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Editorial correspondence, including manuscripts for submission, should be sent to Jan Burgess, ROAPE Publications Ltd., P.O. Box 678, Sheffield S1 1BF, UK. Tel: +44 (0)114 267-6880; Fax 44 + (0)114 267-6881; e-mail: editor@roape.org.

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The State of the Union: Africa in 2001

Lynne Brydon & Roy Love

This edition of ROAPE (and its editorial) has been put together over a summer 'silly season' that, in terms of global and African events, will have anything but trivial consequences for the future of Africa. In the early summer while the petrol bombs flew outside in Genoa, the cloistered representatives of the G-8 countries pushed their own agendas inexorably onwards. The New African Initiative (NAI) was thought up: yet another set of programmes, policies and projects to be foisted on the continent by the rich and powerful, both states and multinationals. Africa and Africans, inasmuch as they featured at all, featured only as a problem: there is still little scope for Africa to be part of any solution, and the fate of the NAI and its acceptance, operationalising and implementing remains to be seen. But only days after the battles in Genoa, the heads of African states met in Lusaka (and what minimal publicity that meeting received!) to perform the final funeral rites for the OAU. The spiritual, political and economic vision of long-dead leaders was replaced by an 'African Union,' more pragmatically '21st century', primarily with economic and social goals, but also with broader security and political aims. This new African Union is a new model to serve new times, drawing at least some of its shape and direction from the EU. There have been signs of increasing recognition in Africa that solutions must come from within. The notion of Pan-African spiritual unity has gone, but the idea of the new union is to create strength by reducing barriers, constructing industrial links, encouraging complementary advantage and presenting a more powerful (because united) front to the rest of the world.

Although sceptics may point out that the European Union is of predominantly industrialised and wealthy economies that have taken almost fifty years to reach their present imperfect stage of agreement, it must not be forgotten that the Union emerged out of the political will to avoid a recurrence of war. War in Africa has tended to occur more often within the boundaries of nation states than in an outright sense between them, but such conflict always has regional effects, and the comparisons with Europe and the political origins of the EU are valid nonetheless. There is much within the nascent AU that has been ignored by external observers but that, in a quiet way, has the potential to secure the foundations of a future union, in whatever shape it ultimately emerges. There are already several significant regional coalitions in the continent. For example, in Southern Africa there is the South African Development Community (SADC), with the experience now of some twenty years, and which is exploring links with the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA). Although not all members of SADC (especially South Africa) are members of COMESA there is nevertheless a joint forum for debate here which links the Cape to Khartoum, if not to Cairo. ECOWAS (The Economic Community of West African States), founded in 1975, has long experience in trying to promote regional economic co-operation and success certainly in both promoting intra-regional trade flows and intra-regional military co-operation, the latter particularly in the interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Another institution whose regional meetings rarely hit the
headlines (and which is regarded as an anachronism by many) is the Commonwealth, which in its meeting of African Foreign Ministers at Abuja on 6 September clearly provided an opportunity for a purposeful African response to the crisis in Zimbabwe. The initial agreement was then followed up by SADC members meeting in Harare itself, perhaps the beginnings of a solution ‘from within’.

There are clearly some strange bedfellows here, and also gaps in the existing networks. The whirlpool of the drain that is the DRC leaches political will from its surrounding states. But the crucial factor drawing the various peaceful African nations together is the realisation that co-operation, a united front on at least some issues, is the only way to focus wider global forces to regional, and hence individual country, advantage, and to prevent the social and economic fabric from being ripped apart, as in Angola, the DRC, Sierra Leone or Sudan in order to extract and appropriate mineral wealth. There seems at least to be the political impetus to fill the gaps in the networks and to staunch the flows of illegally obtained wealth from the continent.

Whatever its ultimate shape and form, the African Union, (or alternatives with lower case), does not signal isolationism and withdrawal from the forces of globalisation, but rather a form of engagement on its own terms, seen as a means of strengthening bargaining power. At the very least, some states within the Union see it as offering the potential of a pragmatic defence against a world system that they distrust and dislike. In either case the problems for the future are immense, not least in respect of the nature of the beast with which they are dealing.

Since the beginning of the summer of 2001, then, the nature of and potential for Africa’s engagement(s) with global forces have changed: a ‘top-down’ new Aid régime, as yet untried, and a ‘bottom up’ resolve on the part of African leaders and their nations to at least economic solidarity were put in place. But as summer drew to a close the world witnessed (literally) a new beginning in global relations. Undoubtedly, the destruction of the World Trade Centre, the attack on the Pentagon and the wreckage of the fourth plane in Pennsylvania will have a wide range of effects beyond the immediate: the mourning of the innocent dead, the disruption in capitalist markets, America’s expressed desire to wage war with terrorists.

It is too early for a detailed ROAPE analysis of these events but there will undoubtedly be consequences for Africa and the early summer initiatives. Where does the NAI stand when HIPC and other debt negotiations are postponed? How will Africa cope, in spite of improving economic performance, when aid is channelled to other regions geographically closer to potential American targets? Africa’s aid and aid conversations are likely to be put on the back burner. How will the new AU leaders deal with Sudan’s position as one of the tiny number of states that recognise the Taliban government, and one which has close former links to Osama bin Laden? The early summer initiatives were positive moves within an established order; we can (or could) analyse them, trace their origins and development and the influences on their establishment; we can (or could) speculate or predict their influences, success and failures. The wanton destruction of September 11th has prodded more than one giant (to use the current metaphor) into movement. The long term consequences for American foreign policy in general and for Africa in particular must be vast: America is now seen to be violable and vulnerable, part of the rest of the world. We must wait to see where ‘Africa’ might feature in future American attempts to aid, cajole, bribe or impoverish in its new relationship with the world outside of itself.
Loss of life by violent or external means is deplorable wherever it occurs. It is not to diminish the effect on the people and families affected in the United States, or our human sympathy for them, however, to reflect that on the African continent there have been many tragedies of human conflict of equivalent or greater magnitude. Their causes are profound, ranging from the psychological to the political and structural, and to understand them is one of our greatest challenges. In The Review of African Political Economy we strive to see behind the surface phenomena, taking as our starting point that it is changes in the forces and relations of production, to use unfashionable terminology, that lies at the heart of social conflict. Even as the tragedy in New York was unfolding the dealers in Wall Street were rushing to cover their losses. Yet, it is the structural and systemic characteristics of capitalism, rather than the rights to life of those who defend them that we oppose. Within this critique we recognise the incongruities that can arise at the cultural and moral level while maintaining respect for those cultural and behavioural differences between peoples that transcend gender, age and class exploitation and thereby enrich our human experience. An eye for an eye and tooth for tooth cannot be part of this.

The papers and shorter contributions in this issue, of course, do not reflect these world events. It is too early. While overtly diverse, however, two broad themes, of the rejection of responsibility, of accountability on one hand, and of the continuing (struggling) significance of ‘struggle’ on the other, underpin many of them. At the structural level the analysis by White Taylor on the significance of oil in setting the boundaries of political process in Nigeria and Algeria places the machinations of international capitalism and its links with the Western state complex at centre stage. Thus, the crucial role of oil in the industrial nations means that access to major sources of supply must be protected, even if this means acquiescence in the face of non-democratic governments who control these supplies. By passing the moral problem on to their governments – as ‘political’ issues – the oil companies are secure in the knowledge that respect of sovereignty of the nation state will be called in to restrict any official intervention that would damage supplies. This dual process thus lays open the door for dictators, opportunists and plunderers to take charge of those nations which have abundant supplies of scarce industrial raw materials. The muted nature of condemnation by the West renders any movement towards democracy and respect for fundamental human rights a distant prospect, and leaves the country concerned in a state of ‘permanent transition’.

In such countries, too, opposition is usually crushed and left to a few scattered intellectuals or an exiled diaspora. Yet, if we are to talk about capitalism in its international and national forms we must also seek its contradictions, its fractions and its class divisions. As Harrison points out in his paper these can take many forms that are difficult to discern, especially where eschatological and relativist discourses have first to be penetrated and dismantled. Going behind the broader analysis of White and Taylor, and taking examples from Nigeria and Mozambique, Harrison shows that political struggle is alive, if not always well. This ranges from the struggles of workers against employers, who may be agents of the multinationals, to struggles of wider civil groups and government against the IMF and World Bank as with the catastrophe affecting the cashew nut industry in Mozambique. In the context of institutionalised oppression, struggle may also manifest itself through youth groups, women’s organisations, and informal parallel markets. Though presenting a number of conceptual problems the call to ‘bring political struggle back in’ has a resounding appeal to all radical interpreters of African political economy.
In his speech to the Commonwealth Club and US/SA Business Council Conference in May 2000 Thabo Mbeki (President of South Africa) is also concerned with 'struggle' and, to some extent, accountability:

*We will succeed in the struggle to end poverty provided we can count on the kind of support you gave us as we fought together to end the system of apartheid.*

It is with this quotation that Patrick Bond opened his inaugural Fanon lecture at the University of Durban-Westville in August 2000, and which we reproduce in this issue. Through an examination of a range of Mbeki's speeches Bond vividly illustrates the ambiguities and contradictions that are intrinsic to any involvement of a poorer nation with the world system; where its leaders end up seeking an accommodation with the major powers and IFIs rather than effectively presenting them with an alternative. The 'struggle' here is at many interlocking levels. There is that of the national state against the global hegemony of western powers, and in the compromises that this generates there is often an intensified struggle of workers, citizens and petty bourgeoisie against government, frequently divided, one against the other. For Bond, Mbeki's "rhetoric has often confused listeners, the strategy is dubious and the tactics have not been effective" leading to an ambiguity in his position that is compounded by lack of clarity in his preferred partnerships. In the latter, however, there is potential for local, democratic, people-centred rather than finance-centred alternatives, in which Bond finds a surprising ally in John Maynard Keynes!

Other pieces in this issue also embody the themes of struggle and accountability, and include the history of division in the Eritrean liberation movements, its manifestation as ethnic contest in Rwanda and wider ramifications in the rest of west-central Africa, 'slippage' in accountability in NGO funding in Nigeria, and the on-going struggle for national independence in Western Sahara. In all of these there are links with the themes examined in the main articles, whether these be on the control of exportable resources, on the compromises and abuses of power, or on the struggles of civil society for identity and recognition in a capitalistic world.
Well-Oiled Regimes: Oil & Uncertain Transitions in Algeria & Nigeria

Gregory White & Scott Taylor

Oil has had a profound impact on countries engaged in transitions to democracy, often undermining the commitment of both local and external actors to democratization. Two African countries, Algeria and Nigeria, demonstrate how oil distorts the domestic regime structure and conditions the nature of international linkages. Key actors in the international arena – notably, former colonial powers, international financial institutions and transnational corporations – are inclined to support undemocratic, military regimes that supply oil, while simultaneously offering only rhetorical support for ongoing transitions. Paradoxically, despite the critical role played by international actors in sustaining undemocratic regimes, and their compromising effect on domestic affairs, the international norm of sovereignty is deployed to rationalise non-intervention in domestic political affairs of the country.

Introduction

The military regimes in Algeria and Nigeria engaged in elaborate exercises in the 1990s to engineer democratic transitions. Yet the sharp repression of political oppositions, interference in electoral processes, and the nullification of elections had disastrous consequences, and their repercussions continue to be felt. Notwithstanding political changes in each country in 1999, there exists considerable uncertainty that the cycle of ‘permanent transition’ to democracy that has long-plagued both countries has ended.

Following the cancellation of national elections in January 1992, Algeria’s civil war raged at a horrifying scale, with a death toll now estimated at nearly 150,000. The war continues to defy efforts to negotiate a peaceful settlement among the plethora of actors in the conflict, while violence and chaos jeopardise stability throughout North Africa and Southern Europe. Elections in April 1999 offered little glimmer of resolution, as six opposition candidates pulled out on the eve of the election, complaining that the military government’s candidate, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, was guaranteed victory. Bouteflika is now the president.

Nigeria’s military rulers similarly engineered a return to an elected government in February 1999 after having successfully forestalled democratic transition since 1983. Indeed, in the summer of 1993, the military spurned election results. General Olusegun Obasanjo’s election in February 1999 may mark a shift in Nigeria’s permanent transition. Obasanjo’s election, however, took place amidst accusations from other candidates of electoral irregularities and the refusal of former US President Jimmy Carter – who led a 60-member monitoring delegation – to endorse the election.
Moreover, Nigeria’s much-heralded return to civilian rule has been highly problematic. Since the transfer to civilian rule took place in June 1999, violent clashes have continued throughout the country. Like Algeria, Nigeria’s political instability over the past two decades has not only had devastating consequences for its own population, but it has also contributed to uncertainty and instability throughout West and Central Africa.

Despite the turmoil evident in two of Africa’s most populous and influential countries last decade, outside actors expressed relatively muted criticism. With the important exception of human rights organizations and other observers, the international community – including the European Union (EU), the United States, transnational corporations (TNCs), international financial institutions, and international organizations – failed to condemn the hijacking of democracy by military regimes in Algeria and Nigeria. To the contrary, international actors provided crucial external support to both regimes. Indeed, well before Obasanjo’s scheduled return to office on 29 May 1999, various governments pronounced themselves satisfied with the outcome of the questionable Nigerian election. In a post-election visit to Nigeria, British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook proclaimed that Nigeria would be rewarded for its return to democracy. In the meantime, the domestic populations in each country continued to suffer under regimes adept at maintaining political power and influence.

Nominally, at least, the military regimes are no longer in place. Nonetheless, despite apparent transitions to civilian rule, the fragility that has characterised both regimes remains a prominent feature of the landscape. Instead of offering predictions about the prospects of the Bouteflika and Obasanjo governments, this paper seeks to illuminate how international quiescence and claims of sovereignty have contributed to the cycle of permanent transitions that plagued, and in many respects, continue to plague, Algeria and Nigeria. Specifically, we contend that, in their quiescence, international actors are implicated in the denial of democracy and human rights by authoritarian regimes if the countries provide valuable resources to the world economy.

First, we argue that the abundance of hydrocarbon resources in both countries contributes to international quiescence. In order to maintain downward pressures on prices in the world oil market, the international arena must maintain a wide array of sources, and Algeria and Nigeria both possess abundant oil and gas reserves. Together with Egypt, Libya and Angola, Algeria and Nigeria account for more than 90 per cent of Africa’s oil, with advanced industrialised countries serving as the primary customers (Mbendi Information Services, 1999). Substantial contributors to world petroleum production since the late 1960s, both countries have derived effectively all of their export revenues from oil; estimates range from 95-99 per cent for each country (Handbook of International Economic Statistics, 1998; Metz, 1993; Frynas, 1998). Moreover, according to industry analyses, much of Algeria and Nigeria’s production potential has neither been reliably established nor fully realised. Finally, the military regimes in Algeria and Nigeria have allowed transnational oil companies virtually unfettered access to reserves in exchange for petroleum rents. As a result, few key actors in either the domestic or international spheres have had the incentive to facilitate or encourage democratic processes. In short, the natural wealth of each country produced a situation in which oil companies and military regimes became mutually dependent.

This first dynamic, suggesting a relationship between oil and international quiescence, takes on greater significance in view of a second factor: the proclaimed
‘inviolability’ of sovereignty and the ostensible unwillingness of the international community to interfere in the ‘domestic affairs’ of Algeria and Nigeria. In these cases, ironically, international actors – although closely implicated in the domestic affairs of each country – invoked international norms of sovereignty and the importance of respecting a developing country’s political autonomy. Thus, if continued access to oil provides a rationale for inaction, arguments about ‘sovereignty’ elevate such inertia to an international norm.

Although the ability of each country to exercise ‘empirical sovereignty’ – that is, effective government, territorial integrity, and popular legitimacy – is severely constrained, both possess an external ‘juridical sovereignty’ (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982); each enjoys membership in international organizations, diplomatic status, and international recognition, even as their domestic situations are highly unstable. Thus, when pressed to intervene in Algeria or Nigeria’s domestic affairs by registering meaningful disapproval of the military regimes’ policies, TNCs, governments, and international financial institutions retreat behind claims of ‘sovereignty’ in order to justify their inaction. Moreover, the regimes rejected attempts at interference. This was most glaringly illustrated in November 1995, when the Nigerian military regime executed the author and political activist Ken Saro-Wiwa against the protests of many observers. Northern governments and TNCs such as Royal Dutch Shell rationalised their inaction as respect for Nigeria’s sovereignty. The hypocrisy of such silence is particularly glaring, however, as Shell was implicated in the political circumstances leading to Saro-Wiwa’s death and has long been closely involved in the country’s economy (Oil and Gas Journal, 20 November 1995). There is a contradiction between ongoing international ‘intervention’ that seeks to exploit oil resources in Algeria or Nigeria, on the one hand, and the invocation of sovereignty to avoid financially or politically costly intervention, on the other.

We attempt, therefore, to explain the lingering uncertainty surrounding Algeria and Nigeria’s democratic transitions by introducing two key intervening variables: 1) international quiescence born of the demand for hydrocarbons and 2) claims of sovereignty made by external actors as well as the domestic regime. The following diagram of causal linkages portrays the connections we seek to illuminate.

Clearly, other reasons exist for the quiescence of international actors in such circumstances. Both the Algerian and Nigerian regimes engaged in sophisticated ‘public relations’ programs, for example, in an effort to undercut mediation and

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**Explaining Permanent Transition in Well-Oiled Regimes**

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![Diagram](#)
negotiation, and to lobby international actors to maintain support for their governments. These public relations programs augment sovereignty claims. Since 1999, Bouteflika and Obasanjo have been exceptionally prominent and active in high-profile diplomatic endeavours. Other factors that help explain international quiescence include the relative marginality of both Algeria and Nigeria to international security concerns, diminished ideological competition in the post-cold war era, and their importance to world oil markets notwithstanding—the countries' peripheral status in international trade. However, with few exceptions (Reno, 1998; Diamond, 1997), the role of oil in the support that Algeria and Nigeria's regimes have enjoyed has not been the focus of sustained analysis. Moreover, the important roles that quiescence and claims of sovereignty have not been highlighted.

In regard to transitions to democracy, connections to the international arena can be conducive to democratic emergence or may serve to frustrate it, as we contend occurred in the cases of Algeria and Nigeria. It is precisely the procedural minimal functions inherent in democratic society—participation, through expression, and contestation, through periodic competitive elections (Dahl, 1971)—that threaten to undermine the asymmetries of power between oil firms and military regimes, as well as between the military regimes and domestic actors. As a result, international and state actors may share a vested interest in maintaining the anti-democratic status quo.

In the next section, Part II, we revisit several theoretical strands in the political economy literature, much of which suggests that resource dependence actually constrains economic policy choice. In Algeria and Nigeria, it has led to distorted state-building processes and has helped to preserve the dominance of TNCs. Moreover, the control of oil-based revenues by the state has ensured the continued flow of resources to entrenched military elites, who maintain substantial power in large part because of fundamental norms of sovereignty. In Parts III through V, we discuss the specifics of the cases. Part III examines the centrality of oil to each country's political economy. Part IV briefly addresses the regime types and the denial of democracy. It does not engage in an in-depth examination of domestic politics, which is beyond the scope of this article, yet it seeks to identify the broad parameters of the regime. Part V is concerned with the international context and the role that linkages to the international arena play in facilitating a 'permanent transition'. Finally, Part VI concludes with a reconsideration of the theoretical lessons to be learned from the Algerian and Nigerian cases and proposes questions for further analysis.

II. Theoretical Concerns
Two essential and interrelated issues require elaboration. First, we examine how the presence of oil affects domestic political and economic structures as well as how it transforms external ties. Second, we seek to understand how external actors deploy the notion of sovereignty when it serves their interests.

Impact of Oil
First, with respect to the impact of oil on domestic structures, natural-resource abundance can paradoxically have a negative impact on development. As Broad notes, in the 'late, late development' experience of the 20th century, economic growth has occurred in resource-poor East Asian NICs, notably South Korea and Taiwan (Broad, 1995:319). 'Late, late development' is distinct from the 'late development' of countries such as Russia, Japan, and Germany at the end of the 19th century analysed by Gerschenkron (1962). The Philippines, on the other hand, with spectacular natural
resources, remained a development failure. Much of the explanation for this paradox is found in analysis of sectoral distortions, political authoritarianism, and the propensity for corruption within such states.

A recent explanation for maldevelopment, albeit a partial one, is articulated in the sectoral thesis put forward by Shafer (1995). In particular, extractive industries pose intractable problems for states engaging in economic restructuring in order to achieve (or re-establish) growth. Given the limited number of actors in extractive industries, as well as the growth and high fixed costs associated with such sectors, underdeveloped states typically lack the capacity to restructure their economies. These economic constraints precipitated by extractive commodity dependence have political implications, in that they severely limit policy choices.

Primary commodity dependence also structures, per force, the character of international linkages. Here we wish to distinguish our exogenous arguments from the economic arguments of what Bierstecker termed ‘vulgar’ dependency theorists (1987:27-38). Clearly, countries in the developing world lack internal revenue sources and must rely on external sources. Countries are unable to adjust because the state’s room for manoeuvre in economic policy is sharply constrained by imperatives of the external revenue sources, whether in the form of debt, sectoral TNC investment, or more recently, currency speculation. Some middle-income countries, such as Singapore, can manoeuvre by altering fiscal and monetary policy, thereby capitalizing on increased globalization (Ramesh, 1995). Other countries, however, dependent on the export of a single commodity, simply cannot shift out of the production of that commodity.

The existence of a lucrative lead sector not only prompts dependency in the sense of ‘vulgar dependencistas’, but it also engenders, in the words of Karl, a ‘paradox of plenty’ (Karl, 1997). Karl explains:

\[ \text{[D]ependence on a particular export commodity shapes not only social classes and regime types ... but also the very institutions of the state, the framework for decision-making, and the decision calculus of policymakers.} \]

Karl’s argument provides a point of departure for related studies that reveal political manifestations of single-commodity dependence.

More than simply authoritarian in character, the corrupt military regimes in Algeria and Nigeria historically have rejected developmentalist agendas. Indeed, the Algerian and Nigerian states are more appropriately labelled ‘predatory’ in character (Evans, 1995:43-50). Politico-military elites in both countries have been preoccupied not with broad, national development concerns, but with personalist objectives and securing access to oil rents. In many instances, the rents derived from the export of primary products provide the inputs for complex systems of political and economic patronage (Boone, 1992; Boone, 1993; Bellin, 1994; Joseph, 1987). Of course, respective players have different motivations and, thus, derive varying degrees of benefit from the activities of the rentier, or ‘distributive state’ (Vandewalle, 1998:140). However, patronage is especially deleterious in the context of developing economies because of the enormous economic impact of such distortion on small economies. Purchasing loyalties takes on a predatory quality, prompting the emergence of ‘pirate capitalism’ or, as evident more recently in South East Asia, ‘crony capitalism’ (Schatz, 1984; Hawes, 1992). Finally, given the short-term horizon of the activities, corrupt officials believe they must strike while the iron is hot. Fuelled by the exploitation of the
primary commodity, the impact of corruption is profound. Ultimately, as Klitgaard illustrated in his ethnographic study of Equatorial Guinea, it becomes difficult to specify only one set of ‘tropical gangsters’ (Klitgaard, 1988; Klitgaard, 1990). A wide array of internal *and* external actors from top to bottom – donors, aid workers, World Bank officials, TNCs, government officials, and citizens – contribute directly or indirectly to the corruption that deforms economic and political life.

With the benefit of oil, therefore, rulers are able to gain near total autonomy from ‘civil society’ – labour unions, businessmen’s associations, political parties, charitable groups, etc. – and so may ignore societal objections. Oil wealth thus insulates authoritarian states quite effectively, enabling the state to eschew a balanced development of the national economy. As Clapham (1996:71) observes:

*It was symptomatic of the relationship between the rentier state and its population that despite the wave of democratisation sweeping Africa in the early 1990s, no African oil-producing state – from Algeria south through Nigeria and Gabon to Angola – achieved a successful democratic transition.*

In the Algerian and Nigerian cases, the facilitators of state power and the suppliers of the rents essential to military/state domination have been the TNCs and consumers in advanced-industrialised countries. As Vandewalle (1998:23) asks in his study of Libya:

*What kind of [domestic] political community is created when the primary social contract is not between the rulers and citizens but between rulers and the multinational companies that provide the state with revenues?’*

Notwithstanding the above, it is important to note that military rule and development are not necessarily incompatible. In the bureaucratic-authoritarian experience of Latin America, for example, economic development did occur to a degree (O’Donnell, 1979). Countries such as Chile and, in the case of East Asia, South Korea, have experienced significant economic development under military regimes (Silva, 1993; Haggard, 1990). In the cases of Algeria and Nigeria, however, military domination of civil society was total throughout the 1990s, and little or no development occurred. The utter dependence on oil – to the detriment of the development of other economic sectors as well as to political liberalization – leads us to concur with Diamond, whose observation of Nigeria applies equally well to Algeria: ‘Without question, both for democracy and development, oil has been more of a curse than a blessing for Nigeria’ (1997:473).

The crucial support for authoritarian regimes takes several forms. The emergence and maintenance of military cooperation between external actors and military regimes merits examination. This collaboration can take the form of military assistance, including the provision of *materiel* and training. It might also manifest itself in the hiring of paramilitary squads to provide ‘security’ for in-country oil operations. Such squads have been implicated in various contexts – Indonesia, Ecuador and Nigeria, for example – in the persecution and harassment of opposition to oil company activities (Karliner, 1997; Sachs, 1995). Indeed, it is logical that military cooperation would emerge in the context of direct external support for military regimes. Oil firms, however, have also provided a more pernicious form of support in the provision of salaries and infrastructure for military personnel with the specific task of protecting oil operations. Where this support extends beyond mercenaries to actual members of
the armed forces, the link between public and private interests is blurred completely. Private interests are validated through manipulation of an ostensibly public force.

In the end, 'well-oiled regimes' receive a wide array of external support: direct rents, corruption, and military assistance. The outcome is the perseverance of authoritarian structures that facilitate the extraction of a highly-prized commodity.

**Sovereignty**

Our second concern, regarding the use of sovereignty claims, goes to the heart of discussions of international norms. Norms specify general standards of state behaviour in international society (Krasner, 1985; Barnett, 1985; Ayoob, 1995). The international society of states – manifested in a wide array of international forums such as the United Nations or regional organizations such as the Organization of African Unity – confers legitimacy and recognition on states (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982:20). Two fundamental components of post-colonial independence are the notions of political autonomy of each state and the inviolability of borders drawn by colonial administrators (Ayoob, 1995:78).

Paradoxically, however, although states enjoy external sovereignty, they may be wholly incapable of exercising the tasks of statehood: effective administration, political and economic stability, and internal, popular legitimacy. Indeed, as is evident in the cases of Algeria and Nigeria, the capacity of countries to exert internal, 'empirical' sovereignty is, at best, limited. Political instability, corrupt economies, populations divided along ethnic/religious lines, and civil warfare hardly blend to prompt effective government. Jackson refers to this as 'negative' sovereignty, in contrast to the 'positive' sovereignty of advanced-industrialised states that demonstrate empirical sovereignty (Jackson, 1990:26). Thus, sovereignty conferred onto former colonies by international law, organizations, and norms is more often juridical than empirical.

The norm of juridical statehood and the corresponding sanctity of boundaries are upheld not only by the external international community, but by state elites, who have a vested interest in maintaining their power. As Jackson and Rosberg argue (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982:21):

*Membership in the international society provides an opportunity – denied to [Africa] under colonialism – to both influence and take advantage of international rules and ideologies concerning what is desirable and undesirable in the relations of states.*

Or, as Katzenstein avers (Katzenstein, 1996:24):

*Governments crave the diplomatic recognition by members of the international society of states because it bestows upon them the legitimacy they may need to secure their existence ... Sovereignty constitutes and legitimates states that are extremely weak.*

Thus, post-colonial states bristle at outside intervention when it challenges their sovereignty (Clapham, 1996; Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein, 1996). They welcome outside intervention, by contrast, when it validates their power: foreign investment, financial aid, military assistance, and international recognition of their rule.

Not surprisingly, newly-independent states often react vehemently against calls for the respect of human rights and democracy (Ayoob, 1995:87). Partly, this strong
reaction reflects a view that advanced-industrialised countries are hypocritical in their ostensible concern for the respect of human rights. More importantly, in some developing states, elites regard preoccupation with human rights and democratization as incompatible with the imperatives of maintaining stability, extending state purview, and state-building. Moreover, they understand that the norm of sovereignty facilitates their prerogative to choose the forms of external ties.

In sum, the international community in the advanced-industrialised countries selectively deploys criticisms of human rights violations when it serves their interests (Sikkink, 1993; Neier, 1997). To dodge calls to intervene in another country’s domestic affairs, international actors discreetly resort to norms of sovereignty, arguing that it would be an unjustified intervention and compromise of sovereignty. Whether or not sovereignty is, in fact, ‘organised hypocrisy’, as recently adduced by Krasner (1999) requires further exploration. One must be struck, however, that despite declarations of dismay at the gravity of the situation, in the end, intervention (even of a milder variant) is often cast as inappropriate. Even in the face of extensive evidence that a given country’s sovereignty has been thoroughly compromised for years, international actors are loath to intervene, and the ‘non-interventionary norm prevails’ (von Hippel, 1995). The presence of a highly desirable commodity typically renders outside actors silent. Continued demand for oil by the international community fosters a need to invoke the norm of sovereignty to ensure future access.

III. Centrality of Oil to the Political Economy

In both Algeria and Nigeria, oil has played the pivotal role in post-independence political economy. It provided the bedrock for Algeria’s statist economic development; it was at the heart of Nigeria’s halting efforts to indigenize its economy. This section focuses primarily on the centrality of oil to the national economies, although it begins to establish the economic connections to the international arena. As stressed in the foregoing section, it is impossible to separate oil from its international linkages. After a brief treatment of state-society relations in Part IV, we examine the political connections of oil economies to the external realm in Part V.

Oil in Algeria

French colonial rule of Algeria was one of the most notorious and thoroughgoing colonial experiences in modern history, and Algeria continues to experience its legacy. Since independence from France in 1962, Algeria’s economy has transformed dramatically. In the early decades of independence, the state-led economy pursued a form of autarkic development under the ideological rubric of third world socialism (Karl, 1997:205; Vandewalle, 1992). With the First Four-Year Plan, 1969-1973, the state placed an emphasis on heavy industry, especially hydrocarbons, neglecting consumer products and light manufactures. In theory, the oil sector would pull the rest of the economy along by providing earnings that would finance imports. The slogan of the era was ‘Sow oil to reap industry’ (Richards and Waterbury, 1996:186). Indeed, with its Second Four-Year Plan (1974-78), Algeria benefited from the quadrupling of world oil prices.

The key actor in Algeria is the national oil and gas company, SONATRACH (the Société Nationale pour la Recherche, la Production, le Transport, la transformation et la Commercialisation des Hydrocarbures). Founded in 1963, SONATRACH has towered over the Algerian economy and is the world’s ninth largest oil company (Entelis, 1999:10). During the 1960s and 1970s, it controlled the exploitation, processing, and
export of Algeria’s oil and gas resources. SONATRACH, however, was not solely an indigenous endeavour; indeed, it functioned in close cooperation with foreign interests. Joint-venture operations were common during the era, such as Getty Petroleum’s 1968 entrance into the Algerian economy, when the American firm controlled 49 per cent of operations (Akre, 1992:89).

