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Editorial

Ray Bush & Morris Szeftel

This third issue of the Roape Review of Books, like the first two, continues to explore the response of scholarship and research to the key challenges confronting Africa. The themes raised here are again at the heart of Africa's political and economic development at the end of the century: food security; conflict resolution and the role and performance of NGOs. In addition, it is also important, in the wake of Africa95 to assess the way in which Africa has been portrayed in western discourse. This is what David Richards does in his appraisal of the major exhibitions, plays and workshops on Africa during 1995. He reminds us of the continuing, often crude and reductionist way in which Africa is perceived and also, when reviewing recent work of Soyinka in the aftermath of the murder of Ken Saro Wiwa and others by the Nigerian state, that speaking out against the tyranny of injustice is a very costly affair.

Understanding the character of African politics and the dynamics of political power remain difficult but essential concerns. One dimension of African politics, which is so often wrongly characterised and stereotyped, is food security. This remains a key issue in the way power is mobilised and sustained. At the end of 1996, there will be another international conference, this time organised by FAO, aiming to resurrect food and famine as an international political priority. The conference is intended to mobilise politicians, aid agencies and world dignitaries to do more than just issue rhetorical expressions of concern for Africa's starving millions. It is intended to be more than the hand-wringing exercise of so many such fora. Yet even as the preparations proceed, there seems to be little that is concrete by way of policy initiatives that might be different from what has gone before, little which might offer hope that Africa's continuing food crises will not continue to develop into periodic famine.

Indeed, food politics in Africa is often about the ability of states and political and economic elite's to perpetuate conditions of hunger in order to sustain power holders. This is discussed in the assessment by Bush of recent literature on food and famine in Africa. Much of that literature is now concerned with understanding the catastrophic impact of conflict, war and civil strife. The intractability of such conflicts is the concern of Woodhouse's commentary. He assesses the state of recent debates and indicates areas where scholarship on conflict resolution might help to overcome the deficiencies in international relations and development theory by yielding strategies to cope with civil strife. One estimate is that over the last ten years, 30 million children have been killed, disabled, orphaned, left homeless or similarly traumatised by war. This recently led UNICEF to call for an 'Anti War Agenda' to protect children from the horrors of war (Africa Recovery, Dec.1995:1).

UNICEF's State of the World's Children, 1996 report catalogues the destruction inflicted on generations of Africa's children and, in consequence, on the prospects for future economic and political development. Thus, for example, half or more of all Somali children under five years of age on 1 January 1992 were dead by the end of that year - and probably as many as half of these deaths were caused by the interaction of war
with malnutrition and disease. Between 1980 and 1988 Angola lost 330,000 children and Mozambique 490,000 children to war related causes. Children are recruited to fight wars for militarised states or warlords and suffer mental harm as well as physical danger and injury: since 1975 land mines have exploded under more than 1 million people and are currently killing perhaps as many as 800 people a month.

Continuing instability in Africa is taking place at a time when concessional aid and official development assistance to sub-Saharan Africa is falling. In constant 1994 prices, official development assistance has fallen from US$16.7 bn in 1990 to US$15bn in 1994. There is also no rise in real terms, in concessional funding agreed through the Lomé Convention in the 1996-2000 period and contributions to the African Development Fund, the African Development Bank’s soft loan facility may fall by as much as US$700.

The World Bank now declares that it is a 'listening bank'. According to its President John Wolfensohn, it is apparently an 'open and ready-to-learn bank'. But there is little evidence beyond the rhetoric, that its continued policies of adjustment and conditionality will help alleviate human misery across the continent. It is, however, the case that the Bank is now open to a new relationship with both foreign and local NGO’s working in Africa. This shift has been promoted by the crisis in development funding and by the Bank’s concern to prioritise what it sees to be the importance of building institutions of civil society.

While in the early 1970s about 1.5% of total NGO income came from donor sources, that share had increased to 30% by the mid-nineties. Yet even this dramatically increased figure is an underestimate of the real financial ties which now bind official donors with NGOs. In 1994 the share of total NGO funds obtained from official sources in Sweden were 85%, for Belgium 80% (1993), 77% Italy (1991), 66% US (1993), 70% Canada (1993) and 10% for the UK (1993). There has also been a rapid increase in the speed with which NGOs have become a conduit for channelling donor funds. For the ten years to 1993/4 the UK increased its funding of NGOs by almost 400% to £68.7 million which raised the share of total aid channelled to NGOs from 1.4% to 3.6%. This was also the experience elsewhere: Australia increased its funding of NGOs from A$20m to A$71million which represented an increase in the share of total aid going to NGOs from 1% to 6% (ODI, 1995, August).

The official popularity of NGOs and their declared ability to reach the poor, together with a view that NGOs might obviate the obstacles to development created by corrupt officials, have added to the renewed willingness by donors to use NGOs to transfer funds and manage projects. Yet in this process, as Gary reveals looking at the case of Ghana in this issue, the independence of NGOs is compromised and so too is their ultimate willingness to support neo-liberal reform strategies emanating from Washington.

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References

Commentary: Negotiating a New Millennium? Prospects for African Conflict Resolution

Tom Woodhouse

The disastrous US and UN interventions in Somalia provoked an equally unhappy failure to intervene in Rwanda. This, in turn, has now produced a reassessment of the role of the United Nations and the international community in the resolution of internal crises. A number of writers have turned to the insights of writing on conflict resolution to seek remedies for the inadequacies of development theory and international relations. Although this new interest has its own problems, not least because states tend to make little use of conflict analysis once crises ensue, it has sought strategies that do not depend on 'quick fix' military strikes. In the process, it has advanced an important debate about the need for local and national initiatives and institutions in resolving conflicts and about the issue of collective intervention for humanitarian purposes.

The challenge of intra-state war in general and the impact of two massively violent civil wars in Africa have called into question assumptions about the processes of peacekeeping, peacemaking and peace-building which the UN Secretary General had so confidently proclaimed to be achievable objectives of a post cold war United Nations system (Boutros Ghali, 1992). At the same time they have provoked a fresh consideration of thinking about humanitarian intervention and related questions of modalities of conflict management and resolution.

In Somalia, UN/US intervention in the civil war, initiated in December 1992 with high hopes of saving millions from starvation and restoring peace and stability, ended ignominiously in the killing of 25 Pakistani peacekeepers on 6 June 1993, and 18 Americans in October 1993. President Clinton soon announced the withdrawal of US forces from Somalia and the complete withdrawal of UN peacekeeping troops to be affected by March 1995, with few of the mandate objectives of UNOSOM II achieved. Over 130 peacekeepers had died in Somalia during the three year intervention between 1992 and 1995, the highest fatality rate recorded in the history of UN peacekeeping. The episode resulted in a revision of US attitudes to peacekeeping, expressed in Presidential Decision Directive 25 (PDD 25) of May 1994, which was seen by many to rule out an US role in future crises unless clear US national interests were at stake and unless a limited and clear objective and exit was identified.

The first effects of this change were felt in Rwanda. While in Somalia the UN came under criticism for intervening too much militarily, in Rwanda it came under attack
for not intervening enough. In April 1994, following the killing of 10 Belgian soldiers serving with UNAMIR, the force was reduced to a small staff of 270 just when the genocide of Tutsi and moderate Hutu was taking place. Between 28 and 29 April over 250,000 Rwandan refugees had flooded into Tanzania in 24 hours, the largest and fastest exodus ever witnessed by the UNHCR. UNAMIR remained in Rwanda after the Tutsi-led RPF took power and was mandated to assist both the Rwandan government and UNHCR with the safe and voluntary return of an estimated two million refugees hosted by neighbouring countries. The UN peacekeepers in Rwanda, 5,500 strong at their peak, came under severe criticism by the RPF for failing to prevent the genocide in 1994; and after the RPF took power they were equally criticised for not preventing alleged massacres, by the Tutsi dominated army, of Hutu refugees. UNAMIR was withdrawn in March 1996 with the vast majority of Rwandan refugees still displaced.

Re-evaluating Intervention

Events such as these have prompted a questioning and re-evaluation of Boutros Ghali’s Agenda for Peace. The United States Institute for Peace sponsored a seminar, the proceedings of which were published in 1995 as African Conflict Resolution: The US Role in Peacemaking, edited by David Smock and Chester Crocker. In 1996, Mats Berdal critically reviewed recent work on the UN. In 1994, Joanna Macrae and Anthony Zwi edited a volume entitled War and Hunger: Rethinking International Responses to Complex Emergencies. And this year Ramsbotham and Woodhouse, in Humanitarian Intervention in Contemporary Conflict have made the case for a new conceptualisation of humanitarian intervention which involves strengthening both the idea and institutions of international community and the accountability of those agencies which act in its name. In all these works, there is an emerging debate in which theoretical and practical insights drawn from conflict analysis and resolution can be seen to add understandings and perspectives missing from both development studies and international relations.

Smock and Crocker acknowledge the impact which the experience in Somalia had on US policy makers, leading to a mood of ‘Afro-pessimism’ and ‘conflict fatigue’. While accepting that combat intervention through Chapter VII enforcement mandates of the UN is not a desirable form of conflict resolution, the book argued against US disengagement and in favour of encouraging ‘layered responses’ to African conflicts, where local and national organisations respond initially, followed by responses at the sub-regional and regional levels and ultimately at the level of the broader international community (p.105). The intention is, then, to encourage African initiatives, to encourage African solutions to African conflicts, and to provide sustained international and particularly US support for such initiatives. The Kampala Declaration which emerged from the African Leadership Forum of 1991 called for a conference on Security, Stability Development, and Co-operation in Africa (CSSDCA). The OAU summit of 1993 approved an OAU mechanism for preventing, managing and resolving conflicts with a mandate to concern itself with internal conflicts or civil wars. The UNDP has advocated establishing an African Peace Fund to assist the OAU to realise some of its new peacemaking and peacekeeping ambitions, and the 1994 African Conflict Resolution Act of the US Congress authorised $1.5 million annually between 1995 and 1998 to support the OAU conflict resolution programme.

There are limitations to all this, most obviously in the minimal operational capability of the OAU. As Cohen pointed out in his chapter in African Conflict Resolution
Negotiating a New Millennium? Prospects for African Conflict Resolution

('African Capabilities for Managing Conflict', pp. 77-94), just when the OAU has undertaken a responsibility to concern itself with internal civil war, the greatest challenge of all for conflict resolution it has severe problems with a still rudimentary organisation and a lack of personnel. The emergence of an indigenous capability for conflict resolution, which is supported by all contributors to the book, provides some reasons for optimism, though this must be prudently set against the nature and severity of the political, social, and economic problems facing Africa and identified, for example, in Bush and Szefelt's 'Commentary: Taking Leave of the Twentieth Century' (ROAPE 65, 1995). Quoting Leys, they pointed out that of the total population of 500 million, nearly 300 million are living in absolute poverty and that the literature on which they commented underscored 'Africa's growing marginalisation within the world order, and its poor prospects for the next century'.

A general global crisis marked by uncertainty and insecurity impacts with particular severity on Africa:

In Africa too the crisis has been most severe where economic hardship has combined with the activation of communal sentiments to influence the distribution of meagre resources through political muscle. At its worst, the process has devoured the state and even produced genocidal conflicts, as in Somalia and Rwanda ... Universal values of citizenship and secular democracy, social justice and equality of entitlement, are in retreat and under attack by the forces of particularism, exclusivity, privilege and prejudice (ROAPE 65, 1995:292).

The scale of the problem is a sobering consideration in assessing the relevance and capability of conflict resolution policies in African contexts. A salutary warning is sounded in the conclusion to War and Hunger: structural forces, such as predatory economic strategies, maldevelopment and the inequitable distribution of resources, which generate and feed the spiral of violence, need to be addressed by structural changes. Humanitarian assistance to sustain those displaced from their homes is a limited and problematic response and one which must be informed by a 're-evaluation of the causes of conflict and the role of the international community in sustaining it' (p. 232). Such an exercise in turn 'touches at the heart of international relations and the current economic order' (Ibid.). Clearly, the act of intervention in conflict-related disasters has the effect of impacting on structural forces: Duffield (in chapter 3 of War and Hunger) makes the crucial point that during the 1980s Africa became the largest recipient of food aid and humanitarian assistance and NGOs became the main agencies of delivering and managing this aid, to the extent that '(i)n nett terms, NGOs now collectively transfer more resources to the South than the World Bank' (p. 58). They are therefore central to the process of negotiation and renegotiation of the structure of post-cold war North – South relations. Given this influence the evidence of a new interest among NGOs in conflict resolution theory and practice is encouraging and timely.

The question of the state of conflict theory and its relevance to practice is raised in a review by Mats Berdal of recent research on the UN, The United Nations in International Relations (1996:95-106). In a section of his review entitled 'Conflict studies, the UN, and international security', Berdal covers work emanating from Australia which is significant because it seeks to apply 'many of the concepts and insights offered by behaviouralist inspired conflict research in International Relations, especially with regard to conflict resolution and management techniques' (p. 96). Much of this work itself relates to approaches to peace research, conflict theory, and conflict resolution which originated in the mid-1950s and which is associated with writers like Galtung, Boulding, Curle, Mitchell, Burton, Azar, Groom, Banks, de Reuck and others, and
which sought to provide explanations of conflict which were not available in the conventional international relations literature.

Very much within this tradition, Kevin Clements and Robin Ward’s *Building International Community* aimed to explain ‘the current inability of the United Nations to respond adequately to the diverse crises before the international community’, a failure based on the ‘failure of old conceptual frameworks to guide timely analysis and effective multilateral intervention’ (Berdal 1996:96, quoting Clements and Ward). For Berdal, however, it is not so much the old conceptual frameworks which have failed; rather, the central assumptions of conflict research are questionable. According to Berdal these are, first, an assumption of an underlying harmony of human interests and, second, a belief in the power of reason to ‘promote right conduct’. In fact it is not at all certain that this would be accepted as an accurate representation of underlying assumptions by scholars working in this tradition: in the first place, new conflict theorists stress the role of needs, not interests; and second they have tended to use perspectives from social and inter-group psychology to demonstrate the powerful play of irrational behaviour in conflict escalation in a way not understood in the rational choice stances of realist thinking. In so far as there is an assumption of an underlying harmony, it is argued by the new conflict theorists that any such harmony has to be constructed through discourse and negotiation, with or without third party assistance, rather than existing as a natural condition or relationship.

Leaving these reservations aside, however, Berdal does point out the way in which the case studies in Clements and Ward demonstrate the gap between expectations from theory and realities on the ground. Thus he argues that the conflict in former Yugoslavia was escalated through the divergent interests of European states and the power ambitions of leaders such as Tudjman and Milosevic, and that there was little evidence of the use of sophisticated conflict analysis by any of the major powers. Yet he also sees that it was precisely a failure to recognise or to understand the need for persistent dialogue and negotiation which was, at least in part, the reason for the debacle in Somalia. In March 1993 the Security Council approved a mandate for UNOSOM II which was breathtaking in its ambition, seeking to assist ‘the Somali people in rebuilding their shattered economy and social and political life, re-establishing the country’s constitutional structure; achieving national reconciliation, [and] creating a Somali State based on democratic governance’ (1996:99). As Berdal points out such objectives could only have been achieved by working impartially with the Somali people and where negotiation skills would need to predominate over military ones. In the event UNOSOM II got dragged into a war against Aidid’s Somali National Alliance and ended up killing a large number of Somali’s in the cross-fire.

The critical review by Berdal provides a healthy questioning of the shortcomings of conflict analysis, or at least of the reluctance of conflict actors to follow its fintlins! It is clearly the case that intentions of putting in place conflict management and resolution mechanisms, whether in Africa or anywhere else, must be informed and guided by realistic assessments of what kind of management or resolution is possible. This evaluation must in turn be conducted in the context of a wider debate about principles which guide intervention in conflicts.

**War, Hunger, and International Policy**

An important concern in considering policy for conflict resolution mechanisms relates to the idea of ‘layered’ responses raised in *African Conflict Resolution* where,
correctly, local and national initiatives are to be supported as the first level of response to conflict before regional and (only in *extremis*) international intervention follows. The danger inherent in institution-building for conflict resolution is that the process may be over-influenced by ideas emanating from military and security policy and that membership of the ‘layers’ will be confined to, or dominated by, elites. At issue here is the question of agency: who are the subjects and who the objects of conflict managing institutions? *War and Hunger* sets out to ‘make a modest contribution to ... debates on war, hunger and international policy’ (p. 2) and to suggest that it is no longer tenable to examine problems of conflict, economic decline and famine as separate phenomena. It is worth noting that peace research and its use of conflict theory developed from just such a realisation.

Adam Curie, the first professor of Peace Studies in the UK, moved from development policy consultancy to conflict resolution when he witnessed in the 1960s and 1970s conflicts in Africa and in Asia which destroyed the fruits of development. Focusing on Africa, the achievement of *War and Hunger* is far from modest, calling for ‘the development of an appropriate discourse on the nature of contemporary conflicts ... (as) a precondition for improving the effectiveness of international assistance and developing new strategies of conflict prevention and resolution’. Lessons learned from the experience of development policy and international aid programmes are salutary ones for those concerned with promoting new layers and mechanisms for conflict resolution. In the conclusion to the book, Duffield, Macrae and Zwi, in pointing to the need for greater accountability in international public action related to disbursing relief and development assistance, make a number of points which are as relevant to conflict resolvers as they are to development workers: development programmes should include an awareness of the need to support public and private institutions capable of managing conflict; criteria for humanitarian intervention should be based on the needs of conflict-affected communities; and conflict affected communities, especially the most vulnerable (a chapter of the book deals with gender and the impact of war on women and families) should be given a voice in determining ‘international action to prevent, mitigate and resolve structural and political violence’ (p. 231).

Greater accountability in international public action in turn raises the question of humanitarian intervention. A significant development in the emergence of a broader concept of intervention came with UN SCR 688 of 5 April 1991, which provided protection and humanitarian relief for Kurdish refugees in northern Iraq through Operation Provide Comfort. As for Africa, Alex de Waal (*War and Hunger*, ‘Dangerous Precedents? Famine Relief in Somalia 1991-1993’) described the political, institutional and media pressures which led to the deployment of the Unified Task Force (UNITAF) in December 1992, ‘the first modern case of the military occupation of a country for avowedly humanitarian reasons alone’; UNOSOM II, deployed from May 1993, was ‘the first use of forces under Chapter VII of the UN Charter which allows for the use of force to make peace’. The result was that ‘Somalia thus became an experiment, an international test-tube in which the instruments of the new world order could be tried out’ (p. 155).

If the experiment is to be continued, Africa is likely to be one of its great laboratories. A CIA report cited by Smock in *African Conflict Resolution* claimed that ethnic conflict, civil war and natural disasters would combine to place a greater demand on humanitarian support in sub-Saharan Africa than at any time since the 1960s. Indeed in a later chapter in the book Herman Cohen, amongst a set of proposals for a
partnership for conflict management in Africa involving African and international commitments, suggests that it may be desirable to make Africa a 'pilot region' for applying Boutros Ghali's *Agenda for Peace*. Such comprehensive intervention is unlikely in the extreme, but the case for some regime of humanitarian support is plain, both because of humanitarian need (measured by the suffering caused by conflict related emergencies) and because the UN will be reduced to the role of powerless on-looker, unable to effect even the most basic standards of humanitarian law, unless some basis for effective international control is agreed.

Of course basic principles of the international order are affected here, most importantly the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention. There seems to be some willingness to breach the non-intervention principle, either by UN directed intervention in crises in pursuit of humanitarian objectives, or by regional groupings taking action to control conflict and instability. Thus Ali Mazrui argued before a meeting of the Foundation for Global Dialogue in South Africa that one option for ensuring peace in the next century was to accept that:

> some African countries will simply need to be controlled by other African countries ...
> Inevitably some dysfunctional countries will need to submit to trusteeship and even tutelage for a while.

He proposed the formation of an African Security Council composed of five pivotal regional states (*International Peacekeeping News*, 1, 11, 1995:2) (Egypt, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Africa and Zaire) which would, presumably, provide the capability for such interventions.

**Re-evaluating Humanitarian Intervention**

While the UN has not developed an effective means of intervening in intra-state conflicts, there have been important shifts in the concept and practice of humanitarian intervention in post-cold war conflicts. The nature of this shift was examined by Ramsbotham and Woodhouse (1996). We suggested that since the end of the cold war the context for humanitarian intervention has changed. During the cold war period the threat to human rights was seen to come from tyrannical governments and, in the absence of the possibility of collective intervention by regional organisations or the United Nations, intervention was usually understood to involve forcible action by states. We identified a set of developments which have moved the debate on agency and method of humanitarian intervention forward. Instead of self-help by states it is now a matter of collective response through the United Nations; instead of forcible intervention, it is now a question of understanding how best to combine non-forcible military options (peacekeeping) with non-military options (the work of NGOs in humanitarian assistance) in responding to conflict related humanitarian crises. We therefore suggest a broader concept of humanitarian intervention ranging from military enforcement, through to a set of non-forcible options for intervention. The new mood underpinning this evolution was well-expressed by the out-going UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar in 1991:

> It is now increasingly felt that the principle of interference within the essential domestic jurisdiction of states cannot be regarded as a protective barrier behind which human rights could be massively or systematically violated with impunity (Ramsbotham and Woodhouse, p. 84).
There are of course serious and well-founded objections from countries of the South about a *carte blanche* that this thinking will bestow on a programme of ‘interventionary humanitarianism’: that the non-intervention principle will be too easily breached by powerful states against weaker ones; and that the palliative of humanitarian relief and stopgap peacekeeping will take the place of long term development and the correction of structural imbalances between North and South. The ambivalence for Africa was clearly marked in the OAU’s *Declaration on the establishment of a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution* which recognised i) that with its burdensome debt and economic problems Africa was not in a position to undertake a regional initiative to restore peace in Somalia, but that ii) ‘Africa believes that regional actors, with a better understanding of local and regional issues, are better placed to handle local conflicts than more distant participants’ (Ramsbotham and Woodhouse, p. 164). The central challenge, and this is where we come back to the policy relevance of academic work in conflict resolution, was identified by Trachtenberg: in the turbulence and suffering of contemporary conflicts, western readiness to intervene in defence of ‘civilised’ values must now be extended to a determination by the international community to uphold truly universal standards. The key element here is legitimacy:

*For an interventionist system to be viable, it needs in particular to have a general aura of legitimacy. In the case of intervention in the Third World, the system needs to be supported especially by the major Third World countries that can be expected to be very suspicious of it. This means more than just solving the tactical problems of getting Third World governments to vote for interventionist actions in the UN and various regional bodies, or even to send their own military contingents. It means figuring out how whole populations, or at least their politically active components, react to intervention – what excites hostility, which aspects of an interventionary policy can generate support – and then framing one’s policy with this understanding in mind. It means listening to people we are not used to listening to, and understanding the limits on our own power and, especially, on our own wisdom* (Trachtenberg in Ramsbotham and Woodhouse, p. 164)

One outcome of this kind of reflection is the realisation that violent civil wars are not amenable to quick fix solutions or to surgical strikes by military forces. In the case of former Yugoslavia, the DG1A of the European Union has judged that conflict resolution there involves long term tasks; that military stabilisation taking 1-2 years will need to be paralleled by a process of infrastructural reconstruction (taking ten years); and by a process of reconciliation taking more than a generation. Another consequence is to find ways and means of ‘listening to people we are not used to listening to’, which is one area of expertise that conflict resolution can make a claim to.

**Conflict Resolution and Civil Society**

In concluding this commentary it is important to make some remarks about conflict theory and what it contributes to the discourse which Macrae and Zwi have called for on the nature of contemporary conflict. The term conflict resolution was coined in the 1950s by Kenneth Boulding, who founded the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. Boulding defined the term as having two components: the analytic and descriptive study of conflict, and the normative element of positive conflict management (the theory and practice of peaceful resolution). While there is not space here to comment in detail, some comment on the core characteristics of conflict resolution is appropriate. There has been, since Boulding first launched his journal in 1957, a steady growth in the literature and there is now a base of knowledge which, though still in need of
development, is capable of guiding policy at a variety of levels of conflict. The momentum for the development of this work came from the realisation that deep-rooted and protracted social conflicts were resistant to resolution by conventional forms of power-political intervention (whether based on military or other forms of coercion). The most fruitful research now suggests that conflict resolution needs to be based on multilateral and multicultural inputs. In other words conflict resolution is not only a process of traditional power-mediation but should be a multilateral approach capable of mobilising a range of intervention strategies from peacekeeping to problem-solving workshops. Implicit in this multilateral approach is the need to combine resolution initiatives capable of tackling political-structural levels of conflict ('objective' conflict); and social-cultural levels ('subjective' conflict). Structural conflict is defined as an outcome of incompatible interests based on competition for scarce resources; it is objective because it is defined as largely independent of the perception of participants and emanates from power structures and institutions which are historically formed and determined. The structural approach to conflict management is aimed at changing institutions and power relations in the political arena. Cultural approaches to conflict resolution involve attempts to improve the ways in which distinct communal groups understand and behave towards each other.

Two attitudes to the perspectives of conflict resolution should be noted. On the one hand, it suffers to some extent from naive advocates who think it capable of curing almost every human ailment. On the other hand, it is regarded sceptically by others who see both its analyses and prescriptions for action as simplistic. One critique commonly heard from this school is that conflict resolution ignores or underestimates the power of economic and political forces and social structures to determine and coerce human action and behaviour. Conflict resolution programmes based on communication, dialogue, third party activity, problem solving etc. are weak instruments in the face of such objective and structural forces, it is alleged.

In between the magic wand wavers and the sceptics are those who see conflict resolution as a useful resource of theory and practice which, along with many other bases of knowledge, can help to empower conflict affected, or potentially affected, communities to negotiate and construct good governance for themselves. It can provide part of the mechanism by which the voices of communities are heard by interveners in the process of building international accountability. The implication of the formula of African solutions to African conflicts is the need to create a role for civil society in the management of conflict and to cultivate a political culture in which leaders are open to inputs from civil society. In *African Conflict Resolution*, Zartman claimed that very few Africans ‘study, teach, analyse, or write on the various aspects of conflict management, reduction, resolution, and prevention’ (p.103) and while there are significant exceptions it is probably the case that the capability in higher education in Africa to contribute to a political culture informed by these perspectives is weak. Part of a long term strategy for institution building for conflict management would need to be the development of a conflict resolution curricula and research agenda in African universities.

The conflict resolution research community in general has positioned itself around a research and training agenda which is not as dependent on western designed concepts and practices as it has been. The analysis of conflict at two levels (structural-institutional and cultural-communal) and the more flexible conception of the range of appropriate intervention strategies in turn has implications for the way in which the role of culture is understood in conflict resolution. Kevin Avruch and Peter Black
(1987) have argued for the need to open conflict resolution to a more sophisticated intercultural and multicultural understanding. They pointed to the need for ethno conflict theories (derived from locally constructed common sense views of conflict), and for ethno praxis (techniques and customs for dealing with conflict which emanate from these understandings).

Prompted by experiences in Somalia, US officials at a meeting in Nairobi in January 1996 announced a new strategy on African conflict management and prevention, with the ten countries of the Greater Horn region intended as its testing ground. In addition to using eminent persons as mediators the strategy relies upon ‘substantially adopting a lot of the efforts being made at the local level’; relying on the knowledge of village elders; and teaching children ‘how to get along with people from different ethnic groups, people with different opinions and other differences’ (International Peacekeeping News, April 1996). Certainly this is an advance on putting peacekeepers into positions where they are shooting at Somalis in pursuit of a mandate of national reconciliation. A little while after this strategy was announced the UN launched a $25 billion initiative, the ‘UN System-Wide Special Initiative on Africa’, designed to revive development on the continent by putting funding into education, water supplies and health projects over the next decade. It would be interesting to question how much officials responsible for both of these initiatives have spoken to each other and how much of the funding initiative will be devoted to a radical strengthening of conflict resolution capability in Africa.

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Bibliography


A review of a conference, two exhibitions and a play which demonstrate the themes and arguments generated by *africa95* which sought to present dynamic cultural work of a continent too often portrayed as a place of famines and tyrants. If the events of *africa95* were clouded by the murder of an artist, they still had much to say about the ‘glorious productivity of African cultures’.

1995 should have been an *annus mirabilis* for anyone with an interest in African arts. Under the co-patronage of the Queen and Presidents Mandela and Senghor, and supported by an array of corporate sponsors (Endnote 1) *africa95* was a British season of the arts of Africa and the African diaspora which took place in galleries, museums, theatres, cinemas, community centres, universities and on television and radio. Events comprised exhibitions of art, photography and an academic conference.

With hundreds of artists visiting the UK, and an education programme in which every major sponsor organised activities and produced educational resources *africa95* offered a unique and spectacular opportunity. It would be impossible to write and tedious to read a review of all these events, so I shall limit my discussion to one conference, two exhibitions and one play since they seem to underscore some of the major issues of debate which *africa95* very productively aired. But the underlying intention of *africa95* was to displace the popular perception of Africa as a continent of famines and tyrants and to see another and truer Africa beneath the ‘Africa’ of ancient legend and the daily news. This was, of course, a highly laudable aim and *africa95* succeeded in celebrating the glorious productivity of African cultures, past and present; and the fact that it also raised questions and caused arguments about the image of Africa in the west, particularly the nature and the language of academic debate and the presentation of artefacts, only contributed to a sense of it being a noble endeavour. But then, amidst all this proper dissension and festivity, ‘The Man Died’ (Endnote 2) and with horrific suddenness, the image of Africa turned to that of the hanged artist’s engagement with politics.

In retrospect the debates and controversies which seemed so significant at the start of *africa95* now seem to have a fragility of substance which is almost innocent. The first session of The Royal Africa Society Conference ‘*Mediums of Change: The Arts in Africa95*’, which opened *africa95*, encapsulated many of those debates. Chaired by the Nigerian writer Adewale Maja-Pearce and concerned with ‘African Literature Today’, Niyi Osundare, Nigerian poet and Professor of English at the University of Ibadan, rejected the current vogue for post-colonial critical theory and was opposed by Abdulrazak Gurnah, Tanzanian novelist and lecturer at the University of Kent. A ‘robust debate’ ensued (Endnote 3).

