century' and how this ideology has now gained widespread acceptance in Africa. This statement indicates how the ideas which have recently been dominant in the West, are now beginning to dominate globally, and how Western-style democracy and other popular Western concepts are gaining universal acceptance. Barkan (in Joseph, R. 1997:367) adds to this argument saying that 'today the western concept of democracy is more or less accepted throughout the world'.

Other writers see democracy as being based on universal principles and therefore being universally applicable. Wright (1997) speaks about how the United States' Office on Democracy came up with five universal principles which could be used to assess the success of democracies throughout the world. The former director of the Office of Democracy Morton H. Halperin, declared that these principles 'are not a Western invention or culturally bound. . . . They're understood as well by Mongolians and Albanians and Cambodians' (Wright 1997). Peterson (1994:130-131) also dismisses the idea that democracy is a Western import as a myth, arguing that democracy is as African as it is Western.

When defining democracy, many Western writers suggest that democracy can be measured. Empirical indicators of democracy are drawn up, and these are used to measure how democratic some states are in comparison with others. Gasionorowski and Power (1998:745) identify several indicators of democracy, operationalise them and then set about using these indicators to measure how consolidated various democracies are. Bratton (1998:54-59) also uses empirical measures to evaluate the quality of second elections in Africa. He draws up tables and calculates percentages in order to assess how consolidated these democracies are. In another article in which he assesses African states' transitions to democracy, he also makes use of empirical criteria to assess democratisation, drawing up tables and graphs to illustrate democratisation in Africa (Bratton 1997:67-93). Samuel Huntington's (1991:266-267) 'two turnover test' of

democratic consolidation is another example of the use of empirical methods to measure African democratic consolidation. The two turnover test says that a country has consolidated its democracy once there have been two post-transition elections in which the incumbents were voted out and allowed their opponents to take office (Bratton 1997:92-93). Along similar lines, Clapham (1993:429) speaks about the 'acid test' for democratic government as being the peaceful replacement of one regime by another through elections. Other attempts to measure African democratisation include Crawford Young (1996:53-68) who draws up a 'balance sheet' on democratisation in Africa and Baker (1999:273-286) who uses a 'democratic audit' to measure African democracy. While the latter two examples do not use strictly empirical indicators in order to assess democracy, these articles still indicate a belief that democracy can indeed be measured.

It can be concluded that when Western writers promote democracy in Africa, they are promoting multiparty elections and liberalism. In addition, Western writers believe that democracy is universally applicable (although they disagree about whether it has universal origins) and that the level of democracy in Africa can be measured so that the democratisation process in Africa can be assessed.

3.2.1.3 Western guidelines on democratisation

As shown above, when the West prescribes democracy for Africa, it is promoting a particular form of democracy, rather than a vague principle that is expected to have diverse manifestations. This promotion of liberal multiparty democracy is tied to various guidelines given by the West regarding how Africa can democratise. Certain steps are seen as vital and the whole process of democratisation is presented as being a linear process with various stages, with Africa having to try to progress rather than regress along these stages.

Many Western writers discuss the idea of there being several preconditions that ought to precede democratisation. According to such theories, Africa does not present very fertile ground for democratisation as it lacks many of these preconditions. Africa is described as being a 'hostile environment' (Young, C. 1996:60) and 'infertile terrain' for democracy (Joseph, R. 1997:363) because of the absence of these preconditions. Lancaster (1993:47) discusses Western democratic scholars' belief in these preconditions, listing some of the preconditions as being relatively high levels of income and literacy, the

existence of a middle class, and little ethnic diversity. Mair (1996:179) discusses the difficulties experienced by African countries in democratisation, blaming these on structural deficits and arguing that the absence of 'functionally orientated, horizontal social differentiation' hampers the emergence of democracy in Africa. Richard Joseph (1997:363) begins his article on democratisation in Africa by saying 'Democratization was not supposed to happen in Africa'. He explains this statement by saying that Africa had little of what were understood to be the preconditions for democratisation and lists some of these preconditions as being economic development, cultural unity, capitalism, western-style Christianity, and civic culture. In his discussion on the Third Wave of democratisation, Huntington (1997:4) says democracy grew out of social pluralism, the class system, civil society, belief in the rule of law, the separation of spiritual and temporal authority, and individualism, implying that these characteristics need to be manifest in a society before the society can democratise.