In the early 1970s, like many oil-producing countries (including Nigeria), Algeria sought to exert greater control over its oil production. On 24 February 1971, Algeria nationalised French gas and oil companies in an attempt to control pricing. Nonetheless, despite this action, SONATRACH maintained close ties with external funders and firms. Although there was a freeze in Franco-Algerian relations, for example, the US remained active in the 1970s; El Paso Natural Gas, General Electric Tempo division, Aero Services of Litton Industries, Scientific Resources Corporation, Boeing, Bechtel, and General Telephone and Electronics all invested in the economy. In addition, in the 1970s, US management firms were active in Algeria, including A.D. Little, Booz-Allen and Hamilton, and Kurt Salmon Associates. Algeria maintained a ‘pragmatic dichotomy’ between the ideological differences it had with the United States and the need for external financing of its heavy industrialization (Akre, 1992:89). During the 1980s, Paris and Algiers experienced a détente, led by Chadli Benjedid (1979-92) and François Mitterrand, and France slowly returned to its position as Algeria’s number-one trading partner. The United States remained active as well.

Despite massive foreign exchange earnings from oil exports throughout this period, as well as domestic and international financing, the economic results were modest. Growth in GNP did not match the return on investment. As Addi stresses, there was ‘feeble return on investment ... [and] industry did not replace hydrocarbons as a major source of revenue’ (Addi, 1995:91). In addition, external debt mushroomed, prompting inflation, speculation, and popular discontent. The official objective had been to use the rents from oil exports to invest in a diversification of industry. This did not occur, however, as state elites squandered the opportunity to use the oil wealth for further industrial development, preferring instead to ensure their own economic gain and political preservation. As Waterbury (1983) demonstrates, Egypt offered a similar experience.

This was particularly acute during the 1980s, as OPEC’s ability (and willingness) to cartelize world prices was diminished. Oil producers with large populations such as Iran, Algeria, and Iraq – in contrast to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait – lost the ability to control prices. Moreover, in the aftermath of the fall of oil prices in 1985-1986 – prompted by the Reagan Administration’s urging of the Saudi Arabian regime to pursue dovish prices on oil – Algeria’s ruling party, the FLN (National Liberation Front), recognised the need to pursue a policy of restructuring. Oil revenues in the aftermath of the price drop fell by 21 per cent, and imports fell by 35 per cent (Layachi, 1996). The country’s debt grew to US$15 billion in 1985, and ballooned to US$26.5 billion in 1991. Servicing the debt placed extraordinary pressure on the country, and falling oil earnings hardly covered the service costs.

The change in the world oil scene, combined with Algeria’s domestic social and economic crises – exemplified by violent riots in 1988 protesting the illegitimacy of the regime and the country’s economic straits – raised a pressing question by the early 1990s. How can an oil exporting country continue to earn foreign exchange if it does not possess the financial and technical means for further development of the sector (Addi, 1995:95)? In July 1991, Prime Minister Sid-Ahmed Ghozali announced the
decision to sell 25 per cent of Hassi-Messaoud, the country’s main oil field, to foreign
countries. Discovered in 1958 by the French, Hassi-Messaoud, which is located in
the east central region of the country, had become a major subsidiary of
SONATRACH. In many respects, the move to sell was an extension of the Algerian
infitah (or economic opening) that had been gradually occurring throughout the 1980s

Without foreign support, however, such ambitions proved infeasible (Addi, 1995:96).
In order to attract foreign investment, the Majlis, or National Assembly, passed the
Petrol Code of 1991. It provides for: the extension of the regime currently pertaining to
liquid petroleum production to cover natural gas production, foreign companies’
access to newly discovered and currently producing fields, the encouragement of
research and discovery efforts for new fields, and the establishment of procedures for
dispute resolution between foreign firms and SONATRACH. The Code passed after
dehensive debate, only after deputies were convinced that it was not a return to a pre-
1971 state of affairs and an abdication of the nationalist doctrine, but a new strategy
addressing Algeria’s current situation (Addi, 1995:97).

Algeria’s hydrocarbon riches are most notable in the area of natural gas, which also
accounts for the vast majority of the country’s unexploited resources. The regime has
participated in the construction of two natural gazoducs that run east, through
Tunisia to Italy, and west, through Morocco to Spain and Portugal. The latter, the
Maghreb-Europe pipeline, was completed in 1996. These joint-capital ventures, with
preponderant European financing, have been the sites of high security. The five
primary customers for the gas in 1996 were France, which took 7.6 billion cubic
meters, followed by Spain, Belgium, Turkey and the United States. SONATRACH is
now the world’s fourth biggest gas exporter – after Gazprom of Russia, Shell, and
Exxon (Entelis, 1999:16).

Still, the old guard within the FLN – especially middle- and lower-level functionaries
within the state – have sabotaged reform efforts (Richards and Waterbury, 1996:233).
Apprehensive that foreign involvement could result in a loss of state control over oil
rents, and a loss of crucial patronage, state elites suffer from the effects of the
‘gangrene of corruption’. Even the austere president Houari Boumediene, who died in
1978 and exercised a relatively tough hand with respect to corruption, admitted, ‘One
can’t harvest honey without sticking your finger in it’ (quoted in Beau, 1995:26).

The contemporary regime lacks the internal support and legitimacy to do the heavy
lifting necessary to restructure the economy; as noted, the population perceives the
regime as corrupt. In the context of the ongoing civil war, which has shown no sign of
diminishing since Bouteflika’s election, and the lack of international outcry, however,
there is little prospect for further restructuring. Moreover, the regime has to contend
with an Islamist challenge, with elements within the regime adopting different
positions. The moderate moves of the conciliateurs within the regime, a position
closely associated with the former President Liamine Zeroual, are usually countered
with more repressive measures by the eradicateurs, led by Mohamed Lamari. Algeria
thus finds itself in a dilemma as its reliance on oil gave way in the 1990s to a
dependence on international oil firms. The context of civil war has produced a volatile
admixture as TNCs have supported the authoritarian regime.
Oil in Nigeria

Like Algeria, oil represents over 95 per cent of Nigeria's exports. It also accounts for some 30 per cent of Nigeria's GDP and 80 per cent of budgetary revenues. Despite the fact that Nigeria is a federal system comprised of 36 individual states – in contrast to Algeria's state centralism – oil revenues are controlled by the central government; states in which oil production are located do not benefit directly. In fact, at the peak of the oil boom in the 1970s, large oil revenues served to increase the power of the central government vis-à-vis the states (Scott, 1992; Forrest, 1987). The military elite, which is dominated by northern Nigerians, wielded substantial influence within past northern governments, and within the current Obasanjo administration. Thus, the north, predominantly Hausa region has benefited in a disproportionate manner from oil resources, contributing to grievances by the rest of the country and ongoing instability.

International control of Nigeria's natural wealth dates from the colonial period, originally entailing palm oil and, later, petroleum products. The best known of the transnational oil companies operating in Nigeria today is the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), a subsidiary of Royal/Dutch Shell. Shell’s presence in Nigeria dates to 1937, when colonial authorities granted it 'exclusive exploration and prospecting rights' (Ahmed Khan, 1994:16). In 1958, Shell was the first oil company to begin exploration of the Delta region, a 70,000 square km area of rich oil deposits, particularly the highly-prized, low-sulfur 'Bonny Light'.

In contrast to Algeria's attempt to exert control over its oil industry immediately following independence, Nigeria's early involvement with its petroleum sector was limited initially to the realm of tax collection, rents and royalties from the operation of Shell and its affiliates. In 1971, Mobil and Chevron made substantial investments in Nigeria's petroleum sector. That same year, however, the military government of Yakubu Gowon established the parastatal Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC). Initially, it was called the Nigerian National Oil Company (NNOC) and was ostensibly established to regulate the industry. NNOC merged with the Ministry of Petroleum Resources in 1977 to form the NNPC (Soremekun and Obi, 1993). Continuing the move toward state control, and partly in response to pressures from the local Nigerian business community following the Biafran war, the government passed the Indigenization Decree of 1972. A second Indigenization Decree was passed in 1977, deepening state involvement in the sector. Today, through a joint venture with Shell, NNPC controls the largest portion of the oil industry: NNPC (55%), SPDC-Shell (30%); Elf (10%); and AGIP (5%). By the end of 1982 all of the TNCs in Nigeria (whether engaged in exploration, refining, or marketing) operated in a minority position (Bierstecker, 1987:241).

Like Algeria, Nigeria's effort to exert greater control over oil has only been a mixed success. Although the oil boom of the 1970s greatly increased federal revenues and an expansion of infrastructure, there was relatively little distributive justice (Kirk-Greene and Rimmer, 1981). Moreover, despite the improved parity in relations between the Nigerian state and TNCs, the latter retain considerable power in the economic landscape. Even in a minority position, two-thirds of TNCs in joint partnerships with the government of Nigeria 'retained effective control over their operations' (Bierstecker, 1987:241), a trend that has deepened in recent years. This is due to the TNCs' comparative advantage in oil exploration, their ability to renegotiate agreements after sharp real declines in oil prices after 1982, and the nature of Nigerian participation in the industry, which is limited because of a relative paucity of qualified personnel.
Indeed, the indigenization efforts appear not to have had meaningful effects on the role, control and function (and profits) of major foreign investors. To some degree, an elite compromise occurred between TNCs, and political/military elites. The latter’s goal is to nominally push the cause of ‘Nigerianization’, although continued effective control by TNCs is satisfactory as long as the politico-military elite maintains access to ‘spoils’.

Moreover, since then head of state General Ibrahim Babangida’s implementation of structural adjustment in 1986, foreign control over oil has increased, undermining the little control Nigeria had over its industry and exposing

the country to exploitation and manipulation ... [In short,] foreign oil investment, rather than being an agent of development, has remained an agent of domination (Soremekun and Obi, 1993:18).

Oil in Comparative Perspective

Several lessons emerge from a comparison of Algerian and Nigerian oil economies. First, parastatals such as SONATRACH and NNPC remain the dominant entities through which the states attempt to control the flow of oil. In one sense, the high (and increasing) international involvement in the oil sectors of both countries means that these parastatals maintain a veneer of domestic national control. Yet, however compliant and powerless they may be in international circles, as parastatals, SONATRACH and NNPC maintain substantial insularity and autonomy from society. They are, therefore, neither accountable nor beholden to democratic pressures. The autonomy provided by state institutions that, in effect, are fuelled by oil rents, offers the state an added degree of protection from domestic forces (Joseph, 1999).

At the same time, however, SONATRACH and the NNPC are staffed by national elites with deep clientelist linkages to society. Senior government and military officials, and their counterparts in the national parastatals, exchange positions regularly, thus maintaining a close linkage between the state and the oil sector, as well as an effective mechanism for distributing patronage. Bouteflika’s government has continued this process apace since the spring 1999. Similarly, Nigeria under the civilian regime of Obasanjo is engaged in highly publicised attempts to diminish these linkages, but has met with limited success (Economist Intelligence Unit, 1 February 2001).

Nonetheless, in both Algeria and Nigeria, foreign involvement remains central to the exploitation, production, marketing and sale of oil. Indeed, despite early rhetoric about indigenization, ideological non-alignment, and auto-centric development, both countries have become more deeply penetrated by TNCs, particularly in recent years. In addition, state elites must remain in close joint ventures with external TNCs due to the demand for technology, investment, and market access. Such ties are revisited in Part V. For now, however, the political character of the regimes merits attention.

IV. Regime & Society

Algeria’s long experience of direct French occupation and the brutal character of the independence struggle contrasts with Nigeria’s encounter with Britain’s indirect rule and its relatively peaceful transition to independence in 1960. Since Algerian independence in 1962, the country’s political system can be characterised as
authoritarian. Indeed, the Algeria’s post-independence regime remains strikingly similar to its colonial predecessor: an autocratic, military command structure with little popular legitimacy. Much like Nigeria’s repeated – if halfhearted – attempts at democratic transitions, the FLN has made only feeble efforts to engineer electoral reforms and open the political system in the more than 35 years of Algeria’s independence.

Ample evidence exists of popular desire for and interest in electoral participation. The proliferation of parties in the late 1980s, as well as the then flourishing press, demonstrated the desire for electoral participation (Mortimer, 1996; Layachi, 1996). Algeria is not a country that lacks a societal, democratic impulse, contrary to the assumptions of the ruling elite and its international backers. As the authoritarian nature of the state has deepened over decades, virulent and destructive forms of Islam have emerged, ones intent on a violent response to state authoritarianism (Burgat, 1993). This is not to say that all political Islam in Algeria is violent; indeed, many strains represent progressive, nonviolent movements (Entelis, 1998). In Algeria, the macabre dance between the state and Islamists, however, has metastasized into a noxious mix of political violence in which 150,000 people have lost their lives. Outside actors, meanwhile, have largely supported the regime because of fears of Islamist resurgence and because of the desire to maintain access to hydrocarbon resources.

Nigeria’s political trajectory since independence is often characterised as an example of military rule interrupted by brief periods of civilian government. After a period of civilian rule following independence in 1960, Nigeria experienced its first of six successful coups in January 1966 (Diamond, 1988). Civilian government was restored in 1979, however, fraught with legitimacy problems and rife with corruption, the Second Republic fell in December 1983 at the hands of a military coup (Falola and Ihonvbere, 1985).

Although the trajectory of the Obasanjo government largely remains to be seen, Nigeria’s civilian regimes fundamentally lacked democratic credentials. The First and Second Republics were wracked by ethnic conflict, power struggles and Nigeria’s peculiar brand of corruption, an entrenched form of clientelism that has been libelled ‘prebendalism’ (Joseph, 1987; Peter Lewis, 1996). Unfortunately, Nigeria’s military governments demonstrated neither economic restraint nor a desire to decrease corruption (Welch, 1995). For the most part, in fact, they have been as corrupt as their short-lived elected counterparts, and have been, at times, brutally authoritarian as well, particularly under the rule of the late general, Sani Abacha from 1993 to 1998 (Crow, 1995).

Like Algeria, Nigeria has the elements of a vibrant civil society; it enjoyed considerable associational activity and a substantially free press until a repressive clampdown under Abacha (Lucas, 1993; Peter Lewis, 1998). The weakening of civil society by successive military governments threatens prospects for future stability, as well as both the achievement and the sustainability democracy. Recent events indicate a slide toward uncoordinated, violent and destructive societal reactions resulting from the continued denial of economic and political opportunity, especially to the youth and disenfranchised poor. Ironically, these events accelerated under Abacha’s successor, General Abdulsalam Abubakar, and several were directed at oil and gas installations. Violence, particularly in the oil-rich Delta region, among the Ijaw, Itsekiri and other ethnic groups has led observers to characterise the situation as a low intensity civil war. This violence brought groups into conflict with transnational oil
companies and government, and had profoundly deleterious effects on oil production. In response, the oil companies, and the Nigerian army, acted to protect their economic interests in the region.

It should be noted that, despite becoming jaded and skeptical, the majority of Nigerians, like Algerians, still desire the realization of democracy. Notably, the widespread alienation with military rule was evidenced by high turnout and popular enthusiasm for the elections held in 1998 and 1999. Ironically, however, citizens in both countries have lowered their expectations over the years, while, at the same time, the capacity of elements of civil society to effect change has also been diminished.

**Lessons: Regime/Society Relations in Comparative Perspective**

Authoritarian regimes, whether military or civilian, provide a certain 'cloak' for the operation of and profit-taking by TNCs in return for compensation. Moreover, certain harmonies may exist between military rulers and the TNCs' maintenance of the status quo that are less compatible with civilian – and especially democratic – regimes.

Algerian and Nigerian opposition movements, as well as critical intelligentsia, have clamoured persistently for electoral and political reforms, providing ample evidence of democratic pressures from societal quarters. Periodic efforts to engineer transitions to electoral democracy, however, served to undercut the power of the opposition. Such ‘segmentary incorporation’ or ‘unruly corporatism’ serves to co-opt certain segments of the population and depoliticise others in the interest of the regime (Vandewalle, 1992; Becker, 1987; Bianchi, 1989).

The character of the opposition, particularly in Algeria, has been a factor in the international arena. In an era when simplistic ‘clash-of-civilization’ theses are fashionable, Algeria’s Islamists do not strike a sympathetic chord with outsiders. This is especially the case in Europe, where a high degree of sentiment hostile to Maghribi and African immigrants has been evident for years (White, 1999). In part, the sentiment has been fuelled by acts of terrorism on European soil, for example, the bombing of the St. Michel metro station in Paris in the summer of 1995. International public opinion, therefore, provides powerful sustenance for the Algerian regime. Initially, the Clinton Administration was less critical of the FIS (Islamic Salvation Front), wary of an Islamic revolution à la Iran. If the FIS came to power, so went the reasoning, it would remember who had been on its wrong side. In recent years, however, the Clinton Administration has joined the European Union and recast its position to support more directly the eradicateurs (Mortimer, 1996; Zoubir, 1996; Henry, 1997).

The Nigerian opposition, by contrast, garnered much greater sympathy from audiences in advanced-industrialised countries. Moreover, since the controversy in the mid-1990s over the condition of the Ogoni peoples, and the condemnation that followed the 1995 execution of the prominent writer, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Nigeria’s oil politics has become somewhat of a cause célèbre. In the projects of environmental and human rights NGOs, Nigeria remains a central focus of policy activism. Presumably, the environmental impact of Algeria’s oil exploitation is as injurious as Nigeria’s, but environmental NGOs rarely, if ever, mention Algeria. This raises crucial issues about the activity of international actors, a subject to which we now turn.
V. International Actors & ‘Permanent Transition’

International actors largely failed to express concern about the Algerian and Nigerian military-backed regimes. TNCs and Northern governments were more than merely silent about the regimes. In fact, we argue, they have been implicated, recognizing the countries as sovereign and legitimate and providing them with crucial military, financial and trade support. In several instances, some criticism may be expressed – the European Parliament criticises Algeria on occasion, and the Commonwealth implemented some sanctions against Nigerian government in the aftermath of Saro-Wiwa’s execution. But even such tepid actions are the noteworthy exception.

Oil and gas companies, for their part, are certainly collusive. For example, firms work in exclusion zones in southern Algeria. Situated in armed compounds, the companies are isolated from the violence in the heavily populated north, especially in the area surrounding Algiers. Moreover, because of their geographic isolation, foreign firms cannot justify their actions as providing important jobs to a community or as being other forms of ‘community development’ (Khalaf and Corzine, 1998:4). In many instances, foreign companies employ security experts to collaborate with Algerian military officials, and companies have provided shelter and food for Algerian army units stationed around fields in Hassi Messaoud. Despite such security measures, however, some foreign crews are skittish and have balked until greater security is added. Nonetheless, the gas pipelines hold great promise for Europe: Algeria’s proved remaining reserves of liquid natural gas are greater than the reserves of Norway and Netherlands combined, and remaining reserves will be sufficient for 56 years (Petroleum Economist, 23 April 1998).

In Nigeria, SPDC operations, encompassing some 96 wells, produced more than 1 million barrels daily, or almost half of Nigeria’s exports in 1996 (Africa Today, May/June 1996). Regarding Shell’s possible complicity with Nigerian military rule, there is growing evidence of its role in supporting the Nigerian authorities. In June 1996, Shell lawyers admitted that the company had paid ‘field allowances’ to the Nigerian military, including access to Shell-owned helicopters and boats. In at least two separate occasions in 1993, military actions directly or indirectly sponsored by Shell resulted in Ogoni deaths, although Shell denies this (Kretzman, 1997:2). Moreover, Shell has acknowledged supporting military action in recent years, ‘admitting it purchased thousands of guns and millions of rounds of ammunition for its police contingent, known among the people as the ‘Shell Police’ (there are also the ‘Mobil Police’, etc.) (Davis, 1998). Amnesty International (1999) reports that other TNCs in Nigeria are also implicated.

Algeria and Nigeria’s continued dependency on the international community raises issues regarding state autonomy. Each state is dependent on the international community and other external actors, particularly the oil companies (Scott, 1992). The international demand for oil – and the political appeal of low fuel prices in advanced industrialised countries, especially the United States – keeps both countries attached to the international community and relatively sanctions free, despite well-documented atrocities committed by the regimes. Ties to the international realm, then, provide the resources and power to maintain greater autonomy from domestic society. States make tactical adjustments to the prevailing neo-liberal orthodoxy, adopting structural adjustment packages and market-friendly reforms. Such states can be quickly adaptive to liberal reforms in order to draw in (and implicate) external actors and secure local legitimacy.
In August 1998, the UN sent a team of high-level officials to visit Algeria, headed by Mário Soares, former President of Portugal. After an initial embargo on the release of the team's report because of sensitive security issues, it was finally released in September. Strikingly, the report blames the enormous violence in the country on Islamic extremists – not the regime – and supported the government’s effort to eradicate terrorism. Derided as a ‘whitewash’ by Amnesty International, the report downplayed human rights violations by the government and the shady role of government forces in civilian massacres (Crossette, 1998). Members of the team were not allowed to visit members of the FIS or to talk with its supporters. One has to wonder if the UN’s softness is, in part, because of the fear that its findings of state involvement would challenge international support for the military regime. The spring 2001 publication of Sale Guerre (Dirty War) – a memoir by former Algerian military special forces officer Habib Souaïdia that details the atrocities committed by the Algerian military against civilians in order to discredit the Islamists – has shaken Bouteflika’s government to its core, yet international actors are likely to remain silent. In its analysis of Liamine Zeroual’s decision to call for the election that resulted in Bouteflika’s victory in 1999, The Economist wrote:

So far international pressure on Algeria, a big oil and gas producer, has been minimal. The latest sign of this is the report, released this week, of the United Nations information-gathering mission. Its conclusion is that Algeria should strengthen democracy and generally do better on human rights, including ‘changing the mentality of the police, the army and the judiciary’, but that it should still benefit from international support in its fight against terrorism. This, it seems, spells out the current limits of the world’s desire to scrutinise Algeria (The Economist, 1998).

Nigeria has witnessed a similar dynamic: calls for democratization by international actors, but little action by those with power, namely Nigeria’s trading partners and TNCs. In the face of protests, for example, Shell repeatedly claimed that it lacked the power to influence Nigerian politics; moreover, it argued that engaging in politics is not the role of a TNC. At the interstate level, the Clinton Administration claimed in 1996 to be ‘seeking tougher sanctions to press Nigeria for democracy’ in the wake of Abacha’s atrocities and the Saro-Wiwa execution (Paul Lewis, 1996). In the end, however, the United States and its partners refrained from any but the most superficial measures (Davis, 1998).

Ultimately, the election of Bouteflika in Algeria and Obasanjo in Nigeria affords the international community the best of both worlds. Nigeria and Algeria have gained at least the façade of democracy, while maintaining leaders and a set of ruling elites that are both familiar to (and comfortable with) the TNC-friendly status quo. Thus, it is not surprising that American and European officials breathed a collective sigh of relief following the 1999 elections in both countries. The existence of democracy on the ground, however, remains of only rhetorical concern to many in the international community. ‘Permanent transition’, alas, forestalls democratic consolidation (Bratton and Van De Walle, 1997; Linz and Stepan, 1996; Young, 1999).

VI. Conclusion

We have sought to establish that the crucial ties between international actors – primarily oil firms, the EU, the US, and international financial institutions – with the Algerian and Nigerian regimes have resulted in the support of authoritarian political arrangements. Such arrangements are a ‘known quantity’ in the face of the political and economic uncertainties that inevitably accompany transitions. Outside actors are
unwilling to engage in more than the most cursory intervention because to do so would contravene the interests of international firms and contribute to higher fuel prices. Reluctance to act is facilitated by the pivotal norm of sovereignty, which allows the international community to demur from action because it would violate Algeria or Nigeria's sovereignty.

At the same time, contrary to the argument made by dependent development theorists, there have been few, if any, tangible benefits to national development by the oil TNCs; industrialization and job creation have been distorted and minimal, and a small, local class of industrialists has not flourished. The Algerian and Nigerian cases embody a retrogressive erosion of development. Thus, the destructive mixture of rentier capitalism – in which the state apparatus derives massive revenues from the export of an extraordinarily valuable commodity – and the need to satisfy the political and economic demands of respective constituencies suggested by prebendalism leads one to expect lasting economic decline. Although rentier or crony capitalism adequately describes the Algerian and Nigerian economic scenes, this label fails to capture the lack of democracy and the total disregard shown for fundamental democratic tenets by the Algerian and Nigerian military regimes.

We see several important factors, not all of them novel, that render the more established theoretical constructs insufficient. First, oil is fungible. Sanctions by one or a few countries cannot effectively reduce export markets. The recent emergence of the Sudan as an oil producer reinforces this point. In Sudan today, in the name of a purported interpretation of Islam, the northern-dominated state continues a brutally repressive war against people in the south that has claimed nearly two million lives, with nearly 4 million internally displaced refugees. Yet radical elements in the regime have been marginalised, and newly-exploited oil is being accessed by multinational oil companies. Sudanese oil came on line in significant quantities only since 1999. Coupled with the diminishment of the rhetoric of Islamic fundamentalism, the Sudan case suggests similar complacency by international state and corporate actors. Indeed, oil firms from polities as diverse as Canada, Malaysia, China and Sweden have already begun to invest heavily in Sudan's oil sector, despite the atrocities committed by the regime.

Second, the United States was unwilling to take forceful action to support democracy in Algeria and Nigeria, despite its position as a hegemon in the unipolar, post-Cold War era. Arguments have been advanced that US activism in Algeria is warranted because of national interest, namely European stability in the face of immigration pressure and political Islam (Pierre and Quandt, 1996). Little has happened, however, with regard to Algeria. The reintroduction of electoral process in Nigeria, furthermore, is the result of the serendipitous death of General Abacha in 1999, which occurred amidst ambiguous, and often-contradictory statements by US officials (Smyth, 1998).

Third, there is a paucity of constituencies or coalitions to pressure the United States or Europe to implement meaningful sanctions against even the most repressive African regimes. (apartheid South Africa was a notable exception). Oppression and human rights violations in Nigeria raised considerable protest, but it was unable to manifest itself in forceful terms for policy change. As far as Algeria is concerned, the image of 'Islamic fundamentalists' in power hardly evokes sympathy in Europe or North America and, as we have argued, may even contribute to public support for the military regime.
Two additional issues that require greater examination in future research merit mention here. First, one must consider the possibility that domestic conflict in African countries may itself serve the interests of TNCs and the West. A society divided against itself, living amidst a steady level of ‘ordered chaos’ and civil war, cannot unite to exert pressures against TNC operations. Such instability, in turn, provides the justification for ongoing support for a military regime by external actors. Here the parallel to ‘conflict diamonds’ may be worthy of exploration – as many have noted that the extraction and value of diamonds is facilitated and enhanced in war-torn societies in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Conakry.

Second, public and media relations efforts on the part of TNCs warrant analysis. Firms devote a great deal of energy to anticipating and responding to criticism of their support of the regimes. Websites offer carefully crafted language about the role of the TNC in the local economy. For example, Shell’s website is worth quoting at length:

> Whether Shell can ‘force’ the government to improve its human rights record is another matter. What ‘force’ could it apply – leaving aside the question of whether it would be right to do so? Some have argued that Shell should threaten to pull out of Nigeria – perhaps thinking that this would halt the country’s oil production and bring it to its knees. But SPDC cannot pull out the reservoirs and the oil production facilities. Nor can it withdraw its 5,000 staff, apart from some 270 expatriates. More to the point, it cannot force those Nigerian staff left behind to shut down oil production. The result would be that oil would continue to flow at present levels for some time to come (http://www.shellnigeria.com).

Such a statement illustrates Shell’s unwillingness to engage the issues raised by its activity within the Nigerian economy and the ongoing rationalization of its presence in a ‘well-oiled regime.’

Finally, international actors often seem to rationalise that ‘the devil you know’ is preferred to the devil you don’t. Western states and TNCs rationalise support for authoritarian regimes because of the fear that populist successors to either the Algerian FLN or the military rulers in Nigeria would be far less accommodating to western economic interests. Nigeria’s Obasanjo, himself a product of the military, is a familiar character to western interests. However, the fear of an anti-western successor regime remains particularly strong in Algeria where the military’s opposition is a radical Islamist alternative – represented by the FIS.

Lamenting the impact of oil on Venezuelan political economy, OPEC’s founder, Juan Pablo Pérez Alfonso, famously referred to oil as the ‘devil’s excrement’ and concluded: ‘We are drowning in the devil’s excrement’ (quoted in Karl, 1997:4). The preference for ‘the devil you know,’ therefore, seems strangely suitable. It is an argument that facilitates the extraction of billions of barrels of oil, yet leaves large populations drowning in authoritarian regimes.

Gregory White, Department of Government, Smith College, Northampton, MA; Scott Taylor, African Studies Program, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, Washington, DC.
Endnotes

1. Despite Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo's move against many members of the military establishment who were part of the previous regime—principally through forced retirements—a leading view holds that 'the military will remain a prominent factor in the future of Nigeria' (Ihonvbere, 1999:60; Peter Lewis, 1999). Indeed, Obasanjo's backing by members of the military raises numerous questions, as yet unanswered, about his independence as well as his flexibility.

2. Here we refer to intervention not in a military sense, per se, but as 'a coercive tactic used to manipulate a country into taking a certain path that would not otherwise be chosen' (von Hippel: 67-68). Therefore, such intervention, in our view, would include sanctions, diplomatic pressure and other coercive means.

3. For example, both leaders have been active partners within the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and both were highly visible, along with South African president Thabo Mbeki, at the World Business Forum in Davos, Switzerland in January 2001. Bouteflika brokered a cease-fire and agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia, while Obasanjo has been involved in negotiations with pharmaceutical companies to provide relief to Africa's AIDS crisis.

4. Algeria's instability and its proximity to Europe is certainly a concern to European officials, but it is an instability that can be contained. Algeria's military regime has historically received close support from Europe.


7. The Maghreb is Arabic for the North African countries of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. Increasingly, it has come to include Mauritania and Libya.


9. Websites of leading environmental organizations often have a section devoted to Nigeria, while Algeria is invariably missing.

10. One possible factor is the activity of Anglo-American companies in Nigeria—Royal Dutch Shell, Chevron, BP, etc.—in contrast to the European countries active in Algeria's fields. Perhaps US-centred NGOs focus more on Nigeria.


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Inside the EPLF: The Origins of the ‘People’s Party’ & its Role in the Liberation of Eritrea

Dan Connell

At the third congress of the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front in February 1994, delegates voted to transform the 95,000-person organisation into a mass political movement, the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). The congress gave the PFDJ a transitional mandate to draw the general population into the political process and to prepare the country for constitutional democracy over the next four years. Near the close of the three-day conference, Isaias Afwerki, the country’s acting president, surprised many of those present with an announcement that a clandestine marxist political party had guided the Front for almost 20 years and that it had been disbanded in 1989, shortly before the end of the independence war. Since then, however, there has been little public discussion of the historical role of the party or its legacy. Drawing on interviews with key participants, this paper explores the origins of what was known as the Eritrean People’s Revolutionary Party and its impact on the liberation struggle during the nearly two decades of its clandestine existence. Questions I address include: How, why and by whom was the party formed? How did it function in relation to the Front as a whole? How did this change from the 1970s to the 1980s? And why was the decision taken to disband the party in 1989? Still to be examined is the party’s legacy in the post-liberation era and how its political culture and mode of operation shapes the contemporary political landscape.