This is neither an inconsequential matter but nor is it an easy debate to summarise since it extends beyond the confines of The Royal Africa Society Conference and
involves the application of post-Freudian and post-structuralist critical discourse to (variously) 'Third World', 'Commonwealth' or 'International English Literatures' and artworks. Its main proponents are Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha who focus on the nature of the representation of post-colonial identity. Bhabha's reconstruction of Frantz Fanon's psychology of colonialism depicts the post-colonial self as a product of the historical intervention of imperialism in its denial of the enabling features of humanity; language, law, civil society and artistic expression. The urge for conquest represents a desire for the subjugation of otherness to bring it within the surveillance of the imperial self. The coloniser substitutes an image of dominance and imperial power for the colonised sense of other; the colonised self looks at the world and sees a reflection of imperial power. The colonial condition prevents, therefore, the formation of workable forms of social and cultural life by creating psychological dependence on substituted colonial domination (Endnote 4). Homi Bhabha writes that if

the [colonial] subject of desire is never simply a Myself, then the Other is never simply an lSelf, a font of identity, truth or mis-recognition ...

Bhabha insists that 'the question of identity can never be seen “beyond-representation”’ (Endnote 5) and in that frame of representation the post-colonial subject becomes a ‘depersonalised, dislocated’:

an incalculable object, quite literally difficult to place. The demands of authority cannot unify its message nor simply identify its subjects (Endnote 6).

This post-modern/post-colonial self is a field of negative definitions in which the subject becomes opaque, ‘incalculable’, emptied of ‘content’, but recognised because ‘empty’. The post-colonial subject emerges as a shadow figure, ‘tethered’ to the more substantial presence of an erroneous western subjectivity and whose only hope of representation is to deconstruct that dominant subjectivity and to exploit its gaps and interstices (Endnote 7). Analysis focuses, therefore, not only on the nature of African identity, but also on the ‘visibility’ of African artworks and writings: how in this melange of psychology and neo-colonial politics, African cultural products may actually be seen in a true or authentic light. Indeed, in the present context, what is the nature of an ‘authentic’ African culture?

Opposition to this discourse which has become increasingly dominant in European and American academe is argued on many points and most forcefully by African writers and academics. They object to what they see as the ‘historylessness’ of the analysis, the confinement of their histories and cultures within the narrow bounds of the post-colonial era and the representation of African artists and writers as being inevitably either ‘voiceless’ or ‘hybrid mimics’ borrowing forms of expression which they can neither control nor make their own. They object also to the often-impenetrable language of this discourse (see above) which radically divorces critical debate from a wider constituency and public role.

That public role of the writer and critic was, however, masterfully demonstrated in the keynote address by Wole Soyinka, Nigerian playwright, poet and Nobel Laureate. He spoke with an energetic humour which contributed forcefully to the darker aspects of his message. In a sardonic tone he explained that the true reason why African dictators refused to leave power was their overwhelming desire to attend their own state funeral. He playfully predicted that the invention of video and virtual reality offered Africa a route to freedom from their tyranny — stage a virtual state funeral for the despots and they would retire to leave the people in peace (Endnote 8).
Soyinka also turned his satirical eye to British art when he noted that the summer drought had been ended by the symbolic sacrifice of an actress in a glass box which the British had disguised as art. The joke evoked that other main area of celebration and dissent which centred upon the main event of *africa95*, the Royal Academy of Arts exhibition ‘*Africa: The Art of a Continent*’ (4 October to 21 January). The range and extent of this exhibition was overwhelming. The exhibition rooms of the Royal Academy were arranged in a circular fashion to mirror a metaphorical journey through Africa: from ancient Egypt in the entrance gallery through, successively, Eastern, Southern, Central, West, Sahel and Northern Africa. Superlative adjectives come so easily that they seem, in the end, to fall over each other: ‘monumental’, ‘unprecedented’, ‘beautiful’, ‘complex’ should just about do it. The equally superlative catalogue runs to some 620 pages with uncounted (by me anyway) illustrations (Endnote 9). I could not possibly summarise the exhibition: in many respects it is not available to summary. What summary could be available from the conjunction of Ashanti gold weights, the minbar of the Sultan Qa’itbay and hundreds of other objects?

In the end, one’s eye and memory focuses upon one or two objects from the hundreds on display to stand as a synecdoche for the whole. For me, that representative object was the sublime seated figure of Tada, a masterpiece of Ife 13th-14th century sculpture and copper casting from the northern frontier of the ancient kingdom. It is a seated figure, dressed only in a wrapper and a net of beads, eyes closed in a state of deep meditation: an avatar of a lost world. I feel this to be an object of great beauty but that aesthetic reaction gives me pause for thought. Why should this object evoke such a reaction? Clearly, this figure can be assimilated to a set of aesthetic categories which render this object familiar to me: its perfectly naturalistic proportions, its expression of a humanist vision. I make sense of this African sculpture by discovering its meanings within western aesthetic categories. I have little sense of what this object may mean within an African context. I am quite willing to believe that this is a personal failing, but I don’t think so. The ‘monumental’ and ‘unprecedented’ nature of the exhibition was not only its singular glory but also its significant problem: the geographical arrangement cut across historical time and there was (for me, at least) little sense of how two adjacent artefacts from different cultures, perhaps from different millennia, could be made to correspond. These are quibbles, I know, when an exhibition such as this has never been seen before, nor I would guess, will likely to be seen again, but it does raise questions about the nature of the presentation (and the representation) of African art in the west.

It is not so much that we simply do not possess the contexts - historical, archaeological or aesthetic – for being able to see this exhibition. ‘*Africa: The Art of a Continent*’ increases the quantity of our knowledge but hardly touches at all the depth of our understanding. The exhibition should be viewed alongside the other exhibitions available during the run of *africa95* but this was the jewel in the crown of *africa95*, conceived of as a ‘way in’ to Africa and as such it confirms a well-established set of misunderstandings in that, in the end, the exhibition probably says more about how Europe views and uses African art than the art itself, that it removes all the works from any meaningful cultural contexts, and you could be forgiven for thinking that Africans stopped producing art in about 1900. African art is, on the evidence of this exhibition, past, pagan and primitive.

But that is far from being the fact of African art’s history of reception in the west. African art in the west constitutes modernity. Without African art modern western art could not exist because African art gave modern artists new forms, perspectives and
models which they used to distance themselves from familiar traditions. The influence of African art on modernism begins in the dusty cellars of the Trocadero, in Picasso’s ‘discovery’ of African masks, in his reworking of African artistic form into *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*, his collaborations with Braque and the creation of the ‘moment’ of Cubism: in short, the revolutionary impact of African form on European art which radically reshaped its destiny during the years 1907-14. In almost every respect, ‘Africa: The Art of a Continent’ conforms to that modernist view of African art. It is emptied of autonomous content, and Africans themselves are excised from the picture – or reduced in significance to anonymous, ‘primal’, primary and unknowing contributors of source materials. In this scenario, the notion of a self-conscious African artist is excised: the African artist lacks that self-consciousness which the European modernist has in abundance. Without this kind of self-consciousness, Africans are bereft of the possibility to represent themselves to themselves, or to others. They exist only as past, pagan and primitive: the anonymous and unaware commodity of modernism but who themselves lack modernity.

Perhaps a couple of examples may clarify what I mean. Kane Kwei is a carpenter. Let me rephrase that. In Ghana he is a carpenter who specialises in making coffins which in their shapes and colours reflect the occupations or lifestyles of his clients. A gardener will be laid to rest in a giant onion or cocoa-pod, a traveller in a jumbo jet with detachable wings, a wealthy businessman in a coffin carved into the shape of a white Mercedes Benz. These wonderfully extravagant objects are nonetheless intended to fulfil a functional purpose as receptacles for the dead. In Ghana.

In Europe and North America, since his Mercedes Benz-shaped coffin’s display at the ‘Magiciens de la terre’ exhibition in Paris in 1989, Kane Kwei has become an artist whose work (often half-size) is much sought by private collectors and museums. His work has been described as ‘surrealist’, an ‘iconoclastic marriage of consumer durables and the cults of the dead’, a ‘blurring of the real and the simulation’, a ‘post-modern pastiche’ which makes no distinction between natural objects and European manufactured goods, a ‘wry critique’ of modernity. There are comparisons with Claes Oldenburg.

Kane Kwei’s coffin seems graphically to conjure the dilemma of African Art in the west. In Ghana, Kane’s coffin is the focus of a range of cultural actions: beliefs and ceremonies which situate it in a location where it has presence. Those terms determine the object as function, but in the western paradigm function separates this object from ‘art’. But when function is displaced, the object becomes amenable to the designation of art. Thus the art-coffin on display in the gallery becomes a trope in the post-modern, post-colonial discourses of identity: the art-coffin speaks of dislocated post-colonial post-modern identities. The coffin’s dislocation has transfigured a functional object into a post-modern artwork.

Sokari Douglas Camp’s exhibition for *africa95*, *Play and Display: Steel Masquerades from Top to Toe*, commissioned by the Museum of Mankind, offers another example. Sokari is a Nigerian artist who seeks to combine the traditional masquerades of her hometown of Bugama, Nigeria, with distinctly non-traditional elements and materials. As she explains:

*The core of the exhibition is a set of eight (life size) figures inspired by the art of the masquerade as practised in my home town in the Niger Delta. The idea behind these works is twofold. First, they are a challenge to the westerner’s continuing penchant for decorating their walls with disembodied and decontextualized African “masks” of whose original*
meanings and functions they have little or no idea - a challenge made by suggesting the full context of costume and performance in which these “masks” are embedded, and thereby deepening and enriching the viewers’ appreciation of them. Secondly, of course, they are creative re-interpretations of the original productions, using the powerful non-traditional medium of welded steel and imposing my own individual artistic vision.

Though they form the core of the exhibition, my eight pieces are supported by numerous traditional masquerade headpieces and videos showing some of these in their full context of costume and performance. These supporting features serve to show, on the one hand how much my work owes to the traditional art of my home town, and on the other the extent to which it is a creative reinterpretation of that art.

Sokari’s claim that her exhibition makes ‘a salutary counterweight to the old-fashioned, decontextualized Royal Academy exhibition’ makes the point about the process by which functional African objects must be dislocated from their context in order to achieve the status of art in the west. But in order to make that important point, Sokari appeals to a truer, more genuine setting and understanding of ‘tradition’ and the authentic nature of African art which she, as an African artist, is uniquely capable of representing. This is a position which is again rife with contradictions which I wish to draw attention to, not to criticise Sokari in any way, but in order to illustrate the situation of contemporary African artists (in whatever medium) and to argue that africa95 significantly reinforces those paradoxes. It does not really matter that Sokari Douglas Camp was educated at London’s Central School of Art and Design and the Royal College of Art, and has held her major exhibitions in Edinburgh, Liverpool, Plymouth, London, Amsterdam, Washington, New York, New Zealand, Tokyo, Sicily, Germany, France, Spain and many other places – except in Africa – because there is no contradiction in being an African and an international artist. Where the contradiction lies is in her evocation of the authentic artefact situated in the context of her hometown when, as a woman, she would not be permitted to practise her art in Bugama: her art is for elsewhere. She is an interpreter, not for Bugama, but for us and as such is confined within the modernist notions of African art which the Royal Academy exhibition represents.

Both Kane Kwei’s and Sokari’s works are, in their very different ways, largely determined by a set of presuppositions about the ‘authentic’ nature of African art which are conditioned by the kind of assemblage of objects displayed at the Royal Academy. Kane Kwei’s ‘post-modernism’ is calculated by the degree of his departure from a tradition of ‘past, primitive and pagan’ funerary artefacts; Sokari’s reinterpretation of traditional forms is, nonetheless, an appeal to that tradition – one which would reject her work on the traditional grounds of her gender. How is this dominant and determining notion of ‘tradition’ constructed? Where does this tradition reside? How is it made? By whom? How did africa95 shape, confirm or alter representations of that tradition?

The questions are not without aesthetic, political and historical significance since the principal conduit for artistic expression in the verbal and plastic arts in Africa of the colonial and post-colonial eras has been through the examination of ‘tradition’. Achebe rewrote Igbo history through the medium of a novel about a ‘traditional’ village; Soyinka sees the fall of the Yoruba state in the failure of a traditional ritual suicide; Ayi Kwei Armah adopts traditional oral narration to recount an African past; the poetic creed of africa95’s co-sponsor is also the national philosophy of Senegal.

It is tempting to see the Royal Academy exhibition as a kind of Platonic theatre of forms: an arrangement of ideal types and essential figures which all African art
imitates as exemplars of these definitive and cardinal models. The exhibition was, after all, designated ‘the art of a continent’. Tempting also to point to the ironies of a theatre of forms without contexts, without histories, essences without meaning ... and in London, not Africa, of all places, ‘heart of our history, original sin’ (Endnote 10). The Royal Academy exhibition, then, as the showcase for africa95, determines the nature of the ‘tradition’ and of the ‘Africa’ it represents. Africa becomes again what it has always been: parenthesised, a simulacrum of itself, historyless, ideally primitive and determined from without.

Tempting, but of course, too easy.

Critiques of africa95 which saw it simply as another form of appropriation and misrepresentation have a point – but it is not the only one, nor is it the most substantial. The difference africa95 made was that it enabled African artists to determine the nature of the presentation of their work and thereby, directly to challenge, shape and re-present their ‘traditions’, not as a series of static ‘authentic’ or iconic forms, but as a contested site for contemporary re-presentations, debates and dissensions.

Nowhere was that contested ground more elegantly or vibrantly displayed than in Wole Soyinka’s new play ‘The Beatification of Area Boy’ which received its world premiere at Leeds’ West Yorkshire Playhouse under the sponsorship of Soyinka’s alma mater (Endnote 11).

The play is set in a Lagos ‘area’, a public space outside a modern shopping mall and the main characters are petty street traders, beggars and Sanda, the ‘area boy’ himself, an intelligent spiv, petty criminal and protector of the human detritus of the district. The concrete-grey stage is littered with the rubbish of the African metropolis and a flashing neon light which marks the entrance to a shopping mall – the hidden world of comfort and consumer durables which Sanda is, ostensibly there to defend as the doorman who keeps out the area’s lowlife. This is no traditionalist’s or modernist’s vision of Africa: it is neither past, pagan nor primitive but contemporary, amoral and sophisticated. Through a series of linked vignettes the play shows Sanda weaving a web of confidence tricks and comic deceptions which enable those who depend upon him to survive in a brutal and corrupt nation. In some respects the play is reminiscent of Brechtian drama in its relentless satiric construction of a post-colonial state descending into vice, anarchy and violence. Each episode in the play is played out against the backdrop of a greater national tragedy as a mass of unseen people drift past the area: a dispossessed ethnic minority evicted from their traditional lands by a vicious military government in cahoots with multinational corporations eager to exploit their natural resources.

Yet this is also Soyinka’s most self-reflexive play since it carries hints and traces of all of his previous dramatic works. There is the same sense of a world ‘tumbling in the void of strangers’ which occurs in Soyinka’s great tragic work Death and the King’s Horseman, combined with the comic virtuosity of the Brother jero plays and The Lion and the Jewel and the acerbic political consciousness of Kongi’s Harvest and Madmen and Specialists. But the play it comes closest to is The Road which explored the world of a group of drivers, lorry-park touts and petty gangsters, ruled over by the Professor, a demented preacher engaged in a strange search for the Word – the linguistic sign which will make sense of a world dispossessed of its meaning. Area Boy also depicts a familiar post-colonial condition: individuals are lost in political and social orders which will not function and in which the avatars of traditional culture are buried in
the detritus of contemporary society. But although the play depicts a deracinated or dislocated post-coloniality, Soyinka offers a different strategy of resistance: one which does not culminate in Bhabha's 'secret art of invisibleness'. The fragmented and dislocated post-colonial world of contemporary Africa is given a different twist by Soyinka's satiric vision. The character of the Judge is a familiar Soyinkan character-type reminiscent of the Professor and a range of dramatic figures who, by their heroism, eccentricity or madness, uncover or symbolise an older, traditional and authentic cultural voice uttering profound truths – truths which ultimately cost them their lives. In *Area Boy*, the Judge/Professor figure has been largely displaced by the wily Sanda, but he nonetheless has a key role in the play's eventual message. At the climax of the play the Judge is shot by a revengeful militia determined to cleanse the streets and the nation of the human victims they have created. But this familiar and tragic dénouement is given a final twist when it is revealed that the Judge is wearing a bullet-proof vest which he stole from the soldiers. The play creates an archetypal Soyinkan tragic moment only to reverse it and step back from it: the voice of tradition, driven mad, marginalised and impoverished by the new world which has displaced his authority, is not sacrificed to that modernity, but survives by a comic sleight of hand. The play, finally, is deftly poised in its representation of contemporary Africa: its version of *africa 95* is of a continent teetering on the edge of catastrophe and anarchy, starvation and brutality, but nonetheless clinging on to its ravaged 'traditions' struggling to make them fit the new order.

Midway through the run of Soyinka's play, that new order took its revenge on a Nigerian writer who dared to evoke the traditional values of his people. Ken Saro-Wiwa and his fellow victims were not as fortunate as Soyinka's Judge. The abyss which *Area Boy* gazes into but steps back from, opened under the Ogoni leaders: no comic resolution is possible in a Nigerian jail.

Ken Saro-Wiwa's death deserves to be treated more seriously than to be seen simply as an apostrophe to a cultural festival but it was a cruel but salutary reminder dropped into the middle of *africa95*'s celebrations, that making art in Africa involves a deadly commitment to more than just the theoretical debates on the nature of identity, authenticity and representation. It deserves a better response than it received from some 'sympathetic' British artists and commentators: Fay Weldon's comment in *The Guardian* that 'this is *Heart of Darkness* country', was insulting and ignorant – insulting to the Ogoni, ignorant of Conrad. But this is territory familiar to African artists and writers; Ngugi, Achebe, Soyinka and many others have been exiled, continually harassed, and imprisoned. Terrible occupational hazards, but 'the man dies who keeps silent in the face of tyranny' (Endnote 12) and it cannot end with silence.

At The Royal African Society Conference, Niyi Osundare read a short extract from a poem by a 14 year old Nigerian poet, Ogechi Iromantu. It is not a great poem, but its clearly voiced aspiration for a better Africa seems a fitting epitaph for Ken Saro-Wiwa, and for *africa95*:

No more screaming, No more crying
no more lies to cover the wounds of sadness and grief
no more unforgettable pain
this is the world intended from the beginning
I see peace in the land for all ... (Endnote 13).
Endnotes

1. British Airways, Blue Circle Industries (UK), Meridien BIAO, Morgan Grenfell, Silhouette Eyewear.


3. Tom Ilube internet site for *africa95* compiled by Ken Woghiren.


8. Tom Ilube internet site for *africa95* compiled by Ken Woghiren.


11. Soyinka read English at the University of Leeds, 1954-57 (BA) and 1957-58 (MA) where he worked closely with Bonamy Dobree, Arnold Kettle and Wilson Knight.


13. From Ogechi Iromuntu’s ‘Outpouring of Innocence’ quoted by Niyi Osundare and cited by Tom Ilube internet site for *africa95* compiled by Ken Woghiren.

*africa95 Itinerary*

Much of the following information has been taken from the internet site for *africa95* compiled by Ken Woghiren:


Cross-Currents: New Senegalese Art, 9 September - 14 October, Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool.


International Sculpture Workshop and Exhibition, 2 September - 29 October, Yorkshire Sculpture Park.

Myths and Mothballs: African Art in the 1990s, 26 October, Courtauld Institute of Art, Somerset House, London.

New World Imagery: Contemporary Jamaican Art, 23 September - 11 May, National Touring Exhibition.

On the Road, 6 October - 12 November, Delfina Studio Trust, London.

Play and Display: Masquerades of Southern Nigeria, 29 September - 17 March, Museum of Mankind.

Rotimi Fani-Kayode/Alex Hirst Retro-Spective, 7 October - 3 December, Impressions Gallery,
York and touring.

**Self Evident: studio portraiture**, 12 August - 16 September, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham.


**Signs, Traces and Calligraphy**, 14 September - 14 October, Concourse Gallery, London.


Confrontation, Co-operation or Co-optation: NGOs and the Ghanaian State during Structural Adjustment

Ian Gary

This article examines relations between non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and African states, with particular reference to Ghana, during a period of structural adjustment and neo-liberal hegemony in Africa. The growing number of NGOs in Africa, and the concomitant shift in international aid away from African states toward NGOs, places these new institutional actors at the heart of debates concerning democratisation, civil society, economic liberalisation, the role of state, and the nature of nation-state sovereignty in an era of a World Bank/IMF condominium in Africa. Building on the work of Fowler and others, the article examines NGO-state relations in Ghana in detail. It argues that NGOs fit in perfectly with the neo-liberal agenda for Africa. With the state under attack from above and below, a new struggle for resources and power is being waged between NGOs and many African states, with, as the case study of Ghana shows, the outcome, in this transitory period, far from certain.

There is clear competition for declining aid resources between the state and local and foreign NGOs. The self-preservation instinct plays to the benefit of those that wield the instruments of power (Integrated Social Development Centre, Accra, Ghana (ISODEC) 1995).

Scan the traffic in any African capital city and one will be struck by the number of Land Rovers, Patrols, Pajeros and Land Cruisers belonging to aid agencies and NGOs. While this gives one an inkling of the extent of NGO operations, recent figures show the huge amount of resources and sheer numbers of NGOs operating in Africa. For example, over US$1 billion was channelled through NGOs in Africa in 1986 (Bratton, 1989:570). Worldwide, more than US$7 billion is channelled through NGOs, equivalent to 16 per cent of bilateral aid flows, with most official aid agencies giving 10 per cent or more of their aid money to NGOs (Clark, 1991:74; Farrington, 1993:26). During the 1980s funding to NGOs grew at five times the rate of official development assistance overall (Fowler, 1992:15).

That the rapid growth in the NGO sector in Africa parallels the era of structural adjustment and the roll-back of the state is no mere coincidence. As this article will argue, the burgeoning NGO sector fits perfectly into the thinking of anti-statist structural adjustment driven by a free-market ideology. They are private organisations, allegedly less corrupt and more efficient and democratic than the state, are often 'entrepreneurial' in nature, and provide social welfare services in areas in which the state has withdrawn. Their piecemeal and uncoordinated approach to
social welfare provision is the exact opposite of centrally-planned state provision. As such, they are proving to be at the centre of current debates on democratisation, civil society, economic liberalisation, the role of state, and the nature of nation-state sovereignty. In many ways the emergence of the NGO sector presents a direct threat to a weakened African state. I argue that it is the explicit project of many international donors, through increased NGO funding, to undermine the African state from 'below', while it is undermined from 'above' through a loss of legitimacy and sovereignty caused by World Bank/IMF mandates.

This article has two major aims. First, to build on the recent work of Fowler, Bebbington, Copestake and Wellard and others, to show how NGOs fit into a neo-liberal agenda in Africa involving structural adjustment and the rollback of the state (Fowler, 1992a; Bebbington, 1993; Bratton, 1989, 1990a; Copestake, 1993). Second, to demonstrate through the example of Ghana, how a new arena in the struggle for power and resources is being created, pitting African states against NGOs, and how this struggle is playing itself out in its early stages in one country. Ghana in many ways has served as a 'development laboratory' for structural adjustment and planned political liberalisation. It has been hailed as a rare African 'success story' for economic reform (it has been pursuing a World Bank/IMF programme for 12 years) and, in 1992, experienced a nominal democratic transition after 10 years of military rule.

In attempting to describe the complexity of NGO-state relations in Africa, my argument contains a seeming contradiction. I argue both that the African state is being weakened considerably from above and below, and that using its remaining coercive and bureaucratic power, it has been able, at times, to co-opt and control the growing NGO sector. I believe both processes are occurring simultaneously and are not mutually exclusive. The fact that most African states perceive NGOs as a threat to their power and legitimacy is a sign of their very weakness.

**Acronym City: The Rise of the NGO Sector in Africa**

For some, NGOs are in the vanguard of an alternative mode of development that is fundamentally different from today's neo-liberal orthodoxy; other lines of reasoning see NGOs playing roles within the existing neo-liberal framework (Farrington, 1993:1).

NGOs have gained prominence in the recent development discourse on Africa for many reasons. The international economic orthodoxy promoted by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the implementation of structural adjustment, has led to the increasing withdrawal of the state from the economic sphere, and a de-emphasis of state-led development strategies, with the World Bank view being that the state should restrict itself to providing a 'sound macro-economic and legal framework' for investment (World Bank, 1989, 1991, 1994). The reduction in state activity in terms of 'service delivery' – health, education, agricultural extension, etc. – has led to a large increase in resources to NGOs to fill the 'service delivery gap'. In development circles, there is a consensus that 'bottom-up' NGOs have a comparative advantage over bloated and in efficient 'top-down' government ministries in implementing development projects and delivering aid and are somehow 'closer to the grassroots'. In their perceived political role, many academics and development practitioners believe that NGOs and grassroots groups are essential building blocks in a 'civil society' which will serve as a countervailing force against the hegemonic ambitions of the 'predatory' and 'rent-seeking' African state (Clark, 1991). Some go so far as to argue that NGOs could be the training ground for an
'articulate and empowered middle class' essential, in the vein of Barrington Moore, for stable and lasting democratic politics (Jeffries, 1993a).

Before venturing further, let us decide what we mean by the 'overused and abused' term 'NGO'. Like much development jargon, the term is so ambiguous that it could be potentially meaningless. It has spawned an alphabet soup of related acronyms like BONGOs (business-oriented NGOs); BINGOs (big international NGOs), etc. Combining categorisations provided by Fowler and Bratton, we can devise a restricted definition which divides NGOs into four main types.

- **Community-based organisations** (CBOs) are small and intimate, often village level, organisations run by the members themselves and relying primarily on locally-generated resources.

- **Service or intermediary NGOs** are registered organisations with paid staff which provide social services to beneficiary groups or 'clients', often CBOs.

- **Intermediary NGOs** are increasingly becoming involved in advocacy and policy work. Membership NGOs, while professional, providing services and employing staff, 'are owned by those who should benefit from the services that the organisation provides.'

- Finally, **International Relief and Development NGOs** are foreign organisations, such as OXFAM or Save the Children, with large professional staffs, field offices in many countries, and worldwide budgets which compare in size with those of the smaller governments in Africa' (Bratton, 1989:571; Fowler, 1992:8).

The distinction between indigenous/local NGOs and foreign/international NGOs is necessarily problematic and ambiguous, although many writers subscribe to a neat delineation between the categories (While many community-based organisations carry out their work with little or no foreign money, it is the rare 'local' or 'indigenous' NGO which does not owe its survival, in all or in part, on foreign funds. While many NGOs are started purely through local initiative, other NGOs have begun as a direct initiative of a foreign funder or in response to the increased availability of resources for NGO work. Conversely, some international NGOs are quite localised in their operations, as are some local affiliates of international NGO networks. This article deals primarily with local NGOs, but recognises the links between local NGOs, foreign NGOs, and the international aid system. This typology leaves out a new breed of 'anti-NGOs' or 'GONGOs' ('government oriented non-governmental organisations') a phenomenon which will be described later.

**Rolling Back the State: NGOs in the Context of African Political Economy in the 1990s**

The growing role of NGOs and their relations with African states must be placed within the context of recent changes in the political economy of sub-Saharan Africa. As state activity declines, NGOs, in the division of labour implied in structural adjustment, are seen by the World Bank and other development agencies as being the key institution to take up the slack in the social arena and 'cushion the blow' of adjustment (Endnote 1). As Fowler notes:

*The World Bank's strategy for poverty reduction entails helping the poor to obtain the means and opportunities they need to become productive within a national policy framework that is supportive of their efforts. The comparative advantage of NGOs should*
make them ideal institutions to assist in this endeavour. Hence, increased collaboration with and finance for NGOs is being called for by the Bank and provided by bilateral and multilateral aid (1991b:56).

With the decreased role of the state under structural adjustment, increased donor aid flows to NGOs, and internally and externally driven political change, African states and NGOs appear to be on a collision course in a new struggle for resources.

The 1980s are often seen as a ‘lost decade’ for development in sub-Saharan Africa. The decade is characterised by economic stagnation and regression, decreased public spending and greater control over national economies by foreign financial and aid institutions. With few options at their disposal, many African countries during the 1980s turned to the IFI’s for financial assistance. In their new-found position of strength, they in turn used policy-based lending to force African governments to carry out far-reaching economic reforms. By the end of the 1980s, 36 of the 47 countries in sub-Saharan Africa had embarked on structural adjustment programmes (Bello, 1994:30).

The net effect of these structural adjustment measures has been a ‘rolling back’ of the state. There has been an erosion of national sovereignty as economic policy is designed in Washington rather than in the African capitals.

Where a Southern state depends on external aid rather than the national economy for its existence it effectively becomes a local government in the global political order. Sovereignty is meaningless in a situation where primary governmental functions – security, economic management, the selection and implementation of public policies – cannot be minimally guaranteed or undertaken unless externally negotiated and financed (Fowler, 1992a:26).

With the erosion of state capacity, NGOs have been seen as key actors in this neoliberal agenda. A US House of Representatives report went so far as to argue that NGOs could enlist the poor in their own impoverishment.

NGOs could contribute significantly, along with trade unions, to giving the poor a voice in the making of adjustment policy ... The increasingly important movement of indigenous Private and Voluntary Organizations, along with the trade unions, offers opportunities for enlisting the poor in a renewal of structural adjustment (House of Rep. 1989:20).

NGOs have been involved in explicit ‘compensation programmes’ designed by the World Bank, international donors, and national governments in several adjusting countries to alleviate the pain involved in reform, but have seldom had a voice in their design.

In the era of structural adjustment, African governments have had to juggle multiple demands: containing discontent and protest engendered by economic reform, struggling to hold onto state power as sovereignty is eroded from above and below, and trying to meet the demands of IFIs and donors. These demands have not been limited to the economic sphere. During the mid-to-late 1980s there was agreement among the mainstream donors that political reform should accompany economic reform. A realistic interpretation of this shift would be that donors saw ‘that the models of development they wished to foster would not be consolidated unless effective demand for them could be articulated by the relevant sections of the society’ (Farrington, 1993:10). The World Bank and other donors demanded ‘good governance’ while others made more explicit demands for political reform, often linking the release of aid to political change, or at least the appearance of change.
Good governance was at first a technocratic, strangely apolitical concept concerned with reforming institutions and improving government administration, but soon took on overtly political meaning. The World Bank’s dalliance with ‘good governance’ led it to support ‘civil society’ but not a strong state. The World Bank ‘is unwilling and unable to look after the other side: to take state-building seriously and to provide equivalent resources to support political learning’ (Moore, 1993:49). Promotion of democratisation and good governance has usually taken two forms: political conditionality and funding targeted at institutions and procedures presumed to encourage democratisation. It is the donors’ second method – promoting political liberalisation by channelling aid to institutions and activities thought to foster democratisation – that leads us to a brief discussion of civil society and its relation to debates about NGOs.