Some Western writers disagree with the idea of there being preconditions to democracy. For example, Lancaster (1993) discusses the theory that preconditions such as those mentioned above might be the effects rather than the causes of democracy. Such writers emphasise the importance of developing these characteristics in order to consolidate the democracy which has begun to take root. For example, Van de Walle (1995:136-139) describes some of the necessary steps that must be followed if Africa is to consolidate its democracy as being the improvement of administrative capacity, the promotion of the rule of law, and the establishment of economic stability. Thus whether these characteristics are seen to precede or follow democracy, there is consensus that conditions such as economic development, class divisions with a growing middle class, individualism, the rule of the law, capitalism and the separation of temporal and spiritual authority are in some way associated with democracy.

Western discourses suggest that there is a particular path that must be followed if democracy is to be attained. Along this path are a number of other milestones, each of which must be achieved if democracy is to be consolidated in Africa. What is notable, is that these milestones are all characteristic of Western societies, resulting in the implication that African states must become more like Western states if they are to achieve what is seen by the West as genuine democracy. Lewis (1992:39-40) says that there may be variations in transitions to democracy, but says:

it is useful to emphasize, however, that the structural continuities evident from the course of European development have subsequently been reflected in the experience of democratizing countries in other areas.

He notes that all recent political transformations have included similar elements as did earlier transitions, implying that there is some kind of universal path towards democracy.

Several Western writers acknowledge that democratisation in Africa may not follow a linear path, but interestingly, offer only two options to Africa: moving forward or moving backward - moving sideways into some kind of alternative political set-up is not given as an option. For example, Diamond (1999:64) says that if newly established democracies 'do not move forward' in the direction of liberal Western-style democracy, 'they are likely to move backward' until they are no longer democratic. Bratton (1997:68) speaks about how David Peterson has pointed out that democratisation will not be a linear process, but that it will 'unfold with occasional steps back for every step forward' - thus the direction is once again along only one path, with the only choice presented being the choice to progress or regress. The sketching of this idea of a path along which Africa can either move forward or backward, creates the image of a long line of democratic progress along which all the world is moving with Western countries leading the way and trying to encourage crippled African states to reach the excellent heights they have already reached. This image is only enhanced by the arrogance of writers such as Diamond (in Shaw & MacLean 1996:247) who declares:

As in 1919 and 1945, democracy enjoys renewed momentum and possibilities in the world, but it also faces great uncertainties ... Now as in 1945, only one nation stands capable of leading and organizing the world towards these ends: the United States.

This kind of discourse suggests that all Africa needs to do is humbly follow the West's 'bright star', the United States, in order to achieve the virtually perfect democratic government that has already been achieved elsewhere.

3.2.2 Africa must Develop

Along with prescribing democracy as a cure for Africa's ills, dominant Western discourses also describes development as vital if Africa is to be healed from its debilitating disease.

Like democracy, development has become a term that is almost completely free of negative connotations, and is associated with everything good and desirable.

3.2.2.1 Development as the cure for Africa's ills

The meaning of the word development implies something good - change in a positive direction. While some Western writers take time to defend democracy as an appropriate solution to Africa's problems of governance, development is seen as so undeniably positive that such a defence is usually deemed unnecessary. An overview of some definitions of development demonstrates the wealth of positive connotations attached to development. Development can be defined as 'a multidimensional process that normally connotes change from a less to a more desirable state' (McLean 1996:137) or as '[p]rocesses leading to a higher quality of life for a given population' (Fry & Martin 1991:98). Thomas (1992:6) says that development is 'a positive word that is almost synonymous with "progress"' and that it implies 'the achievement of whatever is regarded as a general good for society at large'. Todaro (1997:16) echoes this idea saying that development:

must represent the whole gamut of change by which an entire social system ... moves away from a condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory toward a situation or condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually better.

With understandings such as these, it is no wonder that development is regarded as a cure to Africa's illness. Development appears to be positive change, movement in the right direction, improvement, progress. Thus almost every Western discourse on Africa, mentions development as being desirable for Africa. Obstacles to development are identified, directions in development are suggested, and strategies for speeding up development are given. The impression created is that development is such a recommendable thing that every other aspect of the African situation should be examined in terms of how it will impact on development.