Introduction

During the first decade of its existence, in the 1970s, the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) developed a reputation at home and abroad as a highly disciplined political movement whose members consistently – sometimes eerily so – articulated its outlook, promoted its programmes and modelled its values. One of the key features that differentiated the EPLF as a national liberation movement was its commitment to simultaneous social and political struggle and the incorporation of this approach into its political culture as well as its practice. It was this aspect that made it a revolutionary nationalist movement, as it worked to transform the society it fought to liberate.

The EPLF accomplished extraordinary things with meagre resources. Despite the continuing absence of sustained external support, the Front steadily improved its military capacity, while simultaneously building basic infrastructure (construction, transportation, communications), promoting economic development (agriculture,
animal husbandry, commerce and trade), delivering social services (education, health, emergency relief), and campaigning to alter fundamental power relations within rural society (land reform, marriage reform, restructuring of village administration). A dynamism was evident that was easy to appreciate but difficult to explain. Visiting journalists often described the EPLF as a ‘well-oiled machine’, marvelling at its accomplishments while at the same time signalling their unease over the refusal of the Front’s members to acknowledge weaknesses or faults.

The quality of organisation and the high level of consciousness among its members were among the Front’s most distinguishing features. But so, too, was its opacity. How could a steadily expanding guerrilla army with so little outside support function so well and have such a high degree of consensus within it? The answer was not immediately apparent, but it was obvious that leadership was central. As is now clear, it was not only who led the Front but how they did so that explained their effectiveness in action and their unusual degree of political and organisational unity – how the leadership was able to make use of collective strengths, to identify and correct deficiencies, and to steadily replenish and expand its ranks. It was the existence of a highly disciplined, secret party within the Front that accounted for much of this.

For nearly all of its existence, the EPLF was guided by a clandestine marxist party – the Eritrean People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP, usually known simply as the ‘People’s Party’) – that gave it vision, programme and direction while moulding its members to reflect its goals and objectives and to spread its message. Despite the secrecy surrounding the party, its impact was readily apparent in all that the Front did. A grasp of its origins is central to appreciating the role it played in building the EPLF and in liberating Eritrea, as well as in shaping the political culture that continues to define the country’s post-independence political landscape.1

The Origins of the Party

The seeds for the People’s Party were planted in the perilous political environment of the 1960s, when the only armed nationalist force in Eritrea was the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), whose politically conservative leaders, based outside the country, were anxious to end Ethiopian rule but not to see Eritrean society changed. On the contrary, they had powerful vested interests in preventing initiatives in that direction, and they acted ruthlessly to suppress them. Yet they were also divided amongst themselves and deeply distrustful of one another. This created spaces for various opposition currents to arise and grow in the field.

At that time, to voice support for a secular nationalist perspective within the front, let alone a left political agenda, could put one at risk of isolation, imprisonment or even death, so much of this evolved quietly, in one-on-one encounters among the liberation fighters. Radical ideas were swirling around the liberation movement at that time, and activists from a wide array of political trends were joining it. However, most did so with little grasp of the movement they were entering or the dangers they would soon face because of their outlook, or simply because of their ethnic or religious origin.

Some of the ELF’s first foot-soldiers came out of the Sudan Communist Party. Others joined after studying in the Middle East where they were exposed to left parties and Arab nationalist movements and ideas. Among them was Romedan Mohammed Nur, a student from the coastal lowlands who joined the ELF in 1963 while studying in
Cairo and was immediately sent to Syria for military and political training. Romedan was one of the early ELF recruits who would go on to play a key role in the formation of the People’s Party and the EPLF.

By the middle of the decade, other recruits began to come from the mostly Christian, Tigrinya-speaking highlands as well. This in itself posed a problem for the highly factionalised ELF, then dominated by warlords from the mostly Muslim western lowlands and eastern coastal areas, whose personal ambitions overshadowed any semblance of nationalism.

Many of the newcomers brought an eclectic agenda for social and political change drawn from marxist ‘classics’ and popular accounts of other liberation struggles then circulating on the campuses – an agenda at odds with the disheartening reality they found in the field. Fighters sent outside for training – to Syria, to Cuba, eventually to China – also brought back ideas and experiences that clashed with the situation in rebel-held Eritrea and the backward thinking of the ELF’s leadership. One of the student radicals from the highlands to join the ELF in 1966 was Isaias Afwerki, the country’s current president and another People’s Party founder. He told me later that he was stunned at what he found when he arrived at the ELF’s offices in Kassala, Sudan that September:

> In those days it was something like an obligation to join the movement for national liberation. Emotionally and sentimentally, everyone was with the ELF.

> But when I joined the armed struggle in 1966 with many of my friends, we began to know the real ELF. The first day I arrived in Kassala [Sudan], I was frustrated, people telling me about the ugly nature of the ELF. It was a nightmare. For some reason that no one explained, we were ostracized. There was an atmosphere of terror where you had to go out in groups, especially at dusk. There were no instructions, there was no organization, but if you asked questions, you were labeled as an agent of the Ethiopians. Not only highlanders – everyone who joined the ELF found himself in this situation.

> The shocking thing was that during high school, you never knew who was from what tribe, from what region, because there was not a hint of that kind of thing. But in the ELF everything was based on your clan or tribe. This created the ground for a new outlook, a reformist trend. Anyone who got there with high nationalistic feeling would be in the camp against the ELF leadership. It was not a battle of ideas or ideals – it was a question of whether there was nationalism or not. You would never talk about ‘Eritrea’ inside the ELF; always it was tribes or clans or religious affiliations that mattered. Revolutionary ideals had to be injected into the ELF to make it a real nationalist movement.

Isaias had been a member of a secret nationalist organisation in secondary school in Asmara. He and others of this group went on to university in Addis Ababa where they expanded the organisation and developed contacts with Ethiopian revolutionaries. Once in Kassala, Isaias wrote to his comrades to alert them to what he found there, but the letter didn’t reach the others. That December Haile Wold’ensai, another leader of the Addis Ababa student organisation, joined Isaias in Kassala, where he heard the bad news first-hand:

> When I opened the gate, he told me to shut my mouth, make no comments, no proposals. He would tell me everything when we could talk separately. I couldn’t imagine what was going on.
He took me to a restaurant to talk. The first thing he told me was that the situation was a complete mess. There was no national leadership, no national program. To raise questions about this was to risk everything.

The idea of having a clandestine organization within the ELF was the order of the day from the very beginning. It was a very dark moment for us, but we knew there was no other way, that we had to commit ourselves to be dedicated no matter what the cost, that we even had to differentiate between those nationalists who could be committed to a long-term strategy and those who were only emotional.

This was a very dangerous endeavor. In the beginning there were three: Isaias, myself and Mussie [Tesfamikael]. We took an oath to rebuild a genuine national movement, and we signed it with our blood. 3

Each man carved an ‘E’ into his upper arm to signify his commitment. The scars are still visible today.

At the time they made this pledge, the ELF was organised into autonomous geographical (and also ethnic or clan-based) divisions, drawing on the experience of the Algerian liberation movement. However, by structuring the front this way, ELF leaders were able to carve up Eritrea into personal domains allied to one another but not functioning as a coordinated national army (or political movement). ‘None of these people ever talked about Eritrea’, said Haile. ‘Everyone wanted to have his own fiefdom. We called them the “generalismos”’. 4

At first, there were four such divisions, ringing the centre of the territory. Each one had its dissidents, though it was difficult and dangerous for them to maintain contact with one another. In 1965, as more and more highlanders sought to join the ELF, a fifth division was formed in the Hamasien highlands. The ELF took this step both to mobilise manpower and resources there and to balance a power struggle taking place within the front’s Revolutionary Council (RC).

From the outset, the form, structure and leadership of the 5th Division was contested. A highly respected Christian serving in the Sudan army, Tsegai Gebremedhin, was selected to head it, but he soon fled after one of the ELF-RC leaders, Idris Ghalaudios, circulated rumours that Tsegai was a target for assassination. ‘At that time, no Christian had any guarantee of safety’, said Haile. ‘We were not even taking any malaria pills for fear we would be poisoned. In battles, we were mainly guarding ourselves against bullets that came from behind.’

Meanwhile, a growing Chinese interest in the Eritrean struggle introduced a new element to the volatile political mix. ELF leaders had approached China for support, but the Chinese had reservations over the front’s weak leadership. When they agreed in 1966 to provide the ELF arms, they conditioned it on a promise to send the political commissars from the front’s five divisions to China for special training. Among them were Isaias, chosen to represent the new 5th Division in the highlands, and Romedan, representing the 4th Division from the coastal lowlands. As Haile recollects it:

The Chinese said there would be no arms, no money, before they trained these people. Isaias was chosen partly to get him out before [the ELF leadership] eliminated him. I went to the new 5th Division to be a link with our clandestine organizations in Eritrea and Ethiopia. The third one of us [Mussie] was to stay in Kassala, where he had started a magazine, ‘The Renaissance of the Youth’, and be a link there.
Throughout the next year, tensions built within Eritrea over control of the 5th Division, its mission, even its size and operational objectives. ELF leaders also acted to isolate and punish dissidents in all five divisions. According to Haile, this harrowed the ground for the political lessons Isaias and Romedan were learning in China:

This was why there came a need for a clandestine organization that had to go beyond a national program. We needed an ideal that could match or challenge all these problems — not just the corruption of the ELF leadership but the narrow nationalisms that dominated the movement. We needed an ideal to use as a tool to fight all these things, and we needed a revolutionary party to wage this struggle. This reality created an incentive for an outlook to deliver a solution to all these problems.

The Chinese idea from the beginning was to give us this ideal through their training, but only two of the ones who went — Isaias and Romedan, who met each other there — looked at the Chinese experience to see how Eritrea could benefit from it. For them, it was enlightening to see that the Chinese revolution had gone through a lot of problems, some of them similar to ours.

At a minimum, this was a stimulant. At best, the Chinese experience offered us some possible solutions. This is when they decided on their own to have this ‘inside’ organization. But the other three [ELF commissars in China] were totally alienated. They only saw the trip as a vehicle to get arms.

Along with their military training, Romedan and Isaias got lessons in party-formation, as their Chinese teachers insisted that no revolution could succeed without a party to lead it. The two began to discuss the problems in the ELF with their lecturers, according to Haile, who said that this polarized the delegation as the other three accused them of working against the ELF: ‘When they took their meals together, these three would take their knives and make threatening gestures, saying, “This is what will happen to you when you get back.”’

ELF leaders knew some of the trainees would come back ideologically charged — this was the height of the Cultural Revolution in China — so they were wary of the group to begin with. One of them, Idris Ghalaudios, was also worried that RC rival Osman Sabbe, who had set up the trip, was conspiring to reap the benefits of the arms that would flow from the arrangement, so he travelled to Beijing to meet the students and establish his own links with the Chinese. When he arrived, the three conservative trainees told him of Isaias’s and Romedan’s growing radicalism. His response was to assure the Chinese that the five students would be their disciples and radicalize the whole of the Horn of Africa with their teachings. ‘He told them that they would be the ones to form a party and spread the Red Book, and the Chinese believed this,’ said Haile.

Idris left China at this point, but there was little doubt that a confrontation was in the offing. When the five students finished their training and flew to Damascus, Idris was waiting. On their arrival, he told them the whole thing had been a trick — there would be no Red Books in Eritrea, no party, no new ideals, only a chance to get arms and money. He also insisted they turn over their political texts and study materials to him for safe keeping, as they were to fly through Saudi Arabia on their way to Sudan, and carrying such documents could be dangerous. They never saw their materials again.

When the group returned home, the ELF was imploding. The 5th Division had disintegrated into political infighting. Many people suspected of disloyalty to the ELF
leadership had already been killed. At the same time, Ethiopia had begun a series of devastating military offensives that threw the entire front into disarray. The result, said Haile (who was in Sudan most of this time), was chaos:

Many villages were burned, and many people became refugees, but when one division was attacked, the others relaxed. There was no coordination. ELF units were going from village to village to get food, but then they fled, leaving the people to pay the price. Women were giving food to the fighters even when their children were hungry. At last, some of them started to protest, saying the fighters escaped when the enemy came without even helping them to escape, too. People began to withhold food. Many also went to Sudan where they saw what the leadership was doing while they suffered. This discredited the ELF and the model of the five divisions, and it helped the nationalists in each division to organise opposition to it and to the division between the field and the outside leadership.

This opposition coalesced around three issues: unifying the fighters, bringing the leadership inside, and guaranteeing the human rights of the civilian population, whose only role to that point was collecting money and supplying food to the fighters. ‘These three slogans were the mobilising tools for a rectification movement’, said Haile, who fled to Kassala as the Front descended into an orgy of political repression and violence. And this was when Romedan and Isaias returned. The turmoil in the field helped them to survive despite plans by the leadership to eliminate them. But it also disrupted efforts to consolidate the clandestine nationalist opposition into an organised party. ‘The idea of forming a party was short-circuited’, said Haile. ‘There was no breathing space for it then, so from 1968 to 1971 we worked on a mass basis.’

Two left trends – guided by distinct political lines – began to emerge within the nationalist opposition then. One, fiercely nationalist but with maoist overlays, would form the basis for the Eritrean People’s Revolutionary Party in the early 1970s and, through it, the EPLF. The other, a more conventionally pro-Soviet grouping, would crystallize as the Eritrean Labor Party and take nominal control of the ELF after the RC disintegrated. But before this happened, there was a fierce battle for control of the liberation movement and the resources it commanded, followed by a lengthy process of political struggle within and among the breakaway factions.

In 1968, representatives of the 3rd, 4th and 5th ELF Divisions met in the field to select a twelve-man provisional leadership for what they called the United Force. The group included radical nationalists and individuals who went along simply because they had problems with the old leadership. This uneven political mix carried within it the seeds of future discord. ‘It was a mistake to include reactionaries in this group’, said Haile.

They became a Trojan Horse to make more intrigues later. Still, when the enemy tried an offensive to take advantage of the situation, the United Force succeeded in defending territory for the first time. This sent a big signal to the people and to the other divisions, and it threatened the old leaders.

With fighters fleeing the other two divisions in droves and the United Force organizing and politicizing both their members and civilians in the regions where they operated, the beleaguered ELF-RC, led by Idris Ghalaudios, made a final bid to control of the movement. At a hastily convened conference at Adobha in 1969, Idris called for ‘unity’ while mobilising his supporters and allies to purge the radical nationalists. As Haile tells it:
They dominated the conference and immediately began to imprison and kill the democratic forces. Before we could organise ourselves to resist, we had to escape. I went to the Ala Valley. Others went to Sudan, so there was no way to coordinate the establishment of an alternative. The situation was even worse than before, and it was very difficult to have confidence in anyone.

Three groups broke off from the ELF at this point. Romedan went to Aden with a group led by Mohammed Ali Umero (now Eritrea’s ambassador to Kenya). In the months they remained there, the fighters were exposed to numerous left and Arab nationalist political movements and governments, as South Yemen was then a haven for radical ideas and organisations. During this time, members of this group began to discuss the need to form a party to reform the liberation movement. Among those in these exchanges – which did not lead to conclusive action – were Umero, Romedan, and Mahmoud Sherifo (the Minister of Local Government in post-liberation Eritrea, often characterised as the second-most important position in the new state). This group sailed to the Dahlak Islands in small wooden dhows from where they made their way to the Eritrean mainland.

A second group, under Isaias, took refuge in the highlands in the Ala valley, south of Asmara; a third remained in Sudan. The Aden group took the name People’s Liberation Forces (PLF). The second one, in Ala, became known as the PLF 2. The third, nicknamed the Obel group, was called the Eritrean Liberation Forces. Together, they would evolve into a coalition they were to name the Eritrean People’s Liberation Forces. Once consolidated at an organisational congress in 1977, this was adjusted to the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front. But it took them a while – and a lot of struggle – to get there.

The Launch of the Party

The initial step in launching the party was taken at a clandestine gathering in the scorched desert of Eritrea’s Dankalia region in 1971, when revolutionary activists from the PLF1 and the PLF2 met for the first time since the fracturing of the ELF.

On 4 April 1971, like-minded revolutionaries from the two PLF groups established a secret political formation to rebuild the national movement on a more unified and a more radical social and political basis. Among those at this meeting were Isaias, Abu Bakr Mohammed Hassan, Umero, Ibrahim Afa, Mesfin Hagos, Ali Sayid Abdulla, Mahmoud Sherifo, Hassan Mohammed Amir, Ahmed Taha Baduri, Ahmed al-Keisi and a handful of others. According to Sherifo:

> We met there and discussed the need to form a core among us before uniting the new forces, to campaign on the basis of nationalism and progressive ideas, and to rid the others of the prejudices and grudges of the past … We decided to work in a very secretive manner. Marxism would be our leading ideology, and we would call ourselves the Eritrean People’s Revolutionary Party.

Haile Wold’ensae (then in an Ethiopian prison) and several others who were not present at this first meeting – Romedan and Alamin Mohammed Said, among the most prominent – were also among the party’s charter members. Most of them would figure in the EPLF’s top leadership throughout the liberation struggle and in the post-independence state, with the exceptions of Ibrahim Afa, Abu Bakr Mohammed Hassan and Hassan Mohammed Amir, all killed in the war with Ethiopia.
Much of the early work of the People's Party was aimed at moulding the EPLF into a coherent political and social force – one that could model revolutionary behaviour as well as promote new values and that could develop a national identity capable of subsuming the sectarian divisions that had undercut the liberation movement until then. 'The main achievement of the party was national unity', said Haile.

*It brought youngsters from the different Eritrean ethnic groups to work together in the most difficult conditions of survival, and it gave them an ideal that provided some light at the end of a very dark tunnel.*

*Even now we can say that the party made miracles. It made people commit themselves. It made each and every individual think of himself as part of the whole organization and even in the most difficult situation not to lose his bearing. Each individual fighter was facing challenges without looking backwards – and addressing the basic issues of the society in order to transform them. One of its main strengths from the beginning was to address the woman issue.*

Nevertheless, the party barely functioned as a distinct political force during the first years of its existence, as the emerging front fought to survive against attacks from both the ELF and Ethiopia while consolidating its own organisational and political structure. One of the factors that pushed party-formation to the top of the political agenda was an eruption of political infighting in 1973, initially identified with a 'leftist' group known as *menaq* (Tigrinya for 'bats', referring to those who fly about at night) just as the front was preparing to move into the densely populated highlands.

The stage was set when the two PLFs, which were in the process of integrating their respective forces, shifted their bases to the Sahel in 1972. They did this in order to give themselves the security to work out their political differences while maintaining their logistical links with South Yemen, from where all their arms and supplies came. Once the first two groups relocated, the Obel group, whose politics were more eclectic and whose links with the other two less organic, joined them. The plan was to politicise the rank-and-file of the three former ELF forces to develop a basis for unity-from-below through a congress to be convened once the main differences were worked through. But pressures from both the left and the right threatened to abort the project.

Haile Menkerios worked in the information and propaganda department of the joint forces at the time these events took place, though he was not yet a member of the secret party-building group. He recalls this period as one of increasing political tensions from both ends of the political spectrum. A leftist faction within the Ala group associated with Mussie Tesfamichael became frustrated with the slow pace of political development and pushed for a rapid transformation of these groups into a revolutionary political formation, challenging Isaias's leadership in the process. As word of these developments reached Osman Saleh Sabbe – the rightist former ELF/RC member who was then representing himself in Yemen as the head of the new liberation forces (which he called the ELF-PLF) and securing arms and supplies for them – he began to mobilise his loyalists to oppose what he correctly perceived as a threat to his increasingly tenuous position by the direction the movement in the field was taking. This placed the revolutionaries grouped in the new People's Party in a squeeze from both political flanks.

Their response was to pre-empt their attackers in the summer of 1973 by hurriedly combining the leaderships of the PLF1 and the PLF2 under Isaias's command. The Obel group, where Sabbe's influence was strongest, pulled out of Sahel and shifted its
base of operations to Adobha and Barka to avoid participating in this process. Once there, however, it was hammered by the ELF, whose main strength was in this region, and most of the group’s fighters fled into Sudan.¹¹

Meanwhile, weeks after the merger of the two PLFs, the menka faction, whose leaders were marginalised in the command of the newly combined forces, stepped up its opposition to the unified PLF leadership. This apparently galvanised Sabbe loyalists and others on the right flank into action. In the ensuing political struggle, which paralysed the movement, a number of fighters were arrested. Some, including Mussie and five or six others, were executed. Others in the ‘leftist’ faction were brought back into the fold through an extended process of criticism/self-criticism. Several others, identified with the rightist faction, were executed later. Whatever the details, the experience reinforced the leadership’s conviction that greater political cohesion and more centralised organisational control were needed if the Front was to advance its liberation agenda. Building the party was to be the vehicle for this.

Haile Menkerios, who joined the party in 1975 but was never a member of its leadership, points to these events as the seminal experience that gave the People’s Party its prominent role in the formation and development of the larger liberation movement. ‘This party did not form to deal with external issues’, he told me. ‘The need for the party arose from this internal disunity. We were all saying that there was no guarantee of the continuation of our revolutionary outlook unless we formed a revolutionary organisation’; Haile was invited to. Others, like Sherifo, downplay the incident, insisting that it retains significance largely because of the executions that took place afterward. However, few dispute that this period was a turning point for the EPLF and for the party that was to lead it.

The Politics of the People’s Party

During the organisation’s early years, Isaias was the leader of both the party and the liberation front. Romedan was the second in command of both. Another half-dozen or so individuals made up the collective party/front leadership-mainly those I have already named. (Throughout most of the EPLF’s existence, its Politburo was composed of the party’s smaller central committee.) When the armed struggle entered a new, expanded phase in 1975, and the PLF began to grow rapidly, they met in Bahri and decided there should be a distinct party leadership outside the front leadership. At that point, Haile Wold’ensae (recently released from an Ethiopian prison) and Alamin were charged with organisational and political party development – preparing manuals for political education, drafting a party programme, drafting a party constitution, developing a group of highly conscious cadres and so on.

In 1976, with some 150 active members, the party held its first clandestine congress in the slopes north of Asmara, near the small village of Merara. There, they committed the organisation to a socialist political programme for the long-term future and a national democratic agenda for the liberation of the country now. Delegates elected a central committee with Isaias and Romedan as the Secretary General and Assistant Secretary General, respectively. Haile Wold’ensae and Alamin were confirmed in their political roles, and Haile was tasked with setting up an ideological department and a cadre school.

Nearly a year later, in January 1977, the EPLF held its first organisational congress, adopting a National Democratic Program drafted by party members and circulated
among fighters and civilian members before its acceptance. The party also drew up a leadership slate that was accepted more or less as presented. Henceforth, the Front would be led by a 13-member political bureau selected from within a 37-member central committee that was chosen at the congress. Romedan was to be the EPLF’s general secretary, Isaias the vice general secretary. Haile Wold’ensae would head the front’s political department and Alamin would run its foreign relations department.

By this point, the EPLF functioned as a disciplined political organisation whose members shared a common outlook and acted as political emissaries in their interaction with civilians and rival factions. It was separated into military and non-military wings. The Eritrean People’s Liberation Army (EPLA) was organised, US-style, in tiers of three units each, starting at the squad level and up to 500-person battalions. For example, three squads comprised one platoon, three platoons one company, and so on. However, the command structure drew on socialist models, with a three-person leadership composed of a military commander, a political commissar and a vice commander, and no other forms of rank within frontline units. Decisions were made collectively by the three leaders, but once in battle the military commander had undisputed authority.

The notion that each fighter had to model the EPLF’s politics was embedded in the structure of the organisation, which set out to re-mould its members in order to transform the society at large. This started in training camp, which lasted six full months for most new recruits, and it continued within the front as members met three times weekly for political education led by cadres within their units. The content of these sessions varied according to issues of the day, but in the mid-1970s, as the EPLF went through a major growth spurt, the main thread followed a curriculum produced in the field that started with a reprise of Eritrean history and proceeded to a highly sophisticated analysis of the revolution’s goals and objectives. Marxism was the methodology.

The political education for fighters and civilians alike followed a formal curriculum contained in a book produced under party direction in 1975 titled *General Political Education for Fighters*. Each chapter provided a focus for discussions. The topics ranged from the origins of Eritrea and an analysis of its cultural and class composition to reflections on the revolution and its goals, the identification of Eritrea’s friends (workers and oppressed peoples of the world, all progressive forces, the socialist countries) and enemies (Ethiopian colonialism, imperialism, Zionism, internal reaction), the tactics of the revolution, the handling of contradictions and the political economy of ancient and modern societies.

The last chapter concluded: ‘If you fight against imperialism as a united people, organised and led by the workers, you step toward socialism.’ On the back cover was inscribed the slogan: ‘An army without a revolutionary ideology is like a man without a brain. An army without a brain can never defeat the enemy.’

The EPLF cadre school, through which many party members were recruited, took up more advanced study of marxist methodology and politics. Topics included dialectical and historical materialism, common political deviations and the nature of ‘revisionism’. The People’s Party also ran its own intensive cadre school.

Despite its clandestine nature, Estifanos ‘Bruno’ Afeworki, a veteran of the party from the early 1970s but not in its leadership, says that it functioned for most of its existence as an effective vehicle for collective, action-oriented leadership:
The People's Party was a very democratic and egalitarian party [he said] – a platform where EPLF cadres could openly discuss any issue – military, political, social – any issue that surfaced in that period. We drew up short- and long-term programs: the NDP for the EPLF, socialist transformation for the EPRP. The party tried to transform the EPLF society itself, while the front was liberating Eritrea and its people, step by step. That was the key that enabled the EPLF to succeed. The party was very strict about the role of the army and its relations with the population, for example. You were demoted immediately if you did anything wrong to the people.

The party also had its own structures – a cadre school, a politburo, a central committee, even regional administrations – just they were smaller than those of EPLF. We had members in Asmara – in the factories and among the intellectuals – among the peasants in the villages outside Asmara, in the refugee camps in Sudan, in Europe and the USA. No one had a special office for the party, everyone was immersed in the EPLF structure, not like today when we have professional politicians – people who are only doing politics. In fact, a politburo member might also be a brigade leader.13

The EPLF’s most decisive interventions came in the areas of land reform, village democratisation and gender equality. Organisers surveyed land tenure in rural Eritrea – which varied widely from one region to another – and set about reorganizing it on a more egalitarian basis through newly elected village administrations. The EPLF midwifed these committees into existence through a system of sectoral representation based on new mass organisations of peasants, women, workers and youth, themselves segmented by class position. Each sub-set selected its own representative, producing a People’s Assembly of mostly poor women and men of all ages. Though this formulaic approach was modified as the years wore on, it signalled a commitment to empower the disenfranchised majority through entirely new social and political mechanisms. Party cadres were instrumental in carrying this out, while the process itself served as a recruiting ground for new party members.

Village elections were held as often as every three-to-four months as people learned to evaluate the performance of their new officials and to oust those who didn’t measure up. Quotas were set for women’s representation in the new assemblies, and marriage laws were reformed to free women from arrangements that in many cases kept them in life-long bondage. These and other such measures antagonised some conservatives, but they were accompanied by the provision of social and economic services – health care, early childhood education, adult literacy, agricultural extension, veterinary assistance and so on – that were often channelled through the new associations and committees rather than directly administered by the front. This helped to stop the grumbling by those whose prerogatives were curtailed. By arguing that women’s full participation in the independence struggle was essential for the country’s liberation, the front also tried to make it unpatriotic to contest women’s increased prominence in social and political affairs. Most of this was party-driven.

The Convergence of Party & Front

In 1977, the Ethiopian army was collapsing and the liberation of the country appeared in sight; however, the national movement remained deeply divided. Political unity was a heated topic in the EPLF and the ELF and throughout the society, but the two fronts made little progress toward it. Negotiations were carried out on a party-to-party basis with no lasting results. Several attempts to cooperate on the frontlines, including joint assaults on government positions, failed badly and led to sharp
recriminations, mostly aimed at the ELF, whose command structures were weak and whose fighters lacked the discipline under fire of their EPLF counterparts.

Unity talks, carried out sporadically through the late 1970s, never got beyond the formal stage as both fronts – and the parties operating within them – held out for approaches that played to their respective strengths. The EPLF favoured a gradual process of coordination and dialogue at all levels in order to build a united front from below. The ELF called instead for an agreement to combine the two forces through a one-time, movement-wide congress in which each front would be represented according to the size of its membership. These positions reflected obvious organisational self-interest, as the EPLF, with its highly politicised membership, would have an advantage over the ELF in an extended political encounter, while the ELF, with its larger numbers, might have an edge in an abbreviated contest where size alone determined power. This divergence was consistent with each organisation's way of dealing with political matters. It was never resolved.

Meanwhile, the 1978 strategic retreat triggered a gradual rethinking of the party's and the EPLF's general strategy and tactics and a modification of their approaches to social transformation. There were no sudden ruptures, but there was an acceleration of the trend toward the 'Eritreanization' of the movement on the organisational, political and ideological levels. Not only the direct involvement of the Soviet Union but also the behaviour of the rest of the world, socialist or otherwise, encouraged the movement to believe that when the chips were down, there was no one to trust but the Eritreans themselves.

Political education remained a constant feature of life in EPLF areas, though it gradually altered in form, substance and frequency. It took place in small meetings, through intensive courses of study, and in large public seminars. It could involve military units, sectoral groups or whole villages. Its aims were to discredit the enemy, to build commitment to the EPLF, to transmit specific lessons on the meaning and method of political struggle, or simply to increase morale and self-confidence. After the retreat, this process opened up to include more dialogue and more exploration of topical issues. Organisers were advised that meetings should be short and 'untiring' and that they should be scheduled in consultation with the participants to ensure active involvement. Sessions ranged from the difference between Ethiopian-sponsored kebeles and EPLF-supported peoples' assemblies to interpretations of Middle East politics, discussions of the meaning of democracy and disquisitions on women's right to sexual satisfaction in marriage.

To support the intensified political work, the EPLF reopened its cadre school – run by the party – and trained over 400 new organisers from 1979-82 (compared to 266 in 1975). Meanwhile, basic education continued in civilian society and within the military. Adult literacy was a major focus of the mass organisations, and frontline combat units routinely met behind their trenches to study language, mathematics, geography and other primary subjects, as I witnessed in 1979 during a two-week trek on foot from Nakfa to the highlands outside Asmara. Each unit also had its own cultural troupe, which regularly performed the songs and dances of all Eritrea's ethnic groups for the fighters and for villages where they were stationed.

But disunity in the field continued to plague the movement. EPLF attempts to revive the unity talks with ELF near the close of the decade were unsuccessful. By 1980, tensions were at a peak, and the number of armed clashes between the two fronts steadily increased, even as the EPLF prepared for another round of fighting with
Ethiopia. (ELF forces were no longer on the frontlines.) In the spring of 1981, renewed civil war broke out, and the EPLF drove the ELF out of the country altogether. Remnants of the defeated front took refuge in Sudan, some to eventually reconcile with EPLF and rejoin the war with Ethiopia, others to remain in opposition and to attack the postwar EPLF government in the 1990s. Many ELF members simply scattered into the diaspora, as had happened in 1970 during the front’s first big split.