Concern for democratisation leads inevitably to a search for institutions – NGOs, trade unions, professional bodies, churches, peasant movements, independent media, etc. – through which civil society can hold the state responsible for its actions. The post-colonial African state, many have argued, as the centre of resources, has been hijacked by elite interests or ‘colonised’ by interest groups where a patron-client system operates. Civil society, as defined by Ndegwa, is

... the collection of organizations in society that exist apart from the state and that are situated across all classes and interests and which seek to represent and advance those interests. Civil society therefore includes non-governmental organizations, private voluntary organizations, professional associations, churches and other religious bodies (1994:33).

The concept of civil society has gained currency among scholars of Africa, with the writings of Bayart on the African state, Chazan on state-society relations, and Diamond on democratisation being particularly influential (Endnote 2) (Bayart, 1986, 1993; Chazan, 1988; Diamond, 1989). Although there is little consensus on what, exactly, civil society is or how to foster it, it has become a ‘hot’ concept in faddish international aid circles. Donors take a more instrumentalist, less complex, view of the fabric of civil society. With the ‘problem’ identified – weak civil society – donors have sought ways to strengthen it, without realising that institutions such as NGOs in civil society, embedded in the same social fabric as the state, are as susceptible to similar pressures and risks of ‘hijacking’ by elite sections of society.

In much of the writing NGOs are seen as necessarily more democratic and participatory than the state and altruistic representatives of the rural poor, both problematic assertions, to say the least. Copestake’s recent study of NGOs involved in agricultural development in six African countries found that ‘few of the NGOs studied had either formal, democratic systems of choosing office-bearers, or transparent mechanisms for canvassing grassroots opinion’ (Copestake, 1993:290).

Be that as it may, many donor agencies from the World Bank to USAID have jumped on the civil society bandwagon. A recent report on NGOs by the Commonwealth Foundation argues that NGOs operate ‘at the interface of government and its institutions on the one hand, and civil society more broadly on the other’, with intermediary NGOs intervening between government and more numerous community-based organisations (Commonwealth, 1995:17). John Clark in Democratizing Development (1991), the World Bank and others argue that NGOs ‘strengthen civil society and in so doing increase the capabilities of citizen’s in the South to hold politicians and public servants accountable for their actions’ (Fowler, 1992a:16).
Fowler, on the other hand, is highly skeptical of any positive effects on civil society brought about by funding NGOs:

*Today the assumption appears to be that funding NGOs for the socio-economic development of the poor will have a ‘leakage’ effect which will build Africa’s civil society. It would seem, however, that the array of political and other instruments available to present holders of power will plug the leaks (Fowler, 1991b:78).*

Control and Resistance: Major Trends in NGO-State Relations

*The threat to the legitimacy of Southern regimes if they fail to provide services to their citizens may set NGOs and poor Southern governments against each other in competition for aid (Fowler, 1992a).*

In the competition between African states and NGOs, states, in charge of the coercive elements of power, are at a natural competitive advantage. Fowler speculates that ‘the combination of eroded sovereignty of poorer Southern governments and diversion of official aid to NGOs as instruments of global social welfare will heighten tensions between them, requiring a collective renegotiation of institutional arrangements for which NGOs are ill prepared’ (Fowler, 1992a:27). Increasingly, governments across the continent have been looking for ways to control and regulate NGOs. This, of course, is a difficult balancing act – governments want the increase in foreign exchange through NGOs to continue, but desire, at the same time, to avoid any threat to their hegemony. In seeking to regulate NGOs, African governments often have less than altruistic motives.

*Governments are often more motivated by the desire to gain access to NGO funds, or monitor NGOs they fear as political competitors, than by a desire to make NGOs accountable to the rural poor (Bebbington, 1993:25).*

From examining the experiences of NGOs in many African countries, several prominent methods of state control emerge. Bureaucratic regulation measures vary across the continent, but in most African countries local and foreign NGOs must be registered with one or more government ministries, just as any other recognised incorporated entity, be it a corporation or a bar association. While few countries have legislation which deals specifically with NGOs, this situation is now changing. Government controls have been rationalised by a need to coordinate NGO activity. (Early in 1995, a new legal framework was used in Kenya to ‘de-register’ two NGOs dealing with policy issues perceived to be a threat to the government (Lukalo, 1995:37)). Through ‘administrative co-optation’, NGOs in many African countries are being obliged ‘to have their activities approved through the bureaucratic procedures used by the government itself’ (Fowler, 1991b:67). Some governments have used open harassment to discipline what Clark calls ‘unreasonable’ NGOs, with Kenya, and the case of the Green Belt Movement, being notorious in this regard. Perhaps most effective, many African governments, politicians, civil servants, and bureaucrats have taken to forming their own NGOs – GONGOs – which, nominally independent but actually under government control, can be used to divert resources meant for ‘legitimate NGOs’.

NGOs have adopted various means to counter the predations of the state, with varying degrees of success. These efforts include keeping a low profile, forming NGO associations, relying on international links to provide credibility and protection, selectively collaborating with governments, and pursuing policy advocacy, media work and public education. In several African states NGOs have formed consortia,
coordinating bodies or umbrella organisations to present a collective voice to the government and international donors and to coordinate their activities. More often than not these attempts, notably in Kenya, Togo and Ghana, have been unsuccessful because of internal rivalries, government co-optation, and the problems associated with massive funding from foreign donors, who, through ignorance or design, have not 'institutionally strengthened' but destroyed or distorted the growth of NGO associations in Africa.

**NGO-State Relations in Ghana**

A close examination of NGO-state relations in Africa is nowhere more appropriate than in Ghana, a veritable living laboratory for the free-market policies and planned political liberalisation of the 1980s and 1990s. Since Ghana is one of the best known cases of economic reform in Africa, spawning an academic sub-industry describing the success, or failure, of structural adjustment. This article provides only a brief summary of Ghana during structural adjustment.

**Ghana in an Era of Structural Adjustment**

When Flt. Lt. Jerry Rawlings came to power for a second time on 31 December 1981, he inherited an economy in crisis. By 1983, when Ghana's structural adjustment programme began, the economy was near complete collapse and the state nearly bankrupt. Falling cocoa prices, declining government revenue, high levels of inflation, economic mismanagement and an unstable political climate had all contributed to the state of crisis. Faced with this situation, when Rawlings turned to the IMF for assistance, he was not negotiating from a position of strength. As a reward for following the economic mandates of structural adjustment, foreign aid and new loans have poured into Ghana creating a short-term illusion of success. In a country of only 16.5 million people, over US$8 billion in foreign aid was given to Ghana in the first seven years of the programme, making Ghana one of the most-favoured aid recipients in the world.

Structural adjustment has been a 'boom for the few and a bust for the many'. Ghana's traditional sources of income – gold, cocoa, and timber – have benefited from the programme, but this has only exacerbated the colonial legacy of dependence. Nearly all of the US$1.5 billion worth of private foreign investment has been in mining, with most of the profits being repatriated overseas. 'User fees' for health care services and education have been introduced. Disincentives to food producers, and the damage caused to local rice producers by cheap rice imports, have led to increased malnutrition and lower food security. Rapid and indiscriminate liberalisation of the trade regime has hurt local industry, while cutbacks in the public sector have shed 15 per cent of the waged work force. Yet for all the efforts at 'rolling back the state', it still wields considerable bureaucratic power even after over a decade of pruning.

Rawlings has said that the essence of democracy is 'not just paper guarantees of abstract liberties, but above all, food, clothing and shelter, in the absence of which life is not worth living' (Ahiakpor, 1993:585). Despite many coup attempts in the early years, the regime was able to consolidate itself in the late 1980s, and Rawlings felt secure enough to talk of reinventing democracy, 'bottom-up' style. Under increasing pressure from within and from donors eager to see their success story unsullied by military rule, Rawlings began cautious steps towards political liberalisation. District assembly elections without multi-party campaigning, Rawlings hoped, would provide a decentralised grassroots organisation to achieve development objectives.
that the state could not because of the 'retrenchment of public sector welfare' (Denkabe, 1993:187).

In 1991, Rawlings announced a timetable for the return to civilian rule. He effectively controlled the process appointing a constituent assembly which wrote a constitution which was approved in early 1992. When Rawling's lifted the ban on political activity, the PNDC machinery was already set to transform itself into the National Democratic Congress or NDC, while opposition groups scrambled to organise themselves. With control of the broadcast media and the major national newspaper, and access to other state resources, Rawlings was able to win the election easily and appears set to repeat this feat in 1996.

But while Ghana's current dalliance with 'ballot-box' democracy has had mixed results, civil society in Ghana has increased in strength. A lively independent press, independent radio stations, invigorated lawyers' association and various church groups, have all contributed to a strengthened civil society. Popular protests in early 1995 forced the government to back down from implementing a value added tax (VAT) recommended by the World Bank, and NGOs and independent think tanks have slightly broadened the spectrum of debate about Ghana's economic future.

The NGO Sector in Ghana

The evolution of the NGO sector in Ghana has its roots in the charity and welfare-oriented activities carried out by churches in the colonial Gold Coast. NGO activities increased in the post-independence period and their numbers grew rapidly during the 1980s and 1990s - a reflection of the worldwide growth of the NGO sector and increased donor attention and funding. In 1960 there were only ten registered NGOs in Ghana, while by 1991 it was estimated that over 350, excluding numerous village-level associations, were operating (Denkabe, 1993:187). While there are many NGOs, the sector is still young and rather undeveloped when compared to the indigenous NGO sector in countries such as Zimbabwe, Kenya or Senegal (only a few have competent, trained staff, a strong organisation, and good administrative and logistical capacity). Major local NGOs include the Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP) in Kumasi, and in Accra, the capital, the Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC), the Centre for Community Studies, Action and Development (CENCOSAD), and the African Centre for Human Development. NGOs span a wide spectrum of activities, from agricultural extension to environmental education. Much local and foreign NGO activity is concentrated in northern Ghana, a historically marginalised area in economic and political terms. Major foreign NGOs operate in Ghana, including Oxfam, ActionAid, World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, and Save the Children.

Government View of NGOs

We can see many of the dynamics at work in Ghana which we discussed earlier. efforts at control and co-optation by the state are juxtaposed with small victories for NGO autonomy. Under Rawlings and the PNDC, NGOs, like other sectors of civil society, had very little political space in which to operate and suffered under a generally repressive political climate. At the early stages of revolution, the PNDC viewed NGOs with suspicion, and as with any other independent body, like the church or trade unions, as a potential threat to a regime which in the beginning had only a tenuous hold on power. Several NGO activists were briefly jailed in the early days of the revolution, while many of the brightest young development activists,
including critics of the structural adjustment programme were compelled to continue their careers outside the country.

Initial government hostility turned into a more generous attitude as the adjustment programme proceeded and the ‘social costs’ became apparent. The government realised it needed to enlist NGOs in the hope of ‘cushioning the blow’ of adjustment. As long as NGOs did not stray into explicitly political terrain or overtly transformative and empowering activities, the government would allow them to operate in the ‘social’ realm. Denkabe describes the government attitude:

*While NGO activities are regarded favourably by the government, the role of NGOs is largely seen as social welfare provision and taking over responsibility for community development as government reduces the public sector. NGOs are expected to develop their initiatives in accordance with the priorities of regional and district administrations* (Denkabe, 1993:188).

The government values the resources NGOs bring to help meet the ‘service delivery gap’ but at the same time wants to circumscribe their role to the sphere of social welfare. Bridget Katsriku, director responsible for NGO affairs at the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare said ‘NGOs exist to fill in the gaps of the government’s developmental efforts’. In this view then, it is logical for the Ghanaian government to seek to ‘monitor’ (as she put it) NGOs and their activities. A Ghanaian NGO responded that ‘NGOs see themselves and are seen, both nationally and internationally, not simply as plugs for government holes. Rather, they are participants in the development process in their own right’ (ISODEC, 1995b). The government seems to have a different attitude towards local and foreign NGOs. The government is more willing to work with foreign NGOs as they are better resourced, and more established in terms of personnel, expertise, and logistical capacity. Many government departments depend on projects funded by foreign NGOs to provide them with vehicles, fuel, etc. (Canacoo, 1992:7).

Current government regulations on NGOs are minimal. NGOs are required, like other groups and corporations, to register as an entity with the Registrar-General’s Department. NGOs are also required to get a certificate to operate from the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare. In both cases, NGOs must give evidence of their constitution, indicating their aims and objectives, their internal methods of accountability and their activities (ISODEC, 1995a:4).

**NGOs and Structural Adjustment in Ghana**

In the last two decades especially, with the narrowing of the enabling elements of the state, i.e. that part of the state that gives it legitimacy (the provision of services as opposed to its coercive arms), NGOs of whatever form have filled an important economic and social vacuum (ISODEC, 1995b:18).

In Ghana, NGOs were enlisted to assist with PAMSCAD, or the Program of Action to Mitigate the Social Costs of Adjustment, a compensatory programme with clearly political aims. The introduction of PAMSCAD came at a time of growing opposition to economic reform in Ghana, with the Trades Union Congress leading the protest against mass retrenchments, extensive currency devaluation, and so-called cost recovery measures being introduced for education, health and other social services (Hutchful, 1994:582).
With donors fearful that their free-market success story would get off track, plans were made to address, or at least be seen to address, some of the negative effects of adjustment. After a meeting of donors in Paris in 1987, an international mission was sent to Ghana to assess the social impact of adjustment and PAMSCAD was established later that year. The programme targeted retrenched workers from the civil service and state-owned enterprises, the so-called ‘new poor’ and ‘vulnerable groups’ in urban and rural areas. PAMSCAD was jointly administered by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning and the Ministry of Local Government and was beset by intergovernmental rivalries. With approximately US$80 million given by donors, PAMSCAD is seen by many as a huge public relations exercise.

Indigenous NGOs have been involved in the programme and in general have been courted by the World Bank, UN agencies, and others to lessen the shock of adjustment. Donors, for their part, perceived that the Ghanaian state did not have the institutional capacity or the ‘absorptive capacity’ to implement such a large programme on its own and sought assurances from Ghanaian government representatives that NGOs would be able to take up the slack. In the division of labour of structural adjustment, NGOs were to be the ‘hands’ carrying out charity work, while the ‘head’ work was the domain of the multilateral development banks, international donors and, to some extent, the government. It is significant that NGOs were called in to participate in the PAMSCAD programme only at the implementation stage and not in the planning and design stage (Gary, 1993).

While the case of PAMSCAD presents one aspect of how NGOs and the state related to each other under structural adjustment, more light was shed on this subject at an unusual gathering of NGO leaders, top-level government officials and World Bank representatives in March 1992. These included the World Bank country representative and John Clark, formerly of Oxfam but now working for the World Bank to oversee relations with NGOs.

Those expecting NGOs to challenge the prevailing orthodoxy at this NGO ‘Roundtable on Structural Adjustment’ came away disappointed (the roundtable took place during a tense period in Ghana just prior to the lifting of the ban on party political activity, so it is perhaps understandable that there were few dissenting voices). The roundtable, organised by the Ghanaian Association of Private Voluntary Organisations in Development, GAPVOD, the umbrella organisation for NGOs in Ghana, and funded by the World Bank, had the expressed goal of identifying ‘strategies to involve NGOs in attaining the goals and objectives of the economic recovery and structural adjustment programmes’ (GAPVOD, 1992:1). Significantly, it was the first time that all these institutional actors had met together since the beginning of the economic recovery programme in 1983. Ill-prepared to discuss the issues, local NGOs did not provide, for the most part, credible criticisms or alternatives to the reform programme. Many were willing handmaidens of structural adjustment and complained most loudly about not having a larger slice of the PAMSCAD cake.

Through the statements by government and World Bank officials, it was clear that NGOs were perceived as ‘helping hands’ who could usefully serve as cheap delivery systems serving international aid and government interests. NGOs for the most part accepted this role and did not question many of the assumptions of the conference, including the idea that ‘growth equals development’. A handful of NGOs, though, called for more equitable growth and more popular participation in every stage of the recovery programme, while a few were bold enough to call PAMSCAD a public
relations afterthought. The irony of discussing ‘macro-economic policy instruments and their effects on vulnerable target groups’ in a four-star luxury hotel in the capital was lost on all but a few NGO representatives. With increasing recognition and access to the halls of power, NGOs in Ghana, as elsewhere, are at risk of being co-opted by the state and the international aid system.

**External Funding and NGO-State Relations**

With the huge amount of aid available internationally, changes in the donor agenda notably affected the shape of NGO-state relations in Ghana. The increased donor attention towards NGOs worldwide was reflected by a major UNDP mission to Ghana in the early 1990s. The mission was designed to assess the benefits of increased funding to the local NGO sector and the possibilities of NGO-government collaboration. The mission followed closely on the heels of the release of an influential UNICEF report critical of the social impact of adjustment in Ghana.

While donors were enthusiastic about funding NGOs, the Ghanaian government, of course, was lukewarm. ‘External donor agencies, such as the UNDP and the USAID, claim to have had to push the government to encourage greater roles for NGOs’ (Johnson, 1990:120). Donors do not have a free hand to support NGOs unilaterally.

> Official aid allocations to African countries are normally subject to formal agreements and written understandings ... Hence, NGOs which receive funds derived from official commitments will be vulnerable to a government’s withdrawal of its permission or more subtle pressures on donors. And, should an NGO incur the recipient government’s displeasure, in the last analysis donors will almost always terminate their funding to satisfy overriding political considerations and bilateral interests (Fowler, 1991b:71).

There is evidence that the government in Ghana has been using its leverage with bilateral donors to determine which NGOs can get bilateral aid (Endnote 3). Government can also influence which NGOs get aid as well as denying aid to others.

> The history of ‘cooperation’ in Africa is littered with examples of governments using donor finance and technical assistance to gain control over cooperatives and integrate them into the state apparatus, with or without the best of intentions. Donors are so desperate for good projects and success stories they often will smother successful village level associations with their attention and money. Promoting role expansion and rapid growth as well as bureaucratisation can strain and undermine the special strengths and vitality to which these associations owe their success (van de Walle, 1990:116).

An example of this process can be seen in the recent history of the Amasachina Self-Help Association, a broad-based association of village development groups based in northern Ghana. Amasachina’s success in animating hundreds of community groups with limited resources, a voluntaristic ethos and without a top-heavy bureaucratic structure, gained it the attention of the government, development ‘experts’ and researchers, and donors. The organisation was unable to cope with a massive infusion of US$75,000 from the World Bank for a feeder road project. The huge influx of money lead to corruption and power struggles within in the organisation, with the work Amasachina became famous for coming to a virtual standstill by 1993. Outside efforts to mediate the leadership struggles proved fruitless. Today, the president of Amasachina is a leading supporter of Rawlings’ ruling NDC party.
Coordination or Control: The Case of GAPVOD

With the increase in donor interest in NGOs, creating an umbrella organisation or ‘strengthening’ an existing umbrella organisation in Ghana became a priority. Examining the development of GAPVOD, the Ghana Association of Private Voluntary Organisations in Development, provides an example of how NGOs, the state and the international aid system relate to each other. The experience of GAPVOD shows how a nexus of interests can distort the growth of an umbrella organisation and the NGO sector as a whole.

GAPVOD was founded in 1980 by 14 NGOs, mostly foreign and church-based groups, as a forum for information sharing and coordination of activities. Gradually GAPVOD evolved from simply an NGO forum to a service providing organisation, notably providing training in management and other skills to member NGOs. Growth remained stagnant - GAPVOD had only 17 members in 1987 – until 1988 when the government and UNDP sought to enlist NGOs in the PAMSCAD programme. By 1987, criticism of adjustment was mounting and there was tremendous political pressure to strengthen the NGO sector through funding an umbrella organisation. In three years from 1990 to 1992, GAPVOD received over US$600,000 through a special UNDP project known as the ‘NGO Management Service Unit’ which was to provide training to GAPVOD and member NGOs (Gary, 1993; Fowler, 1991a).

Gradually, GAPVOD leadership began to pay more attention to its funders at the UNDP and the government than to its own constituency – the organisation and the ‘project’ became indistinguishable. In addition, GAPVOD became completely dependent on one source of funding. As GAPVOD became controlled by a small cabal, undemocratic decisions and leadership moves alienated rank-and-file NGO members. For example, members were not informed about entering into an agreement with the UNDP, which had major ramifications for the organisation, until three months after the project had started. (The project itself was flawed in that it was a counterpart training programme but there were no GAPVOD counterparts to train.) The ‘strengthened’ GAPVOD was used as a tool of control, rather than coordination, by the government and international donors.

[GAPVOD] has met a mixed reception from the NGO community, since its objectives often reflect the administrative needs of government and international donors rather than of local communities and NGOs (Denkabe, 1993:188).

The organisation became not a collective voice of NGOs but a way for the government and donors to speak at local NGOs. Negative sanctions were visited upon those NGOs which did not join GAPVOD. Coercion by various donors compelled many NGOs to reluctantly join and remain in a group which they felt was unrepresentative of the views of the bulk of the indigenous NGO community. The UNDP’s resident representative in Ghana at the time explicitly told NGOs that if they were not registered with GAPVOD they would be ineligible to receive money from any of their funding windows (such as Africa 2000) (Gary, 1993). British Council scholarships, and other such opportunities, were only available if the organisation was a member of GAPVOD. Notably, the two top officials at the GAPVOD secretariat during the funding boom were former high level government bureaucrats – one with the Ministry of Local Government and the other in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning. The latter used his ties with that ministry to secure multilateral development aid from the UNDP. As Bratton reminds us, ‘In Africa, where public resources are allocated along personal or patronage lines, the most useful ties are informal ones’ (Bratton, 1990:108).
In the course of three years and US$600,000, GAPVOD (a necessary umbrella organisation whose natural growth was distorted through aid for political expediency and control) became a discredited, undemocratic, super-NGO bureaucracy. UNDP suspended funding in late 1992 and it had not been restored by 1995. There have been efforts to revive GAPVOD as an independent NGO association but, as of 1995, it was a shell of an organisation with no full-time employees.

31st December Women’s Movement: From ‘Revolutionary Organ’ to ‘Non-Governmental Organisation’

The story of the 31st December Women’s Movement provides a fascinating example of an organisation transforming its image – while maintaining its core role of supporting the ruling party – to adapt to a changing political climate and a shifting donor agenda. The movement is the most prominent example of a GONGO in Ghana – a governmental non-governmental organisation, a oxymoronic phenomenon mentioned earlier. GONGOs could be the wave of the future in many African countries, Fowler argues.

The shrinkage in external resources to African governments increases the likelihood of GONGOs being created as a way of capturing part of the NGOs expanding financial stream (Fowler, 1991b:69).

The 31st December Women’s Movement, named after the date of the 1981 coup, was founded during 1982 as one of the ‘revolutionary organs’ supporting the Rawlings revolution. By 1984 Rawling’s wife, Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings, assumed the presidency of the movement and it became similar to the ruling party women’s leagues in many African states. The movement aims to educate and support women in various ways, and its activities include setting up day care centres and promoting income generating projects. The movement’s development activities are clearly peripheral to its role in supporting the PNDC. In the run up to the 1992 multi-party elections, the movement was instrumental in drumming up support for the ruling party.

In 1987, it was described as a ‘non-governmental organisation, one of the organs the revolution gave birth to’, but its aims and objectives according to its leaders were identical to those of the PNDC ... a direct result of the movement’s political practice is the easy access to state facilities and resources which it enjoys for its work (Tsikata, 1989:87).

The movement, of course, received extensive material support from the state, usually travelling at state expense. While promoting itself as an NGO, many of the movement’s organisers are on salary of various state ministries while working full-time for the movement. Gyimah-Boadi notes that by the late 1980s ‘[the movement] appeared able to commandeer some of the resources coming into the country from international donors to support programmes for women’, receiving support from the UNDP, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and others (Gyimah-Boadi, 1994:136). As the political climate changed in 1992, ‘revolutionary organs’ were no longer the norm in a ‘multi-party democracy’ so the movement began to remake itself into an ‘apolitical’ NGO. The first lady, though, appeared frequently on national television during the race for the presidency opening day care centres and other projects in thinly veiled campaign appearances. While the movement is commonly seen as a branch of the ruling party, those publicly questioning its ‘non-governmental’ nature have felt the wrath of the first lady, as when, for example, the groups membership in GAPVOD was questioned (Gary, 1993).
The 31st December Women’s Movement is the largest and most egregious example of a GONGO. Many former and present civil service staff and bureaucrats are in prominent positions in NGOs and use their connections to negotiate resources from the international aid system. In 1995, a nearly US$1 million project funded by the Danish government in the Upper West Region of Ghana, was implemented in conjunction with the Ministry of Health and local NGOs. Many Ministry of Health officials and other government workers have set up their own ‘community groups’ or ‘NGOs’ to garner some of the money that donors are so eager to feed into the sector.

The NGO Bill – A Victory for ‘Civil Society’?

In early 1995, the Ghanaian government, in a move very similar to what has occurred in several other African countries, began circulating a draft ‘NGO Bill’ which aims to coordinate and control NGO activity. The bill, further evidence of the continued hegemonic ambitions of the state and increased competition for declining levels of external aid, has created a storm of controversy and resistance from the NGO community, extra-parliamentary opposition parties, and others interested in promoting civil society. While the government says the document is merely a ‘discussion paper’, many NGOs see it as a direct attack on their autonomy (African Agenda, 1995:50).

The bill, if drafted into law, would make it mandatory for all NGOs working in Ghana to register with an ‘advisory council’, stacked with government officials and appointees, which would have the power to deny registration to an NGO if it is not satisfied that ‘the organisation is willing and able to work in cooperation with any agency of state that the Minister [for Employment and Social Welfare] may direct’ (Yeboah-Afari, 1995:882; ISODEC, 1995a:1). The bill also defines NGOs in a narrow sense as ‘any voluntary organisation or body of persons ... which is non-political, non-partisan, non-profit making and which aims at improving the quality of life of the inhabitants of the country’ (ISODEC, 1995a:3).

NGOs responded vociferously to the proposed bill, organising seminars and press conferences, appearing on televised debates, and distributing publications critical of the bill. Foreign NGOs also reportedly threatened to pull out of Ghana if the bill became law (Biney, 1995). The bill has been attacked as unconstitutional on several grounds, including violating provisions protecting the freedom of association. The Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC) in Accra has spearheaded the fight against the bill, saying:

_The definition of NGOs in terms of welfare, non-partisanship, and political involvement, are vague enough as to seek to preclude NGOs from questioning central government policy as part of their efforts to deliver welfare ... The bill is not an innocent attempt to help NGOs liaise better with themselves and government. On the contrary it is a mechanism designed to get them to fit in with government’s designs (ISODEC, 1995:3)._  

ISODEC’s director, Charles Abugre, said that in the midst of partisan politics, NGOs provide a non-partisan moral voice which ‘is a potent instrument of civil society for keeping repressive and corrupt regimes in check’.

For the moment, NGOs appear to have been successful in their campaign to get the government to shelve the proposal. The successful campaign is a reflection of both the growing boldness of many NGOs in confronting government and tackling controversial national policy issues and the increased strength of civil society in Ghana since
1992. This is demonstrated through the independent media and outspoken civic organisations. The response of some NGOs to the threat against their autonomy is in marked contrast to their tepid showing at the 1992 NGO roundtable. Several Ghanaian NGOs now have active policy advocacy, research and publication programmes (Endnote 4). Indigenous NGOs may win this battle, but may end up losing the war as the state looks for less obvious methods or control and co-optation.

Conclusion: NGO-State Relations as an Arena of Struggle for Resources and Power

Changes in both African and international political economy and shifts in the international donor agenda have thrust NGOs into a new position of prominence. Declining terms of trade and the effects of structural adjustment have seriously eroded the economic sovereignty of African states and severely curtailed the extent to which African states are involved in the ‘development project’. Political liberalisation and political conditionality emphasising ‘good governance’ and strengthened civil society have also whittled away at the hegemony of the African state. NGOs, in their perceived ability to deliver ‘development’, foster participation, promote civil society, and lessen the social costs of adjustment on ‘vulnerable groups’, fit neatly with the international donor agenda to weaken the African state.

Massive inflows of aid to NGOs have meant that the burgeoning NGO sector has become a new arena of accumulation for a small number of African elites. As the state shrinks in size and controls fewer resources, and NGOs grow in number and scope and control greater resources, the stage for conflict is set. In the concrete example of Ghana, we have seen how these conflicts are beginning to play themselves out in an African state going through structural adjustment. While NGOs have grown in strength and received increased funding, many have been co-opted by the government and enlisted in the project of cushioning the blow of adjustment. The Ghanaian state has sought direct and indirect ways of controlling the sector and, through the creation of GONGOs, has been able to appropriate some of the funds flowing to NGOs.

While rolling back the state in Africa is an actually occurring process, rumours of the state’s demise may be exaggerated. As more resources for the ‘development project’ are funnelled not through the state but through NGOs, the state will seek new levers of control. Concerning the role of the state in development, the question arises: should African states have the legitimate right to regulate the activities of local and foreign NGOs? Would not reformed state institutions be more efficient in providing social welfare services, let alone planning development, than scattered NGO efforts? I believe so, although reform-minded states would face the double-bind of redefining their institutions while trying to maintain their sovereignty. Opportunity and support to carry out such reform is not likely in an era in which, as Fowler has argued, African governments will become local governments with very limited functions in the globalised international economy.

Hopes that the NGO sector will be an independent, democratic force which will counteract state power may be misplaced. There are growing signs that the elite in Africa, accused of hijacking the state for its own narrow interests, may ‘hijack’ the NGO sector as well. Many NGOs are already run by middle-class, educated urban elites, and few operate along democratic lines. As van de Walle has argued,
There is little evidence that associations in civil society do not operate within the same "social logic" as state institutions, that their officials distinguish between the private and public spheres any more than state officials' (van de Walle, 1990:117).

We have also seen how well-placed bureaucrats and politicians have been able to take advantage of the growing interest in NGOs.