3.2.2.2 Development according to the West

When Western writers indicate that development is desirable for Africa, and indeed for any region in the world, what exactly do they mean? What is meant by development, other

than positive change or improvement or progress? What makes the changes associated with development good and why is development seen as movement in the right direction? To answer these questions it is necessary to closely examine Western definitions of development. The ideas of two prominent Western development scholars, Todaro (1997) and Thirlwall (1999), are scrutinised in order to assess what 'development' is generally understood to mean in the West.

Todaro (1997:13-18) attempts to provide a comprehensive definition of the meaning(s) of development. He starts by speaking about the traditional economic meaning of development which saw development to be fundamentally about the capacity of the national economy to produce and sustain growth in terms of its gross national product or GNP. This understanding of development dominated during the 1950s and 1960s but has since been challenged because it was realised that an increase in GNP did not always translate into any change in the day to day life of most of the people in what has been called the 'developing world'. More and more writers argued that attention had to be given to poverty, unemployment and other social indicators when assessing the development of a particular country or region. Thirlwall (1999:12) provides a similar assessment of early approaches to development concluding that '[a] concept of development is required that embraces the major economic and social objectives and values that societies strive for'. Both Thirlwall (1999:12-13) and Todaro (1997:16-18) then refer to Goulet's identification of three core values which constitute development: life-sustenance, self-esteem and freedom. The conceptualisation of development according to these three values aims to move the focus away from purely economic indicators, in order to include other factors too when assessing what is meant by development.

These three values are central to what is understood as development today. The first, life-sustenance, is related to the concept of basic needs (Thirlwall 1999:12). Certain needs are identified as being 'basic' and it is then understood that development aims to provide all people with these basic needs. Included among these basic needs are the need for food, shelter, health, clothing, and education (Todaro 1997:16; Thirlwall 1999:12). Of course, what is seen as basic health, basic education, basic shelter and so on, is decided by the West, not by the communities concerned. Furthermore, access to food, shelter, health and the other basic needs is basically dependent upon wealth. The wealthy can easily satisfy their basic needs, while the poor are unable to do so. This first core value of development can thus be reduced to individual material well-being.

The second value identified by Goulet is self-esteem (Thirlwall 1999:12). Development is said to be about improving people's feelings of self-worth and respect. What should be noted is the explanation of how self-esteem is achieved. The argument given is that in contemporary society, feelings of self-worth are related to material well-being and prosperity. Todaro (1997:17) says that 'national prosperity has become an almost universal measure of worth' and that 'worthiness and esteem are nowadays increasingly conferred only on countries that possess economic wealth and technological power'. Thus self-esteem as a value for development does not mean that development should aim to improve people's self-esteem, but rather suggests that development should improve people's material well-being because this is ultimately what will improve their self-esteem. Self-esteem as a value for development is therefore really material well-being as a value for development.

The third core value of development is freedom. Freedom is seen as being freedom from 'the three evils of "want, ignorance and squalor"' (Thirlwall 1999:13). This points back to the first value - meeting basic needs - as it appears that freedom is basically freedom from the problems stemming from the absence of these basic needs. The evils of 'want' and 'squalor' occur in the absence of the basic needs of food, clothing, housing and so on, the evil of 'ignorance' occurs in the absence of the basic need of education. The third core value and the first core value are basically two sides of the same coin, and both can be said to be solved by increased material wealth. In addition to defining freedom as being free from the evils of want, ignorance and squalor, Todaro (1997:17) describes freedom as being about having choices and says that wealth increases the range of choice. Wealth allows people more control over their environment and gives them the freedom to choose increased leisure or to have more possessions, or to reject leisure and possessions in favour of something else. Todaro (1997:17-18) warns that wealth does not automatically mean a broadening of choices, pointing to countries like Saudi Arabia, South Korea and Singapore which experienced great economic growth during the 1970s, but limited people's freedom of choice in other ways. The argument is not, therefore, that wealth always leads to increased freedom, but that increased freedom is only possible with increased wealth. Once again, it then becomes possible to reduce the core value of freedom to material well-being as it is material well-being that frees a person from the evils associated with the absence of basic needs, and it is material well-being which increases the choices people can make in their lives.