Though the ELF’s collapse allowed the EPLF to turn its full might against Ethiopia for the first time, it also put enormous pressure on the Front’s (and the party’s) political resources, as it tripled the size of its operations. In 1982 alone, during one of Ethiopia’s most brutal and protracted military campaigns (Red Star), the EPLF organised over 550 new village committees.

At about this time, the Front stopped subdividing its mass organisations on the basis of class. It took this step in part due to the demands of its expanded area of operation, in part to the levelling effects of a drought that was ravaging Eritrea, and also because party leaders began to see it as too mechanical an application of Chinese-derived political formulas. However, there was a renewed emphasis on socio-economic development in the liberated and semi-liberated areas.

Land reform remained at the core of the Front’s work in the densely populated highlands where it was seen as a springboard to social revolution. From 1981 onward, mutual aid teams were organised among poor peasants to increase the scale and cost-effectiveness of their farming activities. Despite problems with resources and logistics and in the midst of yet another, even longer Ethiopian military campaign in 1983, the EPLF also renewed its efforts to improve rural productivity through agricultural extension work, assistance with animal husbandry, and projects such as poultry-raising and vegetable gardening run by the mass organisations. Consumer cooperatives were established, and loan cooperatives were set up to finance village infrastructure projects. Perhaps the most effective project in the first half of the 1980s, though, was the public health programme under which scores of traditional village health workers and midwives were given special training and linked into a national network of preventive and curative medicine. Throughout, the watchword was self-reliance: doing more with less.

In retrospect, the signature of the People’s Party is readily apparent in this fairly rapid adaptation to otherwise disastrous conditions. But a much more detailed reconstruction of these events and the party’s role in them needs to be carried out. Questions to be asked include: How, when, where and how often did party leaders meet? How did they communicate with mid-level cadres and with the party rank-and-file? Who were the key players in the party at this time? What lessons did they take from their new experience in the field and internationally, and how did the party’s political line evolve through this tumultuous period? What criteria were used to select new members or to advance to higher levels of party leadership? How did the rapid growth in numbers affect the party’s internal discipline, political coherence, and outlook? And much more.

Whatever was exchanged in the clandestine party meetings – most of which were rigorously documented at the time – conditions in the field in the 1980s played a central role in the party’s changing outlook. As difficult as things seemed in the late 1970s, they soon worsened. The two longest and most destructive Ethiopian military campaigns of the war were conducted in 1982 and 1983. Then, in the mid-1980s, war and famine combined to create a human crisis of almost unimaginable proportions.
Persistent drought seared the brittle land until the population of northern Ethiopia and much of Eritrea teetered on the brink of starvation. By this time, some 360,000 Eritrean refugees had already fled to Sudan, most due to the war, some as early as 1967. Several hundred thousand more were internally displaced, either subsisting with help from relatives or under the care of the EPLF, whose humanitarian arm, the Eritrean Relief Association (ERA), mounted a cross-border relief operation from logistical bases in northeastern Sudan. However, though millions of dollars in aid poured into Sudan once news of the famine broke, relatively little of it made its way into Eritrea, since most international donors – with the exception of the European Protestant churches and a handful of solidarity groups – declined to support work in guerilla zones. In December 1984, when I toured the area, ERA was feeding more than 100,000 people in thirty camps inside Eritrea, and the numbers were growing by the day. Much of the money for this came from the Eritrean diaspora, though by early 1985 Western NGOs finally became significant contributors.

Not surprisingly, this situation had a further dampening effect on the party’s political mobilisation. Organisers found it increasingly difficult to produce convincing results from social experiments in an economy where there was no surplus, and where people were almost entirely preoccupied with basic survival. As one frustrated cadre put it to me at the time, ‘The people can’t eat ideology.’

Other factors also fostered a moderation of the radical socialist politics of the 1960s and 1970s. The end of the civil war with the ELF encouraged the EPLF to be more inclusive, as the Front reached out to Eritreans of all political stripes on the basis of their nationalism. The need to assign scarce cadres around vast new areas of the country to reach people in former ELF areas limited the ability of the EPLF to carry out its social reforms and its political mobilising at the level of complexity it had brought to its early experiments. Seeing nearly every socialist-oriented movement and government in the world troupe in and out of Addis Ababa helped undermine faith in the litanies of the Left that had informed the Front’s early ideological development, even as protracted internal debates over the nature of the Soviet Union continued without resolution within the party. The experience of administering the liberated zones also fostered a growing sense of the limitations of state-centred development models.

Taken together, these factors did not provoke a political about-face, as one might have expected, but they did foster a more pragmatic approach to economic policy and more openness to experimentation. Precisely how they did so deserves further elaboration, as the ability to steadfastly maintain focus on the commitment to national liberation, whatever the ideological or political tools appropriated to advance it, is a definitive feature of this movement. But it became harder and harder to operate in the way they had.

Former party members say that the clandestinity of the party made it increasingly difficult to convene formal meetings, the more so as the Front expanded in membership and geographical reach. (One party activist said his marriage nearly ended in divorce because his wife became convinced that the excuses he was giving for attending secret meetings were covering up a liaison with another woman.) It became less and less practical to gather party members or party leaders together to discuss the issues of the day in the manner they had in the early years. As a result, much decision-making in the later years was done informally, with little accountability even to other party members.
Nevertheless, the Party was engaged in a continuing process of reflection throughout this time whose outcomes found expression at its second secret congress, in late 1986, where it changed its name to the Eritrean Socialist Party and adopted a more social democratic programme.

This shift in outlook was carried into the planning for the Front's second congress in March 1987. A party-led preparatory committee circulated a draft of a revised National Democratic Program to every member of the EPLF, including fighters and those in the mass organisations, soliciting comments that were incorporated into the document during a year of intense debate. The party also drew up its own slate for the EPLF elections, which it quietly but effectively promoted in the lead-up to the congress.

Among the changes from the 1977 programme adopted at the congress were the deletion of references to 'imperialists' and 'Zionists' in favour of allusions to 'foreigners hostile to Eritrean independence.' The 'masses of workers, peasants and other democratic forces' became 'the people'. 'Anti-feudal and anti-imperialist' popular organisations became 'nationalist' associations. More significantly, the rights of all 'nationalist political parties' were explicitly guaranteed; pledges to confiscate all land in the hands of the Ethiopian government and all foreigners and Eritrean collaborators were scaled back to include only lands held by the former regime; plans to establish large-scale, state-run farming cooperatives were dropped; Eritrean capitalists were encouraged to set up factories and enterprises without reference to size; trade was to be 'regulated' by the state rather than 'handled' by it; and more emphasis was given to public education, treatment of prisoners of war and attention to the rights of Eritreans living abroad. While the rhetorical level dropped a notch, the most important pattern in these changes was a diminished view of the role of the state in Eritrean development and an explicit commitment to multiparty politics.

After this congress, the structure and substance of the front's political education for the mass organisations — and for the fighters — lightened up further. Study groups that used to meet three times weekly for political education began to meet once each week or less. The content of the political education curriculum came from a new manual, published in 1989 to replace the text of the 1970s. The main focus was on Eritrea — the place and the nation — with less theory and more emphasis on practical issues facing the country and the liberation movement. There were also short sections on Ethiopia, Africa and the Horn of Africa; the Middle East; and the international situation. The syllabus was prepared for discussions at three successive levels, starting with a basic introduction to the concepts, then going into more descriptive and explanatory detail, and finally, in advanced sessions, approaching the material from a more analytic perspective.

The shift in content and in intensity had been a long time coming, according to Alemseged Tesfai, an EPLF veteran but not a party member who worked on the development of the new curriculum.

Political education within the EPLF had already been on a decline in the last years of the struggle [he said]. This was because marxism had lost its attractiveness to many of the new breed of fighters who were joining the front in order to run away from the derg's similar rhetoric. More serious than that, even veterans were getting disenchanted with the old ideology — Soviet intervention, Cuban and South Yemeni direct military engagement on the other side and Chinese abandonment of Eritrea's cause were some of the reasons. But then, the EPLF itself was, by the mid-eighties, distancing itself from hard-line marxism. In 1989,
it assigned quite a few of its university-level cadres to re-draft a new program of political education, one that was to be in tune with the 'realities of the day'. Ahmed al-Keisi and Haile Menkerios led that effort and several cadres were part of it. It was decided in one of the meetings there (in Himbol) that the new political education, to be given to the EPLF rank and file and to members of the mass organizations simultaneously, should be free from marxist content and dogma.7

The Decision to Dissolve the Party
Throughout the last decade of the liberation struggle, the party steadily converged with the front – in its political line, its programme, its methodology, and its leadership – even as membership in both bodies expanded geometrically. This made the management of a secret party more and more difficult, and it led to anomalies in the quality of the cadres – so much so, that party leaders began to question the rationale for sustaining two parallel organisations. Haile Wold’ensae was among them:

We had expanded so much we had a lot of problems. Party cells were distant from the center. Unhealthy ways of recruitment began to crop up – people recruiting their friends, for example. We began to see a lack of competence in the primary organizations of the party. Rather than leading the front, they started being problems for it. In some cases, they were more a problem than a resource. Finally, the CC [central committee] realized this and decided to intervene in the process of selection.

By the 1986 congress, the party was diluted from what it had been, and the CC began to question the validity of the primary organizations, the primary cells. They carried a lot of ideological weight but they were sometimes not very practical – always debating the question of the Soviet Union, the socialist camp, etcetera. There was a tension between realistic and unrealistic objectives, but this movement always had an inclination to be more pragmatic than ideological, to define a realistic, achievable programme rather than to become idealist in our approach.

During these years, we began to shed some of our naivetes. We were committed not to sacrifice our national interests to idealist philosophical interests, and we began to see that this clandestinity had its own problems. Also, some of our [party] members were less competent than non-members, some less disciplined. The party became a hiding place for unhealthy elements.

In the beginning, the party had to be clandestine. We existed in a hostile surrounding environment. We could not survive unless we were secret. But now the party had served its purpose and it was no longer a club of the best ones. So the issue we faced was: do we make it open and evaluate every individual and every cell in front of all the front and all the people, which was the only way to rectify the party? Also, with all this streamlining, the setting up of achievable objectives, was there a gap between the objectives of the party and the objectives of the front? If not, there was no reason to have two organizations.

We saw that the two were coming closer and closer, that there was little difference between them, so we asked, why shouldn't the party become the party of the mass? By 1986, the issues were there, but they were not resolved. By 1987, we became convinced of the need for change. The majority of the front was now sharing the objectives of the party but were not members of it.

In 1989, we said, now we are entering a new phase. Therefore, the broad-based movement should replace the party in order to allow not only the front members but the population as
a whole to work for the objectives of the party, which had now become the objectives of the front.

This was not an easy decision. Some thought it would be diluting it, that it was a wrong decision, that the party would be gone if it turned out that we needed it, that this would be irreversible. Others thought the party would be a privilege that they would lose. Myself, I thought it was not possible to continue that way, but was there the possibility of a transition that every member of the party could feel part of that decision? Why not the whole front being the party? But the front was still narrow. There were remnants of the ELF still around, for example. So we determined that there was a need for a broad-based movement, not a party.18

This thinking led to the functional dissolution of the party in 1989 and to the decision to transform the EPLF into a mass political movement, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), at its third congress in 1994. ‘There was no major shift in our orientation’, said ‘Bruno’ Afwerki. ‘We were always a socialist-oriented movement, but slowly we started to be more nationalistic, more concerned about our national interests. And we lost a large number of our leading cadres during the war. This had a big effect. Finally, it matured into a nationalist party, and we dissolved it because there was no longer a need for it.’19

However, this left the nation with a yawning gap in collective political leadership during the country’s first postwar years, when the locus of power shifted to the new government. Even the mass organisations ceased to function but for that of the women, which maintained its network of services and self-help programmes, as the leadership’s attention was riveted on state-building and on meeting the urgent but long-delayed needs of a war-weary population. Then, at the EPLF’s third congress in February 1994, most of the party’s veteran leadership was sidelined, as a younger generation assumed responsibility for the administrative center of the reconstituted front, its secretariat, where authority for day-to-day operations would reside.

‘A debate came up after the war over the need for the continuity of the Front and its work – should it be the old leadership, or should there be new elements? We decided new ones were needed, so we chose a leadership from the generation that was mobilised in the ’70s, not the ’60s’, said Bruno. But six years after the shift, he was less sanguine about its prospects. ‘The PFDJ is not a party in the way we were then,’ he said.

It is more amorphous, more diffuse. But it is a transitional organization, a nationalist umbrella, out of which parties could develop when the time is ripe. The basic belief of the People’s Party was that there should be a multiparty system in Eritrea. I hope this is still alive.

**Summing Up**

The People’s Party had its origins in the brutal internecine fighting of the 1960s, when the ELF imploded, devouring its children. The commitment to build it clandestinely was reinforced in the early 1970s as three breakaway but disunited ELF fragments struggled to reach common ground while battling for their survival against both the new ELF and the Ethiopians and as further infighting (the menqat) threatened to derail the consolidation of the new front. Out of these experiences came the conviction that a tightly organised, highly conscious political core was needed to build and direct the
movement as it sought to transform the society in a revolutionary democratic direction while liberating it from Ethiopian rule.

The party functioned as an extremely effective instrument of political leadership throughout its first decade. During this period, the EPLF fought off the threat to its existence from the ELF, broke its dependence on the rightist Osman Saleh Sabbe for external relations and established its own distinctive presence on the regional and global political scene, vastly expanded and deepened its social base within Eritrea and among the Eritrean diaspora, and survived the onslaught of the new Soviet-backed Ethiopian military machine (with the political disorientation that accompanied the geopolitical realignment of the two superpowers). The EPLF, with the People's Party at its head, went on in the mid-1980s to carry the population through the worst human disaster – the 1983-85 drought and famine – the region had ever experienced, even as Ethiopia sought to use the crisis to further its military and political agenda.

However, the rapid, extensive expansion of the Front and the party in the 1980s, then the only nationalist forces engaged in combat, had a moderating impact on their politics. Coupled with an extended process of reflection triggered both by the changing regional and international alliances and by accumulated experience on the ground, this tempered the party's revolutionary outlook to the point where it and the Front began to converge. By the end of the 1980s, there was little substantive difference between the programme and line of the two organisations (or their leadership).

At this point, the need for a clandestine 'vanguard' leadership began to come into question. With the difficulty party members had convening meetings without giving themselves away and the growing perception that party membership itself no longer reflected the best and most dedicated fighters and civilian activists – some suggested it had become a club of old-time party members and their friends – this sentiment spread. The impending end of the liberation war and the shift in focus to postwar nation-building accelerated it. However, exactly how, by whom and under what circumstances the decision was taken to dissolve the party, and how this was communicated to party members is not clear. Several former party central committee members say it was never actually dismantled. Instead, it was simply 'frozen' in place and then permitted to disappear with no formal closure. Among other things, the peculiar character of this ending makes it more difficult today to examine the party's experience and its lasting legacy. It also feeds the tendency, inherited from the years in the field, to exercise political leadership through non-formal channels, rather than institutional ones.

The People's Party came into existence as an instrument of leadership. It succeeded on the planes of ideology, politics, organisational coherence, personal behaviour and the construction of a genuinely national culture. But it also functioned as an instrument of command and control. It did so at first to maintain the Front's line, to ensure that elements did not develop that would disrupt the organisation or weaken it from within, and to mediate the relations between its members and the outside world (including other Eritreans) so that the movement could present a solid front to its friends and its enemies. In time, however, it inevitably became more an instrument of control than one of leadership. How much of this has carried over into the post-liberation political environment needs to be better understood.
Eritrea’s contemporary political culture reflects a paradoxical mix of self-imposed secrecy and social consensus, of authoritarianism and collective action. The ability to maintain a balance between these contrasting impulses served the people well during the struggle for liberation. But in the post-liberation transition, it has played a more contradictory role - on the one hand helping to promote the development of a unified national culture, while avoiding the ethnic, religious and geographical fragmentation that has torn apart other African nation-states, but at the same time impeding the evolution of this embryonic popular democracy to its next level.

A rigorous examination of the party’s history - its strengths and its weaknesses, its successes and its failures, its pluses and minuses, and above all its lasting impact - is an important piece of the democracy-building process underway now. The chronic difficulties that armed political movements have exhibited in the transition from resistance to democratic governance are well-documented. Can this political movement transcend the proclivity toward self-perpetuating authoritarianism that so clearly comes with this territory? I would argue that it has a far better chance to do so if its own heritage is available to those struggling for such goals.


**Endnotes**

1. This paper draws heavily on interviews with several long-time party members conducted in Asmara in 2000 and 2001. A fuller exposition of party history and programme awaits a study of the extensive documents now in the archives of the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice, and further interviews with former party leaders, members, supporters and critics.

2. Interview with the author, Asmara, 8 April 1992.


4. According to Isaias, the most useful lessons were those regarding military strategy and tactics.

5. Ibrahim Afa, Abu Bakr Mohammed Hassan, Hasan Mohamed Amir died in the liberation war. Romedan, not present at the meeting but part of the core group, retired from politics in 1994. Ahmed al-Qesi was ‘frozen’ in place after independence and dropped from party leadership after falling out with Isaias. Mesfin Hagos, Mahmoud Sherifo and several charter party members who were not at this meeting, including Haile Wold’ensae, fell out with Isaias in 2001 after signing a public letter criticizing the him. Umero and Ahmed Taha Baduri were assigned to Eritrea’s diplomatic corps and were physically, if not politically, distant from the center of power by then. Alamin Mohammed Said, not present at the first meeting but part of this circle, remained close to Isaias and heads the PFDJ Central Office today. Two from the clandestine student movement who joined the Front later – Petros Solomon and Sebhat Ephrem – rounded out this group. Petros was one of those sacked from his ministerial post in 2001 for criticizing Isaias in a public letter. Sebhat, however, remained in place as Minister of Defense. Of the original party founders, however, only Ali Said Abdela and Alamin Mohammed Said remained in Isaias’s inner circle ten years after independence.

6. Interview with the author, Asmara, 1 August 2001

7. In mid-September 2001, the government shut down Eritrea’s private newspapers which had been publishing lengthy interviews with the group of PFDJ critics (many of whom were former
People’s Party leaders as well) known as teh G-15, and then arrested most of the G-15 critics on charges of committing crimes against the nation’s security and sovereignty.


9. They were also joined there by a small contingent from the nascent Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party, which left Yemen in 1972 to get training from their comrades in Eritrea. Whether or not there was a conscious decision to adopt nearly identical names for the two parties, there was clearly a shared political tradition upon which each drew. The two parties maintained links into the mid-1970s, when the Eritreans lost confidence in their Ethiopian counterparts and distanced themselves from them.

10. Isaias was chosen to head the 10-member combined leadership of the PLF1 and the PLF2. He continued in this role after three more people were added to this body from the Obel group, when it merged with the others in 1974.


12. The contents of the manual were summarised for me by members of the EPLF Office of Public Administration in October 1977.

13. Interview with the author, Asmara, 12 December 1999.

14. Party documents from this period, including the 1986 party programme, are on file in the archives of the PFDJ in Asmara.

15. There were 1,359 delegates at the congress, with civilians outnumbering military personnel three-to-one. A quarter of the participants were women. Every nationality in Eritrea was represented. A new 71-member Central Committee was elected by secret ballot, after 120 nominations were taken from the floor. The former members of the EPLF Political Bureau were the top vote-getters, with Isaias and Romedan coming within one vote of each other. The newly elected Central Committee chose Isaias to be General Secretary.


17. E-mail to the author, 16 October 2000.


**Bibliography**


Structural Adjustment, State Power & Genocide: the World Bank & Rwanda

Andy Storey

The Rwandan genocide of 1994 has been partly attributed by some commentators to state weakness or collapse, and the weakness or collapse has in turn been partly attributed to the policies of the World Bank and the IMF. Neither argument is valid, and to advance them is to misunderstand the extent to which state power is a persistent and potent force in Africa and elsewhere, and also the extent to which the World Bank and IMF buttress that power (despite their own rhetoric of ‘rolling back’ the state). The first section of this article outlines the centrality of state power to an analysis of Rwanda in general and of the preparations for genocide in particular, while the following section demonstrates how the World Bank lent material and discursive support to a repressive and ultimately genocidal state apparatus. The concluding section offers some explanation of why the World Bank adopts such policies.

Introduction

The Rwandan genocide of 1994, like other such tragedies, has been subjected to an enormous amount of banal and reductive commentary. One example comes from Thomas Friedman who states that there was ‘an orgy of tribal warfare’ (1999:349). This is a typically clichéd and uninteresting comment; but what is interesting about Friedman’s passage on Rwanda is his partial attribution of the genocide to the absence of state control and regulation. There was/is, he claims,

no big government in Rwanda ... [T]hey just have brutal competition for scarce land, energy and water, with Tutsi and Hutu tribesmen taking turns downsizing each other to grab more resources for themselves (Friedman, 1999:350-1).

The weakness of the Rwandan state is also a factor cited by other writers to help ‘explain’ the Rwandan genocide. Collins (1998) argues that the Rwandan state was a weak and disorganised one. Chossudovsky (1997:115) includes the ‘demise of state institutions’ in his list of what led to tragedy in Rwanda. For Chossudovsky, whose arguments will be discussed in more detail later in this article, that demise was caused in large part by the policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and their imposition of a structural adjustment programme (a package of neoliberal economic reform) on Rwanda in the early 1990s. Adjustment ‘destroyed economic activity and people’s livelihood, fuelled unemployment and created a
situation of generalised famine and social despair'; specifically, 'The state administra-
tive apparatus was in disarray, state enterprises were pushed into bankruptcy and 
public services collapsed' (Chossudovsky, 1997:119, 116). This argument is also 
advanced by Karnik (1998:615), who, on similar grounds, claims the World Bank 
played a 'critical role ... in producing the conflict in Rwanda'.

We thus have two interlocking arguments: the genocide was partly attributable to 
state weakness or collapse, and the weakness or collapse was partly attributable to the 
policies of the World Bank and the IMF. Neither argument holds water, and to 
advance them is to misunderstand the extent to which state power is a persistent and 
potent force in Africa and elsewhere (fashionable claims about 'failed states' 
notwithstanding), and also the extent to which the World Bank and IMF buttress that 
power (despite their own rhetoric of 'rolling back' the state). The elaboration of these 
two points – the continued centrality of state power, and the extent to which external 
agents continue to support that power – constitute the main themes of this article. The 
next section of this article outlines the centrality of state power to an analysis of 
Rwanda in general and of the preparations for genocide in particular, while the 
following section demonstrates how the World Bank lent material and discursive 
support to a repressive and ultimately genocidal state apparatus. The concluding 
section offers some explanation of why the Bank did what it did, and a postscript 
identifies some alarming signs that the same process may be occurring all over again 
vis-à-vis present day Rwanda.

State Power in Rwanda

Background

Rwanda is a very small, landlocked country in central Africa, about the size of the US 
state of Maryland. However, its relatively large population size – approximately 7.2 
million before the genocide and growing by more than 3 per cent per annum – made it 
the most densely populated country in Africa (World Bank, 1994:1; Uvin, 1998:180). In 
the early 1990s, Rwanda was amongst the ten poorest countries in the world in per 
capita income terms; approximately 95 per cent of its population lived in rural areas, 
with 90 per cent engaged in agriculture (World Bank, 1994:1).

Prior to 1994, Rwanda’s population consisted of two main, indigenous ethnic groups 
– the Hutu, who accounted for approximately eighty-five per cent of the population, 
and the Tutsi, who accounted for most of the remaining fifteen per cent (with the Twa 
group accounting for probably less than one per cent).¹ The origins of the groups is a 
matter of intense academic and popular debate, with the Tutsi often portrayed as 
invaders who came from the Horn of Africa and imposed a harsh autocratic régime, 
with a monarchy at its apex, on the earlier arriving Hutu.² More detached 
assessments indicate that the Tutsi arrived in migratory waves, became partially 
assimilated into the existing population, and that the undeniably hierarchical nature 
of pre-colonial Rwandan society did nonetheless allow for some movement between 
ethnic categories (richer Hutu could, arguably, become ‘honorary’ Tutsi).

The German colonial administration (which was established at the end of the 
nineteenth century) and later the Belgian, exploited the hierarchical structure of the 
society as a mechanism of indirect rule, with a certain stratum of Tutsi deployed as a 
colonial ruling class. Whatever fluidity had previously existed in the system was 
greatly restricted as a system of ethnic identity cards was introduced and ethnicity
thus became a strict (patrilinear) inherited characteristic. Tutsi were systematically favoured in employment and education and accorded the status of a superior ‘race’.

The run-up to independence (in 1962) saw a reversal of the colonially imposed order, with Hutu seizing control and beginning a series of pogroms against the Tutsi population. More than half of all Tutsi either died or were forced into exile (Uvin, 1998:20). Those Tutsi driven into exile – many of whom grew up in refugee camps in Uganda – became the source of a rebel army, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which was to attack the régime in 1990, demanding the right to return to the land they and/or their parents were expelled from. Those Tutsi who remained in Rwanda after 1962 were now the subject of discrimination in education, employment and other areas.

The post-colonial régime was initially (during the so-called First Republic) dominated by Hutu from the south of the country, but from 1973 onwards (formally entitled the Second Republic) power became concentrated in the hands of a northern Hutu élite under the leadership of President Habyarimana. The role played by the northern élite – the so-called akazu – is a central focus of this article.

Following the RPF invasion in 1990, the régime’s repression of the local Tutsi population intensified. A power-sharing peace deal signed at Arusha in Tanzania in 1993 was never implemented: instead, between April and June 1994, following the mysterious killing of Habyarimana himself, the army and government-run militias initiated and led the massacre of 800-850,000 people. As Prunier (1995:241-2) has stated, ‘the actual organisers of the genocide were a small tight group, belonging to the régime’s political, military and economic elite’. Most of the dead were Tutsi, though dissident Hutu were also killed. The RPF succeeded in militarily defeating the government forces in July 1994, and the present government is RPF-led (see the Postscript to this article).

The Akazu Corruption, Repression, Mass Impoverishment & Struggles over the State

Akazu is a Kinyarwanda word meaning ‘little house’. In the 1980s, it came to be applied to the country’s ruling clique – the politico-commercial network centred around the President’s family and, to a greater extent, that of his wife (Reynjens, 1994:189). This mafia-type network (Braeckman, 1994:104) had its geographical origins in the north of the country, especially Gisenyi, where Madame Habyarimana came from (Gasana et al., 1999:159). Gisenyi, heartland of the akazu, supplied one-third of the top jobs in government and almost all leaders of the security forces, as well as enjoying a wholly disproportionate share of development projects and higher education places (Human Rights Watch, 1999:47). Akazu activities included:

• Profiteering from the disbursal of state-accorded commercial privileges, including market access, and fiscal and customs exemptions (Braeckman, 1994:104; Human Rights Watch, 1999:44; Reynjens, 1994:190; Sibomana, 1999:26);

• The smuggling of gorillas (and parts thereof), drugs, gold, and diamonds from Zaire (Braeckman, 1994:108; Gordon, 1993);

• Drug smuggling organised through the state-run national tea agency (Braeckman, 1994:104, 105-7);
Prostitution, arms dealing and illicit currency trading (Braeckman, 1994:109-11; Reyntjens, 1995:284);

The siphoning off of foreign aid for purposes of personal enrichment (Hanssen, 1989).

The akazu’s activities continued during the war (after October 1990). The focus then tended to be on diverting resources – including from the state employees’ pension fund – towards military ends, such as the usage, in 1992, of money earmarked for food and drug imports for arms purchases (Hintjens, 1999:257; Melvern, 2000:64-8). But the personal profit motive was not entirely abandoned, with Habyarimana himself depositing commission payments from armaments deals in European bank accounts under the names of various associates and of his children (Human Rights Watch, 1999:123).

A tendency for the akazu to become involved in massive human rights violations (in addition to corruption and associated repression) was decisively established at around the same time as the RPF invasion of October 1990.

In October 1990 and again in January and February 1991, local officials incited Hutu to attack their Tutsi neighbours. More than six hundred Tutsi died in these attacks and scores more were wounded and lost all their belongings (Africa Watch, 1992:2).

A report from Amnesty International in May 1992 documented the involvement of state agents in further acts of mass murder and torture (Amnesty, 1992:1). These findings were confirmed by a later international commission of inquiry on human rights abuses in Rwanda – its report, in March 1993, found that

The Rwandan government has killed or caused to be killed about two thousand of its citizens ... Authorities at the highest level, including the President of the Republic, have consented to these abuses (cited in African Rights, 1995:33).

The degree of central control behind the abuses was apparent at least as early as February 1992, when Africa Watch wrote:

Rwanda is a small, highly centralised state where subordinates typically respond quickly and effectively to directives from above. If subordinate authorities, civilian and military, are violating the rights of others, it is either because they have been ordered to do so or because they expect to elicit support and approval from their superiors for doing so. The failure to bring any persons accused of human rights violations to justice supports the conclusion that violators are acting at the direction of or under the protection of some of the most powerful political figures in Rwanda (Africa Watch, 1992:29, emphasis in original).

As this last quote indicates, and it is a point that is central to this article, what above all else facilitated the practice of illegal and repressive activities on the part of the akazu was control of the state. But state control was vital for not only the practice of repression. Without state control – direct and indirect – over the economy and society, the akazu could not function, economically or politically (Cart, 1995:476). Economic gain rested upon access to political power (Willame, 1995:150). Habyarimana, for example, ‘could call on the heads of private enterprises to contribute materially and politically to his cause, knowing they needed his approval for the state concessions that made their businesses profitable’ (Human Rights Watch, 1999:43); and foreign aid could not be siphoned off without control over the levers of state power (Prunier, 1995:84). The question of who would retain or assume ‘ownership’ of this apparatus
of (corrupt and repressive) control was the key stake of political struggle in Rwanda in the early 1990s.

Some Rwandans were indeed getting rich: those who worked for the state directly, those employed by its offshoots, parastatal enterprises, and those who ran economic development projects controlled by state officials. State employees and the military also used access to preferential treatment to build profitable private businesses. But the prosperity was both fragile and superficial. The mass of the people stayed poor and faced the prospect of getting only poorer. More than 90 per cent lived from cultivation and while the population grew, the amount of land did not. The land available to ordinary cultivators actually diminished in some regions as local officials appropriated fields for development projects and as members of the urban elite bought out the poor, establishing themselves as absentee landlords (Human Rights Watch, 1999:45).