While the new conflict for resources and power between African states and NGOs is in its early stage, and no firm conclusions can be made, I believe the state has a natural advantage. Through the use of bureaucratic power, administrative co-optation and in some cases coercive force, state-centred elites are in a clear position to gain, rather than lose, from the shifting donor emphasis towards NGOs. Some analysts of African political economy speak of the existence of a 'bureaucratic bourgeoisie' depending on access to state resources for its existence. What we may be seeing in the 1990s is the emergence of a new 'NGO bureaucratic bourgeoisie' dependent on the huge amount of money now flowing to the NGO sector in Africa, rather than a hoped for new 'articulate and empowered' middle class. To use Bayart's 'politics of the belly' metaphor, if a large part of the 'national cake' is now being baked in a different oven, it stands to reason that African elites will be visiting the new bakery.

Endnotes

1. Fowler argues that 'structural adjustment promotes a division of tasks between institutions - commercial, governmental and non-profit - according to their perceived comparative advantage in market-led, equitable development. Free enterprise is the economic engine, governments provide infrastructures and a regulatory apparatus, and NGOs secure equity by targeting and assisting groups that are marginalised by the adjustment process' (1991b:79).

2. Bayart (1986:120) provides a salutary description of what it would take to transform civil society in counterpoint to those - the World Bank et al. - who see the 'strengthening' of civil society as a 'technical' quick fix for Africa's problems:

   Civil society can only transform its relation to the state through the organisation of new and autonomous structures, the creation of a new cultural fabric and the elaboration of a conceptual challenge to power monopolies. This can only be achieved by means of ideological and institutional 'mediations', and 'mediations' of new categories are nothing less than schemes for the reconstruction of identity and the plural invention of modernity.

3. Staff members of several NGOs whose work often brings them into conflict with existing government policy told me they had been denied the opportunity to make use of bilateral aid.

4. ISODEC, an Accra-based NGO, has recently launched a weekly newspaper, Public Agenda, which competes with other independent and government-owned papers. Its consistently excellent reporting has critically analysed government actions, social and economic policy, and the structural adjustment programme. Environmental organisations have also been active in confronting the government, most notably the Green Earth Organisation and Friends of the Earth-Ghana.

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Ian Gary, a writer and NGO worker, was West Africa Fellow with the International Development Exchange (San Francisco) in Ghana in 1992. This article is a product of research conducted in Ghana in 1992 and 1995.
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The Politics of Food and Starvation

Ray Bush

This article evaluates the persistence of famine and hunger in Africa. It assesses Africa’s food crisis and traces some of the key debates on famine and starvation since the 1970s. It examines the continuity and change in those debates and argues that many of the recent insights into the ways in which food systems may become vulnerable to famine can be provided by an assessment of the political struggles involved in agricultural modernisation.

Within a decade no man, woman and child will go to bed hungry’
(Henry Kissinger, World Food Conference 1974).

Hunger causes 13-18 million deaths per year worldwide – upwards of 35,000 per day. In developing countries, 60 per cent of deaths among the under-fours are caused by hunger. The issues of Africa’s food security and the recurrence of famine remains at the core of debate about the continent’s future. They are often debated in relation to the causes and consequences of starvation, and the long term effects of persistent malnutrition on human development. Investigators have noted too one of famine’s cruelest ironies, that the producers of food are the first to die from starvation. More particularly, evidence has seemed to confirm that it is the most vulnerable groups of agriculturalists and pastoralists, the poor, the elderly and women that are the first to suffer. This has led to an understanding that famine and food insecurity is linked to poverty and vulnerability, to uneven availability of and access to food and to the nature of food production and distribution (Robinson, 1996; FAO, 1995; Sen, 1981; Watts, 1991).

International relief agencies and NGOs have been primarily concerned with the impact of food insecurity and famine on perceived vulnerable groups. This concern has led to the preoccupation with immediate relief and to the development of more sophisticated monitoring and early warning systems in famine-prone communities. There has also been the consolidation of interest in the ability of communities to withstand stresses leading to widespread famine. Interest in ‘coping mechanisms’ and ‘livelihood strategies’ is the logical outcome of the curious fact that even in the harshest conditions many people survive (and profit) from famine (Swift, 1993; Davies, 1993). Yet while coping strategies and livelihood strategies show that people are not passive victims in the face of famine, preoccupation with ‘coping’ and ‘survival’ is limiting. Coping strategies, like asset sales, barter and loans (especially as food crises intensify) generate winners and losers. In times of crises, when attention is focused on how people manage their assets it is all too easy to lose sight of this process. As Duffield has noted:

The coping strategy of losers ... can become an important factor in the continued survival of more fortunate groups. (A)asset transfer, while helping some, is also part of a process of active underdevelopment: resource depletion, the spread of absolute poverty and the collapse of social and economic infrastructure (Duffield, 1994:52).
For all that explanations of Africa’s food insecurity and famine have become more sophisticated and nuanced than the ‘band aid’ discourse of the early 1980s, old simplifications die hard. For many, the normal starting point is no longer the need to argue the relative importance of political factors as opposed to drought and pestilence in structuring famine. Although the US Congress recently demonstrated an entrenched view that ‘natural causes’ promoted famine when it debated a new weather monitoring satellite for Africa, implying that the best solutions to persistent famine lay in technological initiatives (Glantz, 1996). Indeed, there remains a naive view of what is ‘natural’ or to be more precise nature. It continues to be the case that the term environment is too hastily viewed as separate from the actions of people and therefore separate from people’s constant reshaping of it. Progress has been made. Discussion of the environment is now more directly linked to the capacity of people to grow food and, in the eyes of the international financial agencies (IFIs) especially the World Bank, there is a dynamic (and downward) interaction of agricultural production, population growth and environmental sustainability in Africa. Yet, while there is a consensus about the potential deleterious consequences of population growth in Africa, certainly in relation to per capita agricultural production, it is much more problematic to argue – as the IFIs do – that population growth is the primary cause of Africa’s inability to feed itself. While IFIs view population growth as the problem (too many mouths to feed) the bigger concern for many farmers in Africa is accessing sufficient labour power (too few hands to work) at peak times.

We also need to question the evidence pertaining to levels of food production on which the IFIs base policy. While data on food and agricultural production may well have improved in the last ten years (although even that is arguable) the characterisation of Africa’s food problem as one of poor production levels has generated a one-eyed technicist response from the IFIs, agribusiness and GATT: if the problem is insufficient agricultural production, then the solution is to increase it. Technical solutions and policy prescriptions invariably involve changes to the organisation of production based on the application of US farm models of capital intensive techniques of agricultural production. Africa’s ‘food problem’ is seldom seen as one of guaranteeing access to food, resources or the distribution of output. Policy prescriptions rarely promote strategies for reforming the social organisation of production, unless it is the World Bank’s favoured strategy of promoting private land tenure.

Preoccupation with levels of agricultural production in relation to population growth has also led to simplistic links between poverty and environmental degradation. Thus the World Bank focuses on peasant ignorance, poor technological knowledge, common resource management and bad state policies of pricing and subsidies as the causes of environmental and food crises.

While there has been a broadening and deepening of explanations of Africa’s food crisis, two basic observations seem repeatedly to be neglected. The first is that debates on food security need to be related, though not reduced, to Africa’s persistently marginal international status in trade and aid regimes. It may be unoriginal but it still needs to be said. Independent Africa has, without exception, had inadequate resources available to promote even modest development strategies over which national political actors had control without them being scuppered by the vagaries of international capital or its managers in the IFIs. Where there has been some sustained agricultural success it has been in settler regimes where the theft of the most productive land did much to sustain both agricultural and more general economic growth – at least in the short term.
It is important to recall that the core industrial economies and the newly industrialising countries industrialised on the back of agricultural surpluses. Imperialist states generated that surplus from local agriculture and from overseas plunder. This latter was not possible in Africa although Ethiopia, in the past, and Morocco still, have tried variants of it in relation to their neighbours. The creation of and access to local agricultural surplus in Africa has been mostly unsuccessful. At least four factors underpin these difficulties: extra-economic coercion which created rural resentment; bureaucratised and inefficient state intervention which failed to mobilise and harness rural classes in support of economic growth; peasant resistance; and the inability of rural sectors (neglected or exploited under colonialism and manipulated by the appropriation of spoils by subsequent generations of nationalist politicians) to generate the revenues needed for contemporary industrialisation.

This is not to argue that Africa's room for manoeuvre on issues of food security is immutably circumscribed by its historical past. It is instead to make the point that food security is part of a broader picture of development strategy and therefore should include fundamental questions of development for whom? shaped by what kind of interests? and with what kind of state intervention and at what pace? It also raises questions of what kind of agriculture? with what kind of crop mix? using what kind of technology and price regime? Fundamentally it also raises the question of a development strategy which can use local resources to sustain local needs as a vehicle for improving human development.

The second observation which is downplayed in food security debates is the role of politics and political struggles in shaping Africa's agricultural crisis - although there are notable exceptions to this (Macrae & Zwi, 1994; Keen, 1994; Raikes, 1988; Watts, 1991). There is a need to view famines as the outcome of conflict and political power to a far greater extent than has so far been the case. In order to avoid many famines in future, by mobilising relief in a different way and at a different pace (Keen, 1994; Keen & Wilson, 1994) we need to have a clearer view of what type of politics creates famine, what kind of politics might prevent it, how this can be constructed and what kind of political institutions (to include rather than exclude rural producers) it needs It is indeed quite extraordinary that with all the current hoo-hah from academics and IFIs about 'good governance' and 'democratisation' very little is said about the building of a 'civil society' in which peasants have a leading role. Indeed, the 'concept' civil society seems peculiarly an urban notion rooted in liberal democratic politics.

We will also see that there are many beneficiaries of famine. Merchants, for example, may be able to hoard grain or buy livestock at knockdown prices when the terms of trade between grain and livestock shift dramatically as famines emerge. Merchants in western Sudan in 1987, for example, were described as 'heartless' because they refused to sell grain at affordable prices in several villages in Darfur or to extend credit (shail) facilities. Such was the hatred of merchants because of their actions that many had their grain stores looted by hungry urban and rural dwellers. Yet it is only recently that David Keen (1994) has demonstrated the intentionality of famine as a policy - which functions to benefit and enhance the political position of power holders and their surrogates.

Keen focuses on Sudan between 1983-1989 where famine and all the horror that accompanies it, was nurtured as a political weapon with which to beat opponents of the Sudanese ruling class. Keen challenges many orthodoxies regarding the emergence of famine and who it most usually affects. Most of the debate on how food insecurity becomes famine is shaped by two different theoretical positions. One
emphasises food availability decline (FAD), resulting from drought, war or some other shock to the agricultural system. The other sees it as resulting from a change in people's ability to get access or entitlements to food. That change in access may result from poor harvest or because of poor transportation or because of a shift in the price of food. Keen's analysis now suggests that both approaches are inadequate.

The fuller, and far more sinister, story of Sudan's famine in the 1980s is that it was intentional: it functioned to support a diverse collection of powerful elites in their efforts to improve their economic and political power bases. War induced famine was the goal of Sudanese state strategy with the purpose of reaping economic gain rather than military victory. Keen's contribution raises at least two other general observations. The first is that famine is not necessarily solely the result of policy failure (Swift, 1993; von Braun, Teklu and Webb, 1993; Teklu, von Braun, J & Z Elsayed, 1991) and, therefore, that creating conditions for a different set of policies may not prevent famine. It is also the case that famines need not necessarily be the outcome of a long process and they may not result from 'silent violence' to the poor (Spitz, 1980).

This article now evaluates recent literature on famine and food security in Africa. It will first briefly describe what is seen to be Africa's food crisis, before tracing some of the key debates on famine since the 1970s. It will then examine some of the crucial themes which explain the increased presence of winners and losers in the struggles associated with food politics. These themes relate to the notion of agricultural modernisation; the role of war and conflict, aid and the issues of struggle and contestation which shape peoples access to food. This analysis also requires a sense of people's class position and their gender and age in assessing how they may become enmeshed in a crisis of food access, resource access and dispossession.

While it is impossible to exclude a global perspective in documenting food crises in Africa, episodes of famine cannot be attributed solely to the machinations of the 'global supermarket' or 'food chain' as is often implied by some observers (George, 1977; 1979). Instead, as some recent contributions have begun to indicate, a more fruitful explanation for food insecurity and famine can be gained from investigating the character of local politics which shape national and local food regimes and from the conflicts which have, at times, also been shaped by the nature of international relief and financial agency intervention (Keen, 1994; Morton, 1994).

**Africa's Food Crisis**

Most commentators see Africa's food crisis consisting of declining food production per capita at a time when per capita economic growth has stagnated and food imports have increased. In the immediate post-1945 years food production kept pace with population growth but the rate of increase has fallen since the 1960s. For the IFIs food security is when food is available at all times and when all people can access it. Food must also be nutritionally adequate in terms of quantity, quality, variety and acceptability within a given culture (FAO, 1995b). To identify whether a country is food secure or not the FAO use essentially two variables. The first is per capita availability of food for direct consumption (FAO, 1995a:1). The second relates to the distribution of food supplies within each country (FAO, 1995a:2). Undernourishment is an indicator of inadequate basic intake of foodstuffs (usually given as between 2,400-2,500 calories per day). Table One indicates aggregate figures of calorific intake and masks, in the case of SSA and South Asia the fact that at least 20 countries have an average per capita food availability of less than 2,000 calories per day (Delpeuch, 1994:9).
Africa's food crisis is usually characterised by declining agricultural production in relation to population growth. It is useful to cite one such characterisation at length which summarises IFI orthodoxy on Africa's recent agricultural performance.

Over the past twenty-five years, agricultural production in Sub-Saharan Africa rose by only about 2.0 per cent a year, while aggregate population growth averaged about 2.8 per cent per year. Per capita food production has declined in most countries of the continent. Cereal imports increased by 3.9 per cent per year between 1974 and 1990, food aid by 7.0 per cent per year. But the food gap (requirements minus production) — filled by imports, or by many people going with less than what they need — is widening. In the early 1980s, about 100 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa were unable to secure sufficient food to ensure an adequate level of nutrition for themselves, and average food consumption per capita declined during the 1970s and 1980s in seventeen of the thirty six SSA countries ... Famines in several countries in the 1980s were graphic indications of natural calamity, as well as of civil disruption, in the region. On average ... per capita food intake in SSA in the late 1980s, at 2,027 calories per day, was below the 1965 level and significantly lower than in other parts of the developing world (Cleaver and Schreiber, 1994:16).

The clearest statement of this IFI position remains the World Bank Development Report, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth* (1989). It is also repeated in much of the academic literature, for instance in the disappointing recent collection on food insecurity in Eastern and Southern Africa, edited by Salih (1994). Despite declarations to the contrary, the volume does little to question established orthodoxies, (apart from articles by Bryceson on grain markets in Tanzania and Baxter on the need to listen to pastoralists in formulating policy). Similarly uncritical but more ideologically driven support for IFI orthodoxies is provided in the collection edited by Faris and Khan (1993) on Egypt (with the exception of the chapter by Hopkins on the importance of understanding the social dynamics of small holder farmers).

As Table One shows, Africa's indicators run counter to present trends which give the FAO grounds for some optimism: 'the world can produce enough food to provide the energy and nutrient required for all its inhabitants to have a healthy and active life'.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Per caput food supplies for direct human consumption, historical and projected (calories/day)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Developing countries¹</td>
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<td>African, sub-Sahara</td>
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<td>N.East/ N.Africa</td>
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<td>World</td>
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Notes: ¹ Ninety-three developing countries of the FAO study 'World Agriculture: Towards 2010', accounting for 98.5 per cent of the total population of the developing countries. ² Average of the pre-reform years 1988-1990 assumed to be re-established by 2010.

There is apparently ‘15 per cent more food per person than the global population of 4 billion people had 20 years ago’. Moreover, projections indicate an increase in ‘per caput food supplies for the next two decades’. ‘In the developing countries as a whole, food supplies are expected to increase by 10 per cent per person between 1990 and 2010’ (FAO, 1996a:5).

The FAO is more pessimistic about the immediate crises facing Africa’s access to food. World cereal production in 1995 was estimated to be 1,891 million tons. That was about 3 per cent or 58 million tons below the 1994 volume and continued a downward trend for the third consecutive year. One result of this trend has been the increased price of cereal exports by 30-50 per cent. That means that in 1995-96 low income food deficit countries will pay something like an additional US$3 billion for cereal imports. According to the FAO (1996b) cereal production in SSA fell by some 10 million tons in 1995. This was partly due to drought in southern Africa and also to poor levels of production in eastern Africa.

Poor global cereal production will have a serious consequence for Africa’s food security in 1996. While there have been bumper harvests of other crops in Africa, notably in the Sahel and western Africa, there are shortages in southern Africa and the Horn. While Ethiopia harvested an above average crop in 1995 localised droughts have hit parts of Eritrea. Continuing war in southern Sudan generates shortages there and conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda and Burundi have created situations of food scarcity following disrupted production, hoarding, and increased demand from displaced refugees.

Yet food crises even in southern Africa where drought and the threat of drought created uncertainty in 1995 has not lead to widespread famine. Despite the disastrous drought of 1992-93, the international agencies argued that their combined action prevented the emergence of widespread famine. At that time the threat to 20 million people in 10 countries was kept at bay by an international mobilisation and the inflow of almost US$1 billion in food and funding resulting from the first ever joint appeal by the UN and the regional body SADC (Africa Recovery, August, 1993).

The persistent long term crisis of availability, stability and access to food (FAO, 1996a:5) in developing countries and especially Africa will be addressed by a World Food Summit in November 1996. The FAO-organised summit will examine the persistence of global chronic undernutrition and recurrence of famine. The conference comes 20 years after the 1974 World Food Conference, which had promised to banish hunger within ten years. The problem now, the FAO argues, is ‘serious and complex enough to merit the immediate attention of Heads of State and Government’. The forum will allow the problem to ‘be addressed by those at the highest political level, with ensuring their nations’ food security, and who are in a position to influence policy for all sectors of the economy’ (FAO, Dec.1995:1).

The optimistic view about the efficacy of international fora to address famine seems little diminished by the view that it is political leaders that have contributed to repeated famines in Africa, not least by failing to address underlying causes of malnutrition which affect two out of every five Africans in SSA. Why should this latest conference bring more success? One reason may be that the FAO is emboldened by the appointment in November 1993, of its first African Director General, the Senegalese Jacques Diouf. The FAO now hopes to revitalise the struggle against world hunger. Africa accounted for almost 50 per cent of projects delivered under FAO’s Field Programme in 1994. And on a recent visit to Zambia and Zimbabwe, the new
Director General was certainly upbeat about Africa’s potential. He noted that ‘We Africans know that our continent has much potential’. His evidence was the under-exploitation of natural resources including 4,000 billion cubic metres water run off from Africa’s rivers flowing into the oceans each year (only 7 per cent of Africa’s arable land is irrigated, yet contributes 20 per cent of the continent’s agricultural output) (FAO, 1996c). Diouf has further noted that:

While Africa has made progress in the direction of food security, increasing food production by around 60 percent in the past 20 years, its population has grown by nearly 80 per cent. The result: per capita food production has declined by about 18 per cent (FAO, 1996c:1).

In its preparatory documentation for the 1996 food summit the FAO argues somewhat emotively that:

Spiralling population growth is intensifying pressures on natural resources while hunger and armed conflicts are provoking displacements of people, sometimes on a massive scale. If no determined action is taken to reverse these trends, the number of chronically undernourished people may still be as high as 730 million by the year 2010, over 300 million of them in Sub-Saharan Africa (FAO, 1995a:1).

For all Diouf’s enthusiasm, working within the UN bureaucracy is likely to be of limited value. A recent account of the development and organisation of the FAO (Abbott, 1992) has shown how institutional imperatives and operational difficulties, since FAO’s emergence after 1945, have circumscribed the organisation’s success. More importantly, what Abbot has not done, is to examine the data which FAO (and other IFIs) use and the limitations of their assumptions.

Understanding the Food Gap: Debating Food Security and Agricultural Crisis

While most criticism of the IFIs position on Africa’s food crisis has been levelled against pricing policies and concerns with rolling back the state (Gibbon et al. 1993) there has been very little questioning of the data used by the IFIs to indicate what they mean by food crisis. For Raikes (1988) in what remains the most comprehensive and analytically rigorous single publication accounting for food insecurity in Africa, there is a clear link between the IFI characterisation of Africa’s food crisis and the strategy adopted by the international agencies for agricultural modernisation or, as the title of his book cleverly puts it, modernising hunger. For Raikes, the argument that Africa’s crisis is one of population growth outstripping food production (because of poor technological development, low rates of development and government ineptitude) leads the IFIs to argue that agriculture in Africa needs to be deregulated, government intervention reduced and technological development improved – all key elements of their adjustment policies since 1989. Of course, little mention is made of the protectionist policies (notwithstanding the GATT) of the US and EU.

Raikes does not discount the importance of population growth in reducing aggregate benefits to national exchequers, or that state intervention in agricultural sectors has been plagued by corruption and inefficiency and has involved the transfer of rural surplus to urban consumption. But he also makes two crucial points which are often lost in debates about Africa’s food crises. The first is that the growth of food imports into SSA have been exaggerated. The second is that the ‘direct evidence for stagnation in food production is both very thin and subject to significant bias’:
The net effect of these biases has been to exaggerate the aggregate production shortfall and thus to place excessive emphasis on policies aimed at increasing production rapidly through technological change. This shifts emphasis away from the need to generate incomes for poor people and the need to base production increases on technologies which are environmentally and socially sustainable (Raikes, 1988:14-15).

Raikes argues very cogently for an account of recurrent food crises in Africa as resulting from changes in people’s entitlements to food and notably in people’s lack of access to income with which to purchase food when that becomes necessary. He notes that this does not mean that there is not a food problem in Africa but that it is important to ask for whom this is a problem. We need to stress that ‘it is not countries which suffer hunger (and certainly not their political leaders) but the specific disadvantaged sections of the population, often situated in particular hunger-prone areas’ (Raikes, 1988:15). The increases in African food imports for Raikes are mostly the result of urban demand and state pricing policies and, of course, the policies of developed countries dumping cheap, subsidised food (see also Lang & Hines, 1996). It is seldom stated, in the characterisations of Africa’s food crisis, that SSA’s food imports are smaller than those of north Africa or the near east, both of which are more populous. Moreover, despite the food crisis (and the impact of structural adjustment which has began to undermine significant advances), life expectancy in Africa has increased by 30 per cent in 30 years due essentially to progress in health care (Delpeuch, 1994:15). I am not suggesting that there is not a food problem, but identifying it conveniently in levels of production is analytically inadequate and a distortion.

Raikes is scathing about the lack of rigour in the evidence used by the IFIs to justify their prescriptions for African food security. The indicators which we have already listed, for instance, are based upon areas cultivated, yields per acre and tons produced FAO Production Yearbooks examine this data for around 75 different crops produced in Africa and data collection extends to different livestock categories. But where does this data come from? The answer is two main sources: from African governments, if they are deemed reliable and from FAO estimates – which might more accurately be termed guestimates because, as Raikes, notes, FAO figures are normally rounded to the nearest hundred thousand or half-million tons (Raikes, 1988:18). The most stunning comment perhaps which Raikes makes is that it is largely irrelevant whether the evidence comes from governments or the FAO because ‘there are few countries in sub-Saharan Africa where the level of total food production is known to within plus or minus 20 per cent’ (Raikes, 1988:18).

Raikes suggests that in Africa there are several reasons which should make us question the accuracy of agricultural statistics and the policies which IFIs suggest follow from them. The first of these is that it remains the case that most staple food production comes from small peasant farms, ‘the vast majority of which are covered by no system of registration or crop reporting’. Where these do exist they are usually applicable to large and medium-scale farms, ‘whose contribution to total production tends, in consequence to be exaggerated’ (p. 19). It is almost impossible to produce accurate figures for area cultivated Moreover, census data is limited and often poorly gathered An FAO agricultural census in Tanzania in 1970, for instance, got the direction of population change wrong for four districts in which Raikes was working and entirely missed the major cash crop for one of the districts (p. 19)!

The second reason why agricultural data needs to be questioned is that there is no means for independent checking. Evidence used to calculate area cultivated and yield
per hectare, for instance, is usually gathered by an extension officer who takes a previous year’s figures and ‘estimates’ the proportion by which it has increased or decreased ‘A common practice’ Raikes reminds us, ‘is simply to copy last year’s figure unchanged’ (p. 19). The crucial point is that if there is no basis for estimating area cultivated and yield it is impossible to estimate production apart from what is marketed Yet marketed production ignores the bulk of crop production which is used for self provisioning. It also ignores the point that illiterate small holders are unable, and unwilling, for fear of taxation, to disclose accurate levels of production.

These two problems of accurate data collection, slurred over by simple digestion of agency production and yield statistics also leads to a ‘significant downward bias’ in the reporting of agricultural production. First, there seems to be an ‘automatic’ downward bias arising because the absence of new data collection often means previous production figures are used Yet, all things being equal, increases in population would require, and get, larger levels of production in most cases unless crises of fertility, land access or other entitlements to food are dramatically changed Second, using marketed production as the means of estimating total production ignores the obvious effect that a popular peasant strategy in the 1970s and 1980s, during periods of low farm gate pricing, lead producers to use more financially rewarding parallel markets instead of state marketing structures. Marketed production figures therefore underplay the importance of burgeoning illegal markets, smuggling, cross border trade and barter trade. Finally, as we will see in the case of Sudan, it has been in the interests of African governments to downplay food production levels. In doing so they provide evidence for the need for increased levels of food aid.

There is much in Raikes to commend a reappraisal of his book which is almost ten years old. It continues to provide the necessary antidote to IFI discussion of food security. For while it may occasionally seem that both the World Bank and the FAO are shifting ground, both ultimately feel more at ease with their own orthodox technicist solutions. It is true that the World Bank has recently again embraced the rhetoric of equity and that the FAO tends to declare more critically than the IBRD that there is a need for grass roots social organisation to redress food insecurity (1995c). Yet while it is always possible for them (perhaps because of contradictory positions within the UN system, and because of progressive staffers) to be sympathetic to enhancing the life chances of the poor and vulnerable, and to redistribute resources in favour of the powerless, these tendencies remain largely marginal and are not realised in effective policy outcomes. The agenda of the IFIs continues to be the liberalisation of markets, removal of state intervention and the use of price indicators as the major incentive to raise agricultural productivity.

Confronting IFI orthodoxy is the strong point of Raikes’ contribution. He does it at two levels. The first, which we have summarised, is to confront the methodological assumptions of the IFIs. A similar critique of World Bank expertise, or rather the lack of its professional competence, can be found in Williams’ discussion of the World Bank in Nigeria (1988). The second is to offer a particular critique of policies of agricultural modernisation in Africa. He questions the appropriateness of implanting US or EU farming techniques in Africa and criticises the dumping of subsidised food exports to Africa. Yet he does not argue that the blame for Africa’s food crisis can be levelled at the doors of Brussels or Washington – although at times they have influenced access to food and the price of local production. The character of the international food system (Friedman, 1993; Friedmann and McMichael, 1989) is important in shaping the room for manoeuvre which dependent food import
countries have on access to international shipments of grain and aid. But it is to alternative explanations that recent famine literature has most usefully turned to understand Africa's persistent food crises.

There have been several twists and turns in the famine literature since it first tried to account for the Sahelian famine of 1968-72. Before that, famine had been seen essentially as a natural phenomenon but it then came to be regarded more as a product of human action. In particular, for commentators on the left, including contributors to this journal, the Sahelian crisis of 1968 was the result of ‘capitalism’. With hindsight, the notion that an unspecified ‘capitalism’ was the cause of famine was overly simplistic, but it highlighted the need to investigate the particular character of capitalism as it impacted on the African periphery that created the conditions for famine. In so doing, it began to move discussion beyond blaming the victims for their plight. Editors of this journal at that time, argued that the roots of famine lay in two interrelated causes set in motion by the impact of capitalism: the ‘decline in the food producing capability of different societies in the colonial period and continuing to the present’; and the

transformation of rural production relations both in terms of the development of distinct classes and the change in the relations between men and women brought about by a new sexual division of labour (ROAPE, 1979:1).

Commentators at the time of the Sahelian famine in the 1970s also made another important point: that the crisis would create conditions for a big turning point. Meillassoux (1974) for one, argued that the disruption caused by the agents of international capitalism, namely agribusiness, created a ratchet effect where mass impoverishment not only dislocated food producing activities in the Sahel, but also reduced peasant and post-colonial state resistance to further rounds of international capital formation, in the process laying the seeds for future famine.

While debates of the 1970s clearly established a political agenda of necessary confrontation with international actors believed to undermine the ability of food producers to withstand shocks of drought, desertification or changing terms of trade, the debates at the time did little to establish an understanding of the particular histories of the different social formations that experienced famine (for an exception see the article by Cliffe (1974) on famine in Ethiopia in ROAPE no. 1, 1974). In other words, capitalism became the ubiquitous cause of famine and was everywhere similar in its impact: cash crop production for high value – low nutrition export foodstuffs (George, 1976;1979). Alternatively, colonialism undermined indigenous production systems (see Mamdani on famine in Karamoja).

Agricultural Modernisation
A recent assessment of the social dynamics of agrarian change in SSA provides a rather different and more nuanced view of agricultural modernisation including the differential and uneven impact of colonialism. Sara Berry (1993) has provided a very thorough and challenging account of the pattern of agrarian change in four contrasting social formations; Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and Zambia. While none of these countries has experienced acute famine recently (Kenya has been cited as a case of effective famine prevention, see Dreze and Sen, 1989) Berry develops an argument of considerable importance. She suggests that deterministic interpretations of agricultural change, which may prioritise the world economy or state policy to explain rural change are flawed and inappropriate. She seeks instead, to demonstrate that:
changes in African agricultural production have been shaped, over the course of the twentieth century, by many-layered struggles over access to resources, in which neither direct producers nor governments have exercised a decisive influence on patterns of production and investment (1993:182-183).

Berry offers a significant critique of mechanistic marxist commentaries on rural social differentiation and agricultural stagnation, and she also (though not always explicitly) offers a critique of IFI policy for modernising African agriculture. Her analysis rests on the premise that:

understanding resource access and resource use is not simply a matter of tracing rational actors' responses to relative factor prices and rules governing the definition of property rights or the nature and enforcement of contracts. Farmers' access to and uses of the means of production have also been shaped by the mobilization and exercise of power and the terms in which rights and obligations are defined To study changing conditions of access is also to consider the history of legal and political processes, social relations, and culturally constructed understandings which influence patterns of authority and obligation, the division of labor and output, and the meaning of exchange (p. 3).