The above examination of the three core values of development as identified by Goulet and discussed in Todaro (1997) and Thirlwall (1999), indicates that while the identification of these core values attempts to move the concept of development away from a focus on economic well-being as measured by economic indicators such as GNP *per capita*, these core values can be reduced to economic well-being and thus do not completely transcend the 'development is economic growth' thesis. The core values approach does however alter the 'development is economic growth' thesis to some extent because it suggests that economic growth can only be considered to be development if the wealth generated by this growth is used to meet basic needs, increase self-esteem and broaden choices. Therefore, it presents the argument that economic growth is essential to development, but that economic growth alone does not constitute development.

Another attempt to move the emphasis of development away from economic growth, has been the introduction of the concept 'human development'. The concept 'human development' has been most often promoted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and it could be said that this prevents it from being considered as part of a discussion on *Western* discourses, as the UNDP is broader than just a Western organisation. However, the concept 'human development' and ideas related to it have influenced Western discourses on development in Africa and this means that a brief examination of human development is relevant to this discussion.

Proponents of human development argue that people should be at the centre of development and that development should empower individuals and groups (UNDP 1993:1). Human development is defined in the UNDP's Human Development Report as being 'a process of enlarging people's choices' and three essential 'capabilities for human development' are identified: the ability to lead a long, healthy life; the ability to be knowledgeable; and access to the resources needed to ensure a decent standard of living - health, knowledge and wealth (UNDP 1998:14). These three capabilities are operationalised in order to allow a Human Development Index (HDI) to be drawn up. The HDI measures the three capabilities by looking at longevity, educational achievement, and adjusted income *per capita*. This Index allows countries to be ranked according to their levels of human development. The Index has been criticised for only appearing to include several variables in measuring human development, because an examination of the HDI reveals that there is significant correlation between the three variables used (Sagar &

Najam 1999:744). This means that the countries where people are healthiest and have the most education are with only a few exceptions also the countries where people are the wealthiest. This observation calls into question the ability of the concept of human development to completely transcend measures of development which focus only on economic growth.

There have also been other changes in Western discourses of development. Concepts such as alternative development, reflexive development, and sustainable development have also attempted to move the focus of development from economic growth. The success of these attempts is debatable, but their existence does indicate a belief that development must be more than economic growth.

Whichever definition of development is used in Western discourses, African countries inevitably end up labelled as 'less-developed' or 'under-developed'. Whether using empirical indicators such as economic growth, life expectancy, levels of education, and spending power; or whether using qualitative assessments of self-esteem, freedom or other values, all Western discourses indicate that the African continent is the continent that is most in need of development.

3.2.2.3 Western guidelines on development

Western discourses do not only identify Africa as the least developed region in the world, but also provide a number of suggestions with regard to how Africa should go about developing. Development is seen as imperative for the African continent and the West provides Africa with a number of guidelines on how development should be stimulated.

Western discourses take development to mean a process of change that moves along a certain path in a particular direction. The West is seen as having progressed further along this path and Africa is encouraged to 'catch up' with the West as it moves along the same path of development. Consider Collier (1991:112) who describes the process of development as a 'natural social process'. African states will thus gradually become more developed as development is natural. Comments by Jeffries (1993:30) also assume development to be a natural process, and indicate that development in Africa will occur in a similar manner to the way that development occurred in other states. Jeffries (1993:30) says:

There seems little reason to doubt that economic and political development in African states, if they are to take place, will have to go through something like the same historical stages [as those gone through by other states].

Gleave (1992:2-19) also describes development as being a process which takes a state through various stages. He discusses Carol's stages of technology model, saying that this model draws attention to important features of the development process. This model describes five stages of development and Gleave identifies the position of African countries along these five stages of development. Of course, African countries are shown to be at an earlier stage in the development process than Western countries, and 'progress' is assumed to be in the direction of the stages already attained by the West. Other writers also assume that development is change in the direction of the West allowing them to lament that Africa is not 'making even slow progress in the right direction' (Wiseman 1990:13) and to speak about Africa's 'regression' and 'slide into underdevelopment' (Hawthorne 1992:35). Africa is described as having 'lagged behind' other regions (Griffiths 1999:11) and hopes are expressed that macroeconomic policies will be introduced in order to help Africa 'catch up' (World Bank 1994:35). Even discourses which allow for the possibility that African development could differ considerably from Western development, do not discard the idea of development as a process passing through stages. The UNDP's Human Development Report of 1998 suggests that Africa can repeat the development process which other regions have already completed or it can 'leapfrog' to growth patterns being practised by more 'advanced' regions today (UNDP 1998:7). Development is still shown to be a process whereby countries or regions move along a particular path in a particular direction - even if a little 'leapfrogging' is allowed! Africa is thus encouraged to move along the same path of development towards the same goal, following eagerly in the footsteps of the more advanced West.