While the akazu thrived, the great mass of Rwandans became progressively poorer during the 1980s. And, as the above quote illustrates, part of the reason why they became poorer was precisely because the akazu and its wider circle of associates was thriving, an increasing concentration of land ownership being the most obvious manifestation of how that symmetrical process of enrichment and impoverishment was occurring (Braeckman, 1996:106; Erny, 1994:80; Maton, 1994; André and Platteau, 1998). The agricultural sector, on which most people depended, was already structurally crisis-ridden by a chronic shortage of land and rapid population growth, problems compounded by occasional bouts in the 1980s of drought, excessive rain and plant disease (Mullen, 1995; Pottier, 1993:5; Uvin, 1998:57, 112-3). On top of this came calamitous falls in world coffee prices, coffee being by far Rwanda's main foreign exchange earner (Woodward, 1996:19, 21), and, after October 1990, the enormous costs of war – direct financial costs (an estimated $100 million per annum), but also those arising from the displacement of some 15 per cent of the population (Waller, 1993:12; Marysse et al., 1994:83).

For the great mass of ordinary people, the benefits accruing from the fact that they were ruled by Hutu rather than Tutsi were wearing thin, with the result that a rupture between rulers and ruled was deepening (Voyame et al., 1996:141). A symbolic demonstration of this rupture was the action of southern farmers in tearing up anti-erosion devices which they had been forced to dig under the government's compulsory communal labour programme (Mukankusi, 1998:40). From the middle of the 1980s there were widespread protests against, and non-compliance with, this umuganda system of compulsory communal labour (Kimonyo, 2000:70; Uvin, 1998:125), in part because at least sometimes it had to be performed on lands privately owned by the régime's cronies (Prunier, 1995:87). Even more dramatically, the end of the 1980s saw the uprooting of up to 300,000 coffee trees, cultivation of which was also meant to be compulsory (Kimonyo, 2000: 50; Smith, 1998:242). The advent of multi-party democracy provided a channel through which popular discontent could be expressed and raised the very real prospect of the akazu losing its grip on the organs of state power – organs which, as discussed above, were vital to akazu wealth accumulation.

Habyarimana was forced by international pressure to legalise opposition political parties in 1991, and a large number of such parties quickly became active (Prunier, 1995:126). He later signed the Arusha peace deal with the RPF, which envisaged the formation of a broad-based government involving all political parties, that is, the ending of the akazu's monopoly of power. Electoral competition, together with forced concessions to the rebel RPF, 'threatened to deprive the Habyarimana regime and its
cronies of their control of the state' (Uvin, 1998:63; see also Andersen, 2000:445 and Percival and Homer-Dixon, 1995).

A variety of strategies was put in place by the akazu to deal with these challenges – ranging from electoral manipulation (Human Rights Watch, 1999:52-3), to propaganda that attempted to blame the economic crisis on the Tutsi minority (Storey, 2000), to violence against régime opponents (Vassal-Adams, 1994:23; Longman, 1995), and ultimately to genocide. But the focus of this present article now switches to external actors and how the actions and words of one important external actor – the World Bank – lent support to the repressive state apparatus of the early 1990s and to the élite that desperately sought to retain control of that apparatus.

The World Bank & State Power

The Pre-1990 Period

The World Bank’s attitude towards Rwanda prior to the 1990s (detailed in Uvin, 1998: 42-6) reflected wider attitudes within the aid ‘community’, and these attitudes were, to a remarkable extent, very positive. Uvin (1998:40) describes ‘the very positive, generally accepted image of Rwanda as a model developing country, in which government and citizens were actively, wisely, and successfully committed to development’. Within World Bank discourse in particular, the usual problems of underdevelopment were itemised but these were located within the ‘natural’ rather than ‘political’ sphere – the ones most commonly cited were land shortage, landlocked status, population growth, etc. At the same time, the state was seen to be making valiant efforts to overcome these problems. Uvin (1998:44) documents the recurrent emphasis in Bank reports on ‘the country’s political stability ... the government’s concern for the rural population, its effective administration, and its prudent, sound, realistic management’.

The Bank, as mentioned, was by no means alone in this approach, though Uvin (1998: 46) states that ‘the World Bank seemed to be the... [multilateral donor] with the strongest love affair with Rwanda’. Rwanda generally had a very positive reputation among aid donors, in part because its very well ordered structure allowed for the easy administration of, and reporting on, projects (Gourevitch, 1998:76). Hånsen (1989: 10) notes that Rwanda hosted more development workers per hectare than anywhere else in the world (see also Schürings, 1995:496). During the 1980s, ‘Rwanda was considered the jewel in the crown of countries receiving Canadian aid ...Rwanda was perceived by Canadian CIDA [state aid] officials as incredibly stable with virtually no corruption ... relatively small military force ... perceived commitment to the rule of law’ (Adelman, 1999:188), an impression which led to Rwanda becoming the largest single recipient of Canadian aid in per capita terms and which persisted amongst Canadian development experts into the 1990s (Adelman, 1999:189). At the end of the 1980s, Rwanda was also the largest single recipient of aid from both Belgium and Switzerland (Uvin, 1998:42). Foreign observers referred to the régime, favourably, as a ‘development dictatorship’ (Prunier, 1995:77).

Structural Adjustment, 1990-94

As the above discussion indicates, Rwanda had long been a recipient of substantial development aid, including from the World Bank. However, it was later than most
other African countries in adopting policies of structural adjustment (Braeckman, 1994:86); the economic crisis of the 1980s finally changed this and an agreement with the Bank and the IMF was signed in September 1990. The Board of the Bank approved a Structural Adjustment Credit (SAC) in June 1991. Typically, the Bank recommended ‘the retrenchment of the state from omnipresence to more limited functions’ (World Bank, 1993:viii). The adjustment package contained the usual policy suspects, including (Storey, 1999:47-8):

- Devaluation of the Rwandan franc – by 40 per cent in November 1990 and a further 15 per cent in June 1992;
- Controls on recruitment and salaries in the state sector;
- An increase in user fees for health, education and other services;
- Reduced subsidies to coffee producers;
- The phased removal of protectionist trade restrictions;
- Privatisation of some state enterprises;
- Increased taxes in some sectors to help reduce the budget deficit;
- And a social ‘safety net’ programme to cushion the impact of adjustment on the poorest.

The extent to which adjustment was actually implemented is a matter of some debate. A later Bank report (1997:12) stated that ‘The authorities implemented, in 1991-92, most of the agreed reform measures, except the coffee sector reforms’, whereas Uvin (1998:58) claims that ‘only a small part of the SAP... was implemented’. The ongoing debate about the depth of these reforms and the impact generated (see also Andersen, 2000; Chossudovsky, 1997; Storey, 1999; and UNDP, n.d.) will be returned to later in this article. The most notable and unambiguous short-term impact was a massive increase in development aid – from the Bank itself and from other donors – to help the Rwandan government implement the reform measures (Uvin, 1998:87-8, 91). The Bank itself proffered a structural adjustment credit of $90 million, the first tranche of

<table>
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<th>Country/Organisation</th>
<th>Pledges</th>
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<tr>
<td>World Bank</td>
<td>90.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>United States</td>
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<td>25.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>European Development Fund</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>21.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
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<tr>
<td>France</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>10.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>African Development Bank</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>7.8</td>
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<td>Switzerland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
<td>17.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>216.4</td>
<td>182.2</td>
</tr>
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Source: World Bank (1995: Table 8.b.2)
which ($55 million) was disbursed up to September 1993, with the balance of $35 million ultimately cancelled as the reform programme broke down (World Bank, 1995). However, additional finance to support the adjustment programme was provided by other donors and disbursals of this (non-World Bank) finance ended up being even higher than original commitments, as Table 1 (which excludes IMF support) makes clear. Some at least of this donor assistance probably substituted for assistance that would in any event have been extended, but, overall, adjustment seems to have facilitated a significant increase in the resources available to the Rwandan state, a topic that is returned to towards the end of this article.

Apart from this financial support, the Bank also lent discursive support and legitimacy to the Rwandan state through a benign interpretation of state actions throughout the adjustment period. To illustrate this last point, I focus on two main Bank reports: *Rwanda: Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Growth*, published in 1994, and *Implementation Completion Report: Rwandese Republic: Structural Adjustment Credit*, published in 1995. The reason for this focus is that the former report represents the most considered Bank attempt to deal comprehensively with issues of poverty and its causation – clearly a burning issue in early 1990s Rwanda (see above) – while the latter represents the principal Bank attempt to review (from a post-genocide perspective) the early 1990s record of Bank-sponsored economic reform. Both provide important insights into the way in which the World Bank viewed the Rwandan state at this time.

The World Bank on the Rwandan State

The Bank viewed the Rwandan state as an essentially neutral, if overextended, actor in Rwandan society. The 1994 report on poverty tended to see the Rwandan state as a benevolent, albeit often misguided, institution. Its policy ‘failings’ were itemised, but the political reasons for them were, for the most part, under-analysed, and forces within the state itself were not identified as actively creating and maintaining some of the very problems highlighted in the report. Thus,

> the major obstacles to private sector development are the presence of the state as a privileged competitor and a disabling environment characterised by an inadequate incentive system and pervasive government interference in virtually all aspects of economic life (1).

But the reasons for this pervasive presence – including the accumulative strategies of a state-based élite (see above), and the need on the part of that élite to internally legitimise its rule by discriminating against the Tutsi minority – were not analysed. Instead, reasons offered by the state for its policies were accepted at face value. For example, restrictions (which the Bank wished to see abolished; see also World Bank, 1993:vii) on private sector recruitment practices due to Ministry of Labour regulations were described as existing ‘in order to avoid ethnic discrimination’ (21), whereas their real purpose was precisely to enforce ethnic discrimination. Similarly, restrictions (again ones the Bank wished to see abolished) on rural-urban migration were generously attributed to a desire to avoid the ‘urban bias’ characteristic of other developing countries; understanding was expressed about the fact that spontaneous (and illegal) urban settlements were ‘alarming policy makers’, who would like to limit ‘a threat of destabilising disorder in urban life’ (33). The fact that migration restrictions functioned as a mechanism of dictatorial social control was not mentioned.⁶
In relation to trade policy,

Rwanda's regulatory and incentive framework have [sic] worked to the disadvantage of Rwanda's poor by restricting their opportunities to improve their condition. They have also allowed the non-poor who are better connected to earn rents. The proposals for regulatory reform in the adjustment program would have tended to work in favour of the poor had they been fully implemented ... Trade restrictions allow a favored few to enjoy 'rents' and these tend to be the better-off (20).

But there was no acknowledgement that those earning the rents in question were intimately linked to the state itself – either as its agents, or as recipients of its patronage.

Regarding exchange rate policy, “The overvalued exchange rate also hurt the poor by providing opportunities for the better-off and better-connected to earn “scarcity rents”” (15). And this was followed by a rare attempt (albeit in a footnote) to probe the reasons for such a policy:

The beneficiaries of maintaining an overvalued exchange rate and related policy distortions usually are the urban rich. The political economy of distortion favoring the urban elite, the most influential interest group, without doubt explains why such policies prevailed for so long without being challenged, even in the face of obvious economic decline (15).

But who were the 'urban rich' in question, and what was the nature of their influence over state policy? The Bank remained wedded to a conception of the state as an independent arbiter between competing interest groups (one of which was seen as unfortunately influential), rather than seeing the state itself (or, at least, a nucleus of agents therein) as a powerful interest group in its own right. In Rwanda's case, the state, specifically the akazu, was the single 'most influential interest group'. Similar attitudes towards the state were regularly expressed elsewhere: for example,

National policy must counter-balance the lobby of the richer urban residents who are understandably unwilling to allow increased immigration of the poor into their towns ... Present policies favoring the wealthy (in particular zoning and investment policies) should be re-examined and perhaps eliminated. Examples of such policies are development of large lots for villas (50, 51).

It was, apparently, beyond the Bank's (recorded) capacity to reflect upon who was actually living in the villas in question, and what their link might be to the state. Instead, the problem was reduced to one of the state being dependent on a small number of taxpayers, who could use their consequent leverage to disproportionately influence state policy. Analysis of the extent to which the agents of the state were themselves heavily implicated in the processes of elite enrichment described was, again, noteworthy by its absence.

In summary regarding the 1994 report, the state was seen as implementing polices that were regarded as unwise, and perhaps being excessively influenced by unrepresentative 'interest groups'. But this was as far as it went – those within the state itself were not accorded the status of active agents, a particularly glaring omission in the Rwandan contact where the state was so crucial and so powerful.

This theme of state neutrality was continued in the Bank's 1995 report, surveying the aftermath of its early 1990s adjustment programme.
The President of Rwanda travelled to Washington in October 1990 to assure the Bretton Woods institutions of his personal commitment and his government's intention to implement the SAP [structural adjustment programme] ... Despite the war, the Government demonstrated its commitment to reform by starting to implement the SAP, thanks to a relatively competent administration (i).

Habyarimana's commitment to economic reform was 'confirmed personally ... during a visit to Washington in October 1990' (1).

The tendency was to see the Rwandan state as a committed implementor (and 'owner') of rational economic policies. According to the 1995 report, what partly underpinned failure to fully implement adjustment was:

The authorities' failure to associate the people with the program, [their failure to make] the population aware of the need for and objectives of the adjustment program (iv);

The Government's main lapse in implementing the SAP was failure to mobilise political and popular support for reform (11);

The SAP was not sufficiently understood by all the agents responsible for implementing it. The authorities underestimated the pressure of social, economic, and political interest groups of workers, entrepreneurs, and especially in the National Assembly (11-12),

The results of the program could have been better if the Government had made the necessary efforts to build broader political and popular support for reform. This would have made it possible to reduce opposition to the reforms and to gain the support of socio-economic groups essential for implementation of the program (13).

Several aspects of these last quotes are noteworthy. There is, for example, the assumption that adjustment represented the only appropriate way of responding to economic crisis, and that critics must have been acting out of ignorance or misinformation. Presumably, if workers had been properly informed about the issues, they would have cheerfully accepted a proposed 'national solidarity tax' on wages instead of demanding 100 per cent wage increases and opposing staff cut-backs in the public sector (11). More seriously, the identification of interest groups - workers, entrepreneurs, parliamentarians - carefully excluded the state itself, which was seen as arbitrating (sometimes unsuccessfully or perhaps even unwisely) between these different groups. It was external pressures alone which were held responsible for 'the Government's ambiguous attitude about pursuing economic reform' (12). The extent to which the state itself represented an interest group - and one deeply intertwined with, for example, entrepreneurial interests - was not acknowledged. Occasional exasperation was expressed at aspects of state policy itself:

[Increased military spending was a problem] probably exacerbated by lack of transparency and abuse (10);

The reorganisation of the customs administration to reduce fraud was slow to materialise (10);

Government officials in charge of reform were not motivated (10);

[And tax fraud persisted due to] the tax administration's technical and physical problems (13).
In summary, the problems were technical, the pressures external. The state itself was a neutral agent committed to the wisdom of economic reform and stymied only by technical problems and constraints imposed by forces beyond its direction or control. However, on one occasion in its 1995 report, political issues were explicitly addressed; understanding was expressed about the Rwandan state’s maintenance of coffee price supports which the Bank wished to see abolished:

The rationale was Rwanda’s precarious social and political situation. Full liberalisation of producer prices for coffee would have led to a 35-45% decline … a risk the authorities were not prepared to take in rural areas vulnerable to a rebel takeover … [It was] an untenable proposition on political and security grounds (4, 9).

This frank assessment of the state’s political problems vis-à-vis the RPF – which, probably critically, impinged on the sustainability of the SAP itself – stands in sharp contrast to the absence of any political analysis of the state’s relationship with Rwandan economy and society more generally.

Impact of Adjustment on State Power

As mentioned in the introduction to this article, there is an argument that the structural adjustment policies imposed by the Bank and IMF led to mass immiserisation and thus contributed to insecurity, desperation and violence (Chossudovsky, 1997:111-22). There is some substance in this line of argument. Adjustment, as discussed above, was not popular (UNDP, n.d.:28). The 1990 and 1992 devaluations did contribute to increases in inflation – from 1 per cent in 1989 to 19 per cent in 1991, and 10 per cent for each of 1992 and 1993 (Woodward, 1996: 20; André, 1997: 63, 65). And the benefits of the devaluation, in terms of boosting the prices received by coffee farmers in particular, were cancelled out by the simultaneous insistence on reducing state subsidies to those producers (Marysse et al., 1994:37). The cap on further recruitment in the public service may have contributed to the insecurity of some employees, who feared that they would have to make way for the appointments of the new political masters anticipated under a broad-based multi-party government (Kumar et al., 1996:24; Sellstrom and Wohlgemuth, 1996:39). While Chossudovsky is incorrect to argue that adjustment led to the introduction of user fees for health and education services (these were already in place), it did promote the increase of those fees, and Newbury (1995:14) states that this ‘contributed significantly to social tensions and fears’. This last point is also made by Sellstrom and Wohlgemuth (1996:20) who claim that there is ‘ample evidence that the introduction of higher fees for health and education, among other things, added to the already heavy burdens on Rwanda’s poor’.

However, to take the example of education, adjustment can hardly be held responsible for an already existing and profoundly inequitable system of charges and subsidies that disadvantaged the primary sector (the sector of most concern to the poor) well before 1990 – the Bank (World Bank, 1993:x; World Bank, 1994:7) actually argued for the correction of these imbalances. Nor can the Bank be held responsible for the imposition of desperation-inducing austerity measures, such as cut-backs in health and education services – the Bank (e.g., 1994:43) consistently argued for the protection of social sector spending, and a 1993 Bank report explicitly called for substantial rises in current expenditure on health and education (World Bank, 1993:ix).
More broadly, it is difficult to make any direct linkage – as Chossudovsky (1997:116) attempts to do – between adjustment and the bankruptcy of state enterprises, the collapse of public services, increasing child malnutrition, or the absence of drugs in health centres. This, after all, was an economy in profound crisis regardless of whether it did or did not adopt policies of structural adjustment. Factors such as falling commodity prices and war mean that

There is a strong case for saying that economic factors were important in creating the environment in which the genocide could occur ... However, these circumstances were by no means wholly attributable to the adjustment programme (Woodward, 1996:25).

But the most serious problem with the argument of Chossudovsky (1997) is that it understates the principal impact of adjustment. The potentially most grave aspect of Bank policy towards Rwanda during this period was the increase in state resources it helped facilitate and, relatedly, the boost it offered to state legitimacy. As Table 2 (see also Table 1) makes clear, with the exception of two donors – the Netherlands and Finland – the trend during this period was towards an increase in donor support to Rwanda. Most of this additional aid came in the form of balance of payments support in the context of the structural adjustment programme (Uvin, 1998:87). Thus, the Bank’s attitude towards Rwanda facilitated the extension of increased support to, and through, the state.

The Bank did join in concerted donor efforts to push the regime towards agreeing to the Arusha peace deal (Human Rights Watch, 1999:124), but there was no suspension of funding support until the end of 1993, and even then the cut-off was partial (Uvin, 1998:91-2). Bank officials reportedly raised concerns about the issue of militarisation with Habyarimana, and the Bank president wrote to Habyarimana on the matter in April 1992, yet little action ensued (Melvern, 2000:67). The Bank, like other donors, may have been influenced by the apparent (albeit sporadic) progress being made at the Arusha peace talks, and may not have wished, as it saw it, to endanger that progress by imposing overly harsh conditions on the government regarding access to aid (Barré et al., 1999:10-11). Indeed, the Bank has explicitly stated that part of the reason for proceeding with the structural adjustment programme was to show support for the peace negotiations and the process of political liberalisation (World Bank, 1995:1). According to Melvern (2000:68), the Bank was instrumental in ensuring a resumption of aid to Rwanda at a donor meeting in June 1993:

It would appear that a plea was made in favour of the regime by a World Bank official who reminded the other delegates that in Rwanda at least the government was in control of the country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>1988/90 average</th>
<th>1991/93 average</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>41</td>
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<td>Belgium</td>
<td>33</td>
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<td>France</td>
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<td>Netherlands</td>
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<td>Canada</td>
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<td>Switzerland</td>
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<td>Japan</td>
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<td>Norway</td>
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<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
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<td>Sweden</td>
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<td>Finland</td>
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<td>Denmark</td>
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<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Bané et al. (1999): 48*
The Bank still seems proud of its achievement, noting that the decision to persist with the adjustment programme was based on 'a thorough evaluation of the risks involved in supporting the national reconciliation effort', and that the decision 'was vindicated by the country's ability to absorb the substantial financial support which donors were prepared to extend on highly concessional terms' (World Bank, 1995:10, iv). This latter comment is remarkable, given that much of that support was 'absorbed' into a structure of elite enrichment and militarisation (Melvern, 2000:68). Despite this, Woodward (1996:23) is of the view that the Bank and the Fund were right to supply increased finance as they did: 'The provision of general balance of payments support in support of adjustment is essential to allowing macroeconomic adjustment to occur at a realistic pace, and thereby limiting the social impact. To have tightened the fiscal targets, or to have reduced financial support, would in practice have increased the pressure on civilian spending while doing little to restrain military expansion'. This may perhaps be the case, but it must be weighed against the fact that at least some of the assistance supplied did find its way into corrupt or militaristic uses (Uvin, 1998:90), and that the continuation of funding to the Rwandan state enhanced its legitimacy and may well have encouraged it to believe it could get away with still further abuses. Andersen (2000:451) argues that stronger human rights conditionality in 1992 might have proved effective, and a brief period of concerted donor pressure on human rights issues seems to have led to some improvements in 1993 (Uvin, 1998:96).

Towards Explanation

Why did the World Bank lend such support to state power in Rwanda? Prunier (1995:88) hints at occasional expatriate corruption, with some World Bank officials colluding with akazu agents, though there is no evidence that corruption of this sort was widespread. Hanssen (1989:24) believes that World Bank 'experts' simply knew too little about the realities of the local Rwandan situation: commenting on the period before 1989, he claims that Bank report writers rarely spent more than 15 days in Rwanda at a time and often spoke only English (see also Uvin, 1998:156). Commentators on the Bank at a more general level have pointed to its staff's poor knowledge of non-economic issues, even insofar as these impinge on the performance of the economy (Stremlau and Sagasti, 1998:97).

Other writers claim that such 'ignorance' is part of a wider malaise: the development aid 'community', of which the Bank is a leading member, has an overwhelming need to airbrush reality in order to be able to claim 'success' (reality being notorious for its tendency to reflect lack of aid success). If success cannot be claimed, further projects and programmes cannot be legitimised (Quarles van Offord, 1993). According to this line of argument, it is for this reason of (perhaps unconscious) institutional self-interest that international aid agencies – including the World Bank – portray states as apolitical, technocratic implementers of policy, with social divisions within a country downplayed or ignored. To put it slightly differently, states have not been explicitly analysed as representing certain sectional interests – instead, they have been seen as representing (or, at least, trying to represent) society as whole.

James Ferguson (1990:225) describes how such an analysis worked to the government's advantage in Lesotho: the governmental bureaucracy, heavily supported by the Bank, was portrayed as a 'machine for delivering services' rather than as 'a device through which certain classes and interests control the behaviour and choices of others.' As a result, the Lesotho régime – representing the interest of a particular élite
was able to use World Bank projects to reinforce its bureaucratic state power over rural areas while the World Bank, in turn, was better able to justify the maintenance and extension of its own interventions (on the grounds that they were merely promoting overall societal welfare). In reality, the state served quite a different role, as we have already seen in the example of Rwanda – it was ‘the most important instrument of accumulation of wealth and reproduction of a ruling class’ (Reyntjens, 1996:242). But having allowed the ruling class to accumulate wealth and reproduce itself over time would hardly constitute the sorts of outcomes the Bank could use to claim ‘success’ vis-à-vis its interventions.

Peter Uvin has already analysed this process at work in Rwanda, when he talks of a ‘development ideology’ that the state promoted and to which international agencies subscribed:

[This] basically consists of an argument that the state’s sole objective is the pursuit of economic development for the … masses; as a result … [everyone] interested in promoting development should work with the state to make that possible. This ideology legitimises the government’s intrusive presence in all aspects of social life, and diverts attention from the very real differences that exist between different classes and social groups. In other words, it diverts attention from all things political, replacing them with a discourse of technicity and collective progress … [T]his discourse has come to serve as a powerful tool for Third World elites, in their dealings both with their own populations and the international system (Uvin, 1997:99-100).

As the preceding section demonstrated, World Bank policy towards Rwanda in the early 1990s perpetuated the diversion of attention from ‘the very real differences that exist between different classes and social groups’, thus lending implicit support to the agenda of the Rwandan ruling elite, but also allowing the Bank to better justify business as usual – shifting vast amounts of money, to agents claimed to be committed to the uplift of society as a whole. This strategem ‘situates the World Bank [and the Rwandan state] in a technocratic realm above or outside of politics’ (Uvin, 1998:43), though as Uvin (1998:155) goes on to note ‘this blindness to politics by project planners and managers does not make their political effects disappear; it just renders them unrecognised and undiscussed, to the pleasure of those who stand to benefit’.

However, an obvious query arises here: how could the Bank continue to justify so strongly supporting state structures at a time (the early 1990s) when it itself was committed to ‘rolling back’ state power under the neoliberal economic reforms characteristic of the 1980s and 1990s? The compatibility of the World Bank’s discourse with the interests of governments such as those of Lesotho and Rwanda might have been expected to decline, given the anti-statist thrust of the neoliberal adjustment policies embraced by the Bank. There is certainly a deep distrust of state intervention embedded in the political economy approach currently favoured by the World Bank (Fine, 1999). However, the adoption of the adjustment discourse has not fundamentally altered the extent to which the state is still seen as a neutral force, whose role is to implement policies in a rational, technocratic manner (Hildyard and Wilks, 1998). Bank hostility to state intervention must be reconciled with the ongoing need to work with states: this circle is squared by envisaging a state structure that is committed to its own rolling back, staffed by technocrats who recognise the validity of the Bank’s economic nostrums. Referring to the experience of adjustment in Africa, Gordon notes:
Ironically, despite their critique of the African state, donor strategies in practice complemented the apolitical rhetoric and hierarchical nature of the existing African regimes: and, in fact, sought to shift from one narrow focus of decision making, i.e., top politicians, to another, i.e., top technocrats (Gordon, 1996:1529).

The architects and proponents of structural adjustment often see the implementation of their programmes as requiring skilled (in terms of neoliberal economics) ministers and civil servants ‘detached’ and ‘insulated’ from those ‘interest groups’ who would otherwise derail the necessary process of reform (Gibbon, 1995:137; Gordon, 1996:1528). This attitude is clearly apparent in the work of influential (vis-à-vis Bank policy) writers such as Robert Bates. Bates (1994) exemplifies the tendency when he speaks of the desirability of creating ‘strong economic bureaucracies ... able to resist distributive claims and to minimise economic distortions’ (Bates, 1994:25).

While Bates recognises that elite groups do use the resources of the state for private ends, and this is a view occasionally recognised by the Bank also (Williams and Young, 1994:92), he, and other writers within this approach, appear to believe that this tendency can be overcome by insulation of policy-makers from wider societal interests, though how they can be insulated from their own interests is never obvious. Sandbrook (1996:8) talks of the desirability of ‘technocrats and administrators ... [obtaining] the requisite insulation and competence’; for Sandbrook, the task of government is to ‘mediate the many conflicts within society’, which is a matter of enhancing ‘technical and administrative skills’. There is an implicit assumption that technocrats – once safely ensconced in what Mkandawire (1998:27) describes as ‘authoritarian enclaves’ such as independent central banks – will neutrally administer the tenets of detached economic wisdom. This process can be enhanced if the technocrats devote time and effort to persuading the rest of society that adjustment policies are both necessary and desirable (see below).

The policies themselves, of course, can only be perceived as neutral ‘with respect to those who already accept liberal principles’ (Williams and Young, 1994:94). Indeed, the conception of state neutrality is intimately related to the perceived political neutrality (or technical superiority) of the economic advice itself – the role of the state is to neutrally implement ‘correct’ (in an abstract sense) policies and persuade others of that correctness. Thus, insofar as Bank personnel analyse political issues in the context of adjustment, they tend to do so from the perspective of ‘strengthening the domestic constituency for reform’, promoting ‘country ownership’ of reform programmes, and creating the conditions through which governments can ‘build consensus’ for reform. The actual content of reform is assumed to be beyond argument – the task of politics is simply to persuade people of the merits of implementing reform. This is very much in keeping with the Bank’s (1995:iv, 13) criticism of the Rwandan state for not better ‘associating’ people with the adjustment programme, its failure to build ‘broader political and popular support for reform’.

In general, the above constitute the themes that, as we have already seen, constituted the staples of Bank discourse vis-à-vis Rwanda in the early 1990s:

- The insistence on the state as a mediative/neutral (albeit not always efficient or effective) actor;
- The underplaying of social divisions within the country;
- The stress on the (technical) ‘correctness’ of adjustment policies;
• The analysis of politics in terms of abstracted 'interest groups';
• And the need to persuade the population of the merits of reform.

These themes flowed directly from the institutional requirements of the Bank itself – the reconciliation of a commitment to neoliberal economic reform with the ongoing need to work through state structures, a reconciliation that can only be achieved by the discursive construction of a technocratic state which shares the policy priorities of the Bank itself.

The discourse, therefore, did not flow from any detailed analysis of the specificity of Rwanda – indeed, a central plank of Bank discourse is that it offers universal, technical solutions that do not need to be tailored to local circumstances. But, as earlier sections showed, in Rwanda, probably more than anywhere else in the world, the Bank's discursive construction missed (deliberately or otherwise) a critical element of what was actually happening – sharply rising inequality, accelerating elite enrichment and corruption (mainly organised through the state), and preparations for massive violence on the part of those who controlled the state. The Bank was not alone in this as most of the development aid 'community' also managed to avert their eyes from the increasingly ominous reality of Rwanda at that time (Uvin, 1998:82-102).

Postscript

The new, RPF-led government of Rwanda has been involved in wars in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC, formerly Zaire) since 1996. The second major phase of conflict began in August 1998, and has led to considerable criticism of all parties involved (including several other governments in the region) over civilian casualties, human rights abuses, the looting of DRC resources and other matters (Amnesty, 1997; Human Rights Watch, 2000b; Jackson, 2000; Willum, B, 2001; Willum, G, 2001). There are also serious criticisms being made of the state's human rights record within Rwanda itself (Amnesty, 2000; Human Rights Watch, 2000a).

Aid donors to Rwanda today are displaying a greater willingness than before to engage with political issues, rather than simply turning a blind eye to them (Uvin, 2001). Although aid to Rwanda remains high, concern about the behaviour of the current government means that it itself receives less aid than did the previous regime (Uvin, 2001:181). Nonetheless, as far as the World Bank and the IMF are concerned, some old habits die hard:

In June 1998, the IMF approved structural adjustment aid for Rwanda of nearly US$100 million over three years. Despite Rwanda's increase in military expenditure above agreed limits, the IMF has continued to provide this aid after the start of the war in the DRC. On 31 March 1999, the World Bank approved a 'Rwanda Economic Recovery Credit' of US$75 million, of which US$40 million were released straight away (CCAC/GLAN, 2000:14).

A World Bank economist was asked whether there was not a danger of these funds being diverted to finance the war in the DRC: he replied that

the government [of Rwanda] assured us that it is not interested in the continuation of the war. Which is satisfactory for us ... We have no guarantees, but we have their word (cited in Reyntjens, 1999:42).

Reyntjens (1999:42) comments that 'In the light of all the lies of the Rwandan regime concerning its involvement in the DRC in 1996-1997 and again in 1998, such an
explanation is astonishing'. However, given the patterns described earlier in this article, there is obviously a strong sense of history repeating itself here: the Bank is once again displaying a willingness to lend strong support to Rwandan state power, and the consequences for ordinary people – in Rwanda itself and in the DRC – may once more be bleak.