In her four cases, Berry demonstrates that farmers use both social networks and impersonal economic relations to get access to land, labour and other agricultural means of production. Yet as the twentieth century has progressed, while access to land has continued to be mediated by membership of various social groups, access to labour has become more individualized (p.17). Her evidence suggests that commercialisation and even alienation of land has not led to the consolidation of rights in private property: rights to plant or cultivate tree crops for instance were often sold independently of the land on which they grew. Berry offers a sophisticated view of what constitutes politics in rural social formations:

To gain or defend access to rural landed property, it has been necessary for people to participate actively in politics of rural groups which either hold various rights over land or serve as forums for the mediation of disputed claims. Such groups include not only those of ancient lineage, such as descent groups, villages, traditional ritual communities, or chiefdoms, but also many of recent origin, including recently constituted religious or ritual associations, patronage networks, political parties, cooperatives, and rural settlements created by the state (p.17).

There was nevertheless a different trajectory for patterns of access to labour and access to capital from wage earning income. Increased agricultural production for the market has tended to increase the level of demand and wages for agricultural labour yet urbanisation, the increased opportunities for off farm income, labour migrancy and ‘straddling’ of rural producers, has reduced labour availability. The uncertainty as well as the low returns to agricultural production has often reduced demand by farmers to buy in labour and has coincided with family labour also becoming involved with off farm activities: ‘Continued participation in family and other social networks is no longer a guarantee of continued access to agricultural labor’ (p.18). Berry argues that changes in the access to means of production influences agricultural growth and distribution. These changes will vary across local farming systems and involve the way in which land and labour are combined, organised and ‘renegotiated’. This renegotiation is about the influence which different political struggles have in shaping food and agricultural issues. While Berry does not document the characterisation of formal party political mobilisations, it is clear that her account documents a myriad set of political struggles which she (sometimes unhelpfully) calls ‘social networks’.
Berry asserts that 'culture, power, and material resources are of equal importance, acting in mutually constitutive ways to shape' economic and social change. While not always convincingly distancing herself from what at times appears as a voluntaristic perspective of change, she does explain agricultural change as the outcome of politics and political struggles. This is very welcome. It contrasts with knee jerk reactions which try and explain agricultural crises as the result of the pitfalls of state policy, pricing mechanisms or the world capitalist system.

This extremely important book contains three themes which run through much of the recent literature on Africa's agricultural crisis. Berry adds a dynamic interpretation to them, structuring social change around conflicts and struggles over resources as well as the particular configuration of farming systems. The three themes I want to examine are the impact of colonialism, commercialisation and the post-colonial state on agricultural production.

**Colonial Transformation?**

One of Berry's main tasks is to distance herself from two popular characterisations of the causes of Africa's food crises. The first is the neo-classical view of peasants as rational actors responding to market incentives who may be dissuaded from so doing if state interference is intrusive. Berry argues that this view provides no 'systematic explanation of how power interacts with production and exchange to shape processes of economic growth or differentiation over time' (p.11). The second view which Berry attacks is a marxist view which she interprets as seeing agricultural change 'in terms of structural imperatives which emanate from the world capitalist system' (p.10). In Berry's mind, this marxist view sees power as subordinate to processes of capitalist accumulation - because they 'control the resources on which production depends, capitalists are in a position to exercise hegemony vis-à-vis the state' (p.12).

In offering her critique of these perspectives on capitalist development and particularly on agricultural modernisation, Berry has two big projects. The first, similar to Raikes (1988), is to argue that:

> the way in which a particular rural area was incorporated into the colonial economy and/or into global processes of accumulation and exchange did not necessarily exercise a decisive influence over subsequent patterns of agrarian change (Berry, 1993:8).

Her second project is to give culture an equally important role, alongside power and material resources, in shaping economic and social change.

> In general, the agrarian crises in Africa were not a uniform and inevitable consequence of colonial domination and capitalist penetration, "bad policy", or innate features of African culture. Instead, agrarian change has been shaped by the way power, economy and culture have come together at particular times and places (p.15).

Berry assembles a painstaking argument against over generalising Africa's experience of agricultural modernisation. She demonstrates this particularly well by tracing the differential impact of colonialism and commoditisation in her case studies and in the particular relations established between peasant producers and post-colonial regimes. In the process, she also establishes a strong critique of prescriptions for increasing agricultural productivity on the basis of market incentives and technological innovation. Accompanying the commercialisation of agriculture, the cultivation of new crops and demand for African land and labour, colonial rule tried to establish clear legal rules relating to farmers access to resources. Berry argues, in contrast to
much of the established debate on the role of customary tenure (Ranger, 1983; Snyder, 1981) that

*colonial regimes were unable to impose either English laws and institutions or their own version of “traditional” African ones onto indigenous societies. Instead, colonial intervention provoked ‘a series of debates over the meaning and application of tradition, which in turn shaped struggles over authority and access to resources (p. 24).*

Colonial policy towards local agricultural modernisation varied. In Kenya, Berry argues that there was a contradiction between, on the one hand, enabling local producers to increase production and thereby enable them to pay higher taxes to pay for colonial rule and, on the other hand, there was settler pressure to protect European farmers from African competition. In west Africa, without significant settler population, colonial concern was to facilitate high quality cash crop production for export, without competing with European traders or neglecting food crop production (pp. 26-27). The mistake colonial authorities made, however, was to imagine that the colonial state could impose a notion that African societies were without internal conflicts. Berry argues that ‘precolonial communities were neither static nor internally cohesive’ (p. 28). That patterns of agricultural settlement and authority were extremely fluid across SSA and that there were clear conflicts of power relations associated with control of land and labour.

*In general, colonial regimes imposed themselves on societies already engaged in struggles over power and the terms on which it was exercised by announcing their intention to uphold “traditional” norms and structures of authority, colonial officials were, in effect, declaring their intention to build colonial rule on a foundation of conflict and change (p.29).*

The result was a set of conflicts over rights to land and people which served to generate factional conflicts. They also served to both strengthen and undermine social networks as a basis of access to important resources for agricultural production (p. 33). The result was that customary rules were constantly up for grabs and the outcomes of struggles was reflected in the ‘continual readjustment of the formal institutions of native administration’ (p.37). Further, the conflict over access and control of resources had significance for the way in which markets operated and farmers developed strategies for investment. With regard to land tenure, it meant that the simplistic juxtaposition of individual versus communal tenure (continued by much IFI material today) wrongly characterised property rights and the organisation of labour supplies as static and separate rather than fluid and mixed (p.101). The outcome is that access to labour rather than access to land has become the major constraint to commercialisation.

**Markets and Commercialisation**

There continues to be considerable ambiguity over people’s perception of rights to land in SSA. ‘Access to land depends on their participation in processes of interpretation and adjudication as well as on their ability to pay’ (Berry, 1993:104). In her four cases it has also been shaped by the particular patterns of commercialisation and agricultural growth. She establishes two major patterns of growth and agrarian change. In Nigeria and Ghana farmers negotiated access to land for cocoa growing through descent groups and this included ‘strangers’ from outside the group who might make money payments or sharecrop. The use of unpaid family labour meant that farms were established with low costs but production ensured that labour could be hired in. Cocoa also enjoyed relatively stable prices on the international market for
long periods and this enabled cocoa farmers to expand production. These periods of growth (especially in the first 30 years of the twentieth century) facilitated the expansion of rural markets for other commodities and rural incomes. And because the use of family labour continued, and was a significant factor in establishing new farms, a classic leninist social differentiation in the countryside, between farm owners and labourers did not occur (pp. 18-19, pp. 68-78; see also Konings, 1986).

In contrast, Berry argues that where the farming system involved annual crops for the market, small-scale farms had trouble becoming self-financing. Annual crop production could not sustain hiring labour and this was generally only a phenomenon of larger farms or farmers who could access off farm income. Two processes have limited this type of farmer in northeastern Zambia: British colonial policy discouraged agricultural market growth and subsequently generalised poverty, accompanying the crisis in copper mining. In Kenya, the growth of large farms was limited by pressure on land and subdivision (generated by settler farms and colonial dispossession of indigenous farmers) as well as poor market conditions even for tree crops of coffee and tea. It is a paradox for Berry that Kenya and Zambia experienced greater rural social differentiation, where there was less commercialisation of agricultural labour compared with Ghana and Nigeria.

In contrast with Berry’s analysis, a recent World Bank monograph finds ‘strong synergies and causality chains linking rapid population growth, degradation of the environmental resource base, and poor agricultural production performance’ (Cleaver and Schreiber, 1994:1-2). Agricultural stagnation according to this account is the result of the failure of traditional African crop and livestock production methods to cope with rapid population growth which has caused severe natural resource degradation. Traditional coping strategies have failed to keep up and this has been aggravated by civil wars, poor rural infrastructure, lack of private investment in agricultural marketing and processing, and inappropriate price and exchange rate policies pursued by intrusive governments. The framework of action to turn Africa away from agricultural stagnation is a set of policy improvements detailed in the World Bank 1989 report on SSA’s long term development.

Cleaver and Schreiber argue for the need to quickly reduce the rate of population growth by reducing total fertility rates; change farm systems from extensive to intensive systems which incorporate adequate soil conservation; and management measures to ensure long term stability and natural resource management. ‘Essential to the achievement of these objectives will be addressing the special problems faced by rural women and the emerging land tenure constraints’ (1994:97).

It is in many ways remarkable that the Bank adheres to this characterisation of the problem and the time worn policies that it browbeats governments to adopt. Despite Cleaver and Schreiber’s statement to the contrary (p.2) what they argue is ‘good economic and agricultural policy’ may yield short term productivity benefits. Yet the evidence is that these quickly lead to problems of production, access to resources for rural producers and accelerated social differentiation (Gibbon et al., 1993) – ụka ‘market failure’. There are two major wrong assumptions underpinning this recent World Bank effort. The first is the view that governments indeed have the extensive impact on rural markets that they argue has undermined agricultural performance throughout Africa. The second is the prioritisation of population growth as a cause of stagnation in what the sub-heading to the book calls ‘the population, agriculture, and environment nexus in sub-Saharan Africa’.
Cleaver and Schreiber have tried to present a more serious account of agricultural stagnation in Africa than is usually the case from the World Bank. It does, for instance, seek to explain stagnation in terms of the failure of institutions and individuals to 'adapt quickly enough in the face of very rapid population growth' (p.6) and in so doing does try to insert a sense of history to the project. It argues, for instance, that one difficulty producers experience is the lack of certainty regarding tenure arrangements, whether communal or individual. But its essential ahistorical character is revealed in the over-simplification of tenure arrangements and the timelessness ascribed to farming practices. The main arguments remain as always - stagnation is the result of inefficient government interventions which blocked rural initiative and created parallel markets.

Blaming governments is of course part of the ideological assault the World Bank has made for years. It provides the rationale for liberalising markets and encouraging private investment. Yet it is not enough to simply assert that government = bad and private = good and that rolling back the state will necessarily improve efficiency and productive allocation of resources. There are two issues here. The first of these is well documented in Berry's work, namely that 'the rural consequences of state intervention are neither determined by nor limited to the stated aims of rural development policy' – while the 'presence of the state in rural communities is palpable' it is also 'unpredictable' (Berry, 1993:46). Berry makes that point in response to what she sees as three commonly held views on Africa's crisis (Berry, 1993:43-45). The first is that policy has little impact in the countryside because peasants escape government control (Hyden, 1980, 1983). The second is that government policies are inappropriate for rural interests because politicians are more concerned with lining their own pockets (Bates, 1981, 1983). And the third is that the colonial legacy was one of neo-patrimonial rule where politicians used public office for private gain (Sandbrook, 1986).

Poor agricultural performance in these explanations is derived from either the rationality of different class actors or from the structure of institutions. Yet as Berry notes these formulations 'tend to ignore the interplay between individual action and institutional structure, and both imply that rural development programs have definitive consequences which can be clearly labelled successes or failures' (Berry, 1993:45). Thus the outcome of government rural development policy cannot be read off from stated policy. Yet that is what the World Bank does – its concern being that measures of liberalisation are put in place rather than with the actual consequences of market driven formula.

Rather than arguing that Africa's agricultural problems are the result of too much government intervention it is more accurate to say that it is precisely government neglect of agriculture that has aggravated food security. SSA agricultural budgets have declined, rural investment in facilitating effective rural infrastructure including health and education have not kept pace with urban demands on national exchequers after independence (and they plummeted during the 1980s because of the debt crisis and in the 1990s because of structural adjustment). Moreover, it is noteworthy that the World Development Report, 1991 includes China and Egypt among the better performing countries (where agricultural yield per hectare was more than 2.5 per cent in the years 1960-88, and where average non-agricultural growth was more than 4 per cent). These two economies were fuelled by extensive state provision – now criticised by the Bank as detrimental to the growth that they previously applauded.
The second issue to take up with Cleaver and Schreiber is the view that the market will act as an efficient and effective conduit to facilitate agricultural growth. They assert that ‘farm input and output prices must be determined not by decree or by monopolistic or monopsonistic parastatal marketing agencies, but by market forces’ (p.128). They say nothing about what market forces represent, why they should ipso facto raise productivity – apart from increasing incentives – and they say nothing about which social class will substitute, and with what effect, for the state or parastatal authorities – in providing the necessary agricultural inputs and marketing after the state has relinquished its position.

Cleaver and Schreiber, exemplify World Bank neo-liberal ideology and what Polyani (1957) forty years ago called ‘the economistic fallacy’: the notion that people make decisions based primarily on what they perceive their economic interests to be and that ‘economic man’ makes decisions isolated from the rest of society. They also represent the belief in what Bryceson has called ‘the ubiquity of entrepreneurial behaviour’ (Bryceson, 1994:145; 1993) the hope that a market automatically grows when state controls are removed. In examining liberalisation of grain markets in Tanzania, Bryceson has shown it to be an uneven and slow process and the contradictory way it was ‘moulded by the interaction of policy-makers, traders and consumers’ (1994:150). Her detailed study provides a range of information which challenges what she calls the ‘tyranny of abstract models and the false hopes and expectations they generate’ (1994:162; on markets as arenas of power see Elson, 1988).

These are false hopes which the World Bank wants to extend into privatisation of land tenure on the principle that those with security of title will invest in their land and protect it as a resource. Cleaver and Schreiber are more subtle than most World Bank documents on this issue. They accept that land tenure systems in Africa are complex and that community ownership of land may provide adequate tenurial security (1994:55-60). Yet they argue that private individualised tenure is now desirable because commercialisation of agriculture has induced changes in land use (p.57) and open access systems, ‘found especially in forest and range areas, result in rapid environmental destruction’. They continue:

Open-access systems are not conducive to resource conservation or to investment in land. This problem was resolved in Europe largely by the allocation of land to individual owners who then had an incentive to invest in it, develop it, and conserve it (1994:58).

For Cleaver and Schreiber, there are two inter-linked issues. The first is that ‘individual land ownership does provide an incentive to develop and maintain the land’ (p.59) and they point to private ownership in Zimbabwe and Botswana to support them. Yet they also admit that privatisation of tenure has generated problems of land grab, concentration of ownership and landlessness. These and other problems, like changes to the farming system, crop mix, access to inputs and social differentiation are, for Cleaver and Schreiber, problems of transition between tenure systems rather than of privatisation per se. They can be solved by ensuring a controlled, transparent transition. Yet they ignore the politics of this process, the winners and losers, the class status of the actors demanding individualisation of tenure and the resultant outcome: inter alia greater social differentiation and rural landlessness resulting from dispossession of small holders not absorbed by urban growth and they assume crop mix and levels of production will ipso facto be appropriate for redressing the relationship between population and food production. Commenting particularly on the marginalisation of women in food production, Carol Thompson has noted in southern Africa that:
What is needed is not privatisation of land (often given to cabinet ministers and friends) but rights to land utilisation for the women who cultivate the land (1991:121).

Cleaver and Schreiber also devote an entire chapter to the importance of women in agricultural production, an issue seldom addressed in food security debates. In doing so, however, they go no further than the problem of non-recognition of the work that women do in agriculture. Debates have long moved on from recognising ‘women’s triple responsibility’ of child rearing, household management and production activities (p. 73). There is a need also for them to address the issue of how women are incorporated into such activities, the consequences and opportunities, and their impact on decision making structures.

Policy initiatives designed to reduce the barriers to women’s economic participation, like the World Bank’s ‘investing in people’, fail to recognise that it is not the exclusion of women from economic activities which marginalise them but precisely the way that they are included Elson (1994) among others, has noted that policy makers are only concerned with monetary aggregates of the productive economy and not with human resources, issues of the reproductive economy, indicators of health, nutrition, education and skill development. And that male bias of policy makers disregards women’s work because it is not seen to be part of the economic matrix which constitutes national accounting figures. There is, moreover, the assumption that economic policies of the IFI’s are gender-neutral despite their failure to recognise the differential way in which women enter into economic (market) relationships. IFI policies assume all economic relationships are structured around tradeable activities, and therefore fail to recognise the range of activities which women do and the way in which they are incorporated into market activities (see also Dasgupta, 1993:305-342).

Cleaver and Schreiber’s second, more general error is the primary causal role assigned to population growth in undermining agricultural and environmental conditions in SSA. They argue that ‘land titling will be necessary for agricultural growth, soil conservation, and forest protection’. They also argue that the erosion of community access to land will provide a disincentive to population growth, ‘because the ability to cultivate land is generally determined by the ability to mobilise family labor’ (p. 58, cf., p. 38 and pp. 44-45). For Cleaver and Schreiber, the determinants of reducing the demand for children in SSA are emerging too slowly and World Bank policy initiatives are needed to accelerate population control.

The hypothesis is that rapidly increasing population pressures in the past twenty to thirty years has, in most of Sub-Saharan Africa, overwhelmed the only slowly evolving rural tradition of farming, livestock raising, fuelwood provision, land allocation and utilization, and gender-specific responsibilities in household maintenance and rural production systems (p.46).

Technological constraints and population pressure have, according to these commentators, undermined traditional farming methods and accelerated soil degradation by extending the cropped areas (see also Grigg, 1993). There are three main criticisms that can be made here. The first is the questionable nature of the evidence which the World Bank uses to establish its argument. We have already raised this in relation to area cultivated and yields and we can apply the same comment equally in relation to population pressure and land degradation. The second is one of cause and effect. They assume population pressure is the determining factor promoting environmental and food crises and that it is the poor who degrade and undermine the environment more than the wealthy. Yet recent useful work (Chambers, 1994; Broad, 1994) has questioned the view that ‘in rural areas, a denser population is necessarily and always
bad for the environment’, that ‘poor people live hand to mouth and cannot take a long view’ and that ‘poor rural people lead simple lives and need simple solutions’ (Chambers, 1994:2,6,7).

Ultimately Cleaver and Schreiber present a similar view to the World Bank’s conception of agricultural modernisation, one which Bernstein has characterised as a model ‘that is simultaneously an abstract and idealised representation of the development of capitalist agriculture in the West, and the inspiration of policies to "modernise" agriculture in Africa and other parts of the Third World’ (1990:7). It is a view of modernisation which includes a process of commoditisation which requires specialisation, the drive to standardise technical conditions of production to ‘reduce the variations, obstacles and unpredictability of natural environments’ (Bernstein, 1990:6-7). A major problem with the Bank’s formulations for agricultural modernisation is that their models fail to recognise the character of existing relations of production and social reproduction: they have no idea about the mechanism and dynamic of rural social change because they see only market formula and privatisation of tenure as the leading mechanisms for reform. They make incorrect assumptions about *inter alia*, the way in which production is organised, about the ways in which decisions are made in the countryside, and by whom, and that the household is the locus of decisions and that men and women, young and old, make decisions equally.

These assumptions, and this view of modernisation, is present in Cleaver and Schreiber’s work despite the claim that they want to ‘promote effective demand for sustainable and environmentally benign farming technologies’ (p.199). Their approach contrasts sharply with that of Michael Redclift (1992). Redclift has proposed (see also Redclift and Sage 1994) the need to de-emphasise supply side issues and to enhance the demand side of the equation when discussing environmental management. He has shown the importance of seeing environmental concern as part of agricultural policy and of involving ‘local people in policy objectives which they have had no real opportunity to influence’ (Redclift, 1992:256). Redclift reminds us of the importance of understanding rural politics again and of the way in which it is constructed. He also reminds us that policy makers make rural producers feel like ‘poachers on their own land’ and that what is now required, to facilitate social transformation and rural empowerment is to try and understand the way in which rural poor formulate their interests.

Redclift (and others too, like Chambers, 1994; Chambers and Conway, 1992; and from different perspectives, Dasgupta, 1993; and Desai, 1992) provide a far more sophisticated and less mechanistic guide to the issues which link food crises and population growth. Essentially they have a sense of the importance of understanding the factors contributing to social inequality. These become a benchmark against which to assess producers (and non-producers) access to sustainable rural livelihoods (Chambers and Conway, 1992). Dasgupta (1993) for example has given a substantial defence of avoiding the triggers to destitution by policy makers who have little understanding about rural decision making. Commenting on the crass way in which policy makers reify private property rights as the vehicle for sustainable rural development he has noted that:

> It is not difficult to see why common-property resources matter greatly to the poorest of the rural poor in a society, or therefore, to understand the mechanisms through which such people may well get disfranchised from the economy even while in the aggregate the society is enjoying economic growth (1993:291).
These mechanisms of dispossession include shifts in population size and density and also predatory governments and 'thieving aristocracies' (p.292) Dasgupta also notes that while the outcome of changes to common property resources vary they 'can have disastrous distributional consequences, disfranchising entire classes of people from economic citizenship' (p. 294) He is lead to the view that:

resource allocation mechanisms which do not take advantage of dispersed information, which are insensitive to hidden (and often not-so-hidden) economic and ecological interactions ... which do not take the long view, and which do not give a sufficiently large weight to the claims of the poorest within rural populations (particularly the women and children in these populations) are going to prove environmentally disastrous (1993:294).

Entitlements and Vulnerability

Sen has provided a theoretical framework which argues that food crises are underpinned by peoples lack of access to food (1981). Because food is seldom distributed free - it is after all like any other commodity in capitalism - what becomes important in preventing famine is facilitating access to it. Dreze and Sen later clarified the concept of entitlement in the following way:

What we can eat depends on what food we are able to acquire. The mere presence of food in the economy, or in the market, does not entitle a person to consume it. In each social structure, given the prevailing legal, political, and economic arrangements, a person can establish command over alternative commodity bundles (any one bundle of which he or she can choose to consume). These bundles could be extensive, or very limited, and what a person can consume will be directly dependent on what these bundles are (Dreze and Sen, 1989:9).

No other work on famine and food security has been so influential in shaping our understanding of who suffers, where and how? Sen focused our attention, on issues of access and market power showing that (contrary to the ideologues in the IFIs) markets are constructed around relationships of power. There has, of course, been criticism of Sen (de Waal, 1990; Woldesmeskel, 1990; Basu, 1986). He is seen to have focused too much on perceiving famine victims as passive. Various writers suggest that he has tended to focus too much on the wage labourer without assets (not entirely relevant for Africa), that he has tended to ignore the violence in famine, that his characterisations of famine have been too economistic - food producers might starve to preserve their assets, and mortality occurs from things other than starvation (de Waal, 1990; - and that there is little about the mechanism whereby institutional rights to food are established Another criticism is that while Sen has put access to food centre stage, he has not examined how capabilities or the totality of rights to food (or more generally to basic needs) is constructed (Watts, 1991).

Dreze and Sen (1989) go some (but not the whole) way to meeting these criticisms. In Hunger and Public Action they are concerned with the way in which state activities mediate or construct food crises. Thus there is a glimpse of the politics underpinning the emergence of food crises and it is related to the state's willingness to protect or promote entitlement so as to prevent dramatic declines in living standards or to expand basic capabilities of the population. Chambers and Conway (1992) build on Sen's view of capability to link it to the concepts of equity and sustainability. They integrate these concepts through the notion of sustainable rural livelihoods. They define a livelihood as comprising:
people, their capabilities and their means of living, including food, income and assets. Tangible assets are resources and stores, and intangible assets are claims and access. A livelihood is environmentally sustainable when it maintains or enhances the local and global assets on which livelihoods depend, and has net beneficial effects on other livelihoods. A livelihood is socially sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, and provide for future generations (Chambers and Conway, 1992:iii).

There is a need to situate discussions of relationships between population growth, environmental degradation, and food security with nuanced rather than generalised assumptions about food producers capabilities and vulnerabilities (Bohle, Watts and Downing, 1993) This allows our understanding to be structured around the role of power, political and economic. Vulnerability is shaped by two processes. At a macro level, the need to investigate issues of policy failure, resource poverty, population growth, bad luck and the hierarchical appropriation of resources (differential access, generational access, conjunctural access and entitlement failures) (Bohle, Watts and Downing, 1993). Vulnerability is also shaped by issues of sensitivity to temporal fluctuations (perhaps relating to seasonality and all that may mean relating to resource access including labour power); spatial differentiation (geographical locations) and the need to have a sense of how choice has been shaped historically.

This typology is valuable because it raises questions about vulnerability and capability in relation to farming systems. It requires a sensitivity to changes in resource endowments and therefore to changes in relations of production and how wealth is retained and how households cope with stress. The questions this focus directs us to also ensures that we go beyond simple notions of poverty, of ‘the poor’ and ‘the rich’, because clearly ‘the poor’ are also differentiated and not equally vulnerable to different crises or capable of the same responses.

**War and Food Riots**

Perhaps the most interesting recent literature on famine and food security is that which tries to break new ground by explaining not only why and how famines emerge but also by putting centre stage some of the consequences of famine. Most famine literature has been preoccupied with causes (Swift, 1993). This has tended to lead commentators to underplay the complexity and inter-relatedness of the process by which access to food may change and market power become marginalised. It has also tended to downplay the politics of struggles over resources and positions of power which stem from the process.

It is with the rethinking of international responses to complex emergencies that a focus on the relationship between War and Hunger (1994) has emerged. As Macrae and Zwi note in their introduction to this important volume,

Conventional approaches to conflict analysis have tended to focus on the international, macro-level dimension, ignoring the local-level rationale, and the impact of low-intensity strategies on individuals and households. However, without an understanding of the local political and cultural complexities, and of the motivations of individuals and groups for sustaining struggles, the means of preventing and resolving them, as well as of relieving their effects, will remain elusive. This lack of political analysis has limited the understanding of food-security issues in Africa. The human-rights dimension of famine has been underplayed in favour of environmental and economic factors, seen as politically neutral. The public face of famine, at least until the early 1990s, has been maintained
primarily as an enviro-economic crisis, rather than that of a legal, social and political
disaster, with integral environmental and economic components (Macrae & Zwi, 1994:10)

While famines are different, there are, according to Macrae and Zwi common trends
in the aetiology of conflict famines in Africa. In particular they argue that in recent
famines in Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia. Sudan and Somalia, ‘famine was not
simply a consequence of conflict, but represented its goal’ (p.11). There are three ways
in which attacks on food security are promoted There may be an act of omission
(failure to act); an act of commission, where a state, or other forces attack the means to
produce or procure food; and an act of provision, where actors may promote the
differential supply of food.

Several recent commentators have began to establish a framework within which
especially low intensity war is waged on structures which produce or distribute food
(De Waal, 1993; Duffield, 1994; Cliffe, 1994). These commentators have identified the
ways in which armies destroy and consume crops, destabilise markets and establish
regimes which are based on waging war as a goal in itself – what de Waal has called
‘the rapid development of political economies based upon militarised asset-stripping’
(1993:33).

David Keen’s The Benefits of Famine (1994), offers a thorough and sophisticated
framework for understanding the horrors of famine in southwestern Sudan between
1983-89. Just when the ‘international community’ early in 1996 envisages ways of
curtailing the bestial activities of the Bashir/Turabi islamicist regime in Khartoum,
Keen’s work highlights the way in which famine in south western Sudan

emerged from a long history of exploitative processes ... that had created famine in the past,
while conferring substantial benefits on groups with superior access to political power and
the means of violence (Keen, 1994:13).

These groups included those continually vying for power after the overthrow of
Nimery in 1985, who was himself guilty of suppressing news of famine in Darfur and
Kordofan in the early 1980s. There has been a continuous theme in Sudanese politics
since independence in January 1956: the inability of a single bloc of classes to exercise
hegemony and to break from the sectarian political struggles of the two religious sects
the Khatmiyya and Mahdist Ansar. The inability of any regime in the history of Sudan
to generate legitimate government has been repeatedly underscored and promoted by
economic crisis, famine and political instability. Since the islamicist coup of 1989 the
regime has sought what Duffield has called ‘political survival in the context of
permanent emergency’ (1994:51).

Keen offers us a perspective on why and how the ravages of famine in south western
Sudan were generated by the political regime. Unable (unwilling) to transcend long
running sectarian conflicts it uses processes of famine in the south as a tool of state
policy. For Keen this is why famine is created in this part of Sudan and crucially for
him:

Notwithstanding Sen’s emphasis on poverty as the root of famine, it was, in a sense,
precisely the wealth of victim groups that exposed them to famine. Processes of famine
involved the forced transfer of assets from victim to beneficiary groups in a context of acute
political powerlessness on the part of the victims. ... The 1985-1989 famine was the creation
of a diverse coalition of interests that were themselves under intense political and economic
pressures in the context of a shrinking resource base and significant environmental crisis in
the north (1994:13,14).
Keen has written a big book: its detailed analysis is extensive in its use of sources and full of general insights about the role that states play in creating famine. He notes that it is dangerous to generalise about famines but argues that there are many common dynamics with other cases (the arming of militia for instance was also common in Ethiopia’s famines in the 1980s). But he is also scathing about the way in which international donors have contributed to the creation of famine. In Sudan, he argues, donors were ‘unhelpful’ in three ways. They let the Sudan government define the relief problem, they failed to adequately monitor the delivery of relief – and to ensure that it reached the intended beneficiaries – and they avoided addressing underlying conflict (Keen, 1994:175).