This idea is reinforced by discourses proclaiming the West to be a model for African development and by discourses that view Africa as a child and the West as the mature adult who must lead the immature child to adulthood. Piel (1993:26) says that 'developing' countries 'all aspire to the Western model' and that they 'progressively embrace "Western ideas"'. Alderman (in Simon 1995:321) implies that Africa is immature and must learn from the mature West when he speaks about Ghana as being 'Adjustment's Star Pupil'.

Despite the acknowledgement that development is more than economic growth, Western guidelines on development still have a strongly economic focus. African countries are encouraged to make particular changes to their macroeconomic policies in order to develop. Even though Western writers have given attention to the importance of other factors such as basic needs, education and health in defining development, guidelines on how to develop tend to only address the economic changes that must be made. Ravenhill (1998:400) says that there is 'a measure of agreement on a solution for Africa's malaise'. This solution is said to be 'Adjustment with Growth' which involves various changes in economic policies. In order to develop, Western discourses advise Africa to restore 'sustainable fiscal equilibrium' (Van de Walle 1995:134), to introduce 'rigorous economic management' (Young, C. 1996:65), to achieve a 'sound macroeconomic policy stance' (World Bank 1994:1), and to establish a 'new international economic order' (Tordoff 1997:311). Other writers emphasise the importance of a 'policy of sound money, self-reliance and transparent accounting' (Pythian 1998) and the pursuit of 'liberalisation and restrictive monetary and fiscal policy' (Dale 1999:45).

Western discourses clearly show economic reforms to be the 'medicine' that can cure Africa of its ills and stimulate its development. Minney (1996) says that while Africa's economic health 'is usually grim ... the continent's new and emerging stock markets could help revive the patient'; C. Young (1996:65) describes 'macroeconomic management' as the key to restoring Africa's 'economic health' and Michaels (1993:98) describes structural adjustment as 'necessary medicine' for Africa.

It seems that when the West speaks about development as the cure for Africa's ills, it is referring exclusively to changes in the *economic* policies of African countries. Western writers may acknowledge that development is more than economic growth, but their advice to Africa on how to develop is advice on how Africa should stimulate economic growth and generate wealth, not on how Africa should improve the quality of life of its citizens, provide basic education for all, build up people's self-esteem or find ways to lengthen the lives of its people. Either it is assumed that economic growth will be accompanied by an improvement in all of the above factors, or mention of the other aspects of development are only rhetoric and development as promoted by the West really is only about economic growth.

3.2.3 An Analysis of Western Discourses on Democratisation and Development

A probing analysis of Western discourses on development and democratisation reveals the way that these discourses perpetuate current power relations. The empiricism, universalism and materialism implicit in these discourses and the way they serve to sustain Western dominance, is discussed below. Several writers, both from the West and from other parts of the world, have written excellent analyses of the way in which Western discourses ensure the continued dominance of the West and act to oppress other parts of the world, including Africa. Most of these writers address the dominance of Western discourses with specificially in respect of development, but their arguments have wider relevance and are used here to support the argument that Western discourses on development and democracy should be challenged. Examples of such writers are Said (1978), Nederveen Pieterse (1991), Parajuli (1991), Esteva (1992), Watts (1993), Brohman (1995), Crush (1995), Escobar (1995), Leroke (1996), and Thompson and Tapscott (2000). Their analyses are comprehensive and imply support for the argument advanced below: that a challenge of Western discourses on Africa is urgently needed. While it is not possible to include the insights given by these writers in the discussion below, the conclusion reached at the end of the Chapter is based upon the findings of these writers as well as the comments below.

3.2.3.1 Empiricism: measuring democracy and development

Western discourses on democracy and development in Africa aim to measure levels of democracy and development. This is often done through the construction of empirical indicators of democracy or development and the operationalisation of factors deemed to be central to democracy or development.

Democracy and development are both based upon principles. Democracy is based on the principle that the people should govern and development on the principle of improvement. Both of these principles are not easily quantified. However, Western discourses attempt to construct tests of democracy and indices of development. As discussed earlier, Western discourses attempt to measure democracy by empirically examining electoral politics in Africa, and development through the indicators of economic growth and indices operationalised as democracy and development in Africa.

such as the Human Development Index (HDI) . The problems with the construction of empirical measures of democracy and development will now be addressed.