Andy Storey, Development Studies Centre, Kimmage Manor, Dublin 12, Ireland; Andy.Storey@dsckim.ie. An earlier version of this article was presented as a paper at the conference on 'The global constitution of “failed states”: consequences of a new imperialism?', Sussex, 18-20 April 2001. My thanks to participants at that conference, and to Peter Uvin, for helpful comments. An even earlier version of the article was released as a postgraduate working paper of the School of Sociology and Social Policy, Queen’s University, Belfast.

Endnotes

1. The phrase ‘indigenous’ is used to denote differentiation from the white, mostly European community, who represented an economically and socially important group in the society also (Uvin, 1998:16).


3. The most likely explanation of his death is that he was killed by members of the akazu itself, concerned at his alleged betrayal of the Hutu extremist cause (Prunier, 1995:213-29).

4. Lugan (1997:450) describes the ‘international community’ as having a veritable passion (engoument) for the country.

5. Unless and until otherwise stated, all page numbers in the text refer to World Bank (1994).

6. For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Verwimp (1999), who relates these control mechanisms to the régime’s rhetorical idealisation of peasant life.


8. Until otherwise stated, all page numbers in the text now refer to World Bank (1995).

9. This refers to parliament’s voting down of a proposed increase in tobacco taxes (iv).

10. A report from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) dating from the early 1990s at least acknowledges that most adjustment measures were, presumably for reasons other than disinformation, very unpopular (UNDP, n.d.: 28).

11. Concern about the outcome of the state-RPF struggle led to the Bank requesting that RPF representatives be associated with the negotiations on the structural adjustment programme (World Bank, 1995:12-13).

12. The Bank (1994:15) has argued that the social impact of inflation was limited by the fact that food prices rose less sharply than overall prices, and many of the poor were subsistence farmers outside the cash economy. This argument needs to be treated with caution – 25 per cent of the population was landless and many more had to supplement their own production with purchased food and other goods (Mullen, 1995:23).

13. See also Kanimba (1991:23) who documents the explicit commitment of the structural adjustment programme to at least maintaining health and education services at existing levels.

14. Chossudovsky (1997:118) does recognise this impact but, to my mind, does not sufficiently emphasise its importance.
15. Talks, which were due to begin in early 1993, on a new joint Bank/Fund programme of support were postponed until the government had signed a peace accord with the RPF (UNDP, n.d.:30).

16. It is possible that Bank personnel expressed certain matters to state officials on a face-to-face basis that did not feature in the official reports reviewed here. However, even if such behind-the-scenes pressure occurred, to claim that structural adjustment supports 'were made conditional on democratic developments in Rwanda' (Andersen, 2000:448) seems somewhat overstated.

17. Much of the increase in military spending was, in fairness, hidden — such as the diversion to the army of lorries purchased for ostensibly agricultural use, and the usage by militias of hospital vehicles (Melvern, 2000:67). However, Melvern (2000:67) still notes 'It is a mystery why the five missions sent by the World Bank to follow and supervise the SAP between June 1991 and October 1993 apparently failed to notice all this [diversion of funding] activity'.

18. This relates to a much wider debate about whether the genocide might have been prevented by different types of external intervention — see Kuperman (2000).

19. For a cogent critique of the approach, see Leys (1996:80-103).


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Bringing Political Struggle Back in: African Politics, Power & Resistance

Graham Harrison

This article will investigate the enduring importance of political struggle as a key notion in the understanding of contemporary African politics. It does so with an awareness that this notion has fallen out of academic favour. This article sketches an approach that gives a key role to political struggle in processes of political change in sub-Saharan Africa. In doing so, African political economies are seen as necessarily contested and therefore there is a need (to re-work the phrase of the new statists/institutionalists) to consider bringing struggle back in to the analytical frame.

Political struggle is used in this article as a theoretical term; it is not supposed to allude to a specific institutional form or a certain political agenda. Struggle is a process, a result of mobilisation provoked by some form of resistance. Nevertheless, using terms such as resistance and struggle clearly requires some normative judgement. In this article, the notion of struggle is based in a sympathy for mass politics rather than elite politics, widening political participation, and the promotion of socio-economic equality. Consequently, struggle alludes to political mobilisation and organisation to express and promote demands which are in keeping with these sympathies. Struggle is not used to refer to processes associated with the struggle for spoils (Szetel, 1983; 2000), or the violence and struggle associated with complex emergencies (Duffield, 1993; Keen, 1994). Struggle also involves a particular understanding of political economy more broadly, based in a critique of capitalism. This draws our attention to the relationship between structure and struggle, but at this point it is important just to note that struggle relates to social tensions and contradictions which go beyond the liberal-pluralist framework of 'checks and balances', multi-party contest, and a basically positive sum approach to socio-political intercourse in which – under certain conditions – dialogue and negotiation will produce marginal benefits for all involved.

The Death of Political Struggle

It is easy to understand how and why political struggle has not enjoyed great prominence recently. The end of the Cold War (or at least the way the 'victory' of the West has been represented) and the neo-liberal 'revolution' entrenched in many societies in the 1980s has yielded (and been promoted by) an intellectual climate which is increasingly hostile to the idea – and certainly the ideal – of political struggle. The key features of this intellectual climate are the more nihilistic strains of post-structuralism, the triumphalism of a schematic liberalism (articulated with increasing
power as the World Bank consolidates a greater intellectual presence), a tendency towards eschatology (with telling cross-overs into the media and the intelligentsia), and a revived interest in the epistemology of cultural relativism. Each of these approaches has written into it a hostility towards a serious consideration of the role of political struggle in African political economy as outlined above. Let us briefly review these approaches in order to get a sense of the decline of struggle as an analytical concept.

**Post-structuralism & the End of ‘Heroic Narratives’**

Post structuralism as a general rubric contains within it a significant amount of diversity in terms of both epistemology and normative approach. The postmodern desire to reject all ‘foundational’ political beliefs, and to focus on a concern with a supposedly agnostic analysis of discourse and signifiers, can reasonably be rejected whilst taking on board the increasing cynicism with grand constructions of nationalism and progress, and accepting an increasing awareness of the complexity and local specificity of political formations. Furthermore, the increasing interest with ‘new social movements’, very much the progeny of a post-structuralist and post-marxist tendency, has provided important insights into contemporary forms of struggle (most often seen as new forms of resistance to globalisation) (Burbach, Nunez & Kagarlitsky, 1996).

More specifically in respect to analyses of political struggle in Africa (and not only encompassing post structuralism), there has certainly been an increased – and healthy – cynicism concerning previously fairly well-established ‘heroic’ narratives of national liberation which, when subject to detailed historical investigation, reveal *ideologies* of liberation which hide the fact that, during struggle and after liberation, some are more equal than others. One might reasonably draw a trajectory here from de Brito’s (1988) revisionist work on Frelimo’s liberation war, to Leys and Saul’s (1995) balanced evaluation of SWAPO, and finally Clapham’s (1998) edited volume on present-day guerilla warfare. In the contributions of Clapham, struggle is perhaps driven by popular aspirations and ideology (one could make this case in respect to the National Resistance Movement/Army (NRM/A) in Uganda) or concerns of institutional control and power, as well as control over resources.

**Liberalism & the Politics of Positive Sums**

Concurrent with all of this interesting work has been a growth in the significantly more vacuous and stultifying work produced by the World Bank’s dalliance into the field of ‘political science’. Since it became apparent that economic liberalisation in sub-Saharan Africa produces considerable political and social disturbance (perhaps building on already existing social and political instability), the Bank has elaborated a strategy of external relations based on engagement with – and the selective incorporation of – important alternative sources of information and evaluation concerning the Bank’s activities. Thus, we see the Bank’s attempts to engage with non-governmental organisations, to create a political lexicon for Bank interventions (governance, partnership, participation and so on), and to produce large amounts of academic work on issues such as corruption, ownership, and culture. Also, within academe, the increasing importance of consultancies and the profusion of workshops and other forms of funding by the Bank and intergovernmental organisations has ensured that the Bank’s political ideology has ‘rippled’ into the university (Schmitz, 1995). The broad contours of the Bank’s work defines an image of African politics
based in a bland liberalism, or neoliberal populism (Harrison, 2001), portraying political change, or more accurately political 'progress', in terms of rational dialogue, positive-sum games, mutual concessions between different interest groups, and a conceptual separation of politics from economics. Reading the Bank's literature, there is no room for a notion of political struggle, unless one uses this term to encompass the three strategies of voice, exit, and control (Paul, 1992) because in a market-oriented polity there are no contradictions so profound as to necessitate it. The problematic for the Bank is to avoid exit and, in so doing, render political action narrowly delimited by liberal boundaries.

**Eschatology & the End of Hope**

Since the early 1990s, some observers – especially diplomats and journalists – have come to conclusion that, even if political struggle once existed as a significant presence in African politics, it has now been replaced – destroyed? – by an overwhelming wave of self-destruction.² The best-known example here is Kaplan's *Atlantic Monthly* article (1994), which was reviewed with great insight by Englund (1998). The tenor of this viewpoint – as Westerners stand aghast at the genocide in Rwanda or the war economies of Sierra Leone or Angola – is that the West would be best off disengaging as much as is practically possible from Africa, constructing a wall of defence in their wake. Clearly it would not be surprising to learn that, if he has read anything on Africa, George 'Dubya' has read Kaplan. Political struggle in this sense merely connotes a struggle for rapidly declining resources – not only commodities (the 'blood diamonds' of Angola or Sierra Leone, or even the tropical hardwoods of Liberia), but also livestock and people.

**Functional Chaos & the End of Progress**

A strong argument has emerged which portrays notions of political struggle as prescribing, in authoritarian fashion, a culturally and historically embedded set of ideals on African and non-Western societies and cultures more generally.³ Rejecting this Western liberal notion of struggle has led some to analyse contemporary African politics through a relativist lens. As with post structuralism (with which there are some affinities here), there is no good reason to reject all of this work – Williams (1999) has provided much insight into the supposedly neutral term 'development', especially as articulated by the World Bank. But, in other forms, cultural relativism appears to have a complex affinity with Kaplan et al. Chabal and Deloz's *Africa Works* (1999) takes disorder as its starting point, portraying African politics in essentially the same vein as Kaplan but without the journalistic salacity. Chabal and Deloz identify the ways in which chaos, disorder, and the collapse of all things 'official' work to reproduce forms of authority. Corruption, civil war, and so on are actually signs of a functioning African polity, not a collapsing one. It follows that struggles for peace, democracy, social progress, are actually dysfunctional – almost retrograde.

So much for political struggle: victim of our neoliberal historical conjuncture and a profusion of epistemologies which write struggle out of the picture. Furthermore, the undeniably upsetting and extremely costly emergence of conflict and economic collapse in much (but not all) of Africa give even those who have a normative sympathy with the notion of struggle little more than a kind of 'hope against hope' approach to struggle: a reference to struggle as an act of faith, a coda of *a luta continua* at the end of otherwise dour narratives. The next section outlines a conceptual schema through which to integrate political struggle as a central part of contemporary African
politics, based in a critical awareness of the importance of class relations and the contradictions of African states' experiences with capitalism.

**Rethinking Struggle**

**National Liberation?**

African nationalism has been the central vehicle through which much analysis of struggle and liberation in Africa's post colonies has taken place. The idea of a 'national interest' against a form of imperialism has proved persuasive and has mobilised intellectuals of the left to write in solidarity with some form of nationalism, whether based on Jacobin ideals of self-determination, or on forms of radical nationalism, the latter represented most clearly by Frelimo in Mozambique. Nationalisms of the latter kind have produced a strong line of 'solidarity writing', based on critical support for a nationalist movement or regime. However, within this writing, there has always been an implicit tendency to assume that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend', and therefore to write in a way that belies a normative sympathy for a regime besieged by imperialist intervention, at the cost of a sharp critique of the authoritarian forms of rule hidden behind the national veil, for fear of giving ground to imperialist interests. More than any other journal ROAPE has considered this paradox in the politics of nationalism – a Janus-like anti imperialism and national authoritarianism – for example in respect to 'petty bourgeois politics' generally (Saul, 1974; Williams, 1976), and Mozambique (Meyns, 1981; Cahen, 1993) and South Africa (Fine, 1989) more specifically.

It is certainly the case that, in exceptional circumstances, nationalism can mobilise a population to resist external oppression, and that in the course of struggle, forms of egalitarianism and participation can emerge. A strong example here is Eritrea during its struggle for self-determination (Cliffe & Davidson, 1988), but one can identify threads of similar processes in the ANC's struggle against apartheid, in late colonial Lusophone Africa, and Uganda from 1980 to 1986. Perhaps Burkina Faso's brief 'revolution' from 1983 to 1987 under Thomas Sankara, very much built upon a notion of national identity in a 'land of people with integrity', provides an exception to the rule: a radical nationalism forged not in conflict, but quashed by a conservative military coup (in which Sankara died) dressed up as revolutionary 'restoration', perhaps with French encouragement. But what is praiseworthy within these radical nationalisms is not nationalism per se, but a more specific set of social trends or organisations which develop within the hubris of mass mobilisation and notions of citizenship. The relatively well-researched example of the liberation war in Zimbabwe reveals the tensions that specific progressive movements developing within a more austere and 'controlled' national mobilisation can provoke (Moore, 1994).

So, notions of national liberation do not provide a useful starting point to understand struggle beyond the constitution of a general political backdrop for more specific political movements. A nationalist struggle will always be accompanied by more specific struggles within a nationalist movement to determine the content of nationalist politics; a coupling of struggles of nationalism (against an external protagonist) and struggles for nationalism (between groups contesting the content of nationalist politics). It follows that the established distinction between national and imperialist interests is of dubious utility, hiding at least as much as it reveals. It is hardly controversial or innovative to say that many post-colonial party-states have
evoked a 'national interest' to justify all kinds of authoritarian practice, and that 'anti-national' or 'unpatriotic' can be defined basically as any group that resists the power of the ruling elite of the day.

**Structure & Struggle**

Class analysis constitutes a potentially productive starting point for the analysis of struggle, but it also raises difficult issues as to how one conceptualises class and its relation to struggle. Clearly, the first question that one should engage with here is: 'is class relevant to Africa?' Most researchers do not think so. In this writer's experience, finding a paper presented at a conference with the word 'class' in the title is either extremely rare or warns us of an empiricist Weberian analysis of socio-economic strata. Clearly, class does not explain everything in Africa; perhaps class does not even explain much in certain conjunctures. But, in terms of analysing struggle, one can construct an argument that class analysis is essential.

1. Let us not forget the grand scheme into which detailed research must be situated. Africa's political economies have been profoundly shaped by global capitalism since the late 1800s. African societies are currently in the thrall of the international finance institutions which quite clearly maintain a neo-liberal agenda in keeping with a powerful (post) Washington Consensus, itself an ideology-dressed-up-as-science articulated by powerful Western states and international finance. As capitalism's geographical scope and intensity of interaction increase so precipitously, it seems strange to abandon the methodology best equipped critically to evaluate it.

2. The founding point noted above can lead in a number of directions. One is the nationalist approach, already rejected. Another is to argue that global capitalism has won out against the alternatives, ergo, all that happens in Africa must serve or reflect global capitalist interests. Neither is particularly helpful, and both lead to a curious neglect of class, in the pursuit of a reductionism to states or a determinism of 'structures' respectively.

3. Another approach is to begin, not with a 'big picture', but to analyse social movements and political organisations themselves, and on their own merits. This means that a political party may not easily be described, via some pre-emptive schema, as 'petty bourgeois', or a social movement as 'worker' or 'peasant'. Many political parties – especially those which are short-lived – can be the constructions of perhaps ten or so individuals, best described as malcontents from the incumbent ruling elite; and social movements are often organised around some form of ethnic solidarity or morality which is in no sense directly reducible to an economic 'base' of some kind. In other words, political organisations and movements that, say, mobilise in the name of justice, equality, empowerment, or redistribution do not do so according to any clear class-based schema. But, this is quite definitely not to say that these movements are innocent of class relations. This does not mean merely that 'leadership' and 'followers' have different interests (although this is often important). It also means that political movements are historical products of a changing political economy – defined by processes of accumulation, production, and class relations – with which they engage in a process of mutual (albeit unequal) influence.

Some examples. Political mobilisation based on notions of political identity have gained prominence recently, especially ethnic and youth movements. These are seen as part of a politics of identity that has little to do with class or capitalism. In respect to ethnic identity and politics, one might consider the well-known example of the
Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). MOSOP is clearly based on ethnic identity. Its founding moral claim is that oil extraction in Rivers State, Nigeria has been unjust because it has taken resources from Ogoni land and returned precious little to the Ogoni people apart from pollution. Saro-Wiwa provocatively portrayed this as genocide against the Ogoni. This clearly raises questions about ethnic plurality and the nation-state, the relative merits of federalism versus consociationalism; the issue of group rights and their relation to individual rights (Osaghae, 1995a; Welch, 1995). But the origins and fortunes of MOSOP are inextricably interlinked with transnational investment, capitalist development and its negative externalities; uneven development; the close state-capital relationship, and changes in the global oil markets (Khan, 1994).

Remaining with the oil industry in Nigeria but moving into the plants themselves and the labour processes therein, Adesina explicitly outlines the understanding of work collectivities as cultural repositories of oppositional and protest activities.

... to the extent that work and non-work relations are bound up in workers' self-awareness, their self-identity is defined by and within specific cultural and experiential contexts. Work relations therefore acquire specific meaning: agrarian idioms, and ... allusion to chieftain relations are just two such cases. ...The important thing is that consciousness is a process of constitution within definite socio-cultural contexts (Adesina, 1989:317-318; see also Adesina, 1990).

Both the examples of MOSOP and workers' culture in Nigeria's oil producing areas show how cultural resources can be mobilised to form identities that relate to class struggle as well as ethnicity, region of origin, language and so on.

The increasing and dramatic incidences of youth protest also allude to issues of identity, as well as generational difference and questions concerning the relationship between modernity and 'tradition'. Once again, this article does not seek to refute the importance of these issues, but rather to stress that the shaping of these issues cannot be divorced from the political economy of capitalism. Growing academic attention given to youth politics in urban Africa is principally a result of the spectacular upheavals in African cities, driven by urban youth groups. It has been the youth who have been at the forefront of anti-dictator and anti-structural adjustment street protests throughout the 1980s and 1990s, for example in Mali (Turrittin, 1991; Kay Smith, 1997) Burkina Faso (Harsch, 1999), and Zambia (Simutanyi, 1996).

The historical roots of these protests can be found in the crisis of economic development that has led to a decline in the modernisation project from the early 1980s. Previously, post-colonial modernisation was based on economic growth until the early 1970s and, subsequent to the first oil shock, the contracting of international debts and large unsustainable budgetary deficits and inflationary financing. After 1979, the bubble of what Zack Williams (1990) has called the post-colonial mode of accumulation burst, leading to unstable waves of retrenchment, wage freezes, and cut backs in social provision throughout the continent. It is within this conjuncture that one can understand youth protests. 'Youth' is a social category, rather than an age cohort; it relates to young men who expect to be able to leave their parents' home and establish an independent household unit - a social condition of transition so to speak. But the economic crisis of the early 1980s has put youth into a 'limbo'. Chikhi describes the social repercussions of economic collapse in Algeria as follows:

"the younger generation live the tragedy of exclusion in a particularly straightforward, brutal fashion. The overwhelming majority are out of school ... Their chances of getting into"
the productive work chain are slim, because urbanisation no longer goes hand in hand with industrialisation. These people are in 'social quarantine'. Unemployment rates climbed from 16% in 1983 to ... 23.6% in 1989. And these young people make up the overwhelming majority of those counted in these statistics (Chikhi, 1995:325-326).

Similar examples can be found in West Africa: Donal Cruise O'Brien talks of a 'lost generation ... [which] marks the rupture from the relatively comfortable socialisation procedures of the period from 1960 to the late 1970s' (1996:57). So, youth identities, and the rash of riots and protests from the mid-1980s onwards are a result of the collapse of the post-colonial regime of accumulation and the temporal insertion of a particular social category therein which sharpens the social cost and contradiction of this collapse.

Much of the research on political struggle and youth is centred around visible public acts of rebellion and violence, giving the research a focus mainly on young men. It is worth bearing in mind that other forms of collective political action involve young men and women. Examples include participation in new religious movements (Adogame, 2001), involvement in issue based pressure groups (for example the Uganda Debt Network which is both politically prominent and staffed by relatively young men and women). Young educated women can also be key participants in growing fundamentalist movements (Christian and Muslim).

The examples are brief and selective, but they make a central point in the development of our methodology: political mobilisation and struggle is not best seen in a straightforward way as 'class struggle'. But it remains the case that struggles and actions articulated through identities, ideologies, and ethnicities constitute – and cannot be fully understood in isolation from – part of a capitalist political economy and associated processes of investment, accumulation, trade, recession, wage labour, and so on.

4. Part of the problem with 'class analysis' is a result of confusion over exactly what this phrase means. Geras (1990) ably demonstrates how marxism has been caricatured with increasing gusto since the decline in the intellectual currency of socialism, and one component of this is to assume that 'class' connotes an economic category. Thus, supposedly, a working class is a group of wage labourers whose collective behaviour should follow an economic logic of the rational pursuit of maximum wages and, eventually 'revolution'. But one can employ 'class' in less rigid and economistic fashion (Thompson, 1980; Burawoy, 1991; Wood, 1992). The importance of class derives from its focus on the social nature of labour. By understanding productive activity in relation to the accumulation of capital, one can identify key contradictions in social relations, and tensions/conflicts between classes. How these tensions and contradictions express themselves is the subject of historically-informed research, not of pre-emptive schemas. The nature of peasant production is inextricably linked to markets dominated by merchants, states, and traders who extract surplus from peasants through terms of trade; production may also be more tightly controlled via state 'development' projects or outgrower schemes. But peasants' responses cannot be discerned therefrom; in fact they vary from the strategies akin to those of petty entrepreneurs (diversifying into more lucrative trade crops) to those of an insurgent class (chasing state cadres out of the village or destroying the property of a large trader or commercial farm). One can identify contradictions in the wage labour process, but one can also identify a wide variety of social and political manifestations of these contradictions, from strikes to 'game play' (Barchiesi, 1996).
5. If we understand class struggle in a way that does not reduce political action to the directly prescribed effect of some assumption of 'capital logic', we do not need to abandon the fact that class provides a uniquely valuable compass with which to evaluate struggle and its impact. As noted in points 3 and 4 above, struggles cannot be divorced from capitalist political economy, and class struggle can be employed in a way that does not reduce political action to an established narrow prescription of rational action. But of course, political struggle will in turn modify the social relations of a society. This brings us to a widely-discussed problematic in social science: the relationship between structure and agency. One way to resolve this apparent paradox is to consider the way in which structure and agency interact over time, creating a degree of mutual definition. Marx's apt statement sums it up: 'men make their own history but not in circumstances of their own choosing'(Marx, 1978:595). Relatedly, research on the capitalist state by those associated with the journal *Capital and Class* have paid attention to the relationship between structure and struggle. Amongst fairly detailed theoretical elaborations, the point has been made that structures embody within them a 'moment' of struggle, or resistance within the bonds that the former create. In other words, structures do not merely impose a set of rules and dominations upon society generally, they are also shaped by a concern to control, channel, suppress, and co-opt forms of resistance to power and therefore structures are necessarily shaped by resistance.

In sum, we can conceptualise political struggle in the following way. Initially, we need to understand the ways in which capitalism creates contradictions and forms of exploitation in specific places and times. This provides a theoretical context within which to research forms of political mobilisation and resistance which will not yield clear schematic features of 'class action' but will need to be interpreted in terms of capitalist political economy. By employing class in a non-deterministic way, struggles can be understood not merely as effects of a broader political economy but as partially constitutive of that political economy as well. This means that the structures that shape inequality and disempowerment also contain within them grains of resistance, of greater or lesser strength. This approach has repercussions for the way we understand contemporary political issues and themes in African politics.

**Understanding Structure & Struggle: Democratisation**

Studies of democratisation have established a strong sub-field in African studies over the last decade, providing fertile ground for considerations of struggle in contemporary African politics. While many studies of democratisation have opted for a fairly descriptive and empirical methodology, some have raised important analytical questions concerning the way we understand political mobilisation and change – all directly relevant to the concerns of this article. In the first place, researchers aimed to define how democratisation came about, producing a fairly straight forward dualism in the literature: democratisation was the result of a limited change in the structures of a global political economy; democratisation was the result of the decisions and actions of agents, individual or collective in African societies (Woodward, 1994). Those who stress structures often relate cautionary narratives concerning the scope or potential of democratisation: it is an elite process (Ake, 1993, 1995; Schraeder, 1995); it is a result of general global trends, such as the collapse of communism or new policy approaches in the West, not popular political engagement (relatedly, Young, 1993). In this schema, African populations might actually play a marginal role; they might participate in a political process which does not actually give them any power. Those who stress agency are more sanguine (Wiseman, 1999), but hardly optimistic, often
adopting some form of 'transition' approach (Osaghae, 1995b) in which new regimes must endure certain institutional consolidations before becoming a sustainable democracy. An interest in political actors in democratisation presents more promise for those interested in struggle, but much of the transitions literature has built into its methodology an elite focus (Saul, 1997) in which agency matters mainly because forward-looking elites are required to move the state towards its appropriate role in overseeing market-based growth.

The analytical model sketched in the previous section requires that we begin with political movements, understanding their dynamics not as an effect but as a component of a changing capitalist political economy. It rejects both a top-down predilection for structures because this can easily 'write out' political struggle, as it does in an otherwise insightful neo-Gramscian approach (Abrahamsen, 1997). It rejects an agent-based approach – of the kind take by Bratton and van de Walle (1997) and others (Hyden, 1992:4) – because this approach tends to separate actions from a broader context; in other words, there is an unnecessary separation of the political and the economic, apart from ubiquitous references to patrimonialism.

Focusing on political struggle soon produces a wide gamut of political movements and mobilisations. From the emergence of the first cracks in the post-colonial authoritarian edifice, labour unions, students, civil servants, women’s groups, business associations, and less often, peasant groups mobilised to infuse ‘transitions’ with a particular social content.

To pick selectively from the example of labour unions. In Nigeria, the transition back to a civilian regime via elections was brought to a halt by the military in 1993. As a result a wide range of pro-democracy movements emerged, demanding that the military recognise the results of the 1993 elections. The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) was a key part of the democratic struggle (Agbu, 1998:250). The NLC, particularly the oil unions, Nupeng and Pengassan, supported the broader Campaign for Democracy, protesting the annulment of the presidential elections (Lewis, 1999:147). The strikes held by the oil unions cost the oil industry, and the Abacha regime which took power after Babanginda’s exit, 25 per cent of its daily oil revenues for every day that the government refused to accept the outcome of the elections (Financial Times, 25 September 1994). It was therefore no coincidence that the state’s response brutally to quell democratic protest involved demobilising the NLC, Pengassan, and Nupeng (The Independent, 19 August 1994). Another aspect of the state’s response was to sow divisions within the structures of the NLC, a strategy in which it was already well-practised (Beckman, 1995).

Elsewhere, mass strikes significantly boosted other pro-democracy demonstrations (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997:148; 1992). In Cameroon, strikes helped force a National Conference and subsequent elections (Krieger, 1994:611). In Tanzania, where the corporatist binds were particularly strong,

under pressure from within... especially from students and trade unions ... the ruling party has slowly liberalised and begun to dismantle its monopoly of power over the state (Ohlson & Stedman 1994:207).

After 1987, Mugabe began to moot the possibility of legislating a one-party state. This plan eventually failed, partly because of splits within the ruling party, but also because of resistance to the idea within Zimbabwean civil society. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) was ‘the major civil institution which opposed the
concept of the one party state’ (Sachikonye, 1993:262). In Zambia, the success of the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) in ousting Kaunda and UNIP can only be explained through the support of the Zambian Congress of Trade Unions which provided organisational and logistic support, as well as providing the party with its leader. Note Chiluba’s words in 1990: ‘the Zambian Congress of Trade Unions believes that the one-party system is open to abuse; it is not the people in power who should direct political change, but the ordinary masses.’ (in Bratton & van de Walle, 1992:425). More recently, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in Zimbabwe repeated this pattern: the ZCTU provided the support base and the leader (Morgan Tsvangirai) for the first significant opposition party in Zimbabwe since 1987 (Bond, 1999:14).

Any detailed study of a labour union must consider the specific history of that union – its personalities, relations with the state, the nature of the workplace, its ethnic or regional bases, and so on. It must also consider two other issues. Firstly, unions’ (supposedly novel) movement into the political arena often derives from concerns within the workplace, most obviously the desire held by workers to ensure that their representative body has adequate political space to express their demands. In other words, class relations constitute a key dynamic of political mobilisation. Secondly, unions’ mobilisations to support democratisation infuse the democratisation process itself with social concerns. In this respect, one can trace a convoluted inter-twining of demonstrations against structural adjustment and mobilisations for democracy (Ihonvbere, 1993:144). However, the actions of states – both to repress and incorporate – have weakened labour unions (Herbst, 1991:179; Jeffries, 1991:165).

It is also notable that the supposed ‘natural constituency’ of structural adjustment, business, has not strongly supported adjustment programmes. This is the result of the close relationship between capitalist classes and the state, which structural adjustment should, in theory, sever. Resistance to this has led business organisations for many factions of capital (Gibbon, 1996) to evoke notions of ‘national sovereignty’ in order to mobilise a defence against neo-liberalism and preserve the political conditions for accumulation.

More violent demonstrations against the effects of structural adjustment have been prosecuted by young men who worked within the burgeoning informal sectors of the cities, the social group ‘in limbo’ that was mentioned earlier. These ‘food riots’ have been provoked not only by structural adjustment, but by a more general economic decline brought about by the contradictions in post-colonial regimes of accumulation. In this sense, it is neither valuable to blame all on SAP, or to construct false historical divisions between pre and post adjustment (which often reflect a national-imperialist dichotomy of the type mentioned earlier). In general, regimes which have accumulated and reproduced their public and private power over the independence period have also implemented – or more accurately translated – structural adjustment into ‘their’ national societies, whilst remaining in power.

To move back to the question of methodology, we can make the following comments. Social struggle has been embedded in the nature of transitions. Struggles have not only promoted political liberalisation and given many academics a renewed hope in civil society; they have also engaged with the structural disposition in which democratisation has taken place. Unions have been concerned with the condition of workers, the social effects of retrenchment, abolished subsidies etc.; and the relative power of workers vis-à-vis managers, political elites, and capitalists. Business organisations have tried to preserve the political relations with the state that ensured
them the conditions to accumulate under some form of political protection. Youth riots have challenged states from which they have been alienated, and the property relations which only present them starkly with the contradictions of their own exclusion, manifest in some form of close juxtaposition of extreme wealth and poverty. Taking political struggle as a starting point provides a different view of democratisation. Political change is dynamised by political mobilisation, but political mobilisation engages not merely with transitions, but with structures, whether it be those imposed or maintained by SAP or those which ensured the reproduction of state-capitalist class relations and accumulation during the post-colonial period.