Similar issues have been taken up by Morton (1994) but Keen shows similarities across the Horn of Africa and important policy implications follow from his analysis. He argues that international donors need to ‘take account of the political and economic processes creating famine, rather than simply (and optimistically) allocating relief to some of the poorest groups once they have descended into destitution’ (pp. 230-231). In the cases of Sudan and Somalia Keen argues that relief agencies should not use the presence of violence as a reason for not giving aid should instead be seen as ‘something that can be reduced by effective and impartial relief operations’ (p. 231). He wants the international community to tackle the causes rather than just the effects of violence. The problem for Keen is that politically weak groups fail to gain access to relief where famine has been actively created by state policy. In other words, where famine is clearly not the outcome of poverty, or market failure – Sen’s entitlements – famine relief has to take a different form. It necessarily must address, and confront ‘sovereign’ states. Of course that is what the ‘international community’ does do, when it is driven by imperialist agendas and seeks to support clients it wants to keep in power, but should we accuse Keen of naivete if he argues that this process of relief supply and engagement with famine situations needs to become more generalised? He argues that relief agencies (and there is a difference between bilateral donors, those in the UN system and NGOs) should adopt a more holistic approach. That means supplying relief to more than just the conveniently accessible locations and to ensure that all areas of need are reached. It also means that traditional Early Warning Systems fixated with changes in the weather should also monitor human rights abuses and political struggles likely to promote famine.

Fundamentally, Keen’s work indicates that response to famines should be informed by what we know about the particular famine. Instead of simply chucking more food or money at perceived shortages of food he argues that we need to examine the interests and behaviour of both famine victims and beneficiaries. In Sudan, the focus on ‘famine as starvation’ inter alia legitimised late intervention which did nothing to avert the continued impoverishment of politically weak, but economically once strong Dinka communities.

Food Politics

This article has reviewed a range of material focusing on the persistence of hunger, famine and food insecurity in Africa. One of its purposes has been to highlight the continuity and change in much of that literature since the mid-1970s. I have argued that many of the recent insights into the ways in which food systems may become vulnerable to famine can be provided by an assessment of the political struggles involved in agricultural modernisation. Instead of reifying particular single causes to famine disasters, it is necessary to have an historical sense, in famine affected regions, of how peoples entitlements to food are generated and how they change over time.
That involves an understanding of the way in which political and economic power is articulated and who the dominant and subordinate classes and social groups are in any particular case. It also involves an assessment of changes in the relations of production and social reproduction within and beyond the household.

It may be that the preoccupation with causes per se tends to misdirect our concerns. For while the context underlying the immediate onset of famine disaster is important it is also crucial to have a sense of the process which leads up to and transforms social relationships during famine. Looking for single causes obscures this complex procedure in the desire to provide a neat snapshot of something precise which donors or aid agencies believe they might manageably be able to redress. This is why environmental determinism has become so seductive. This is not to deny elements of environmental underpinnings to food crises. It is instead to deny their frequent prioritisation, notably by the World Bank but academics too, which inevitably fails to illuminate social dynamics of politics and struggle over resources. After all, is it not the case that historically there has been a frequent assertion, particularly by colonial authorities, that Africans were to blame, that they were mismanaging ‘nature’ and that pastoralists destroyed the carrying capacity of the land? Yet we know in cases where this was especially the case, in Zimbabwe and South Africa for instance, farming systems continued, albeit under stress induced less by poor farming procedures than by the vagaries of colonial policy.

If the major concern in any food crisis reasonably remains the need to prevent mortality, relief has got to address issues other than those which relate simply to food supply. Intervention to prevent famine requires an understanding of the political struggles and process which have created it. Famine prevention involves creating political structures whereby producers and consumers, and especially rural people can participate in constructing and acting upon their own political agendas. This involves the possibility for peasants to ‘voice out’ which is too easily slurred over in both international prescriptions for ‘governance’ and by African leaders’ keenness to preserve dictatorship under the guise that the continent does not need to import western liberal democratic systems. Indeed, Africa does not and should not adopt bespoke formula. The case against so doing has been made forcibly elsewhere (Baylies, 1995; Beetham, 1994; Allen, 1995; Hawthorn, 1993). It remains the case, however, with the single exception of Mamdani (1986) scholars have excluded peasants, or worker-peasants, from any debate regarding democracy, the need to bolster civil society and multi-partyism.

Food politics is about the way that producers make decisions in the face of difficult choices. It is about:

(power, politics and rights broadly understood, all of which are embedded in a multiplicity of arenas from the domestic (patriarchal politics) to the national/state (how ruling classes and subaltern groups acquire and defend certain rights) (Watts, 1991:21).

On a more optimistic note, food politics is also about the way in which people respond to and construct popular responses to ‘the systematic undermining of previous economic and social structures and of an earlier moral order, in the name of “adjustment”, to ensure renewed capitalist development on a world scale’ (Walton and Seddon, 1994:3). While Walton and Seddon put the issue of food riots firmly on the agenda, they and their collaborators focus almost solely on urban crises and thereby fail to contribute to our understanding of peasant responses to economic crisis. They nevertheless have at least begun to redress an imbalance in much of the
food literature. They do not treat producers and consumers in developing countries as passive pawns in a global food chain. For while Walton and Seddon usefully situate a myriad set of struggles throughout the world in the context of global adjustment, which they date from the mid-1960s, and as a response to the vagaries of structural adjustment in the 1980s and 1990s, they also begin to put centre stage the role of political struggle where social forces have become proactive in opposing contemporary crises.

They argue that the 'recent growth of popular struggles and protest (is) a distinctive political development of the last two decades, involving an exceptionally wide range of social forces, both responding to, and itself shaping, the process of global adjustment that has accompanied a global crisis' (Walton and Seddon, 1994:5). The importance of Walton and Seddon's work, backed up by several excellent case studies (Riley and Parfitt on Africa and Udayagiri on Asian debt and India) is to argue that the contemporary global crisis of capitalism is more than just a financial-economic crisis. It is also a political-economic crisis and a social and cultural crisis. This has manifested itself with the emergence of new social divisions and solidarities and new forms of identity and morality (p. 21). The origin of an international wave of price riots, strikes and political demonstrations has been the persistence of international debt and the austerity programmes imposed by the IFI's. Riley and Parfitt highlight austerity protest in Africa have generally been part of a broader struggle of opposition to the 'prevailing modes of rule' and they make the important caveat to generalisation that '(t)he locale does determine the modality of protest and its consequences' (Riley and Parfitt, 1994:168). It is now time for assessment of the ways in which famines are created to document the political struggles of peasants, in the era of austerity imposed measures, to construct a meaningful arena within which they can assert their political will onto issues of food production and distribution; rural livelihood protection and promotion and the ability to transform these struggles into local action.

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The Political Economy of Mauritania: An Introduction

David Seddon

The Review has not published anything of significance on Mauritania for nearly two decades – since Mahfoud Bennoune’s analysis of ‘the political economy of Mauritania: imperialism and class struggle’ (1978). The Review is not alone in failing to provide readers with an analysis of the recent evolution of Mauritanian politics and its political economy. Despite Mauritania’s membership of the Arab Maghreb Union (created in 1989), it is generally considered so marginal that it is rarely included in works on the Maghreb. In most studies and surveys of the Maghreb, from Samir Amin’s classic study, The Maghreb in the Modern World (first published in English in 1970), through to more recent books, like Lawless & Findlay’s North Africa: Contemporary Politics and Economic Development (1984), Mauritania fails to get even a mention. At least in Nevill Barbour’s Survey of North West Africa (the Maghreb), originally published in 1959, with a second edition in 1962, and Wilfrid Knapp’s third edition in 1977 (entitled North West Africa: a Political and Economic Survey), there is a brief – but all too brief section on Mauritania and the Sahara. Those wishing to know more about the broader context of Mauritanian political economy and politics should turn to studies of the long struggle in the Western Sahara, like Thompson and Adloff’s The Western Saharan’s: Background to Conflict (1980) and Hodges’ excellent Western Sahara: the Roots of a Desert War (1983). These volumes discuss Mauritania’s political economy with regard to the war in the desert.

Reference works on Mauritania provide a more detailed source of information, but many of these are now out of date. Gerentein’s Mauritania (1967) remains a standard introductory text and is usefully supplemented by his Historical Dictionary of Mauritania (1981). (His short piece ‘On the history, ethnology and political philosophy of Mauritania’ in The Maghreb Review, vol. 3, no. 7-8, 1978, provides a fascinating insight into the relevance for contemporary politics in Mauritania of culture, myth and religion). The World Encyclopaedia of Political Systems and Parties (1983, 1987) published by Facts on File and edited by George Delury has a useful, but dated, entry on Mauritania in volume II. The Economist Intelligence Unit produces regular ‘Country Profiles’ and quarterly reports – these are extremely useful sources particularly on the Mauritanian economy. A concise and reasonably comprehensive Country Profile has been recently published by the European Community (February 1995).

Concern over the grim human rights record of Mauritania, particularly during the second half of the 1980s and into the early 1990s, prompted several studies by human
While one can be critical of Bennoune's rather crude class analysis, and his tendency to cast the Mauritanian political economy in a classic and timeless mould as 'a neo-colonial state', his analysis remains a useful starting point for a consideration of contemporary Mauritanian politics and economics. But it was produced before the coup of July 1978 which overthrew the one-party regime of Mokhtar Ould Daddah and, although the editors assured readers at the time that 'that event has clearly done nothing to disturb the basic pattern described' (1978:31) by Bennoune, much has in fact changed since then.

What follows is an outline of political and economic developments over the last two decades as the basis for more detailed analysis in the future. I have been unable to consult one of the few, recent analytical works on the political economy of Mauritania: *Global Restructuring and Peripheral States: the Stick and the Carrot in Mauritania*, by Mohameden Ould-Mey (November 1995), but this will be reviewed in a later issue of ROAPE.

**Background**

Mauritania covers an area of just over 1 million sq. kms., 90 per cent of which consists of desert. Geographically and culturally, Mauritania links the Arab Maghreb with sub-Saharan West Africa; the majority of the population is Arabic-speaking and Muslim. Mauritanian society remains deeply divided along ethnic and tribal lines despite an accelerated process of class formation. The population of around 2 million consists of a majority (some two-thirds) of Arabic-speaking 'Moors' of mixed Arab, berber and black African descent, divided into tribal groupings and into two major categories: the 'white' Moors (Beidan) and the 'black' Moors (Harratin), the ex-slaves of the Beidan. The significant minority (at least one-third) of the population consists of various black African ethno-linguistic groups, including Peul (Pulaar), Toucouleur, Soninke and Wolof. All of these were historically stratified, slave-owning societies. The black African groups tended to be settled farmers along the Senegal River valley, while the Moors were predominantly pastoralists. This division remains significant, albeit increasingly blurred today, as a result of the process of class formation and reformation, particularly in the rural areas.

The historically dominant position of the Beidan has been progressively eroded over the last 40 years, especially since the early 1980s (when slavery was formally abolished). They nevertheless remain generally the most powerful and affluent group in Mauritanian society. Much of the dynamic for political division and alliance in post-colonial Mauritania is essentially that of struggles for power within the traditional ruling class, drawn from this group. The Harratin, although historically a sub-altern class, now constitute a growing force within Mauritanian society, with an important element in higher positions within the army and the civil service, and a majority constituting the bulk of the urban and rural labour force and shanty town population. The ethnic black groups constitute a significant minority whose political
opposition is rooted in the discriminatory workings of Mauritanian society under Beidan rule.

Historically an essentially rural economy and society, Mauritania has experienced a process of rapid but unplanned urbanisation, particularly since the early 1970s when severe drought precipitated a massive rural exodus. Today, the capital, Nouakchott, has a population of around 550,000; other urban centres include the port of Nouadhibou (70,000) to the north, and Kaedi (74,000), Kiffa (65,000) and Rosso (50,000) in the south. Population density is greatest in the Sahelian regions to the south of the country and, particularly, along the Senegal River, which marks the southern border with Senegal.

Neocolonialism, State Capitalism and 'Islamic Socialism': 1960-1978

Before independence in 1960, Mauritania was governed by the French from St. Louis in Senegal. The Union Progressiste Mauritaneieene (UPM), which under the leadership of Mokhtar Ould Daddah formed the first internal autonomous government in 1957, merged in May 1958 with elements of the Entente Mauritanienne to become the Parti de Regroupement Mauritanien (PRM) and to take power on independence. Under Ould Daddah, Mauritania was declared an Islamic republic. Between 1960 and 1978 it was also, in effect, a one-party state. In 1964, the PRM changed its name to the Parti du Peuple Mauritanien (PPM).

At the end of the colonial period, the Mauritanian economy remained largely based on livestock production and agriculture; exports were predominantly animals, dates and gum arabic. Out of approximately 600,000 economically active persons, some 400,000 were engaged in livestock production, 160,000 in agriculture, and the remaining 40,000 in other activities, such as trade and handicrafts and wage labour. Between 60,000 and 80,000 worked outside the country in plantations south of the border, in Senegal. As late as 1955, only two major towns had electricity, to service some 2,000 European employees of the colonial service and MIFERMA (the multinational mining company Mines de Fer de Mauritanie, established in 1952). There were no paved roads or railways. In 1957, only about 7 per cent of school-age children attended classes.

From 1960 MIFERMA began to develop the mining sector. Between 1960 and 1973, the company invested 18 billion francs, while the rate of extraction rose dramatically, from 1.7 billion metric tonnes in 1963 to 7.4 billion in 1967, 9.1 billion in 1970, and 10.5 billion by 1973. Output per worker increased from 1,500 metric tonnes in 1964 to 21,000 by 1972. By the late 1960s, the backflow of funds from Mauritania to Europe accounted for about 70 per cent of annual receipts from sales; the mining operations were hugely profitable for the predominantly European MIFERMA investors and shareholders (the Mauritanian state had a 5 per cent share). The mining sector came to dominate the Mauritanian economy. By the early 1970s, minerals – mainly iron ore – accounted for nine-tenths of the value of Mauritanian exports and for about half of Mauritanian GNP. Even with its small share, one-third of the state's budget was financed by MIFERMA royalties. MIFERMA employed about 4,500 workers in the early years, but by the early 1970s a total of 30,000 Mauritanians were classified as wage and salary earners, over 11,000 employed by the state and 19,000 by the mines and other private business. Bennoune argued that:
in Mauritania, the recognition of national sovereignty by France in 1960 did not result in the radical alteration of the colonial status quo ante. The post-independence state apparatus inherited from the pre-1960 period not only was kept intact in its basic structure, function and finality, but was perfected and strengthened in order to preserve the interests of multinational corporations with only a gradual change in the political, administrative and military personnel in favour of the indigenous emergent predominant classes (1978:31).

He cited a spokesman of the Association de la Jeunesse Mauritanienne (AJM) - which Bennoune regarded as 'a genuine nationalist movement'. He said that ‘independence was handed to those who spent the major part of their lives collaborating with the imperialists' (p. 39). There is support for this thesis as far as the first ten years of Mauritanian independence are concerned. The ‘independent’ Mauritanian economy was dominated by the development of the largely foreign controlled mining sector, with infrastructural and social development linked closely to the interests of MIFERMA and SOMIMA (the Societe Miniere de Mauritanie).

The development of fishing as a commercial activity also took place during these early years, with European fishing companies taking a catch estimated at 300,000 tons a year in the mid-1960s, compared with 6,000 tons by indigenous fisherman. GNP more than doubled between 1959 and 1966, with three-quarters of the growth taking place in the mining sector and most of the remainder in mining-related services and administration.

The social and political impact of this pattern of economic development was considerable. As Bennoune remarked, ‘this rapid development created new social contradictions’ (p. 45). The uneven development that resulted from the dynamic growth of the European-dominated mining, fishing and commercial sectors, and from the growth of the state apparatus, and the subordination of the ‘natural economy’ to the demands and rhythms of these sectors, was exacerbated by the severe droughts of 1969-74. The failure of the government to deal with the rural crisis resulted in tens of thousands of Mauritanian’s streaming into the urban centres, transforming them into shanty towns. The population of the seventeen designated ‘urban areas’ grew from 77,000 in 1962 to 300,000 in 1975 and Nouakchott alone expanded from 7,750 to 103,483. By 1976, only 27 per cent of the population remained as pastoralists, with 31 per cent urban dwellers (as compared with 6 per cent in 1959).

The emergence of an embryonic working class can be discerned during the 1960s. The mining sector increased in importance at that time and recruited labour from the rural areas. There also took place the growth of a more radical, nationalist opposition movement. Housed in over-crowded and unhygienic slums without running water or electricity, on the outskirts of the mining areas, the Mauritanian miners began to sense their common interests. The first strike took place in Zouerate in 1968. The MIFERMA management called in the army to crush it; several workers were killed and many injured. As a result, a radical group was formed within the official Mauritanian Workers' Union (UTM) and at the UTM Congress in February 1969, the radical rank and file formed ‘a progressive UTM’ which was supported by the teachers’ union. The government undertook a programme of repressive measures against the workers and the teachers, but in the autumn of 1969 found themselves faced with a series of strikes and demonstrations and, over the next year, the radical trades unionists forged an alliance with the clandestine Democratic Movement established in 1968.

During 1970 and 1971, the government of the one-party state (which had come effectively to represent the interests of foreign capital) and what had emerged as a
popular protest movement, struggled bitterly for the upper hand. What resulted was a political and social compromise in favour of Mauritanian nationalisation and a form of radical but authoritarian populism, comparable in some respects to regimes that had emerged elsewhere in north Africa (e.g. Egypt under Nasser, Sudan under Numeiry).

By 1972, the political bureau of the PPM was calling for the revision of the existing cooperation agreement with France and beginning to argue strongly for Mauritanianisation and eventual nationalisation of the multinational MIFERMA. That company’s (together with that of SOMIMA’s) exploitation of Mauritania’s iron ore and other mineral resources now dominated the Mauritanian economy. A new agreement was eventually reached with France in February 1973, covering technical, economic and cultural cooperation, but not monetary and military matters.

Mauritania then left the West African Monetary Union and French army personnel withdrew. The regime increasingly adopted a radical posture on international issues, supporting African liberation movements, developing closer links with the Peoples’ Republic of China (Chinese advisers even came to Nouakchott), and joining the Arab League in October 1973 – a historic moment at which to join. Yet the regime remained strongly opposed to the growth of political opposition movements (notably the clandestine Democratic Movement) and to trade unions. In September 1970 it was announced that ‘no trade union or group of any kind in Mauritania has the right to express political ideas which contradict those of the party’.

The trades unions had become, during the late 1960s, an important organised force and their militancy (expressed through a series of strikes) in support of nationalist demands was a major factor in the government’s stance on relations with France, the creation of a national currency and nationalisation of the iron ore mines. The UTM was, however, brought under the control of the PPM and the government in 1973, and the leadership remained in the hands of appointees of Ould Daddah until 1981. The Democratic Party began as a leftist student movement but grew to become a major (albeit clandestine) political force during the early 1970s. It advocated racial and ethnic harmony and a more open, democratic regime. It suffered serious setbacks, however, when several prominent members joined the PPM in the mid-1970s and then again when others joined the new government and administration after the 1978 coup.

In the summer 1975, the PPM adopted a ‘party charter’ advocating ‘a truly national democracy in accordance with the requirements of economic and cultural independence’. It called for the supremacy of the Party over the state organs and the adaptation of the Party in the direction of democratisation, efficiency and progress. The political system was to be ‘Islamic, national, centrist, and socialist’. Mauritanian Islamic socialism was to be based on five governing principles: the nationalisation of key sectors of the economy, the elimination of exploitation of man by man, systematisation of punishment and reward, state control of basic public services, and a mixed economy in which the state was to undertake joint enterprises with foreign or domestic private capital for mineral prospecting and processing, provided private capital abandoned ‘outdated individualism’ and settled for ‘fair profits (cf., Bennoune, 1978:49).

Mauritanian nationalism became increasingly irredentist during the 1970s. Towards the end of 1975, following the ruling of the World Court at the Hague in favour of self-determination for the Western Sahara, the government signed an agreement with
Morocco and Spain committing Spain to withdraw from the Spanish Sahara to hand over to a joint Moroccan-Mauritanian administration. When Morocco launched its blitzkrieg against the Polisario, Mauritania, inevitably, became involved. Over the next two years, participation in the war was to cost Mauritania dear. Indeed, it was a crucial factor in the overthrow of the Ould Daddah regime by the army and the establishment of the Military Committee for National Salvation (CMSN). Economic performance during the 1970s as a whole was not good, with average annual growth in GDP at only 1.7 per cent (compared with 6.7 per cent in the 1960s). One important reason for this was the collapse of output and export revenues in the second half of the decade linked to Mauritania’s involvement in the war against the Polisario in the Western Sahara.


The 10th July Movement – a faction within the CMSN – took its name from the date in 1978 when a group of army officers overthrew the Ould Daddah regime. It had three aims: withdrawal from the war and neutrality in any ensuing conflict between the Polisario and Morocco, economic recovery, and the restoration of democracy.

Between 1978 and 1984 there were four different military heads of state and frequent changes of personnel within the CMSN. The first two military leaders effectively failed to achieve significant progress towards these basic objectives: Colonel Mustapha Ould Mohamed Sayek was unable to extricate Mauritania from the war in the Western Sahara, or to quell social unrest at home; Lieutenant Colonel Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Ahmed Louli (who took over in June 1979) was little more than a figurehead for his prime minister, Lieutenant Colonel Mohamed Khouna Ould Haidalla, who replaced him in January 1980, having negotiated an effective ceasefire with the Polisario. Between 1978 and 1980, political parties remained outlawed, despite the declared objective of a return to civilian democratic rule. In place of the banned political parties, the CMSN established official mass movements, with the intention of overcoming tribal, ethnic and other divisions such as the Structures for the Education of the Masses (SEM). Within this framework, ‘popular committees’ were established with direct representation from a basic cell of ten families, through district committees consisting of ten cells, to zonal committees, based on ten to fifteen districts. Delegates were then mandated to departmental, regional and national committees – although, in fact, no national conference had been held after nearly a decade. The three-fold aim of these mass structures were: to strengthen national unity, to promote economic development, and to improve social conditions. Their work was based on community activities, such as adult literacy classes, building of roads, mosques and classrooms, planting trees and developing market gardens, and protecting buildings and fields from dune encroachment. They were more active in the urban than in the rural areas and demonstrated the characteristics of structures imposed from above, rather than mass movements from below.

This structure for ‘mass mobilisation’ was maintained under Ould Haidallah. In 1980, the Shari’a was formally introduced and an Islamic Court of Justice founded to try crimes against people and property and to adjudicate in family matters. The Special (Military) Court of Justice was also established to investigate and try cases which threatened the security of the government and the state. Slavery was officially abolished. In December 1980, a civilian prime minister was appointed to head a transitional government and a parliamentary constitution was drafted which provided for a multi-party state with a presidential system of government.
Ould Haidallah's position within the country was, however, not secure. The Mauritanian Workers' Union (UTM) had re-emerged by 1981 as a significant force, although it was divided as to its political role. Its secretary-general, El Kory Ould M’Heitty was jailed by Ould Haidallah's government for pro-Libyan activities. Political factions or movements at this time included the Ba’athists (who maintained links with the Iraqi Ba’ath Party), the Nasserites, and the Muslim Brotherhood – all of which represented various ‘Arab nationalist’ perspectives; there were also the Strict Nationalists and the ‘Free Man’ (El Hor) organisation, representing ethnic black Mauritians and Moorish ex-slaves (Harratin) respectively. The most powerful opposition movement, based in Paris but with support from Morocco and Senegal, was the Alliance for a Democratic Mauritania (AMD), established by a group of conservative businessmen and members of the banned PPM as a possible vehicle for the return of Mokhtar Ould Daddah.

It was the AMD which sponsored a failed coup attempt against Ould Haidallah in March 1981. The constitution was suspended and army officers returned to key government posts as members for the Military Committee for National Salvation (CMSN). Two officers dismissed from the CMSN led a small force across the border from Senegal against the government, but failed to rally the support of the Mauritanian army and were captured, tried and executed. The attempted coup lost the AMD significant support: Senegal expelled known AMD activists, the major supporters of the AMD in Mauritania were executed or imprisoned, and even Ould Daddah’s commitment to the AMD became uncertain. One immediate consequence of the coup attempt, was the signing of a ceasefire agreement with the Polisario. Ould Haidallah, angered by the support provided by Morocco to the AMD and its attempted coup, abandoned the position of neutrality in favour of a pro-Polisario stance and relations with Morocco were severed. A friendship treaty was also signed with Algeria, the main backer of the Polisario.

In 1982, the Democratic Movement called for the formation of a united national front with the participation of all political movements. The call, however, was rejected by the CMSN, which continued to emphasise the unifying character of the SEM and its contribution to economic development. But economic crisis and social unrest created increasing difficulties for Ould Haidallah. There was continuing opposition to him from within the ruling elite. Both a former military head of state, Ould Sayek, and former civilian prime minister, Ould B. Neijara, were involved in plots and sentenced in 1982 to ten years hard labour.

The deteriorating economic situation did not help. Although agricultural output grew at an average of 3.1 per cent a year during the 1970s as a whole, food production stagnated – per capita food production in 1979-81 was only 77 per cent of the figure for 1969-71. Industrial production slumped during the 1970s to average a negative growth rate of 4 per cent a year. The 1981-85 Five Year Plan involved an ambitious investment programme to help restore economic growth which had suffered as a result of drought and the financial cost of the war in the Sahara. But by 1983, the difficulties involved in achieving the Plan targets were apparent. Drought again hit the economy hard. Between 1980 and 1984, the Mauritanian economy experienced a 0.2 per cent growth rate in GDP and a decline in per capita GNP of 0.6 per cent a year. The balance of payments deficit in 1984 was equivalent to 26 per cent of GNP, and the level of the foreign debt had reached more than twice the size of GNP ($1.5 billion compared with $600 million). Historically an agrarian economy, the contribution of agriculture and livestock production had declined from more than 40 per cent in the 1960s to 20 per cent by the mid 1980s. Agriculture as a whole had grown at a rate of
only 1.6 per annum between 1980 and 1985; population growth rates during the same period averaged 2.1 per cent. Successive droughts had reduced the livestock population by more than a third, and total cereal output had slumped from around 120,000 tonnes a year to nearer 20,000 tonnes. In 1983, the government declared the whole country a disaster area and requested assistance from the international community. By 1985, cereal imports had reached 240,000 metric tonnes, supplemented by food aid in 1984/85 amounting to 135,000 metric tonnes of cereals.

**Economic Reform, Political Stagnation: 1984-1989**

In December 1984, Ould Haidallah was replaced as Chair of the CMSN and head of State by Colonel Maouïya Ould Sid’Ahmed Taya in a coup d’état. Ould Taya promised that his government would respect human rights, free political prisoners and ‘end the use of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment’. Many political prisoners, including the former UTM secretary-general, Ould M’Heitty, were released from jail under a general amnesty. The new government did not, however, issue a new constitution or indicate whether it planned to return power to a civil authority.

A regional conference on territorial administration, held in June 1985, discussed administrative decentralisation. In December plans for municipal elections were announced. But despite the introduction of elections for mayors in the 12 regional capitals and in Nouakchott in 1986, and their continuation until the crisis of 1989, the existence and activities of political parties remained illegal (until April 1991), and strict rules on association continued.

Ould Taya’s government officially recognised the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in 1984, continuing Ould Haidalla’s foreign policy initiative in this regard. This move was partly prompted by political considerations, and partly by a wish to bring a definitive end to the involvement of Mauritania in a conflict which was proving extremely expensive.

On the economic front, a short term stabilisation programme was initiated in the context of an agreement with the IMF in April 1985. The government immediately undertook a series of reforms, which were to be developed in the subsequent Programme for Economic and Financial Adjustment (PREF) for the period 1985-88. In addition to the usual macro-economic features of a ‘structural adjustment’ package, an emphasis was placed on developing sectoral strategies with a priority accorded to investments in productive sectors, particularly in areas where rapid returns might be anticipated (e.g. in irrigated agriculture). In contrast with the priorities of the previous Five Year Plan (mines and infrastructure), the new Programme focused particularly on rural development, with over 42 per cent of public funds being directed towards the rural sector generally (including rural water supply), of which 37 per cent was to go to agriculture.

During the four years of the PREF, economic growth in GNP averaged 3.6 per cent a year, inflation was reduced (from 13.6 per cent in 1985 to around 6 per cent at the end of 1987) and the financial situation improved significantly. Farm output increased five-fold after 1984. In 1987-88, total cereal production was 120,000 tonnes and reached the planned PREF target of 40 per cent of national cereal needs – although this was largely due to good rains rather than to significant developments in agriculture. The area under rain-fed cultivation increased from 60,000 ha. in 1985 to 165,000 ha. in 1988 as farmers took advantage of the more abundant rainfall. There was, however, an increase in the production of irrigated cereals, notably of paddy rice along the Senegal
River. A process of regeneration took place in the livestock sector which was also largely a result of several years of good rainfall. The number of camels reached 850,000 head by 1988, cattle around 1.3 million and small stock over 7 million head. Despite this, official estimates suggest a net annual reduction, between 1980 and 1988, of 1.45 per cent in the population involved in agriculture and livestock production. That contrasts with a net increase per annum of 3.3 per cent in the economically active population as a whole, a rise of 8.5 per cent in ‘the informal sector’ and of 12.4 per cent in the category of the unemployed. The rural exodus and the emergence of a very substantial impoverished urban (shanty town) population was very dramatic during the 1980s.

Since 1988, Mauritania has been involved in programmes to mitigate the social effects of structural adjustment through the regional Social Dimensions of Adjustment (SDA) facility provided by the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the UNDP, among others. However, these have proved generally unsuccessful in limiting growing unemployment and deteriorating living conditions for a very substantial proportion of the Mauritanian population. The social costs of the PREF were considerable, as cuts in public expenditure adversely affected the more vulnerable sections of the population. The rural exodus, exacerbated by drought in the early 1980s, continued throughout the decade. The rapid growth of the urban population, especially Nouakchott, which came to account for over a quarter of the country’s total population, reflected the difficulty of the continuing struggle for survival in the rural areas and resulted in serious new economic and social problems. For Mauritanian’s, the economic reforms meant wage freezes, job losses (especially in the public sector), higher energy and utility charges, and increases in the cost of living linked to devaluation and the phasing out of subsidies. These especially affected the burgeoning urban population.

The Arab Maghreb Union, (AMU) announced in February 1989 was designed to promote improved economic relations between the five Maghreb states. Real progress in the development of the AMU, however, remained limited and Mauritania – the weakest of the Maghreb economies – benefited little. At home, the PREF was followed by a Programme of Consolidation and Renewal (PCR) for the period 1989 to 1991. The PCR again gave priority to investment in rural development (34.3 per cent of total public investment) with a view to enabling agriculture to cover 50 per cent of the country’s food needs. To this end, considerable effort was to be devoted to the encouragement of the private sector and the development of irrigated agriculture. One consequence of this was increased competition for resources and access to land in the south which had serious social and political consequences.