The use of empirical indicators creates the illusion of neutrality. The use of these indicators allows for tests of democratisation and development to be done, allowing Western writers to label some countries as democratic, others not; some as developed and others as developing. This labelling process appears to be devoid of bias because the tests appear scientific and scientific tests are presented by the West as being incontestable. However, the choice of indicators and the method of operationalisation are both open to Western bias. Thus, the empiricism evident in many Western discourses disguises bias rather than eliminating it.

A few examples are needed to illustrate the way in which bias exists in empirical measures. In terms of democracy, the empirical analysis of elections allows the procedural understanding of democracy to dominate. Richard Joseph (1997:364-365) discusses this when he speaks about 'Schumpeter's triumph'. He quotes J. Peter Euben as having said that the 'contemporary consensus view' of democracy is that 'democracy is largely a matter of choosing among élites in periodic elections'. Other aspects of democracy are overshadowed by elections and one of the reasons for the dominance of elections in understandings of democracy is surely the ease with which elections can be empirically analysed.

In terms of development, the problem of empirical analysis is even more evident. A brief discussion of the HDI demonstrates the dangers of empiricism. The HDI reduces human development to three essential 'capabilities' - health, wealth and knowledge. The reduction of human development to these three capabilities is questionable. Two of the three are to do with physical or material well-being and no capability with regard to spiritual or emotional health is included. Surely human development is not just about how long you live, how much you spend and how much formal education you gain along the way? What about how happy you are, whether or not you find spiritual fulfilment, whether or not you are psychologically healthy, how compassionate and altruistic you are and whether or not you develop meaningful relationships with other people and God? The way in which the capabilities used by the HDI are operationalised is even more objectionable. Health becomes longevity, wealth becomes purchasing power and knowledge is operationalised as literacy and enrolment in formal academic institutions. The

operationalisation of knowledge is particularly unsatisfactory as it suggests that prior to the arrival of Westerners in Africa, Africans had no knowledge as most Africans were illiterate and had no formal educational qualifications. But an illiterate African person without any formal education has knowledge - knowledge of how to live in his or her environment, knowledge of cultural norms and values, knowledge of the supernatural, knowledge of cultural and personal history, and the list continues. To operationalise knowledge as being formal Western-style education is to insult all indigenous African knowledge.

To be fair, the UNDP does recognise the incomprehensiveness of the HDI (UNDP 1998:14), but this recognition does not excuse the problems associated with the selection and operationalisation of particular capabilities. The capabilities chosen allow the West to appear far more developed than Africa, but the choice of other capabilities, such as spiritual well-being or altruism, or a different operationalisation of the capabilities, could produce very different results. Thus what appears to be a neutral index of human development can be shown to have several biases.

In conclusion, Western empiricism promotes the construction of measures of two concepts, democracy and development, which are ultimately immeasurable. These empirical measures give the illusion of neutrality and accuracy, but can be shown to have several biases and inaccuracies.

3.2.3.2 Universalism: democratisation and development as Westernisation

Western discourses present democracy and development as universal ideals that are as desirable and applicable in Africa as in the West. They present a particular form of democracy, and a particular understanding of development as being universal.

As discussed earlier, Western discourses on democracy promote multiparty liberal representative democracy. An understanding of democracy that sees it as being associated with liberalism, indirect rule through representation, elections and multiparty competition has gained prominence in the West. This understanding of democracy is then presented by Western writers as the only acceptable model of democracy. This is an example of the universalism of the particular that is condemned by postmodernist critical theorists.

This universalism of the particular is not only oppressive in that it stifles the development of alternative ideas, but is also oppressive in that it prevents change that would benefit African people. Richard Joseph (1997:365) quotes Joel Barkan as having said that 'western programmes to support democratization are welcomed by all save those who would dislodge the process'. Viewpoints such as this one lead to the oppression of those Africans who support alternative forms of democracy as well as those who support forms of government other than democracy. In addition, Western-style liberal democracy has been shown, both by those who favour it and those who oppose it, to protect the powerful and prevent radical change. Przerowski (in Joseph, R. 1997:374) is said to have seen the 'genius of liberal democracy' as being its ability to create the appearance of uncertainty, while protecting vested interests and promoting the deferment of substantive demands.