It is important to recognise the role of struggle, in the sense outlined here, because it provides us with a key insight to the nature of politics in those countries where second rounds of national elections have taken place. It is clear that the possibilities for structural change have been stymied, and that new constitutions have been accompanied by substantial structural continuity. However one explains this conjunction of political opening and substantial structural continuity, it is clear that the effect of this conjunction is to produce a clear discourse of disillusion or apathy within African societies. Reading the main newspapers of many African countries yields arguments that new regimes are just the same as old ones, that all parties share the same narrow set of policies, that all politicians are in it for the money, and that external involvement in politics remains a powerful – and unaccountable – presence. Much of this state of affairs is captured by Mkandawire’s analysis of ‘choiceless democracies’ in sub-Saharan Africa (1999). Choiceless democracies are those in which elections and party contest do not address substantive issues of social relations and structures. It is in this sense that one can understand the street-level expression coined in Niger after the 1995 elections: changer le changement! (Ibrahim & Souley, 1998:163); in other words, democratic change must allow the social mobilisations it produces to engage with the structural and class issues which dynamised their emerging activities as much as constitutional change or a desire of liberal political rights.

It follows from the analysis above that political struggle is at a nadir: invigorated by a democratisation process which was itself dynamised by political mobilisation, political elites and external agencies have ensured the consolidation of choiceless democracies. Subsequently, a strong political sentiment of resignation and cynicism has set in. Perhaps the clearest example of this is the ZCTU in Zambia, where a labour union that produced the main opposition party is now very remote from its progeny, the MDC, which is now dominated by Zambian business and external donors (Ihonvbere, 1995). But there is no more reason to imagine that this state of affairs is permanent than there is to suppose that capitalism has reached some kind of stable end stage, akin to an ‘end of history’. Consequently, it is important that academics research forms of political struggle as they emerge, with a close eye on changing political economy. Any single country will repay research in this vein: analysing the specific dynamics of political mobilisation, their historic specificity and their engagement with the class relations and structures of a country’s political economy. We will take the example of Mozambique.

**Mozambique: Contemporary Threads of Struggle**

Mozambique held its second multi-party elections in 1999. As with the 1994 elections, they were generally seen as ‘free and fair’ by the international observers, although there were far less observers that in 1994, and Renamo boycotted the Assembly of the Republic in protest at what it saw as irregularities and fraud. During the 1990s, there
had also been a national census and the establishment of locally-elected municipal authorities. The economy was the fastest growing in the world in 1999, with an increase in GNP of 19 per cent. One might imagine, then, that Mozambique has successfully stabilised itself after the war and is now on the way to ‘normality’ or even ‘recovery’. But political issues and struggles remain which behove us to take a more critical view of Mozambique’s contemporary politics.

Mozambique relies on the export of cotton, cashew, and prawns for the bulk of its export revenue. As part of structural adjustment, state-owned cashew nut processing factories were privatised. In contrast to the general trend in privatisation in Mozambique (which has been radical and far-reaching, compared with the rest of Africa), the factories stayed under national control, bought by Mozambican capitalists, often of Asian origin. Many factories were re-equipped with new machinery after their private owners had taken out loans to secure productivity. Cashew privatisation was seen as one of the few successful cases of national development in Mozambique, after many state enterprises sold off to foreign concerns faced problems as productive units were changed into trading centres, there was widespread retrenchment, and allegations of racist labour relations emerged.

In 1995, the World Bank, supported by a consultancy it had funded, conditioned further loans of the removal of an export tariff on raw cashew nuts. The export tariff had ensured a price structure which allowed Mozambican factories to gain access to cashew nuts (a peasant crop) rather than face shortages as nuts were exported to India for processing and re-export (Hanlon, 2000). The Government protested, arguing that removing the export tariff would damage the embryonic Mozambican cashew processing sector. However, pressure was maintained to get rid of the tariff, and it was phased out as a condition of structural adjustment. The cashew processing industry had to lay off workers as a result of the changes in cashew price structure. Eventually, almost all cashew processing factories were forced to close as the nuts went abroad unprocessed, leaving Mozambican capitalists with large debts and no means to pay interest or principal. A second consultancy, undertaken by the international auditors Deloitte & Touche, found that – contrary to Bank arguments – removal of the tariff had damaged Mozambican cashew processing and that the policy had had an overall detrimental effect on the economy.

Much of the controversy concerning cashew nut processing has been generated by Mozambican organisations. The cashew industry’s representative body, AICAJU (Cashew Industry Association), as well as the cashew worker’s union, SINTIC (Cashew Workers Union), have lobbied the government to replace the tariff and to demand ‘reparations’ from the World Bank. In 1997, AICAJU demanded that the World Bank pay compensation for the damage it had imposed. The union also claimed that the World Bank was liable to pay compensation to retrenched cashew workers, who number over 8,500. The Bank agreed to consider this proposal in 1997, whilst not changing its liberalisation policy in spite to the Deloitte report. Subsequently, Mozambique’s National Assembly voted to increase the export tariff, counter to World Bank policy; the export tariff went from 14 per cent to 18 per cent in 1999. The activity of AICAJU and SINTIC have defined and envigorated the controversy over cashew. The ‘cashew issue’ has also highlighted the complex contours of political struggle in an indebted country: a need to engage with IFIs as well as the national government, and a situation in which it is not entirely clear that the government represents the ‘national interest’ articulated through the cashew organisations, as it has a great deal tied up its good relations with the World Bank and
The example of cashew reveals a small example of political mobilisation giving content to formal democracy: an elected chamber eventually passed legislation which produced a policy that had structural repercussions, not only regarding the cashew processing industry but also the relationship between donor/creditors, states, and political organisations.

There is no pre-emptive reason to assume that this specific Mozambican example is unique. Researching political mobilisation within a framework of post-colonial political economy will provide a key to understanding the nature of political change. Approaches that ‘write out’ struggle as an anachronism or a product of Western imagination leave political analysis caught between the bland utopia of liberal capitalism and the dystopias of political collapse and decay.

**Graham Harrison**, Politics Department, University of Sheffield, UK.

**Endnotes**

1. For example, compare the work of Lyotard (1984) with Laclau and Mouffe (1987).

2. More strictly academic observers have paid increasing attention to various forms of millenarian religious movements which evoke images of judgement days and the end of the world. For example, see Gifford (1991); Ellis & Ter Haar (1998).

3. Related issues have been given their most thorough treatment within International Relations. For example, see Jones (2000); Hopgood (2000).

4. Sankara changed the country’s title from Upper Volta to Burkina Faso, the latter meaning ‘the land of men/people with integrity’. This was associated with Sankara’s austere populism which condemned conspicuous affluence in urban areas.

5. Bratton and van de Walle take a lot of time to concern themselves with issues of structure-agency, but ultimately the core of their detailed and comprehensive book relies on an almost exclusive focus on agency, with structures apparently playing a reinforcing role post hoc.

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Zimbabwe: Labour's Options within the Movement for Democratic Change

Suzanne Dansereau

The article sets out to understand the option for labour represented by the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), a movement made up of a wide cross section of groups opposing ZANU-PF's twenty-one year hold on power, with key leadership coming from the labour movement. The article seeks to understand the nature and potential for change embodied in the MDC given its alliance with groups from below, often labelled civil society or new social movement.

It documents labour's radicalisation, moving from the shop floor into broader political action and alliance-building and eventually into a direct partisan challenge for political power in the 2000 parliamentary elections. It analyses MDC policies, finding a seemingly contradictory emphasis on participation and social democracy, alongside the proposals for a mixed economy involving international donors and investors, with a moderate state role whose objective is to create employment and alleviate poverty. These policies reflect the loose alliance making up the MDC, ranging from citizen, labour and human rights groups, with some commercial farmers and industrialists. The challenge is to maintain support from the various interests within this common front as it consolidates itself into a party, capable of putting forward a national project. This requires a struggle between competing interests, and it is labour's actions within this struggle and its outcome that will ultimately define labour's options within this new grouping.

Introduction

Zimbabwe's most recent parliamentary elections in June 2000 were hotly contested, undertaken in a context of land invasions, heightened political mobilisation and political violence. For ZANU-PF, a party steeped in the struggle against colonialism and guerilla war, this was their 5th election under the same President since independence in 1980. By contrast the MDC, formed less than a year prior to the elections, emerged out of the new realities of the post-independence period, a coalition of disparate groups under the leadership of the labour movement. Out of the 120 contested seats, ZANU-PF won 62 seats, Ndabaningi Sithole won his traditional seat for ZANU-Ndonga and the MDC won 57 seats. ZANU-PF appointed the 30 seats permitted under the current constitution to expand what looked like a narrow majority, into a far more decisive one. Yet for the first time since the 1987 unity accord between ZANU and ZAPU, there is a substantial opposition in place, well-positioned to seriously contest the presidential elections in 2002.
For many, the mere fact such an opposition exists in the face of growing limits to political freedom seems victory enough as it marks a significant opening for democracy. Yet fundamental questions as to the nature and potential for change of the emerging opposition and the dissent it channels need to be posed. Does it represent an important new direction or merely a decapitation of the labour movement as their leaders move from shop floor to parliament? What is the capacity of groups such as labour and other non-state actors to bring about social change and development? Debates around democratisation in Africa recognise the potential of groups ‘from below’, seeing them as part of a ‘third wave’ of democratisation, acting alongside a plethora of newly-emerging political parties to promote democratic governance and human rights (Diamond & Plattner, 1999), thereby expanding the political process by channelling citizen demands (Laakso, 1995; Skaines, 1993:401-28; Van Rooy, 1998). Others see them as anti-hegemonic, creating countervailing citizen power to the state, and through the creation of broader alliances ‘escaping the global project’ (Esteva & Prakash, 1998:1; Escobar & Alvarez, 1992; Rist, 1997; Munck & O’Hearn, 1999; Wignaraja, 1993).

Yet much of the analysis of civil society or new social movements fails to differentiate as to the interests, roles and especially emancipatory potential and political project (Dansereau, 2001) among these diverse groups which at times are said to include trade unions, community groups and even businessmen’s associations. Uncritical support for the ‘associational revolution’ (Schmitz & Hutchful, 1992) might result in support for a democratisation model that inadvertently supports, as do the World Bank and other international agencies, an increased role of non-state actors as a way of facilitating a reduced state role (Stevens & Gnanaselram, 1995:97-105). As state services are devolved to volunteer-based organisations, the state public functions are replaced by organisations that while promoting participation are also largely ‘private’. This devolution to the private also suggests that alliances made up of a broad cross-section of groups, coming together into a Movement to seek state power by contesting elections – as the MDC has done – are nonetheless faced with significant challenges. The first is the danger of co-optation as constituent groups continue to seek state response to their specific issues. The second is the difficulty in forging the basis of unity needed to put forward a national project out of a set of diverse platforms and special interests.

Labour in Zimbabwe moved from shop floor action into overt dissent and eventually a direct political challenge when avenues to the defence of workers’ were closed. To reach these objectives, they spearheaded alliance-building and eventually formed the Movement for Democratic Change to contest the 2000 elections, bringing together commercial farmers, some members of the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries alongside residents’ associations, human rights groups and academics. Analysts often refer to these different interests as the MDC’s right or left wings to explain seemingly contradictory statements emerging out of the movement or other policy weaknesses. We would argue instead that these are in fact signals of difficulties experienced by an alliance as it attempts to overcome the disparate nature and real interests of its membership as it seeks to form first a movement, and eventually a party.

We will therefore examine the options now facing the labour movement in the context of the MDC and the challenge it faces in putting forward the interests of its members within the context of an alliance made up of groups historically opposed to each other. At issue is first the challenge posed by political action, organised in the form of a broad-based alliance; and second, the nature of that alliance which brings together
labour and the private sector. To do this we will briefly recount labour's move from shop floor to parliament in the formation of the alliance, and examine MDC policies and platform to see if and how labour's voice is coming through.

**Radicalisation of Labour: Moving from the Shop Floor ...**

The decision of the labour movement to become involved in partisan politics reflects a long trajectory that began with an initial distancing of the labour movement from ZANU-PF in the mid-1980s and its growing opposition to government economic policy since the adoption of structural adjustment in 1991 (Dansereau, 2000; 1997:90-122). Early opposition to structural adjustment addressed specific hardships such as rising unemployment and falling real wages as well as the modification of labour relations with the amendments to the Labour Act in 1992 which saw government abandon its role as 'defender of workers' rights, preferring to act as 'referee' in a liberalised collective bargaining process. Government would now recognise more than one union per sector, abandoning the sliding scale principle in national wage increases while maintaining the Ministry of Labour's role in collective bargaining and even announcing its support for the creation of union-free export-processing zones (ZCTU, 1994:4). Reforms also meant that legal strikes would be harder to organise as the list of essential services, therefore without the right to strike, was now longer (Tsvangirai, 1992:74-76).

Yet by 1994, deteriorating real wages, falling from an index of 122 in 1982 to 67 in 1994 (Kanyenze, 2000), alongside government calls for workers to tighten their belt for the good of the nation at a time when top government officials were awarded hefty salary increases, provoked an increasingly angry worker response. Soon after large-scale strikes began in key economic sectors such as banking, posts and telecommunications, hospitals, construction, insurance with teachers threatening to join these job actions. Many of the strikes were successful in spite of the labour laws forbidding them and workers made some wage gains. A brief thaw occurred in state-labour relations in 1995 and early 1996 with the ZCTU's publication of their policy document criticising structural adjustment, doing so at a time when government was preparing the next stage of the programme. 'Beyond ESAP' in 1996 represented, according to Raftopoulos and others, an attempt to engage the state and the international financial institutions in a more constructive debate on structural adjustment. Mugabe, apprehensive of labour's strength during the 1995 general elections, followed shortly by the Presidential elections in 1996, agreed to meet with labour leaders and attended May Day celebrations in 1995, for the first time since 1991 (Raftopoulos, 2000).

This rapprochement was short-lived; inflation continued to eat away at previous wage gains. In 1996, a second series of strikes, this time in the public service, virtually paralysed the country and created a political crisis. Over 160,000 workers, including between 70-80 per cent of government workers, went off the job, affecting hospitals, airports, posts and telecommunications, and again with teachers threatening to join in. The bulk of public sector employees returned to work after 2 weeks but doctors and nurses continued for 49 days. The government fired the 2,000 nurses and 200 junior doctors and called in the army to care for patients.

A sense of political crisis developed. Strikers gained some public sympathy, including among back bench Parliamentarians. Government was accused of using manipulation, coercion and bullying tactics over the care-giving sector, especially nurses. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) attempted to organise a national strike, but was met with significant repression and the brief imprisonment of
strike leaders. University students joined in over university-based issues with the sense of crisis heightened by a bomb scare at the university.

Continued inflation fuelled large worker demands, often around 60 per cent, to try and keep up with inflation but winning increases of only about 35 per cent. These were won through significant job action – with over one hundred in 1997 alone, accompanied by several demonstrations, national stayaways and consumer boycotts. A national stayaway took place in 1997, paralysing the country once again and resulting in riots and army intervention. In reaction, the government imposed a ban on all strikes and demonstrations. In response, the ZCTU withdrew from the Tripartite National Forum which negotiated national economic solutions, saying it wouldn’t return until the ban was lifted. It argued that the President had exceeded his constitutional powers, demanding a full constitutional review by a representative council, to be undertaken before the 2000 elections.

This inability to solve workers economic problems coupled with increasing repression against workers strikes and demonstrations pushed the labour movement into alliance with other groups opposing the ZANU-PF government. Opposition to government had become increasingly widespread among other social groups, fuelled by economic difficulties, government’s lack of response to specific issues and in reaction to the unrepresentative elections in 1995 which brought home to many the impossibility of bringing about change in the existing political system. There was a growing sense that the current context was one of corruption, abuse of power resulting in increasing poverty, hunger and riots and that these could not be solved given the shortcomings of the constitutional and legal framework for democracy in the country (Makumbe & Compagnon, 2000). Opposition groups and trade unions shifted their struggle from a purely economic one to a more political one over democratisation. Labour groups began working with representatives of citizens movements – the Council of Churches, cooperatives, human rights organisations, student groups – and others to form a first coalition of 96 organisations, the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) in 1998. The ZCTU’s Morgan Tsvangirai became President of the new organisation whose objective was to push for a full, representative constitutional review aimed at limiting Presidential powers. The government, in an attempt to regain the momentum and deflect the support for more radical constitutional change proposed by the NCA, set up its own review, appointing 400 people to a Constitutional Assembly to consult the population and draw up a draft constitution to be put to a national referendum in February 2000.

Once the ZCTU withdrew from tripartite national discussions in 1999, it convened a broader convention of trade unions and opposition groups, forming the National Working People’s Convention to

map out strategies to protect workers from the biting economic conditions, after a
government ban on all forms of collective job action, by beginning to put into place a strong,
democratic popularly driven and organized movement of the people.

This became the Movement for Democratic Change in May. Its stated objective was to quickly form a full-fledged, worker-led party, but in its initial period, it concentrated on mobilising and educating for social change and engaging in a campaign for democratisation, emphasising social democratic, human-centred development, political pluralism, participatory democracy, accountable and transparent governance. In September 1999, at a ZCTU Congress, the union gave its support for it to become a full-fledged party, and together with participation from 40 popular groups, and an
attendance of 20,000, the movement was officially launched, declaring it would contest the 2000 elections (The Worker, 1999).

The movement entered the election period a few months later, with activists and members coming from a diverse set of interest groups. Current leadership reflects the MDC's close association with the labour movement. The current President and Vice President of the movement – Morgan Tsvangirai and Gibson Sibanda – holders of the two top positions within the Zimbabwe Confederation of Trade Unions (ZCTU) have been key to distancing the union central from the ruling party. In addition, 8 other trade unionists are members of the MDC executive (The Worker, 2000). The alliance over constitutional issues within the NCA brought in several constitutional specialists, university lecturers who play a prominent role in the movement, as well as human rights groups in response to demands for greater political freedoms. Alliances over general economic hardships and the battles to have the government impose price controls brought in activists from consumer groups, teachers, NGOs, students, the cooperative movement, some of the churches and others. In addition, there are regional branches of national organisations participating, even if the national organisation does not, including branches of the Commercial Farmers Union (CFU), the Zimbabwe Farmers' Union (ZFU) and the Indigenous Commercial Farmers' Union (ICFU) (Makuwadza, 1999). The MDC, though largely considered an urban based organisation, was conscious of the need to increase its presence in the rural areas and undertook, between late 1999 until the February 2000, constitutional referendum to organise in rural as well as urban areas. The objective was to provide an alternative message to that presented by ZANU-PF whose stronghold is in the rural areas (Raftopoulos, 2001), where many are cut off from all but official sources of information. This diversity expanded after February 2000 with the start of land invasions and attacks against white commercial farmers, many of whom openly supported the MDC, a support needed by the cash starved movement. Other forms of financial support also came from some indigenous business people. The Indigenous Businessmen's Association was clearly supportive of ZANU-PF during the election campaign. Relationships with the large-scale economic sector are present, though less clear, articulated largely by MDC's principle economic spokesman Eddie Cross, former Vice-President of the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries.

The Elections ... to Parliament

Government defeat of its constitutional proposals in February 2000, losing to a 54 per cent 'no vote', and a low voter turnout of 26 per cent, precipitated a political crisis for the government. This was ZANU-PF's first major loss since independence, making the party realise the extent to which the opposition might threaten its victory in the next election, concluding that strong action was needed. Anti-colonial rhetoric against international donors and commercial farmers increased as the party declared its refusal to return to the days of colonialism while re-iterating a commitment to land reform.

Land invasions on white-owned commercial farms began soon after. Initially these were thought to be spontaneous actions undertaken by the rural poor pushing for much needed land reform to address land inequality created by brutal colonial expropriation – and still unresolved. Yet it became clear, especially as elections drew nearer, that these actions were led by elements among the war veterans, including the late Dr. Chenjerai Hunzvi, an ex-combatant and president of the War Veterans Association and medical doctor whose allegiance to ZANU-PF was confirmed when
he became that party's candidate, winning the Buhera constituency for the party. The movement was popular among many land starved peasants and even workers who had invaded 1,700 commercial farms by election time in the hopes of gaining access to land by this means. Invasions were the most intense in the Mashonaland provinces, bread-basket of the country and a ZANU-PF stronghold.

ZANU-PF youth allegedly also participated in the land invasions and in violent actions against the opposition in the run up to the elections. Government refused to sanction these actions and President Mugabe declared:

_To the war veterans I say remain on the occupied farms until we start redistributing the land to our people in the next few months. No police officer nor soldier would be sent to evict you_ (Agenda, 2000).

Such declarations and the failure to make arrests in connection with the murder of five commercial farmers and another 33 people during the election campaign prompted growing criticism of the government for refusing to uphold the rule of law in spite of court judgements calling for the eviction of squatters.

When the elections were called, the MDC was less than a year old and poorly financed. It nonetheless fielded candidates in each constituency, the only opposition movement to do so, giving it the stature of a national party. Organising took place in a campaign that was increasingly tense with numerous reports of violence and intimidation of opposition organisers as well as the electorate who, it was alleged, were being told that ballots were not truly secret. Ultimately 32 of the 33 people killed during the campaign were connected to the MDC. By mid-May, Amani Trust, a local human rights non-governmental organisation, reported 5,078 incidents of violence since the beginning of the election campaign (Agenda, 2000:3-4).

In spite of great apprehension during the last few weeks in the run up to the election, turnout was high on election day and the polling was smooth and peaceful. There were reports of voter intimidation during the long wait in the queues. International election observers noted some discrepancies in the vote count with stories of unreliable movement of some ballot boxes but in all they said the process had been legitimate. The aftermath of the elections was also peaceful, in part because both sides felt they had won something important: ZANU-PF because it won the right to stay in power; the MDC because it won sufficient seats to mount a viable parliamentary opposition and to provide a strong basis to contest the 2002 presidential elections.

The distribution of seats reflected MDC's urban support, winning all seats in Harare and Bulawayo, and in all secondary cities. It also won several seats in Matabeleland, in the south of the country, a region previously represented by ZAPU. It did less well in rural Mashonaland prompting an MDC analysis that the intensity of the squatter movement, including violence and intimidation in that area partially explained their poor showing as it deliberately prevented their contact with people in the rural areas. There were also numerous reports of harassment of urban workers and the confiscation of their newspapers and MDC paraphernalia when they visited family in the rural areas. The election of some new young parliamentarians also reflected MDC’s support among young people to whom the veterans' appeal carried less weight, reflecting a generational divide that crosses both urban and rural areas, resulting from large-scale youth unemployment.
A diverse group went to Parliament for the MDC: several trade unionists (*The Worker*, 2000), Roy Bennet a white commercial farmer from Mutare, Munyaradzi Gwisai, a member of the Trotskyist International Socialists, along with Gibson Sibanda, former President of the ZCTU and now MDC House Leader. Parliamentarians represented all areas of Zimbabwean life – educators, entrepreneurs, professionals, ex-civil servants, clergy and former NGO staff. A big disappointment was the failure of the movement president, Morgan Tsvangirai, to win his seat in rural Mashonaland East.

**Labour in the MDC Platform**

The following is a brief outline of the MDCs principle policy areas found in its ‘Policy Manifesto, the Programme for Change’ (2000) and to see the extent to which the movement reflects its labour roots. The manifesto states core principles: giving priority to the interests of the people and the nation; social democracy; building a united, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society as well as sustainable and equitable economic growth. Priority areas are the economy, land, democratisation and social services.

It gives priority to overcoming the current economic crisis, including addressing the high levels of poverty. Economic change will be based on ‘economic empowerment of the majority’ through the negotiation of a social contract achieved within a National Economic Consultative Forum, involving all national stakeholders. Growth will be employment intensive, encourage women’s participation in the labour market, and create sustainable employment in the informal sector, to be coordinated through a Tripartite Labour Market Commission. It recognises a role for the state in the economic sector, yet also aims to rationalise government spending, while directing the state towards strategic areas to prevent market failure by providing incentives to the private sector. The objective is to achieve sustainable economic policy, equitable distribution using a community based participatory initiative with decentralised administration.

Land policy within the Manifesto describes a people-driven land reform, involving the acquisition by the state of between 6-7 million ha. of land to resettle 200,000 households currently living in communal areas. Land to be acquired will be underutilised, derelict and multiple owned land, to be identified and designated by a Land Commission, involving all interest groups. Implementation will be through a decentralised process involving regional and district boards, traditional authorities and village assemblies. Rural service centres will be established to allow peasants access to support services. They will also gain freehold title in communal and resettlement areas enabling the use of land as security to attract investment, while introducing safeguards against land transfers.

Emphasis is put on democratisation through the institution of a people’s constitution, implemented through a stakeholder process, building an accountable and transparent government – free of corruption. This will require greater independence of the electoral process, the limitation of presidential powers, especially the abolition of the president’s power to appoint 20 members of parliament, while reducing the size of cabinet, decentralising local authorities by introducing participation at the local level.

Another priority area is the improvement in provision and delivery of social services, including increased spending in health and education, as well as improved access to decent housing.
Thus we see, throughout the Manifesto and other MDC documents, emphasis on participation either through a tripartite or stakeholder process, through community based participatory initiatives or the decentralisation to local or regional authorities. Key areas of decision-making involve a stakeholder process such as a Land Commission, a National Economic Consultative Forum, and a Tripartite Labour Market Commission. This is extended to the area of economic participation in job creation, in order to meet people’s economic and social needs, with the intention of alleviating poverty. The participation of women is extensively mentioned as is the respect for the rule of law as a way of safeguarding participation. Much of this reflects the participatory approach championed within NGOs, reflecting the involvement of MDC members and parliamentarians from the NGO sector. The reference to tripartism draws its roots from the trade union movement as is the promise to include all groups in a National Economic Consultative Forum, a stakeholder-driven process aimed at establishing a consensus based social contract, reflecting one of ZCTU’s policy directions.

The emphasis on participation, the creation of consensus, the use of different languages of participation reflects diversity of membership and leadership, coming not only from the trade union movement but community groups, business associations and many others. The ‘Programme for Change’ document reflects the intention to appeal to all Zimbabweans, speaking of benefits to the nation as a whole. The platform thus reflects a common front or multi-class approach rather than the more specific interests of workers. There is no special mention of workers’ rights, control or benefits but rather to the country as a whole. The concern is to rehabilitate the economy, address poverty and social hardships, and correct the excesses of the previous regime. The movement is indicating to the population that it will represent their general interests, not only the interest of a specific group, reflecting the broad coalition that makes up the movement.

Workers and peasants are however recognised for their role in the anti-colonial independence struggle. More recently, the ZCTU and civil society groups are credited for the creating a Peoples’ movement, challenging government’s abandonment of the ‘principle of representative stakeholder participation’. This movement eventually gave birth to the MDC. It reflects the interests of this broader people’s movement, aimed at ‘reclaiming peoples’ power’, rather than a workerist party and indicates in the Manifesto that it:

\[is \textit{a united front of Zimbabweans representing various interests and constituent organisations, coming together to pursue common objectives and principles that advance the interests of all people across Zimbabwe, workers, peasants, informal traders, students, unemployed, women, youth, disabled people amongst others (MDC, 2000:4).}\]

This populist approach is combined with an economic and social programme reflecting the MDC’s social democratic nature. In spite of what may seem to be neoliberal rhetoric with the usual emphasis on cutting government spending together with the establishment of ‘an investment driven economy requiring fiscal, monetary and financial stability’, the state is nonetheless accorded a role in economic development. It is expected to provide inputs into strategic sectors of the economy ‘to build productive capacity for long term social and economic growth so as to restore conditions conducive to the real development of the people and the nation’, along with an emphasis on employment creation and the provision of enhanced social programmes, including health, education and housing, all aimed at addressing the
high rates of poverty. Again workers' interests are not specifically targeted but included within a broad mandate to address poverty issues.

The proposed economic policy also involves re-establishing relations with international donors, resulting in ZANU-PF’s accusation that the MDC represents their interests rather than that of the nation. The MDC does propose working with the international community to 'negotiate ourselves out of this economic quagmire' (MDC Press, 2001), including restoring the rule of law, establishing a national land reform programme and introducing a stabilisation and recovery programme (Ibid.).

Thus while it sees the country's economic recovery requiring the support of international donors, the movement insists this is a more moderate version than ESAP programmes adopted by government. The objective is to restructure national debt to reduce the cost of debt servicing, increasing the power of national financial institutions over the market (MDC 2000). While indicating support for international trade and regional economic integration, this should be limited by giving the state powers to intervene and exert some control over the marketplace so as to reduce dependency, develop national economic capacity and achieve economic justice.

Recognition of a state role in limiting the market, alongside support for international trade and globalisation reflects a more moderate approach consistent with their objective of creating employment through the support of national capital, via the support of indigenous entrepreneurs and local manufacturing interests. Thus while there is no direct mention of labour rights within such a framework, it is nonetheless consistent with the mixed economy approach common to a social democratic platform that puts the emphasis on economic justice and employment creation. The platform does not entrench labour's role, recognising instead its role in the people’s movement and situating it in a broader national alliance of popular classes. The movement is clearly not a workerist party, but a common front of different political and economic interests.

**Unity or Diversity?**

In practice, the MDC seeks to maintain unity out of this diversity as it fights for its survival in response to the context of violence, terror and intimidation, experienced since February 2000. The MDC estimates that 54 people have died in political violence since January 2000, most of them MDC organisers and supporters (MDC, 2 April 2001). Policy discussions come second, as no major policy revisions having taken place since the 2000 elections. Since the elections, the movement has been involved in over 30 court challenges over election outcomes, charging ZANU-PF with violence and intimidation in the run-up to the elections. It has won a handful of these, toppling a few ZANU-PF notables such as Olivia Muchena (MDC, 27 April 2001), winning one by-election and two mayoralty races, one in Masvingo and the other in Bulawayo, in spite of the violence. It is fully expected that the next presidential election campaign will also be difficult because of this violence. The attempt is also to disrupt the MDC’s support among workers by supporting the work of the Zimbabwe Federation of Labour (ZFTU) who travel to factories and mines, intimidating workers into withdrawing from ZCTU-affiliated unions (Rezive, 2001).

The movement’s first priority therefore is the struggle over democratisation, rallying a wide variety of groups in the struggle for greater political space. Policy differences between the groups are left largely unresolved, or are articulated in a way that is sufficiently inclusive, allowing all interest groups to see their interests represented, at
least on paper. In fact, the movement’s main policy thrust for all intents and purposes is its principle slogan: Chin’ela Maitiro (change); all other policy positions take second place. Given the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe, it provides a powerful rallying cry to unite the varied groups opposing ZANU-PF.

The movement’s challenge then is to maintain support within this diverse group as it pushes for greater political freedom in the face of mounting violence and death threats against MDC leaders.

Some rumblings of impatience are being heard especially from labour groups as they wonder if the MDC is perhaps hiding behind this excuse of violence to postpone the emergence of clearer policy proposals. Labour is already warning the movement not to develop a ‘chef’ syndrome and to remember labour’s role in the formation of the organisation. The ZCTU warns that forgetting it will lead to the movement’s ‘complete demise’. At its Congress in February 2001, it tabled discussions as to the best strategy to employ in its collaboration with the MDC; some advocated a formal link with the movement, others a less direct link. Discussions centred on the best strategy to assure labour’s interests are properly represented within the MDC (The Worker, February 2001).