Ethnic Conflict and State Repression: 1986-1990

The second half of the 1980s was marked by increasing social tension particularly in the south of the country. This was where black ethnic communities constitute a relatively large minority, and where issues of access to and control over the increasingly valuable irrigable land became more critical. The June 1983 decree relating to the re-definition of land rights in the Senegal River Valley area, for example, was seen by local black ethnic communities as an attempt by the government, and the Beidan, to seize their lands. Development projects associated with dam building, increased antagonism between the different local communities and ethnic groups, and between local groups and the state. But inter-community tensions were not restricted to the south, and political opposition to the government – much of it from black ethnic groups and Harratin, increased generally during the
mid-1980s. The distribution in 1986 of a document entitled 'The Manifesto of the Oppressed Black Mauritanian', produced by a political movement known as the African Liberation Forces of Mauritania (FLAM), led to demonstrations in several parts of the country, and to numerous arrests. Many of those arrested were subjected to torture and brutality. In October 1987, the government announced the discovery of a conspiracy supposedly aimed at its overthrow. Dozens of black members of the armed forces were arrested and tried. In December, following popular protests against the execution of three black officers, several members of the black ethnic community (including trades' unionists, academics and civil servants) were arrested; many of them were tortured.

In April 1989, violence erupted in the south. This originated largely in claims to land along the Senegal River. It involved Senegal and Mauritania in an international conflict as well as large numbers of those living in regions close to the Senegal River. In both countries, hundreds of people were deliberately killed in mob violence; the victims were singled out essentially by virtue of their national and ethnic affiliation. In the Republic of Senegal, the violence aimed at Mauritanians had come to an end by early May, with many of those involved arrested on criminal charges. In Mauritania, however, the violence continued, with operations against security forces as well as by local vigilante groups. The roots of the violence in southern Mauritania lay deep in the long-standing but now aggravated tensions between ethnic black communities and 'black' Moors (Harratin) on the one hand, and the 'white' Moors (Beidan) on the other.

In November 1989 and October 1990, Amnesty International published two reports on Mauritania. The first drew attention to the scale and seriousness of human rights violations between 1986 and 1989 and the second examined human rights violations in the Senegal River Valley. It recorded the deterioration of the security situation and the particular problems of the south. The October 1990 report also indicated that extra-judicial executions, torture and the cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of villagers had reached alarming levels in the south of the country, with the army, security forces and militia arresting, torturing or killing hundreds of black Mauritanians. During 1989 and 1990, thousands of black Mauritanians were summarily expelled from the country or forced to flee for their lives. In November 1990, Amnesty International declared that 'what is taking place in southern Mauritania is, in effect, an undeclared war in which one community is using the resources and power of the state against another community'. The situation remained tense and violence continued, albeit on a more restricted scale; the border between Mauritania and Senegal remained closed until May 1992.

The foreign community in Nouakchott generally expressed its concern and distaste for the government's failure to deal effectively to quell the inter-ethnic violence and the evident involvement of the state itself in orchestrated violence and repression. Several foreign agencies withdrew their staff and their assistance to Mauritania during 1989-1991 in protest against the role of the state in human rights abuses. During the latter part of 1990, the expatriate community became even more isolated as a result of Mauritania's position in the Gulf crisis and growing hostility towards 'Westerners'. As the Gulf crisis deepened, the Mauritanian government made clear its support for Iraq. When the war began it denounced the 'appalling aggression' against Iraq and warned that the US-led coalition was intent on 'the destruction of Iraq and its economic and military potential'. It reaffirmed its solidarity with Baghdad in 'its terrible ordeal' but denied rumours that the wife and children of Saddam Hussein had flown to Nouakchott.
The official government position was generally supported by the majority of the Mauritanian population. Within the country, security remained tight, in the aftermath of the political crisis of 1989-1990; and when some 2,000 people demonstrated in Nouakchott on the outbreak of war, to show their support for Iraq, security forces dispersed the crowds with tear gas, and the government closed down all schools and colleges in the capital. Throughout the country, hostility towards ‘Westerners’ obliged expatriates working with relief and development agencies, or with the consulate and embassies, to leave the country or remain strictly within their own official compounds.

**Economic and Political Reform: 1991-1993**

Political liberalisation was declared in the aftermath of the Gulf war. This declaration was the result of several pressures. From foreign lending agencies (including NGOs) and governments (notably of France) and from fears at the level of conflict and tension within the country. The government agreed to recognise and legalise political movements and groupings within the country and to declare that there would be rapid progress towards elections. In July 1991, a new Constitution established the framework for the development of a pluralist political regime after more than a decade of military rule. By October 1991, six political parties had been officially recognised, at least one of which – the Union of Democratic Forces (UFD) – promised to provide serious opposition to the government and its policies. The freedom of the press was upheld as a basic principle, although in practice strict controls were maintained.

Presidential elections were held in January 1992, and Colonel Ould Taya, former head of state and chair of the CMSN, was elected President. He stood, for the Democratic and Social Republican Party (PRDS), against Ahmed Ould Daddah (the brother of the former President Mokhtar Ould Daddah), who headed the major opposition party in the Union of Democratic Forces (UFD), and two other parties. In the subsequent legislative elections, in March 1992, the clear winner – gaining 52 of the 79 seats in the first round of voting and thereby gaining control of the National Assembly – was the PRDS. The decision by the six opposition parties, including the UFD, to boycott the elections (based on the experience of alleged vote-rigging during the previous presidential election) made such a victory inevitable. The ruling PRDS was referred to by the opposition as ‘a so-called party, but really the administration in disguise’. There is no doubt that, despite the formal move to multi-partyism, the regime remained very much as before.

Nevertheless, on 18 April 1992, the Second Mauritanian Republic was declared and the ruling CMSN disbanded. Diplomatic relations, severed in August 1989, were restored in April with Senegal and ‘national unity’ was proclaimed as the government’s central concern. The UFD, the major opposition party also claimed to be the party of national unity with a liberal economic policy. Yet according to the editor of *Al Bayane*, reputed to be one of the leading lights of the new ‘independent press’, ‘politically speaking, we see very little difference between the ruling party, the PRDS, and the opposition, the UDF’. Nevertheless, the changes introduced were regarded by as the first fragile steps towards democratisation. In early 1993, the Prime Minister announced a cabinet reshuffle marked by the dismissal of the Minister of the Interior and the new post was created of secretary of state, in charge of the organisation of municipal elections. They were scheduled to take place later in the year. By April 1993 the Mauritanian Human Rights League reported, ‘the complete
absence of prisoners of conscience, true freedom of the press and complete multiplicity of political parties'. Four months later it was possible to argue:

slow progress continues to be made towards a more open political system. There are now numerous (perhaps 18) political parties, although the PRDS and the UFD dominate the political scene. The press has proliferated over the last two years, and there are now numerous weekly and fortnightly papers, in French and Arabic for the most part, on sale in the urban areas. Although financial difficulties (small capital, limited circulation) inhibit many of these, there is relatively little government censorship. As regards human rights, the situation has improved significantly since 1990, although abuses continue (Seddon and Ould Merzoug, 1994:12).

Relations between the predominantly ‘white’ Beidan government and the black ethnic minorities – so central to the violent events of 1989-91 – continued to be difficult. In May, parliament granted an amnesty to members of the armed forces who had committed ‘criminal felonies’ between 1 January 1989 and 18 April 1992. According to Amnesty International and diplomatic sources, up to 600 black Mauritanians, many of whom had been soldiers, had been arrested, tortured, killed or ‘disappeared’ during this period. An amendment to the legislation to provide financial compensation for victims and their families was rejected by the government. The decision to grant the amnesty provoked a demonstration by the widows of the victims, which was broken up by the police using tear gas. In June, Hamdi Ould Mouknass, of the UPD was arrested before a press conference at which he had been planning to urge the government to re-establish national unity. One of his demands was that black Mauritanians who had fled to Senegal to escape the violence against their communities in 1989-92 be allowed to return. The opposition dismissed government claims that since the restoration of diplomatic relations with Senegal there were no obstacles to their return.

Presidential and legislative elections in late 1993 confirmed the effective domination of Mauritanian politics by the presidential incumbent and his party. The PRDS, which continued to support President Ould Taya as Head of State, now held all the seats in the National Assembly. The opposition had boycotted the elections in protest at fraud alleged to have taken place in earlier presidential elections. Despite the continued existence of legal ‘opposition’ parties, their significance remains strictly limited. The UFD continued to be the major alternative grouping or alliance, committed to both political and economic liberalisation. Its leader maintained in early 1994 that electoral fraud was both endemic and continuing, and that it was the UFD which in fact won the presidential election in which Colonel Ould Taya declared himself the winner.

The PDRS and the UFD undoubtedly dominated the political scene, yet there were other significant political parties. These included the Union for Democracy and Progress (UDP), the Independent Democratic Movement (MDI), which was a member of the UFD coalition and strongly critical of continuing human rights abuses, the Party for Liberty, Equality and Justice (PLEJ), which defined itself as a black, non-violent party and demanded autonomy for the Senegal River Valley in addition to ‘black rights'; the Union for Democratic Progress (UPD) and El Hor which was effectively an anti-slavery movement linked to the UFD.

As the political regime experienced a somewhat greater degree of ‘openness’ during 1991/94, the state itself was beginning to initiate a tentative programme of decentralisation, as a complement to economic liberalisation. As far as administration was concerned, the twelve regions continued to be controlled by governors appointed
by the central government; the more ‘traditional’ administrative structures – the
emirates – having now effectively disappeared. Nouakchott continued to be
administered directly by the central government. The process of decentralisation
of state ministries has been slow and disjointed, creating real difficulties of administra-
tion and execution, particularly in the rural areas, which have tended to be starved of
funds and personnel. The economic implications of this disruption have been
considerable.

During the early part of the decade, the economy remained in deep difficulties. The
Programme of Consolidation and Renewal (PCR) was adversely affected in 1990/91
by successive years of low rainfall, a drop in the price of iron ore and a serious
reduction in the fishing catch, as well as by the Gulf crisis. In 1990, GNP declined by
1.5 per cent in real terms after 4.8 per cent growth in 1989; but inflation was up at 6.8
per cent. The external debt had doubled in ten years and by 1990 was equal to 227 per
cent of GNP. In 1990, food production totalled 105,488 tonnes, as against 134,000 in
1989 and output from fishing continued to decline, although its value held up well.

Negotiations for a second structural adjustment programme had begun in late 1988,
but talks were halted in 1990, in the light of the Mauritanian government’s policy of
‘active neutrality’ in the Gulf crisis. Arab capital from the Gulf withdrew and other
external sources of finance dried up during the latter half of 1990. USAID withdrew in
1991. In response, the government desperately sought the support of the international
community for a medium term programme for 1992/95. That programme had a
number of objectives: to increase the rate of economic growth, to reduce the rate of
inflation and to reduce the current account deficit. Talks with the IMF began again in
December 1991. A large cut in public investment brought the budget deficit down to
4.9 per cent of GDP and, as a result of a decline in imports, the balance of payments
also fell. An outline agreement was concluded during 1991 with the European
Community for 1992-94 under Lomé IV, ‘based on a very clear and precise
programme of economic reform’, according to the prime minister (quoted in The
Courier, 1993). The EC planned to provide Mauritania with a total of Ecu80.5 million.
Of that figure, Ecu61 million would be in Commission-managed grants and Ecu8.5
million the first instalment of the specific Lomé IV funds for ongoing structural
adjustment support intended specifically to cushion the social effects of adjustment.

The first structural adjustment programme had begun with a 16 per cent devaluation
in 1985; in September 1992, the currency was devalued by 40 per cent against the franc
and 28 per cent against the dollar. The main objectives of the programme, endorsed by
the World Bank and the IMF, were to achieve an annual growth rate of 3-5 per cent by
1995 and to reduce the country’s external debt ($2 billion in 1989; $2.2 billion in 1993).
The measures were met by rioting in Nouakchott as local merchants raised food
prices by 40 per cent, leading the government to impose a two-week, dusk-to-dawn
curfew in the capital. In an interview in November 1992, the prime minister declared:

the liberalisation of our economy, de-monopolisation, privatisation and everything that
goes with them have a real effect on employment and prices in the short term, so reforms
must be accompanied by social and poverty control programmes – social development
programmes for education and health, for example, and employment promotion operations.
We think that the success of these reforms also very much depends on the government’s
ability to implement and get funders’ support for the social programmes. We also believe
that back-up social measures are needed to ensure the vital social and political stability
and the success of the adjustment programmes. This is why the social sections of the adjustment
programmes which we have just launched are so large (The Courier, 1993).
The ‘social costs’ of the economic measures adopted were felt immediately yet there was little sign of the implementation of the ‘social and poverty control programmes’ let alone the programmes for education and health, or employment promotion operations. The economic crisis affected living standards in both rural and urban areas. In 1992, Mauritania was ranked 93rd out of 125 on the basis of per capita BNP, but 161st in terms of the Human Development Index. Life expectancy at birth was around 45, one of the lowest in the world, with infant mortality at 132 in 1,000. On the Index of Human Suffering published by the Population Crisis Committee in Washington DC (1992), Mauritania ranks 18th worst in the world in human suffering (scoring 81 out of 100); its Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI) was very low at 27/100.

External donors approved government austerity measures. The IMF agreed a loan in December 1992. It was equivalent to $US47 million under an enhanced structural adjustment facility to support the economic and financial reform programme covering the period October 1992 to September 1995. Early in 1996, the French government conclude a finance agreement worth about $US12.8 million. That was also aimed at supporting the government’s structural reform programme and its efforts to reduce the balance of payments deficit. The Chinese have also granted an interest-free loan of $US9.5 million. Clearly, support for structural adjustment was considered appropriate for the ‘well being’ of the economy.

This has been despite the social costs, and despite evidence that efforts by the Mauritanian government to pursue structural adjustment in agriculture, under the Agricultural Structural Adjustment Programme (PASA) had not been successful. The development of agriculture was always going to be hard; after all, only 0.2 per cent of Mauritania’s land is suitable for agriculture. The average annual growth rate in agriculture between 1980 and 1993 was a miserable 1.7 per cent, which given the rate of population growth represented a decline in per capita output. But, in 1992, the Minister of Rural Development declared that ‘the results of the Agricultural Structural Adjustment Programme (PASA) for 1988-1993 have not been up to expectations’. For the third successive year, Mauritania experienced poor rainfall, and in October a FAO/CILSS crop assessment mission estimated total cereal output at 94,000 tonnes (below the poor harvest of 1991), with rainfed production particularly low, at 32,800 tonnes. The high level of the Senegal River allowed more planting of recession crops than in 1991 and the area under recession cultivation also increased, (where water use efficiency was maximised) but irrigated output (mainly of rice) declined. That was partly as a consequence of lack of inputs and maintenance and increased user charges, but also from disputes over land rights. Pasture conditions were generally poor and locusts were a major problem infesting some 700,000 ha.

As a result, the FAO anticipated that only just over one third of national cereal needs would be satisfied by local production. Mauritania mounted an urgent international appeal for food aid. The continuing drought, combined with austerity measures adopted under the government’s continuing economic reform programme, led to the growth of pockets of developing famine and widespread malnutrition during 1992. In 1992/93, food aid in cereals to Mauritania totalled 42,000 tonnes (a decade before it had been 26,000 tonnes). Nearly 70 per cent of those ‘in poverty’ were estimated to be in the rural areas and while 40 per cent of urban dwellers were in poverty, over 70 per cent of those in the countryside fell into that category.

Rainfall in 1993 was good and livestock production and agriculture both benefited. At the end of the year, record levels of output were anticipated, although again the threat of locusts was considerable. During 1993, the government made systemic efforts to
improve its relations with other parts of the Arab world (which had ended to regard Mauritania as something of a pariah after its overt support for Iraq during the Gulf War). The Tunisian president visited the country in April and in the same month the Nouadhibou oil refinery was re-opened with assistance from Algeria. Also in April, Saudi Arabia despatched a large quantity of food aid. These were promising signs.

**Signs of Economic and Political Progress? 1994-96**

In January 1994, the IMF approved a loan equivalent to $US23.2 million under the enhanced structural adjustment facility in support of the government’s second annual ESAF programme. Mauritania was to receive the first instalment from the end of the month. In May, a meeting of donor states in Paris, promised to provide $US235 million to support the government’s economic reform programme up to the end of 1996. Planning minister, Taki Ould Sidi, told the meeting that the Mauritanian government was seeking 64 per cent of its $US600 million public investment programme for 1994-96 from grants and 23 per cent from loans. The remaining 13 per cent would come from the government’s own resources. Donor countries were reported to be working on a major restructuring of the fishing industry, which accounted for 56 per cent of export earnings.

The minister provided donors with data indicating that the government had surpassed its 1993 growth and inflation targets, a growth rate of 4.9 per cent was quoted (compared with a target of 3.5 per cent) while inflation had fallen to 2 per cent (compared with a target of 3.5 per cent); inflation in 1993 had been around 9 per cent. The minister was careful not to remind potential donors of Mauritania’s external debt of around $US2 billion, its balance of payments deficit of $US125 million and the fact that over 20 per cent of the workforce were unemployed.

In 1994, growth in GDP was 4.2 per cent, while the rate of inflation was kept to 4 per cent. Congratulated by the IMF as being evidently committed to reform, Mauritania retains the support of the international agencies and bilateral donors. In January 1995, the IMF approved a series of loans worth $US63 million. These funds were also granted to support the government’s economic reform programme for 1995-97. Key objectives of the programme were to reduce the budget deficit through spending controls and increased revenues, and to privatise public sector enterprises. The first loan, for 1995, equivalent to about $US21 million, would be disbursed in half yearly instalments, starting at the end of January.

In the same month, a 25 per cent increase in bread prices, resulting from the imposition of VAT on foodstuffs, provoked serious rioting again in Nouakchott. The government acted quickly to quell the protest. Security forces were deployed and police fired tear gas at protesters who had erected road blocks in the city. A night time curfew was imposed and all demonstrations banned until further notice. Diplomatic sources described the protests as spontaneous, but the government accused the opposition of organising the protests and several opposition leaders were arrested, including Hamdi Ould Mouknass, president of UDP and Mohammed Ould Daddah, secretary general of the UFD. The curfew was lifted at the end of January and the opposition leaders released. Almost immediately, the government announced that the state would now maintain responsibility for all essential goods, including rice, tea, sugar, cooking oil and bread. Controls were also to be introduced to check monopoly activities and speculation and it was stressed that any traders ‘taking advantage’ of the imposition of VAT to increase basic prices would be punished.
Whether these government moves represent a genuine concern for the welfare of the poor or fear of popular unrest and the potential for conflict within Mauritanian society is debatable. But the government has certainly proved generally able, over the last few years, to respond to certain pressures from below and to manage a degree of glasnost without releasing its control over the economic reform programme and the political process. The ‘opening up’ of political life in Mauritania – and the ‘onward march’ of democracy – has continued, albeit slowly and hesitantly.

In January 1994, after more than a year of legal battles, an independent trades union, the General Confederation of Mauritanian Workers (CGTM), received official recognition. The July 1991 Constitution sanctioned union pluralism, but previously only the government backed Mauritanian Workers’ Union had been permitted to operate. In 1993, the US stripped Mauritania of its special trade status because of its failure to improve workers’ rights.

In February, the ruling PDRS won control of 172 out of 208 municipalities in the second round of the municipal elections (in January they had won 163 out of 197 with a reported turnout of 70 per cent of the electorate). This was despite a strong showing by the UFD and by around 60 independents, of whom 19, including the candidate for Kiffa town, were successful. The elections had been delayed and when they took place, were the subject of considerable extra-electoral political manoeuvring. The chair of the Mauritanian Human Rights Association and a leader of the opposition UDP was arrested just before the January elections but was released three days later following international protests. Despite objections of the two major opposition parties, the Union of Democratic Forces (New Era – UFD Ere nouvelle) and the Union of Democracy and Progress (UDP) they were generally considered fair. In Nouakchott, the UFD came close to rivalling the PDRS, with 17 councillors against 20. Elsewhere it was able to count on the ‘Peul vote’, and to take control of several municipalities in the border regions along the Senegal River such as Kaedi and Boghe. Other ethnic black groups, such as Soninke and Wolof were more divided in their loyalties, but still tended to support the UFD.

Whether the UFD will continue to attract support from the black communities remains uncertain. There is evidence that it has lost support over the last couple of years from its black constituency and from the Harratin. It is reduced, some would argue, to a rump consisting of old marxist leftists of the national democratic movement (MD), anti-Ould Taya islamists and a few of the major tribes of the Trarza. It can still raise a respectable crowd of supporters, but may find it difficult to survive without a clear programme, a party congress and a strengthening of its social base. Even the return to Mauritania from exile, of the former president, Mokhtar Ould Daddah, in January 1995 (whose brother is leader of the UFD), proved less significant an event than anticipated. After 17 years in exile, and effective ‘retirement’ in Nice, the former president intended to return to the Mauritanian political scene. He started by making clear his views on several key foreign affairs topics. He announced, for example, in an interview for a Moroccan newspaper, that the issue of the western Sahara was effectively over with only the Algerians continuing to fuel the conflict between the POLISARIO and Morocco. But this impact on Mauritanian politics, after such a long absence and without a coherent political following is likely to prove limited. That is despite his having established a new NGO, ‘Mauritania Yesterday for Tomorrow Foundation’ through which to operate.

The UDP, led by Hamdi Ould Moukness, casts the UFD in the role of an extremist (radical) and out-moded opposition. It presents itself as the moderate and realistic
opposition, but has an even less substantial base of support. Both the UFD and UPD are increasingly seen as 'Beidan' parties, with little to offer the black communities. Movements like the FLAM, which directly represent these important minorities, may increasingly detach themselves from the coalitions that have dominated Mauritanian politics since 1992. They may act unilaterally as more sharply defined interest groups to secure specific political objectives, such as the return of those expelled during the 'events' of 1989 and 1990. In July 1995, the UNHCR began a census of Mauritanian refugees in Senegal. This was the first concrete step in the process of repatriation of the several tens of thousands of black Mauritans who fled the country to escape violence and repression in 1989/90. Concern was expressed by black community leaders at that time, that the refugees would be forcibly returned.

Yet if there are signs of movement and re-alignment within the political arena, the government is still concerned to retain control. In September 1994, more than 60 alleged members of the islamic group Hasim (the Islamic Movement of Mauritania) were arrested. Among these were two senior members of the UFD, which denied any involvement by its members in pro-islamist activities, as well as three Egyptians, two Sudanese and a Saudi. Hasim was established in 1990 and maintained close links with groups in Tunisia and Sudan. The government also banned political speeches in mosques and ordered the dissolution of the Cultural and Islamic Association of Mauritania, which it was alleged, had acted as a front for Hasim. Two centres of islamic learning were also disbanded. Those arrested were granted an amnesty by the president in October after they were reported to have 'confessed their crimes'.

The Iraqi ambassador was declared persona non grata in October 1994 and given 72 hours to leave the country. The government action followed persistent rumours of an impending coup attempt. Explaining the decision, the government declared that there had been an increase in ‘secret missions’ from Iraq threatening the stability of the country. Mauritania had supported Iraq in the Gulf War, but subsequently had criticised Iraqi actions as ‘unacceptable’. The expulsion of the Iraqi ambassador was followed in November by a series of apparently related arrests involving more than 50 alleged pro-Ba’athist militants. Those arrested included seven army officers and all faced a range of charges related to illegal political activity and having secret dealings with a foreign power. The progress towards resolution of conflicts between Israel, Jordan, and Syria in the middle east has clearly led to a re-alignment with respect to Iraq. Immediately after this, Libya recalled its ambassador to Mauritania in protest at Mauritania’s decision to recognise Israel. Libya stated that it was severing all economic assistance to Mauritania and ‘dispensing’ with Mauritanian workers in Libya. But the material benefits of re-establishing good relations with the other middle eastern states and ‘coming in out of the cold’ will certainly outweigh the loss of Libyan goodwill and support.

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For all those whose political consciousness was developed in the 1950s and 1960s, it seemed self-evident that the struggle for decolonisation was coincident with the struggle for independence. In his well-known quasi-biblical aphorism, Kwame Nkrumah proclaimed: 'Seek ye first the political kingdom and all else shall be added to it'. In her original and iconoclastic book, which deserves wide notice, Helen Hintjens argues that decolonisation is possible without formal statehood.

Hintjens is particularly familiar with the French cases of 'decolonisation through absorption' – principally the cases of Reunion (just off Mauritius in the Indian Ocean), Guadaloupe and Martinique (in the eastern Caribbean) and Guyane (on the Atlantic coast of South America). For those who were interested in these territories at all, it has largely been assumed that they were 'assigned' a status as départements d'outre-mer by the French state through a process of force majeure. However, all is not what it may seem. Two of the greatest anti-colonial thinkers were born in the French Caribbean. One, Fanon, thought that a violent rupture from the past was necessary to create a fully-liberated personality, but the other, his teacher Aimé Césaire, held the opposite. In 1946 he wrote: ... the assimilation of these colonies to the metropolis will be the best possible reply of France to the theoreticians of racism'. For him, the integration of the colonies with France was the culmination of the Revolutionary Jacobin tradition, the final demonstration that Liberty, Fraternity and above all Equality actually meant something.

This strand of thinking has been suppressed by the conventional wisdom that territorality is equivalent to Liberty (or its necessary precondition). But what if the gift of territorial independence is a poisoned chalice or a totally empty cup? Was this not seen in the ultimate absurdity of four of the Bantustans being granted the status of 'independent homelands' by the apartheid government? On 4 December 1981 the independence parade of the Ciskei commenced with a spectacular debacle when a drunken soldier allowed the flagpole and the newly-acquired national flag to come crashing to the ground: a figurative moment indeed. Was this why the Kwandebele fought a heroic struggle against independence? And take, for another example, the case of the 'Revolution' of 1967-9 by the Anguillans which was wholly misunderstood by the British press at the time as an attempt at separatism and independence. In fact it was an attempt 'to switch sovereignties from the poor and hated St Kitts [back] to the wealthy and well-liked Britain'. When British troops invaded the island to suppress the revolt, they were greeted by Anguillans lining the streets waving Union Jacks.

Hintjens is able to cite some intellectual heavyweights in support of her thesis. Gellner, for example, poses this question: 'Suppose that the 'underdeveloped' and underprivileged population had not conceptualised their discontent in terms of nationalism, but had simply concentrated on a struggle to achieve full citizenship within existing political units'? Stuart Hall is equally insistent that the stripping away of a common citizenship from those
in the Commonwealth was a profoundly disabling outcome of independence. Suddenly the period of decolonisation does not appear such a victory for colonised peoples after all. Decolonisation (perhaps not in all places, but certainly in many) can be seen as a form of denial, a shedding of the political and moral responsibilities of the colonial powers, an act of dismissal and disdain. I’ve suggested elsewhere that, as far as Britain was concerned, in the 1950s and 1960s there was a ‘silent class struggle’ between the Colonial and Foreign Offices. The latter were filled with upper-class Atlanticists (who wanted to deepen the special relationship with the USA) and Europeanists (who wanted to join the EEC). They held in common their contempt for the middle class ‘boys’ in khaki-shorts who spoke fondly of the days as district officers in far-flung outposts of the empire. The Foreign Office toffs were totally disinterested in the Empire and saw it as a costly piece of baggage. Their views prevailed.

Is Hintjens suggesting independence was all a ghastly mistake? Can she be interpreted as an old-fashioned political reactionary? Decisively not. She argues from the self-declared point of view of a ‘feminist-humanist’ and has interesting things to say about sexual decolonisation and the delegitimising of inter-racial sexual relations. But her main point is that there are ‘more ways to skin a cat’ than demanding independence. Post-colonial outcomes can be achieved by intellectual and artistic endeavour (Britain’s finest intellectuals and writers – think of Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Salman Rushdie or Homi Bhabha – are often ex-colonials or their descendants.) Post-colonialism is also a political struggle for equality and recognition. It is even more potent if it can be de-territorialised and taken to the heart of the racist empires. For those with open minds this is a challenging, sophisticated and intellectually exciting book.


This is an important and welcome book. At a time when all too many on the left in the West (and in Africa) continue to bemoan ‘the African tragedy’, and so-called ‘aid’ agencies like the World Bank persist with wholly ungrounded optimism to peddle their own failed prescriptions for African economies and societies, Michael Barratt Brown has preferred to consider the alternatives that exist. He emphasises the contribution of African thinkers and of indigenous groups and movements in Africa as the basis for real ‘African alternatives’, while trying (not wholly successfully) to avoid the trap of romantic populism. He focuses on the potential ‘within’, drawing attention at the same time to the constraints imposed by Africa’s historically conditioned position in the global political economy and the world market. But he suggests that here also there are choices and openings – for ‘alternative trade’, for example, both within Africa and with the rest of the world, arguing that ‘there is a place for self-reliance without isolation from the rest of the world’ (p. 368).

This is an optimistic and encouraging book, seeking both to inform and to persuade its readers of (sub-Saharan) Africa’s real choices. It is also one in which self-reliance is given new meaning. The central theme is that ‘Africa is different and that African paths of development must therefore be different also; we must therefore listen to the authentic voices of Africans who speak of these alternative paths, and even more pay attention to the practice of Africans who have initiated activities which lead towards them’. This is a strong and positive theme; it is also one which makes me uneasy in some respects.

Michael Barratt Brown believes, together with many African thinkers and writers
on development, that most of Africa's problems stem from external forces and interventions (although he is also critical of the role of the post-colonial state and many African elites). There is, still, he believes, the possibility of an alternative, distinctively African road to development, which has been clearly signposted, but which has also effectively been blocked, for many years. The African road to development will – and must – be different from other roads and will be, must be, based on the distinctive culture and political economy of African societies. Progress along this road involves, essentially, recognising both the potential of indigenous African initiatives and the failure of external agencies, like the World Bank to support these initiatives or to devise and promote appropriate and effective alternatives.

Barratt Brown's vision of the African road to development is explicitly positive – critics might say, utopian or romantic. He argues that hope is a more productive basis for alternative strategies than fear:

(F)ear leads to continuing defensiveness against retaliation, to beggar-my-neighbour actions, a fortress mentality, fascist-type regimes and ethnic cleansing. Hope is a better guide in the longer run, hope that builds on confidence in human beings' capacity to cooperate as well as to compete, hope that is nourished by the ability to listen to what people themselves are saying about their condition and how they might improve it (p. 113).