The promotion of Western-style democracy thus marginalises those Africans who reject this Western model, maintains current power relations, and carries with it the suggestion of a superior Western model which should be aspired to by Africa. Van Binsbergen (1995:5) states this argument succinctly:

[G]iven the distribution of economic and military power in the modern world ... could members of a relatively powerful nation-state resist the temptation of claiming that their culture-specific institutions have in fact supra-local, global relevance and truth? ... If [democratisation in Africa] amounts to furthering the *North Atlantic* model of formal democracy (disguised as universal), does it not at the same time imply the superiority of the north, and reinforce the relations of subordination which have existed between north and south since the 19th century?

A similar argument can be presented with regard to development. Development too is seen as a universal process headed towards the same universally desirable goals. Development is presented by Western discourses as change in the direction of becoming more like the West and this change is seen as undeniably good. Thompson and Tapscott (2000:92) say that the development establishment 'has at its core the mantra "be like us or sink"'. What is presented as help from the West is not very different from coercion. This practice cannot be separated from power. This is pointed out by Brohman (1995:128) who explicitly links Western discourses and power when he says:

As Western hegemony has expanded, so has the power of the universal concepts of the West's main intellectual frameworks - invariably at the expense of alternative frameworks that do not accord with Western interests.

Western discourses on development present only one way forward for Africa and present the West as the model to which Africa should aspire. This assumption of leadership in a project of upliftment, both reflects and perpetuates current power relations between the West and Africa.

The arguments above lead into an argument about Westernisation: if Western discourses on democracy and development encourage Africa to become more and more like the West, then it can be argued that democratisation and development basically amount to Westernisation. Harrison (1993:48) observes that every capital city in the world is beginning to look more or less like every other, but he notes that 'the style is exclusively western. And not just in consumer fashions: the mimicry extends to architecture, industrial technology, approaches to health care, education and housing'. This observation acknowledges that African cities which are labelled 'developed' are those that have become Westernised - that have Western-style buildings, Western-style clothing, Western day-to-day practices and attitudes. Consider the assumptions that motivate Coll (2000) to note in his description of Freetown:

[I]nvariably, there is a functioning cyber-cafe, and the streets pulse with battery-powered hip-hop music and generator-operated satellite news and the buying power of Western Union money transfers sent by the tens of thousands who have made it to Europe and America. A progressive generation of young and ambitious Africans, you might say admiringly

He goes on to lament that not all young Africans are like this. The 'good' Africans are those who imitate the Western way of life.

Democracy in Africa is only viewed as genuine when it is similar to democracy in the West, development in Africa is seen as positive because it will make Africa more like the West. The conclusion is that the solution to Africa's ills is to Westernise and that Africa will only be described by Western writers as democratic and developed when life in Africa is much the same as life in the West. In summary, Western discourses on both democracy and development present a picture of an inferior Africa, a superior West and a

universal path along which both are moving, with the West leading the way. Western discourses assume that Western-style life is universally preferable and use their position of relative dominance to try to convince Africans of the superiority of the Western way of life. These discourses smother alternatives, discourage diversity and entrench Western hegemony.

3.2.3.3 One value system for all

Related to Western assumptions of universalism, is the promotion of the Western value system as appropriate and preferable for all. This is especially evident in Western discourses on development. These discourses have at their roots particular Western values and the appropriateness of these values for Africa is assumed. Leroke (1996:226) believes that the idea of development is based upon the values of the Enlightenment which he lists as being progress, emancipation, equality, improvement of living conditions, justice and liberty. These ideals are then assumed by Western development theorists to be universal.

When examining Western discourses on development and the values implicit in these discourse, one Western value is very evident - that of economism. Economism can be described as being a syndrome characterised by a focus on material satisfaction through goods and services, that sees the individual as the unit to be satisfied, and that uses cost-benefit analysis as a guide to individual choices (Galtung 1996:403). Western discourses on development assume that increased material wealth is beneficial and desirable, and that individual material well-being indicates development. Earlier, the centrality of the concept of economic growth in Western definitions of development was discussed. This preoccupation with economic growth originates in the Western value of economism upon which Western discourses on development are founded.

The assumption of economism is not always immediately evident in Western discourses, but a critical assessment of any Western discourse on development generally reveals economism lurking beneath. Consider Dynes (2000) who in discussing development in Africa says:

Most African leaders recoil at the idea of introducing private property rights. They fear that freehold tenure would destroy Africa's ancient "communal cultural system", which lies at the root of their own power base. They are right. It would.

But it would also liberate Africans from the grinding poverty to which they have been condemned in their millions.

This statement assumes that an end to poverty (in other words increased material wealth) is more important and valuable than a communal solidarity. Wealth is assumed to be more important to Africans than tradition or culture. Private property ownership is compatible with the individualism and materialism at the root of economism, but not with the traditional values of many African communities. Thus development discourses such as this one are premised upon a Western value system and are opposed to African value systems.

Writers such as Dynes (2000) assume that Western values are superior and implicitly promote Western values in discussing development. Other writers, like Granato, Inglehart and Leblang (1998:195-208) openly advocate the destruction of certain African values and their replacement with Western values, defending this process by arguing that it is necessary for development. Granato, Inglehart and Leblang (1998:195-208) advance the hypothesis that African cultural values need to be eroded if Africa is to develop. In their analysis of culture and economic growth, African countries are shown to value obedience and religious faith more than values such as thrift and determination - two values associated with economism (Granato et al. 1998:199). This is shown to inhibit economic growth, which is seen as vital for development. The writers conclude that while a society's entire culture need not be obliterated in order to promote development, certain aspects of particular society's culture (such as a value system emphasising obedience and religious faith) must change if development is to take place (Granato et al. 1998:205).

Brohman (1995:125) acknowledges the Western values upon which Western development discourses are premised and discusses how this assumption of Western values is oppressive to Africa. He says:

In a highly normative and ethnocentric manner, Western values were universalised and linked with progress, while the values of traditional Third World societies were denigrated and tied to stagnation and underdevelopment.

An examination of the value of economism and how Western understandings of development are based on values such as economism, demonstrates the way in which Western discourses on development subtly promote the destruction of African values and their replacement with Western values such as economism. This entails the hegemonisation of Western values and should be challenged because it is a continuation of Western domination of Africa, because it obstructs the appearance and development of alternative value systems, and because it promotes the homogenisation of the world and the end of diversity.

3.3 CONCLUSION: THE NECESSITY OF AN AFRICAN CHALLENGE TO DOMINANT WESTERN DISCOURSES

It was previously argued that the dominance of Western discourses is contrary to the interests of Africa and should thus be challenged by the African Renaissance. An analysis of a few dominant Western discourses on Africa strengthens this argument. Western discourses have been shown to reflect and perpetuate current power relations between the West and Africa. Discourses on the African situation suggest that Africa, unlike the West, is suffering from ill-health, and that this situation can only be amended with the help and advice of the West. This clearly reflects the West's position of dominance in global politics and perpetuates this position of dominance by suggesting that Africa can only become well through listening to and mimicking the West.

Western discourses on democracy posit definitions of democracy that favour Western conceptualisations of democracy and suggest that Africa can only become democratic through following the path along which the West has already advanced. Western discourses on democracy present Western-style democracy as universally applicable and imply the superiority of the West and the desirability of Westernisation for Africa.

Western discourses on development also paint a picture of a superior West leading the way to an improved existence, with Africa struggling on behind. Western discourses on development imply that there is only one type of change that can be called progress and that for Africa progress is basically Westernisation. Discourses on development subtly promote Western values at the expense of other values and in this way obstruct the flourishing of alternative value systems and alternative world views.

The aforesaid analysis of selected dominant Western discourses provides only a very brief overview. Western discourses on other aspects of African politics, such as statehood, ethnicity, civil society, and Africa's position in a globalising world should also be examined in order to reveal the Western assumptions implicit in these discourses and to indicate whether or not these discourses also perpetuate current power relations between the West and Africa. It is acknowledged that only a very brief critique of Western discourses on democracy and development is provided here and that there are several other aspects of these discourses which are also interesting and pertinent. However, the overview provides enough support for the argument that the African Renaissance should both assess and challenge Western discourses if it is ever to achieve its goals. Clearly, Western discourses on Africa are not neutral, objective assessments of the African situation. Alternatives are vital if the goals of the African Renaissance are to be achieved and if Africa is to be emancipated from its position of relative powerlessness. Western discourses cannot be allowed to remain hegemonic: the destruction of existing alternative discourses and the obstruction of the elaboration of new alternatives must be ended.