What is required for African development, he suggests, is not a framework for competition, as the conventional wisdom of the development agencies and international financial institutions suggests, but a framework for cooperation – locally, nationally and internationally – based on African realities, aspirations and hopes.

Barratt Brown argues that 'it is time that those outside who are concerned about Africa should stop offering answers to our perceptions of Africa's problems and just listen to Africans for a change' (p. 1). This is a crucial theme of the book. But which Africans, one is inclined immediately to ask? Which are the authentic voices of Africa' to which he refers (p. 2) – those in government, those trained as social and natural scientists (often in western institutions), those in business (in industry, commerce and agriculture), those struggling to make a living as small farmers and peasants on the land, those employed in the urban areas or managing to survive in the so-called 'informal sector', those out of work or living from hand to mouth, men or women? Is there not something inherently problematic about referring to the authentic voices of Africa? What of the undeniable divisions and cleavages within contemporary African society and the different voices with which Africans speak? We are assured, for example, that 'it is the profound conviction of African thinkers and writers that there is an African road to development that cannot be the European road' (p. 4), and yet it is also argued that 'educated Africans have themselves been brainwashed by European education' (p. 3). Whose is the 'authentic' voice? And who is to decide?

One of the strengths of Barratt Brown's book is that many different African voices are heard and many different African experiences recounted. He recognises its limitations – '(w)e have listened to African voices, but only those selected by their access to a publisher, a researcher or a trader' (p. 325) – and acknowledges that 'i(t) would be mere presumption to claim that much can be learned from this book by African experts. Their knowledge will be both wider and deeper than what is revealed here. The aim of the book was different: it was for those of us in the North who are interested to learn something from Africans and from those who had worked closely with Africans, so that we should understand the African condition and culture better, and thus take Africa's experience into account in con-
sidering our own future' (p. 326-27). 'The African condition' is, however, not unitary or uniform; and the issue of 'authenticity' is, moreover, not resolved. Perhaps it cannot be by any objective analysis, however scrupulous regarding its own prejudices and predilections. But it will undoubtedly be the subject of continuing debate, struggle and conflict within Africa – as it has been in North Africa and the Middle East, where the pervasive and increasingly violent struggle between Islamist and secular movements is essentially about which of the various alternatives offers 'authentic' development possibilities.

Most of the book (Part Two) is devoted to a consideration of African initiatives – programmes, proposals, plans, policies, and, above all, practice – in regard to African development; the last section (Part Three) elaborates the basis for 'A framework for cooperation', drawing 'lessons for the people of the North and the South'. But, by way of introduction (chapters 1 to 6) Barratt Brown reviews Africa's recent historical experience and the consequences of 'what was proposed from outside'. Barratt Brown presents this part of the book essentially as a review of 'the sorry failures of those from outside Africa who offered solutions to Africa's problems based only on outside experience and on outside interests' (p. 113). It is, as a consequence, a somewhat selective a prelude to the major concern of the book, which is to examine 'African alternatives'. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 together, however, provide a trenchant critique of World Bank and IMF theory and practice regarding African development, which corresponds generally with the position of this Review over the last decade. Barratt Brown admits that one of the more specific aims of the book was 'to question further the received wisdom about African economies, as preached by the World Bank, whose false assumptions have already been exposed in the world markets' (p. 327). The book's subtitle reflects the author's view that the Bank represents the epitome of all that is wrong with external agencies which fail to listen or to learn, and the subject index indicates the extent to which the World Bank is discussed throughout the book (only some African countries have more entries).

Part Two provides the detailed evidence for the central argument of the book – that a framework for cooperation is required which i) recognises the distinctive culture as well as the particular political economy of African societies and the contribution that can be made to African development by indigenous initiatives, ii) supports these initiatives so that they grow and spread, and iii) is itself a product of such indigenous initiatives.

In the first chapter of this central section (chapter 7 – 'Africa Must Unite: the alternative vision'), Barratt Brown reviews the strategy contained in the Lagos Plan of Action, which, although preempted, 'became an important benchmark for future discussion of African development between African governments and outside bodies' (p. 130). Counterposed to this vision of an international strategy for development is a discussion of the authoritarianism of individual states with their internal cleavages and divisions, and of the unsustainability of current economic reforms without a more effective integration of local initiatives and social movements. 'African leaders' are revealed to be an unreliable avant garde for African development; in Barratt Brown's hoped-for future they and their governments will be more truly representative of the interests of their people and more accountable to them.

The Lagos Plan of Action confirmed support for effective regional integration, but not all African politicians or economists agree about the purpose of regional groupings, or their value. In chapter 8, Barratt Brown examines the experience of 'Regional Groupings in Africa' and argues that regional cooperation in Africa
'is a matter of taking positive action towards integration and not simply of removing barriers to trade' (p. 141). If 'beggar-my-neighbour' is a strategy for common crisis, 'better-my-neighbour' requires concerted effort and collaboration. (Echoes here both of Stuart Holland's *Out of Crisis* and of *Global Challenge: from Crisis to Cooperation* – the report of the Socialist International Committee on Economic Policy chaired by Michael Manley). He also argues that, as in post-war Europe, regional cooperation as a central development strategy requires technical assistance and financial support. If finance needs to come before trade, it may be appropriate to revive the proposal for an African Trade Clearing Union:

(i) if it were possible for a major programme of debt relief to be applied in Africa, aid for reconstruction might begin to flow into the continent once again, and a structure for such financing on a multilateral basis would then be required (p. 150).

Chapter 9 considers the problems of unequal trade and falling commodity prices, and explores the potential for 'taming the commodity markets' and for securing international commodity agreements. Barratt Brown suggests that action need not be only at the inter-governmental level, and that African producers themselves can develop new forms of cooperation, both internationally (in the way, for example, that millions of small coffee producers have managed to do through the Small Farmers' Cooperative Society) and within their own countries. He argues that 'if African countries are to make common cause to defend their resources, it can only be done on the basis of the fullest possible mobilisation of all the skills and opinions of the men and women in rural Africa' (p. 167).

This theme – the crucial role of the ordinary people of Africa (Claude Ake's 'forgotten alternative') – is taken up again in chapter 10 ('transformation and self-reliance') where the emphasis is on the potential for 'human-centred development' and the related necessity of 'democratizing the decision-making process'. The emphasis on the creative potential of 'indigenous African institutions and values' which runs throughout the book is here at its most explicit, and arguably most romantic. Barratt Brown begins by quoting *African Alternative to Structural Adjustment Programmes: a Framework for Transformation and Recovery* (by the Economic Commission for Africa – ECA) which refers to 'the implications of African perceptions of human beings as the fulcrum of development, (the) extended family for the cooperative spirit of self-help development and traditional sanctions on leadership' (p. 168).

As regards the last of these, Barrett Brown refers approvingly to those African writers who 'agree on one basic proposition: the African way, while not communistic, is communitarian. Despite the monstrous dictators at the top, African society is profoundly democratic' (p. 4). But in this chapter, while arguing that 'underlying the ECA programme lay the absolute necessity of establishing democratic governments in Africa' (p. 184), he also recognises that 'when these brave resolutions are compared with the reality of governance in most of the African states before 1990, they appear as nothing more than the mouthing of pious devotion' (p. 185). Where, then, have been the so-called 'traditional sanctions on leadership' to which he, and the ECA refer? Undoubtedly the combination of internal pressure from popular movements and political opposition on the one hand, and the political conditionality of western governments and agencies like the World Bank on the other, has generated political changes towards formal multi-partyism over the last five years. But that is recent and the social forces involved essentially contemporary rather than 'traditional' in any meaningful sense – and hardly, yet at least, 'profoundly democratic'.

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Barratt Brown recognises that 'in proposing 'human beings as the fulcrum of development', the African Alternative has been criticised as being strong in philosophical commitment, but weak in practical application' (p. 175). His response is to review the specific proposals contained in the African Alternative for modifying and transforming structural adjustment and to argue that 'no one can say that the philosophy at the beginning of the ECA paper is not supported by a balanced package of practical measures and policy instruments' (p. 179). In reply to the warning contained in 'The Dar es Salaam Declaration on Alternative Development Strategies for Africa' - 'that the most basic problem with alternative development strategies in Africa is their implementation' - Barratt Brown argues that the proposals have been widely discussed and have influenced a wide range of organisations and institutions, including the World Bank itself. ‘Influence’ is important, and not to be sneered at; but it is not the same as ‘effective implementation’.

The emphasis on values and institutions predisposed to ‘human-centred development’ that Barrett Brown suggests are distinctively African recalls Diane Elson’s essay (ROAPE no. 62) on ‘People, Development and Financial Institutions: an interpretation of the Bretton Woods System’, in which she defines ‘people-centred development in terms that emphasise self-determination ... the formation and use of human capabilities through social and political and economic arrangements that put people in control of the development process’ (p. 513). While Barratt Brown stresses ‘the contrast between European economism and African humanism’ (p. 187), others might wish to question this stark distinction as one not so much separating ‘Africans’ from ‘Europeans’ as distinguishing a particular ‘economistic’ (money-centred) vision of development from one founded in human and social values. They would rather seek common between all those in the North and in Africa who espouse the values of human centred, social(ist?) democratic development.

Indeed, Barratt Brown himself clearly does so, in effect, when he argues that ‘a new framework of fair trade for balanced and sustainable development be established’ and recognises that ‘this will not happen as a result of some ukase (sic) from above but from the efforts of groups of producers and consumers in the South and the North working together from the grass roots of their several societies to build new economic relations’ (p. 9-10). Although, as Elson acknowledges, ‘Africa is today suffering more than most regions from the domination of money-centred development over people-centred development’ (ibid. 523), her thesis surely applies not only to Africa, but everywhere?

Chapter 11 considers ‘An African model of industrial development’, arguing that appropriate industrialisation is required. The negative lessons learned from earlier commitment to western technology or Soviet-style industrialisation are underlined. Barratt Brown points out that, in the successful East Asian NICs, the measures taken to promote industrialisation ‘were specific, carefully timed and rigorously planned – and they took into account local cultures, a far cry indeed from the World Bank’s favoured prescription of incorporation in the world markets freed from all state regulations and controls’ (p. 202). Support by the state and public enterprises for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in particular is recommended, as is detailed consideration of the applicability to African conditions of the new and emerging technologies (NET) and the promotion of mutually supportive ‘cooperative alliances’ between enterprises (as in Japan and elsewhere). The positive benefits of confidence, trust and cooperation, rather than risk, uncertainty and competition are emphasised; and new local forms of popular organisation are identified as
having the potential for creating appropriate frameworks for such synergy between enterprises.

The links to the informal, second economy are explored in chapter 12. Barratt Brown is surprisingly positive regarding the effectiveness of informal access to finance and the operations of small scale savings and credit associations, but less optimistic regarding the capacity of the informal sector to provide the basis for growth and development without considerable further support and investment (particularly in education and training) and 'the deliberate establishment of sustained extra-market relationships' (something Sanjaya Lall has argued has been provided by the state in all countries which have successfully industrialised, and precisely what the World Bank has been systematically discouraging African state governments from supplying, p. 233).

He argues that the informal economy is as widespread in the rural areas as in the towns and is, in effect 'a response to Africa's crisis: in the everyday struggle of survival in Africa, the majority of rural and urban households survive through juggling a myriad of activities' (p. 226). The crucial question concerning the second economy in Africa, he suggests, is not so much whether it can be translated into formal development but whether it will come to threaten the state's control of economic activities. If so, the question arises of whether it will itself be controlled, incorporated and repressed or whether it can become the basis for multiple new 'alternative' development actions which will go beyond coping mechanisms and survival strategies to begin to realise 'strategic needs'.

It is not surprising, then, given their importance in the second economy and their centrality in rural and urban survival struggles, that Barratt Brown considers the role of women in the African political economy in Chapter 13. He reviews first the constraints they face and then turns to their economic importance and forms of organisation before considering their capacity to play a crucial part in broader transformation. Barratt Brown argues that 'the oppression of women in Africa is only now being documented' (citing Carolyn Baylies and Janet Bujra writing in ROAPE no. 56), but also emphasises that 'much of what we have seen in this chapter and the last shows women ignoring or secretly challenging the state authorities' (p. 261), and also, significantly, openly confronting the state in a number of different ways.

The importance of this challenge is underlined but not fully explored. Furthermore, while there is some discussion of gender relations and reference to the failure of the World Bank to recognise class and gender differences, Barratt Brown also fails to develop here an analysis of the complex relationship between gender and class – or between gender and religion or gender ethnic affiliation. He ends somewhat tamely that 'to be effective it is necessary for women's organisations to be integrated into the whole range of measures that Africans are proposing for developing human resources' (p. 262).

Chapter 14 on 'developing human resources' begins by trying to explain why the 'African vision' of developing human resources differs from the conventional wisdom (the 'current perspective on Africa') and its general emphasis on 'human resource development' looks at first sight remarkably similar to the current concerns of the World Bank. The thrust, however, is different, as other sections ('adjustment with a human face', 'income distribution before growth') indicate. The argument is also different from, and more radical than, that proposed and developed in the UNICEF Adjustment with a Human Face. 'Breaking out of the downward spiral', it is argued, will depend in large part on mobilisation from below: an effective strategy for renewed economic growth and broad based development
implies not just effective human resource development but also 'involving and empowering the poor themselves' (p. 281).

Chapters 15 and 16 focus on 'rural development from the grass roots' and 'urbanisation and workers' organisations' respectively. The first involves a consideration of the mixed experience of rural cooperatives and peasant associations, the second an examination of rural-urban differences, forms of organisation and resistance in the urban areas. There are hints throughout of a class analysis of rural and urban social structures, but this is not, unfortunately, developed. The section on 'strikes and resistance', for example, fails to provide a much needed discussion of the relationship between 'working-class' and 'popular' actions and movements, and their potential for democratic transformation in the light of more than a decade of popular urban protest.

As Part Two – the major part of the book – comes to a close, the reader may be struck, as I was, by the overwhelming concentration throughout on economic and social forms of cooperation and collaboration, and the relative lack of analysis of conflict – of politics in the broad as well as the narrow sense. The systematic pursuit of African alternatives will unavoidably involve confrontation with vested interests at all levels. Yet, there is little discussion of the implications of such confrontation. There is remarkably little on protest and resistance, and even less on political movements and parties, the role of the military, class, ethnic and regional interests in relation to political power, the constitution of governments or the state apparatus – in general, very little on the structure and dynamics of African politics. The central concern of the book is with popular democracy, empowerment and transformation, and yet the discussion of 'democratic structures' focuses essentially on the organisation of production and marketing.

It is acknowledged, at the beginning of Part Three, that many important aspects of Africa's past and present have, unavoidably, been treated only relatively briefly and superficially. For example, 'the regimes established by African rulers after independence have been judged, often harshly, but only looked at in any detail in a dozen or so examples out of fifty-six nation states' (p. 325). But the political constraints – both domestic and international – on the kinds of economic and social cooperation regarded throughout the book as the key to the development of real African alternatives are only touched upon and the capacity of grassroots organisations and institutions to challenge the entrenched interests, both domestic and foreign, that have maintained a 'stranglehold on Africa' so far (cf. ROAPE no. 62) has not been really assessed.

Chapter 17 sets out elements of what might be a response to the above concerns and implied criticisms. Barratt Brown asks how markets can be regulated and new forms of self-reliance developed in ways appropriate to African circumstances. His answer is that 'linkages and networks' might prove most effective and he considers a range of existing African networks and NGOs. Barratt Brown explicitly links the work of NGOs to the proliferation of new forms of grassroots activity which effectively challenge the domination of state and market alike.

In a section on 'democratising government', he sees the increasing pluralism of contemporary African societies as liberating and argues that the pressure for ending state domination that increased dramatically during the early 1990s was a combination of pressure from 'above' (and outside) and from below. These did not emerge suddenly in 1990, but 'came out of movements of peasant protest, women's demands, trade union organisation and the radicalisation of students and intellectuals over many years' – p.
But after a brief reference to these popular movements, the discussion reverts to 'development projects' and the potential for change that resides in the linkages between NGOs and grassroots organisations. Here again, a discussion of the relationship between political movements, popular movements and grassroots organisations would have been welcome.

Finally, it is recognised that 'what is achieved by cooperation on the ground will still need a protective framework in the wider world economy' (p. 346). The last chapter, on 'Africa in the world economy', examines debates on the implications of integration and the possible benefits of marginalisation. Barratt Brown believes that Africa cannot escape from the market, but that it can perhaps, more successfully in the future than in the past, manage it and even shape it to contribute effectively to human development in Africa. As regards the relationship with 'like-minded' people, institutions and governments in the North, Barratt Brown argues that 'solidarity is not enough': openings for alternative trade must be created, the giant corporations must be challenged, GATT and the World Trade Organisation must be dealt with, the Bretton Woods institutions reformed, and the burden of debt relieved.

These changes, he recognises 'will not happen without a great shove from public opinion in the North and united demands from the South ... The pressure has to be kept up'. He believes, however, that, 'although Africa's crisis is grave indeed, the present conjuncture of events gives grounds for hope' (p. 367); 'those who thought that with the end of the arms race nothing need be changed - the market would solve everything - have found that they were wrong; those who thought that nothing could change unless everything was changed - the whole market ideology overturned - have seen that some things can be changed, even within the market' (p. 368). Change is inevitable, change is possible, change is desirable; but if the current African crisis marks a turning point, the direction and character of change is still - to some extent - a matter of choice.

Book Notes

This section gives brief notes of books recently received which may be of interest to our readers; some may be reviewed in depth at a later date. If you would like to review books for ROAPE, please get in touch with the book reviews editors, Ray Bush and Morris Szeftel (Politics Department, University of Leeds) or Roy Love at the ROAPE office. Compiled by Roy Love.


It is too easy to dismiss smaller countries that are on the periphery of larger wealthier neighbours as having nothing important to say on industrial development, but, as Balefi Tsie demonstrates in the example of Botswana, it is not so much the consequences of neoclassical economic forces that have produced this belief as regional political and institutional constraints introduced by that powerful neighbour or by previous colonial authority. Tsie provides a thorough analysis of the important period up to 1990, covering the different policy contexts of the colonial, independence and post-SADCC periods with regard to industrial development especially in manufacturing, where he explores, for instance, the reasons why the cattle industry, in which a neoclassical comparative advantage is usually admitted, has led to so few related industrial spin-offs.

Relations with Zimbabwe during UDI, the objectives of SADCC prior to 1990, and the ambiguous nature of relations
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Relations with Zimbabwe during UDI, the objectives of SADCC prior to 1990, and the ambiguous nature of relations
with South Africa throughout the apartheid period were all key factors influencing various attempts to develop a sustained manufacturing base. These are analysed both in general and in the detailed investigations of Chapters 6 and 7 on textiles and cattle products. Putting South African destabilisation activities to one side the period from 1966 to 1990 was a crucial test of the abilities of the ‘front line’ states to develop whatever potential they had in manufacturing production and Balefi Tsie has filled a useful gap in the case of Botswana in reviewing and assessing the successes and failures of the endeavour and in reminding us of the importance of the political.


Readers of ROAPE will be wary of American books published by organisations with the word ‘democracy’ in their title. This is one such, stemming from the National Endowment for Democracy, and it is correspondingly limited. There is little attempt to explore definitions and concepts, and it is a fairly conventional run through of systems and structures of ‘democracy’ in action. As such it is quite useful, pointing out the many limitations to the checks and balances approach when ethnic differences are identified with different parties. Overall, however, it is in the ‘end of history’ vein, even including a contribution by Fukuyama. The case studies include only one African example which deals fairly briefly with Nigeria since independence. The editors’ introduction brings one to a halt immediately with the premise that during the ‘cold war’ period ‘nationalism had come to be regarded primarily as a phenomenon of the third world’ and that ‘ethnic conflict, too, ... was viewed as belonging primarily to the third world’. Regarding by whom? And why? The answers are not explored in this book, much of which is concerned with Eastern Europe.


A collection of essays dating mainly from the 1980s but which lose none of their stimulation or relevance to the present on that account. Chapters range from the first in which we are referred to the ‘six mountains’ carried by African woman on her back (foreign intrusions, the heritage of tradition, backwardness of African women, men, race, and herself) to several literary based chapters, one on the origins of ‘Women in Nigeria’, another on the effects of structural adjustment on women in Nigeria, and, in Chapter 18, an extended discussion of feminism in an African context. The author’s style provides an integrated balance which links the reality of women’s experience in Africa, including a number of anecdotal incidents, with underlying theory. A book of interest to the academic while remaining readable and provocative to the student.
Current Africana, in its new form, covers much the same material as before, though it does not include dissertations. The bulk of the items listed are from 1994 but will include material from 1993. The next listing will be in June 1997 (ROAPE no. 71) and will cover 1995.

The material is organised by region (except for Nigeria and South Africa, which have distinct sections), and within each region by five broad subject areas:

- Politics (which also includes current affairs, international relations, and some aspects of law);
- Economics and development;
- Society and social welfare (which also includes gender, some anthropological material, health, urban studies, and demographic studies);
- Rural economy (which also includes agriculture, food and famine studies);
- General and other material (which also includes environmental and media studies).

Within these subject areas – which are admittedly crude – items are arranged alphabetically. Many of the items are chapters from books, and in many cases the books concerned are also listed. In these cases an abbreviated reference is given (editors and short title only), plus the number of the book itself.

For a detailed subject index, and for a listing covering a much wider range of material, see the International African Institute's annual Africa Bibliography, published by Edinburgh University Press. I welcome comments on the arrangement, and notification of missing items. Send these to me, Chris Allen, Department of Politics, 31 Buccleuch Place, Edinburgh EH8 9JT (e-mail address: c.h.allen@ed.uk).

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Africa Resource Guide

This WorldViews AFRICA guide includes information on international nongovernmental organizations whose primary concerns are the nations and people of the African continent. For information on organizations for whom this region is just one among many concerns, see the other resource directories and guides compiled and published by WorldViews (note: WorldViews is the new name for Third World Resources, effective 1 January 1996). This Africa guide is divided into four regional sections: Africa (general), North and West Africa, East and Central Africa, and Southern Africa. Organizations are grouped according to their location or their regional focus. This is a working directory. WorldViews would appreciate notices of updates, corrections, and recommended additions for future editions of this list. Please send all correspondence to 19th Street, Oakland, CA 94612-2397, USA. Tel: 1-510-835-4692. Fax: 1-510-835-3017. E-mail: worldviews@igc.apc.org. Web site: <http://www.igc.apc.org/>

Note from the Editors

TWR has changed its organizational name and the names of its various publications to WorldViews. We have two reasons for making this change:

1. The term 'third world' is continually misunderstood in the popular mind to mean that the peoples of the so-called developing countries are 'third class' citizens of the world. We wish to disassociate ourselves from this misconception by discounting the use of 'third world' in our organisational identity.

2. As international political, economic, and social realities more and more transcend national and regional boundaries it is clear to us that it is unnecessarily confining for us to focus our organizational energies solely on the countries that fall within the geographical limits of Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean and ME. These regions will continue to be uppermost in our minds, but our institutional focus will be broadened to allow us to trace the dynamics of world political, economic and social realities wherever they lead. The name of our information clearinghouse at the DataCenter will be the WorldViews Resource Center. The name of this quarterly magazine will change to WorldViews: A Quarterly Review of Resources for Education and Action beginning with the Jan-March issue. WorldViews@igc.apc.org

AFRICA (GENERAL)

Association to Support the Committees for the Struggle against Repression in Morocco, 14 rue Nanteuil, 75015 Paris, France. Tel: (45) 32.01.89.
Africa Access, 2204 Quinton Rd., Silver Spring, MD 20910, USA. Tel: (301) 587-5686.
Africa Book Centre, 126-204 37th St., Queens, NY 11378, USA. Tel: (718) 930-3426.
Africa Book Centre, 14 rue Nanteuil, 75015 Paris, France. Tel: (45) 32.01.89.
Africa Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies, Kairaba Ave., Kombo St., Mary Division, Banjul, Gambia. Tel: (220) 390-764.
Africa Centre for Human Rights, P.O. Box 3451, 29 La Tebu St., East Cantonments, Accra, Ghana.
Africa Commission on Human and People's Rights in Development, c/o Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Botswana, P.B. 0022, Gaborone, Botswana.
African Association for Human Rights, P.O. Box 2310, Ottawa, ON K1P 6G7, Canada. Tel: (613) 238-2137.
African Association for People's Rights in Development and Planning, 43 Boulevard Pinet, Laprade, P.O. Box 1921, Dakar, Senegal. Tel: 21.56.46.
African Bar Association, P.O. Box 673, Banjul, Gambia. Tel: (220) 392-962.
African Bar Association, 43 Boulevard Pinet, Laprade, P.O. Box 1921, Dakar, Senegal. Tel: 21.56.46.
African Bar Association, 43 Boulevard Pinet, Laprade, P.O. Box 1921, Dakar, Senegal. Tel: 21.56.46.
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African Bar Association, 43 Boulevard Pinet, Laprade, P.O. Box 1921, Dakar, Senegal. Tel: 21.56.46.
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Maendele Yo Wanawake Organisation, P.O. Box 44412, Nairobi, Kenya.

Mazingira Institute, P.O. Box 14550, Nairobi, Kenya.

National Council of Women of Kenya, c/o Wanjari Maathai, P.O. Box 43741, Nairobi, Kenya.


Research and Information Centre on Eritrea, Via della Dogana Vecchia 5, 00186 Rome, Italy. Tel: 794.6137. Eiretta Information.

Shoga Women Group, P.O. Box 7939, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Somali Studies International, P.O. Box 2295, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Somali Studies International Association, Secretariat of Research and Documentation, c/o Folklore Institute, Indiana University, 506 N. Fess St., Bloomington, IN 47401-3122, USA. Tel: (812) 855-1027. Fax: (812) 855-4008.

Sudan Democratic Gazette, P.O. Box 2295, London W14 OND, England.


Sudan Studies Association, 1005 Shelter Lane, Lansing, MI 48912, USA. Tel: (517) 332-4518. Fax: (517) 336-2736.

Sudan Update, P.O. Box CPRS, London WC1N 3XX, England. Tel: (0207) 845 827. Fax: (0207) 845 827. E-mail: sudanupdate@gn.apc.org.

Sudan Women’s Association, P.O. Box 8981, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Tel: 255-51-29089. Fax: 255-51-44939. Sauti ya Siti.

Uganda Women Media’s Association, P.O. Box 681, Kampala, Uganda.

Women’s Research and Development Project, P.O. Box 35185, University of Dar es Salaam, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Zambia Alliance of Women, c/o Fedan Mulenga, P.O. Box 51068, Lusaka, Zambia.

Zambia Association for Research and Development, c/o Sara Hlupelile Longwe, P.O. Box 37836, Lusaka, Zambia. Tel: 260-1-224507. Fax: 260-1-222883. E-mail: zard@p87.f1.n761.25.fidonet.or.zm.

NORTH & WEST AFRICA

Algerian League for Human Rights, c/o Ali Yahia Abdenour, 19 rue Abane Ramdane, Alger, Algeria.

Friends of Liberia, P.O. Box 28098, Washington, DC 20038, USA.


Tanzania Media Women’s Association, P.O. Box 8981, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Tel: 255-51-29089. Fax: 255-51-44939. Sauti ya Siti.

Uganda Media Women’s Association, P.O. Box 681, Kampala, Uganda.

Women’s Research and Documentation Project, P.O. Box 35185, University of Dar es Salaam, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Zambia Federation of Women’s Organizations, P.O. Box 51068, Lusaka, Zambia.


Regional Economic Research and Documentation Center, B.P. 7138, Lome, Republic of Togo. Labor and Development / African Trade Union News.

Sahara Fund, 4438 Tindall St., NW, Washington, DC 20016, USA. Tel: (202) 364-9473. Fax: (202) 364-9472.

Saharan People’s Support Committee, 217 E. Lehr Ave., Ada, OH 45810, USA. Tel: (419) 634-3666. SPSC Letter.


Western Sahara Awareness Project, 705 Center St., 3rd floor, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130, USA. Tel: (617) 983-1712. Fax: (617) 983-1714.

Western Sahara Campaign, Oxford Chambers, Oxford PI, Leeds LS 1 3AX, England. Tel: (0113) 245-4768. Fax: (0113) 245-4766.

Women in Nigeria, P.O. Box 253, Samaru, Zaria, Nigeria.

Ad Hoc Monitoring Group on Southern Africa, 2232 Rayburn House Office Bldg., Washington, DC 20515, USA. Tel: (202) 226-1275.

Africa Human Rights and Justice Protection Network, P.O. Box 6400, 708 Capital Centre, Levinson Arcade, Windhoek, Namibia. Tel: 264-61-228-251. Fax: 264-61-228-251.

Africa Institute of South Africa, P.O. Box 630, Pretoria 0001, South Africa.

Africa Resource Project, P.O. Box 296, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.

African Association for Literacy and Adult Education, P.O. Box 50768, Nairobi, Kenya. Tel: 254-222-391.

African Bar Association, P.O. Box 2595, 5th floor, Savoy House, Inez Terrace, Stanley Ave., Harare, Zimbabwe.

African-American Institute, Southern African Training Program, 833 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA. Tel: (212) 350-2969. Fax: (212) 682-6036. SASPOST.

American Friends Service Committee, Southern Africa Program, 1501 Cherry St., Philadelphia, PA 19102-1479, USA. Tel: (215) 241-7169.

Anti-Apartheid Movement, 13 Mandela St., London NW1 0DW, England. Tel: (0171) 387-7966. Fax: (0171) 233-0173. Anti-Apartheid News: Vote for Democracy in South Africa.

Azanian Trade Union Coordinating Centre, P.O. Box 2412, Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania. Tel: 27937. On the Labour Front.

Canada-South Africa Cooperation, P.O. Box 1034, Sta. B, Ottawa, ON K1P 5R1, Canada. Tel: (613) 233-5593. Fax: (613) 233-6228.

Canadians Concerned About Southern Africa, 445 Forget St., Regina, SK S4R 4X3, Canada.

Center for Women’s Studies, University of South Africa, 392, Pretoria 0001, South Africa.

Centre d’information et de documentation sur le Mozambique et l’Afrique australe, 3680, rue Jeanne Mance, Bureau 440, Montreal, QU H2Z 2K5, Canada. Tel: (514) 499-0314. Fax: (514) 499-0153.

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