The MDC must seek to reconcile labour’s position with the interests of other members who may also show the same impatience and demand policies more specific to their interests. Multi-class alliances are difficult to maintain especially within a constituency-based organisation such as the MDC which still refers to itself as a movement and not a party. Members retain their participation in their constituent groups, with their own decision-making structures, and especially their own channels of contact and communication with government. The Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) for example oscillates between supporting the MDC while ‘seeking dialogue with government’ (CFU, 21 March 2001). The ZCTU also continues to push for inclusion in national economic debates, yet it has so far been unsuccessful in making significant headway, thus making its alliance with the MDC more stable. The MDC is thus caught between the different real interests that separate its constituent members, leaving it with a shifting political base, that makes it difficult to engage in a policy dialogue aimed at reconciling different interests and creating a more unified and detailed policy platform.

**Conclusion**

This underlines the key issue within the MDC. It remains a movement rather than a fully-fledged political party. It includes different component groups with different interests which have not yet arrived at an internal compromise essential to the formation of a national project. Instead the movement platform seems not so much a compromise but a listing of different, and still competing interests. In that sense labour and the other groups have more to gain by continuing to exert pressure in their attempt to control policy direction, as well as attempting to reach, as both the CFU and the ZCTU are doing, a compromise with government.

The MDC’s attempt to form an alliance based on civil society has come up against the pitfalls of alliance building. On the one hand, the MDC can be seen in the light of the old fashioned common front parties, with the difference that it recognises an enhanced role to civil society and social movements, in keeping with the current recognition of citizen and non-state action in political matters. Attempting to go forward into a formal political challenge based on such a loose alliance is problematic.
Bringing together members that remain organized into constituent groups might work in the formation of a movement, but if the MDC wishes to take and hold power, it will have to undergo the difficult transition to party status in which co-existent and contradictory interests are debated and struggled over, resulting in a struggle over the control and direction of the party. The extent to which labour retains a prominent and decisive role in the new party will only be known once that struggle takes place. Until then labour and all other constituent groups will continue to try and influence the party while negotiating with government over specific issues. There is a risk in fact that once that consolidation takes place and the Movement for Democratic Change becomes a full-fledged party that its policy positions could be very different than those articulated in its current Manifesto. Doing this in the current context of violence and intimidation will make it a challenge indeed. There is especially no guarantee that labour will emerge out of this struggle with any kind of privileged role.

Suzanne Dansereau, Saint Mary’s University, Canada.

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South Africa's Agenda in 21st Century Global Governance

Patrick Bond

Introduction

Can Thabo Mbeki change the world? It's a fair question. 'We will succeed', implored Mbeki to a captivated San Francisco audience in May 2000, 'in the struggle to end poverty and underdevelopment in our country and continent, provided we can count on the kind of support you gave us as we fought together to end the system of apartheid' (Mbeki, 2000). Thus the South African president invited leading representatives of US business, who in reality had for decades been die-hard supporters of apartheid (nearly uniformly opposing ANC calls for comprehensive sanctions), to help combat what Mbeki has already begun to term 'global apartheid' - a system nearly as profitable for US capital as was South African racism.

Either Mbeki is lost, bewildered, simply capable of saying anything pleasing to any audience to curry favour, like any politician or something else is going on. Mbeki would argue strenuously against the former interpretation, as witnessed in his August 2000 attack on the 'Caliban native petit bourgeoisie, with the native intelligentsia in its midst, that, in pursuit of well-being that has no object beyond itself, commits itself to be the foot-lickers of those that will secure the personal well-being of its members'. It will be clear, in excerpts from his speeches considered below, that Mbeki's approach to the global ruling elite is not about personal self-advancement, or even advancement of a goal so narrow as merely increasing foreign investment in South Africa. Instead, let us take as a given that Mbeki's approach is to engage the global ruling elite so as to pave the way for a continuation of what he terms the South African 'revolution'.

For in the same speech, Mbeki continued, 'Our own intelligentsia faces the challenge, perhaps to overcome the class limitations which [Walter] Rodney speaks of, and ensure that it does not become an obstacle to the further development of our own revolution.' Taking this position seriously, it is up to anyone engaging in analysis of global geopolitics and economics to determine not whether Mbeki is seeking to 'further develop' the South African revolution through ever more strategic global insertions, but how is he managing such a challenge; what underlying analysis informs the approach; what strategies and tactics are appropriate; and whether alliances are properly considered - all of which are addressed below.

It is by now evident that economic 'globalisation' - by which is generally meant free flows of trade, finance and direct investment, under conditions of overwhelming transnational corporate power, underpinned by a system of global embryonic-state institutions based mainly in Washington - simply doesn't work for South Africa, or Africa. For that reason, Mbeki and his closest colleagues - finance minister Trevor
Manuel, trade and industry minister Alec Erwin and others – claim to be reforming the interstate and embryonic world-state system.

The reform strategy will fail, though not because of lack of will, integrity or positionality of those involved. After all, since 1994 extremely talented South African officials have presided over the board of governors of the IMF and World Bank, the Non-Aligned Movement, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the Commonwealth, the Organisation of African Unity, the Southern African Development Community and a host of other important international and continental bodies.

Instead, the failure is already emanating from the very project of global-reformism itself, namely, its underlying philosophy, inappropriate practical strategies, and ineffectual tactics. Instead of leading the world, Mbeki and his Pretoria colleagues run a different danger: treading a well-known, dusty path – a cul-de-sac of predictable direction and duration – that, notwithstanding mixed rhetorical signals for all effective purposes excludes (indeed, most often rejects) alliances with increasingly radical local and international social, labour and environmental movements who in reality are the main agents of progressive global change.

Thus the South African post-apartheid official leadership will not achieve its own limited objectives, much less the further-reaching transformation required under current excruciating global conditions. In concluding that Thabo Mbeki cannot change the world, a more radical strategy necessarily arises as an alternative.

‘Globalisation Made Me Do It’

According to economists Jonathan Michie and Vishnu Padayachee (1997), ‘In the South African context, globalization has become a synonym for inaction, even paralysis, in domestic economic policy formulation and implementation.’ Mbeki lectured the ANC’s July 2000 National General Council that globalisation impacts on the sovereignty of small states such as ours ... The globalisation of the economy resulting among other things in rapid movements of huge volumes of capital across the globe, objectively also has the effect of limiting the possibility of states to take unilateral decisions.

Fin de Siecle Strife

For post-apartheid South Africa, the mood of liberation shifted quickly to despair during two moments of powerful international financial discipline, in early 1996 and mid-1998, when currency crashes and capital flight provoked dramatic interest rate increases and, in the first instance, the high-profile disposal of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (Bond & Khosa, 1999). The prime culprit in making South Africa so vulnerable was the government’s March 1995 decision, under intense pressure from local and international financiers, to discard the ‘financial rand’ exchange control mechanism. This decision had the effect of attracting enormous speculative financial flows, which in turn fled rapidly as conditions changed and the investor-herd turned.

The country’s allegedly ‘sound’ economic fundamentals were, of course, deteriorating markedly during the late 1990s. Growing foreign imports amplified local de-industrialisation and job loss, while trade with Africa became extremely biased,
contributes to geopolitical tensions and economic refugees from neighboring lands (and resulting xenophobia by South African workers). There was, moreover, a net outflow of international direct investment from South Africa during the first five years of democracy, while the uneven dribs and drabs of incoming foreign investment were largely of the merger/acquisition variety rather than for new fixed-investment ('greenfield') projects.

Simultaneously, economic advice poured in from international financial centres, based upon persistent demands not only for macroeconomic policies conducive to South Africa's increased global vulnerability, but also for social policies and even political outcomes that weakened the state, the working-class, the poor and the environment. From 1996-98, international financial turmoil offered Pretoria a learning curve to hell: among other outcomes, sinking the country's per capita living standards while intensifying the world's worst inequality; sending real interest rates to their highest-ever levels; crashing the Johannesburg Stock Exchange more than ever before; generating unprecedented municipal bankruptcies; forcing cuts in water and electricity to the poorest citizens; exacerbating apartheid geographical segregation; and reducing the ratio of people formally employed to those desiring a job to levels unprecedented in a century.

Meanwhile, because Washington's grip on international economic power remained relatively undisturbed during the late 1990s notwithstanding the arc of emerging market crises, other disappointments were still ahead. 'Debt relief' promised at the 1999 G-8 meeting in Cologne turned out to be, as Jubilee 2000 South Africa critics had predicted, a 'cruel hoax' (Notwithstanding Mbeki's plea in Japan in July 2000, there was nothing further on offer to either the poorest countries or to those like Nigeria and South Africa that were victims of odious debt repayments). The guru of 'Post-Washington Consensus' theory within the World Bank, chief economist Joseph Stiglitz, was fired in late 1999 (International Business Observer, 2000), and was followed by an angry Ravi Kanbur in June 2000 due to Summers' censorious interference in the drafting of a World Bank poverty report. A 'Free Trade' deal between Pretoria and the European Union was negotiated, and renegotiated again and again when southern European countries protested at SA exporters' use of the names port, sherry, ouzo and grappa. Another 'Free Trade' deal (like Europe's, catalysed and nurtured by lobbyists of large corporations) between Africa and the United States likewise went through numerous palpitations, and eventually included ridiculous riders such as the requirement that clothing exports from Africa to the US would have to include vast components of US-sourced textiles.

**Mbeki's Self-Mandate**

The world was becoming an increasingly brutal place when Thabo Mbeki assumed the South African presidency in May 1999, as testified to by rising levels of mass-popular protest. Thus by mid-2000, just before his first anniversary in office, Mbeki emerged as an apparently far more aggressive critic of the global status quo. He made a series of trips to international political and economic centres and debated global governance. His colleagues, as well as other compatriots, played active roles in key multilateral fora. Within southern Africa, Mbeki burdened himself with increasingly hands-on diplomatic functions (particularly in relation to Zimbabwe and the DRC).

At first glance, this activity represented an impressive, forthrightly progressive attempt to re-jig the global economy in the interests of lower-income countries, to actualise the 'African Renaissance', and more generally to imprint the world with
South Africa’s successful political deal-making model and ‘social democratic’ approach to development.

But at second glance, with a more careful interpretation of Mbeki’s agenda, cynics could justifiably object to his minor tinkering, confused and confusing rhetoric, reluctance to question received wisdom when applied to domestic macroeconomic and industrial policy, failure to draw through the logic of the argument from broad generality to concrete settings, and questionable alliances. While key speeches containing insights into Mbeki’s strategy are invariably eloquent and well received, they leave important intellectual questions hanging. This is obviously not because of a deficient intellect (nor the failure of extremely talented Government Communications and Information Services staff to stock the presidential website with his best work). It is because the approach taken is suffused with immense contradictions: on the one hand Mbeki argues that, to paraphrase, ‘globalisation made me do it’ (Saul, 2001); on the other, he occasionally resorts to advancing amongst the richest, most profound critiques of international markets to be found in contemporary South Africa.

**Mbeki vs. ‘the Globalisation of Apartheid’**

South Africa exists within an extremely unfavourable balance of global forces; to point this out had, by the turn of the 21st century, become pedestrian. For Mbeki, though, the glaring power imbalance provoked moments of honest and impassioned confrontation, even in the presence of Bill Clinton at the outset of his vaunted May 2000 US tour:

> Mr. President, during our discussion today we also observed that as the world globalizes, we continue to be confronted by unacceptable levels of poverty and deprivation, disease, war and conflict. Indeed the gulf between rich and poor has been widening.

**Unethical Development**

With a distinctly distressed moral tone, Mbeki forthrightly complains about the unfairness of the international system. Amongst intellectuals gathering at a gala African Renaissance event in late 1999, for example, Mbeki’s brilliant, wide-ranging speech tackled:

\[
\text{the problem we are facing even as we stand here, of arriving at the point when we can conclude the bilateral agreement between our country and the European Union. Stripped of all pretence, what has raised the question whether the agreement can be signed today or not, is the reality that many among the developed countries of the North have lost all sense of the noble idea of human solidarity. What seems to predominate is the question, in its narrowest and most naked meaning – what is in it for me! What is in it for me! – and all this with absolutely no apology and no sense of shame.}
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‘What is in it for me!’ The scorn with which Mbeki dismisses not only trade realpolitik but also the very foundation of Adam Smith’s invisible hand as optimal allocator of resources, is noteworthy. He invokes, periodically, deeply ethical contentions, as in this speech (as head of the Non-Aligned Movement) to the Group of 77’s April 2000 South Summit in Havana:

> All of us present in this hall represent counties that can pride themselves on the continued existence of a strong spirit of communal, human solidarity among many of our people. The
atomisation of the family and the individual, driven by the development and entrenchment of the capitalist system, has not reached the structural permanence it has attained in the developed countries of the North.

And again, in July 2000 just after Germany had won the right to host the 2006 soccer World Cup by one vote, he told his party’s National General Council: ‘As the ANC, we therefore understand very well what is meant by what one writer has described as the globalisation of apartheid.’

It is with such phraseology that Mbeki accomplishes a dual elision: on the one hand a displacement of the South’s problems from the (untouchable) economic to the moral-political terrain, which in turn evokes calls for reform (not dismantling) of existing economic systems and institutions; but on the other, as noted above, a relentless campaign to persuade his constituents that ‘There Is No Alternative’ to globalisation. For here, with Mbeki addressing the July 2000 ANC National General Council meeting in Port Elizabeth, we locate a striking difference in Mbeki’s rhetoric regarding racial apartheid – which the ANC always insisted should be ‘abolished’ not reformed – and global apartheid:

Let me now mention that big, and some think, ugly word – globalization. This is one of the contemporary phenomena we will have to ensure we understand. We will have to understand this because whether we like it or not, we are part of the world economy. It would neither be possible nor desirable that we cut ourselves off from that world economy so that the process of globalization becomes a matter irrelevant to our country and people.

For Mbeki, the most important practical difference between racial and global apartheid seems to be the contemporary lack of a distinct ‘enemy’:

[There is nobody in the world who formed a secret committee to conspire to impose globalization on an unsuspecting humanity. The process of globalization is an objective outcome of the development of the productive forces that create wealth, including their continuous improvement and expansion through the impact on them of advances in science, technology and engineering.

Thus even though, symptomatically perhaps, power relations are skewed, the driving force of globalisation boils down, in Mbeki’s neutral story, to little more than technological determinism. With this defeatist attitude, and considering that South African state elites were not managing their own developmental challenge particularly successfully, the next logical question is whether those elites should be entrusted with some of the world’s most important development management positions.

Ending Global Apartheid?
Mbeki and his team would answer in the affirmative, combining self-confidence with a unique noblesse oblige. Alec Erwin (1999), for instance, openly expressed Pretoria’s grandest ambitions to his parliamentary colleagues, (ironically) just prior to the Seattle round of the World Trade Organisation:

We will soon have to give leadership not just to the process of the development of our own economies [in the developing world] but to the equitable development of the world economy. The political capacity to do this and the will to do it in the G7 is weakening despite the power of the social democrats.
In the wake of defeating apartheid, the ANC – in particular – must dramatically expand its objectives, Mbeki told the Port Elizabeth gathering in July 2000:

“When we decided to address the critical question of the ANC as an agent of change, the central subject of this National General Council, we sought to examine ourselves as an agent of change to end the apartheid legacy in our own country. We also sought to examine the question of what contribution we could make to the struggle to end apartheid globally.

The best answer – contradictory though it turns out to be – may come in the field of pharmaceutical products (especially access to anti-retrovirals to combat HIV-AIDS), as discussed below and in Part Three. But the answer Mbeki has instead provided (for example, in Havana in 2000) combines at least five fronts:

1) the alleviation of the debt burden carried by many of our countries, including its cancellation;

2) an effective mechanism to ensure a substantial increase in capital flows into the developing economies as this is a prerequisite for development;

3) the reversal of the trend resulting in a sharp drop in official development assistance;

4) the opening of the markets of the developed countries to our products, including agricultural products; and

5) the transfer of technology.

Debt Debacle

We can consider these challenges one by one. It is arguable that Mbeki’s approach to the first, debt relief, has done incalculable damage, mainly by virtue of his failure to endorse the Jubilee 2000 South Africa campaign against ‘odious debt,’ including apartheid debt. Numerous vitriolic debates between civil society and government have occurred on this issue since 1996, and do not bear repeating in full here. Suffice to say, Jubilee 2000 critics argue, had Mbeki and his predecessor Nelson Mandela been truly serious about the debt issue, they would not have:

a) agreed to repay the apartheid foreign debt to commercial banks when it was last rescheduled in October 1993;

b) claimed, repeatedly, that there is no foreign debt owed by the South African government (by ignoring roughly US$25 billion parastatal and private sector debt, for which the South African state inherited repayment and guarantor responsibilities);

c) negated the possibility of demanding reparations for previous foreign credits to the apartheid regime; and

d) endorsed, repeatedly, the Highly Indebted Poor Countries initiative of the G-8, IMF and World Bank, which proved such a distraction from the cause of debt cancellation (Bond, 2000).

Reversing Financial Flows

Regarding the second issue – inflows of capital – there are two kinds worth considering: financial and foreign direct investment. It hardly needs arguing that ‘hot
money' speculative inflows to emerging markets do not by any stretch qualify as ‘a prerequisite for development.’ Nor do the vast majority of foreign loans granted to Third World governments over the past thirty years. Nevertheless, Manuel (1999) continues to argue – as in a September 1999 speech to the US-South Africa Business and Finance Forum – that international finance should continue flowing freely to and from South Africa:

South Africa remains committed to the gradual liberalisation of the capital account. These controls will continue to be reduced in a manner that does not destabilise the market, while ensuring that the financial system manages its risk exposure in a prudent manner ... In South Africa we have established certain principles: as financial flows are far larger than central bank reserves the rationale for defending the currency is questionable. We are convinced that our banking system survived the difficulties of last year [1998] because the experience of currency movements in previous years had shown the Banks the value of having in place highly effective risk management systems and the need to be constantly conscious of the dangers of currency exposure.

Yet to advance this Washington-friendly discourse, Manuel had to ignore all the evidence to the contrary: the exceptionally expensive effort by Reserve Bank governor Chris Stals to prop up the rand in mid-1998; the massive losses sustained by SA banks gambling in international financial markets, also in 1998; and the failure of a substantial chunk of the small-bank market due precisely to ineffectual Reserve Bank supervision and regulation (Bond, 2000).

Even if attracting financial flows is a questionable objective, the second type of potential capital inflow – plant, equipment and machinery – is typically understood as an essential ingredient in any Washington-approved development strategy. But after having done all in his power to attract foreign direct investment, Mbeki has not succeeded; South Africa has suffered a net outflow of such investment since the end of apartheid. Confirmed Steve Morrison, the Africa expert at Washington’s premier imperial think-tank, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Mbeki ‘has toed the line in a disciplined fashion, yet he has had very little return on that’ (Plotz, 2000).

Reforming the International Financial Institutions

Is there, as Mbeki seeks, an ‘effective mechanism’ to reverse the problem of scarce capital inflows? The standard mechanism to date has been the ‘seal of approval’ of the World Bank and IMF, yet huge controversies surrounded the late 1990s – and ongoing – imposition of Washington-Consensus macroeconomic policy, dictated top-down, justified by Washington’s need to rebuild the ‘confidence’ of international investors (via enormous bailouts paid for through huge cuts in living standards). Would reforming the international financial institutions constitute a viable strategy for changing investment patterns? (Bond, 2001).

The chair of the IMF and World Bank during 2000, Trevor Manuel, describes his reform agenda mainly in terms of democratising the Bretton Woods Institutions, by which is meant expanding developing country inputs to the board, rather than director voting according to the present formula of ownership. As he explained in an interview with the Institute for Global Dialogue in mid-1999,

The power relations in these institutions need to change. This is a ‘Catch 22’ situation. Their Articles of Association go back to 1944, when the first shares were allocated. Voting is
based on the amount of shares a country holds. The biggest problem that confronts us in relation to the Bretton Woods Institutions is that you need an 85% vote to effect any change. With the US holding about 17% of all shares, no reform can take place without its agreement. Therefore, the kinds of reforms we are hoping for are not going to happen unless the world takes a very different approach to these institutions.

The 'kinds of reforms we are hoping for' in global financial markets have never been publicly spelled out in convincing detail. Manuel has occasionally lobbied in public and private in favour of financial taxation and capital controls. But even when Manuel has talked of a globally-coordinated 'Tobin Tax' against speculative financial capital flows (as in a mid-1999 interview), it has been conditioned by caution:

As a small economy with low savings, however, we are dependent on foreign capital flows, and are likely to be punished if we took such a decision... We are very mindful of the need to restructure the international financial system, and would want to be part of the first wave of constructing some 'speed bumps' to financial flows ... But now, as there doesn't appear to be a financial crisis anymore, too few of the appropriately placed people are asking what has happened to this idea (Ibid. p. 15).

In contrast, at least a few people were, early in the 21st century, asking what happened to Manuel when he became chair of the Bretton Woods Institutions. From South Africa's standpoint, what would a reformed World Bank and IMF look like? One answer might be surmised by considering that, as Manuel put it, 'Our relationship with the World Bank is generally structured around the reservoir of knowledge in the Bank' (Ibid. p.15), and that the Bank itself considers its South African operations as the key pilot in its reinvention as 'Knowledge Bank.' Yet virtually without exception, development knowledge shared with post-apartheid South Africa – for example, missions and policy support in fields such as water, land reform, housing, public works, health care, and macroeconomics (Bond, 2000) – was excessively neoliberal in orientation, and failed to deliver the goods.

As a result, the ANC has had quite a schizophrenic relationship with the Bretton Woods Institutions, and in the wake of the 16 April 2000 protests in Washington, this degenerated into defensiveness. 'It is very fashionable for people to say that the macroeconomic policy of the country was dictated by the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank,' complained ANC general-secretary, Kgalema Motlanthe, in a Mail and Guardian (5 May 2000) newspaper interview shortly after the mid-April Washington, DC protests against the two. The verb ‘dictate’ insinuates unwillingness, and so may be a red herring. In reality, Pretoria and Washington have constructed a revolving door, as witnessed not only by Manuel's job as chair of the Bretton Woods Institutions during 2000 (and persistent rumours he was going to take a permanent job there), but that of other bureaucrats who move seamlessly between the World Bank, Department of Finance and the Johannesburg banks.

Residual suspicions of nefarious Bank and IMF involvement in South Africa are worth noting in part because of their history. A National Reparations Conference opened by Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane in May 2000 resolved to demand the World Bank and IMF repay black South Africans for apartheid loans. From 1951-67, the Bank lent Pretoria more than $200 million, about half of which went to support electricity generation in dirty coal-fired plants. Yet black townships and rural areas were denied electricity due to apartheid. As late as 1966, the Bank granted $20 million in apartheid loans even after Albert Luthuli and the Rev. Martin Luther King called
for anti-apartheid financial sanctions, and the United Nations General Assembly explicitly requested the Bank to stop (it replied to the UN, refusing (Caufield, 1997)).

In 1986, the Bank again busted sanctions by indirectly lending to Pretoria, via the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, using a special London trust fund account to accomplish the stunt. The IMF continued its apartheid lending into the early 1980s, including $2 billion in loans after the Soweto uprising began hurting Pretoria's credit rating. After the IMF was prohibited from lending by the US Congress in 1983, it continued to give the apartheid state economic advice: to adopt neoliberal policies during the late 1980s and early 1990s, including privatisation, extremely high interest rates, export-oriented strategies and the unpopular Value Added Tax.

But, claims Motlanthe, things changed. 'We're not accountable to the IMF or World Bank, as we have not borrowed from them' (Mail & Guardian, 2000). This is incorrect, for in December 1993, an $850 million IMF loan was signed by the interim government, known as the Transitional Executive Council (TEC), purportedly for 'drought relief' (18 months after the drought ended). That loan bound Pretoria to cutting government deficit spending (from 6.8 per cent to 6 per cent of GDP in 1994) and reducing wages. The conditions were kept secret until a Business Day leak in March 1994. That newspaper's top financial journalist concluded that (Bond, 2000):

The Reconstruction and Development Programme and the TEC statement of policies to the IMF are arguably the two most important clues on future economic policy ... The ANC, in signing the statement of policies to the IMF, committed itself to promoting wage restraint (Business Day, 30 May 1994).

The progressive sections of the RDP were subsequently ditched in practice (Bond, 2000). Motlanthe was also not told, apparently, about a $46 million World Bank loan to promote exports in 1997, nor of tens of millions of dollars invested in South Africa by the Bank's private sector subsidiary, the International Finance Corporation. These include stakes in Dominos Pizza (which subsequently went bankrupt), in for-profit healthcare, in housing securities to make high-income people's homes more affordable, and in infrastructure privatisation, none of which fight poverty (and all of which add a US dollar liability to South Africa's stressed current account).

Aid Fatigue

Third, regarding foreign aid, Mbeki calls for 'more and better managed aid so as to deal with the basic needs that will have to precede any form of development in certain areas.' One problem is that Mbeki did very little in practice to dissuade Clinton and other international leaders of the classically neoliberal trend known as 'trade, not aid' (the 1990s value of North-South aid fell by a third).

But what lessons does South Africa itself have to offer? Were foreign donors encouraged, under post-apartheid rule, to turn aid pledges into real programmes; sustainably provide for basic needs; promote civil society; and support good aid-management (for instance, monitoring and evaluation, and regular collective consultations with government)? There is a strong case that the Mandela and Mbeki governments were disastrous models in all these respects (Bond, 2001).

As one example, Donor pledges of nearly $5 billion were made to Pretoria between 1994 and 1999. But just as government failed to disburse much of its own domestic-sourced development funding (80 per cent annual RDP-related budget 'rollovers' were typical in the early years, but even during the late 1990s, inability to spend
poverty relief funding became a national scandal), the record of South Africa’s largest donor (the European Union) was also appalling. Thus in making the case for more aid internationally, Mbeki has not yet provided a convincing case that such aid won’t exacerbate well-known problems of bureaucratic capture and non-sustainability.

**Trade Rules**

Fourth, Mbeki wants to correct what he calls the ‘rules and regulations that make the world trading system unbalanced and biased against the very countries that need a fair trading system so that these countries, which represent the majority of humanity, benefit from international rules of trade.’ Even if the South African economy is on the margins of world trade, Pretoria has won a high profile in global circuits for at least three institutional reasons: Alec Erwin’s 1996-2000 presidency of the UN Conference on Trade and Development; his controversial role in the 1999 WTO Summit in Seattle; and his subsequent attempt to bring together a new ‘G-5’ middle-income bloc to restart WTO negotiations. The latter two functions – particularly Erwin’s distaste for the Seattle social-movement protesters and his near-refusal to join the Africa bloc of trade ministers protesting abominable treatment by US trade negotiator Charlene Barchefsky – must await treatment by other experts (Keet, 2000).

Throughout, Erwin has argued for less Northern protectionism for ‘dinosaur industries’ like manufacturing and agriculture, but he has done so meekly: ‘In addressing the challenge of trade and development in UNCTAD IX, we were attempting to break with a conception of contestation by stressing partnership’ (Erwin, 2000).

Yet worth asking is how partnership has benefited South Africa in vitally-needed technology-transfer, for example in the case of patent surrender on vitally-needed AIDS drugs? How has it generated mutual interest in trade – instead of ‘What is in it for me!’? How has it transformed aid? How has it generated investment – with Mbeki bending over backwards to Washington’s economic prescriptions? How has it accomplished even a modicum of debt relief?

Progress on any of these issues depends on who one is in partnership with, of course. At one point in his US trip, speaking to an African-American congregation at the venerable Ebenezer Church in Atlanta, Mbeki (2000) invoked the forces of social progress:

> In a world where no country can insulate itself from other parts of the same world, our success is highly dependent on your concrete support. This global solidarity between ourselves was part of the vocabulary of the civil rights movement, and some of us will remember that Dr. King was one of the first world leaders to call for a boycott of South Africa as part of the struggle for democracy. This kind of solidarity amongst those who work for the same objectives, has been the hallmark of our own movement and struggle for democracy. We are therefore saying that we should continue with this struggle of working together and striving for social and economic justice for the poor, for countries of the South, and come with practical ways of assisting Africa to pull herself out of the quagmire of poverty. I can assure you that you will find many amongst Africans who are ready to work in honest partnership with yourselves.

But with whom in the world does Thabo Mbeki really have an honest partnership, and with whom is he building genuine solidarity? Notwithstanding the eloquence of his Atlanta speech, the answers are not obvious.
Under Mbeki's influence, post-apartheid foreign policy examples of areas where solidarity was not extended to democrats include Western Sahara's Polisario Front, the Indonesian and East Timorese people suffering under Suharto (recipient of a 1997 Cape of Good Hope medal), Nigerian opposition activists who in 1995 were denied a visa to meet in Johannesburg, the Burmese people (given the junta-controlled 'Myanmar's' unusual diplomatic relations with Pretoria), and victims of murderous central African regimes which were SA arms recipients. The National Conventional Arms Control Committee reported that from 1996-98, undemocratic regimes like Colombia, Algeria and Peru purchased more than R300 million rand worth of arms from South Africa (Batchelor, 1999).

Towards, or Against, 'Global Solidarity'?

Is there, instead, scope for an honest partnership with the world's progressive social movements?

Allies in Health?

Sadly, the answer is negative, as demonstrated by the single most evocative issue associated with globalisation and public policy in South Africa: HIV/AIDS treatment. Early signs were encouraging, for during a brief, extraordinary period, Mbeki and his then health minister (now foreign minister) Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma forthrightly attacked the prerogatives of transnational corporate capital in the pricing of pharmaceutical products (particularly anti-retroviral drugs used in the treatment of HIV/AIDS) (Bond, 1999). Tragically, this was an exception that proved the rule, for the confrontation soon became Mbeki's most embarrassing failure – not only to change the world, but to change the trajectory of mass death facing his desperately ill domestic constituency.

There was a chance for an alliance. A vibrant 'Treatment Action Campaign' emerged in 1999, embarked on protests at US consulates in Johannesburg and Cape Town, and began networking with the Philadelphia, New York and Paris chapters of the advocacy group ACT/UP. US Vice President Al Gore – a lobbyist on behalf of pharmaceutical firms – was confronted aggressively in Tennessee, New Hampshire, California and Pennsylvania at the very outset of his campaign. Numerous newspapers carried front-page stories on Gore's quandary.

Within weeks, the vice president's own cost-benefit analysis began to reveal the danger of siding with the pharmaceutical firms, whose millions would not offset sustained damage to Gore's image. In a September 1999 meeting with Mbeki in New York, Gore conceded the validity of the SA Medicines Act. With Thailand also making noises about exorbitant drug prices and with tens of thousands of protesters in the streets, President Clinton agreed at the Seattle WTO summit not to push for harder-line patent protection for US pharmaceutical companies. The firms reacted with promises of cheaper, though not free, drugs, which in turn were spurned by activists as too little, too late. When faced with the prospect of local production, drug companies changed the subject by announcing offers of free medicine, which subsequently did not materialise. The South African government then failed to take advantage of the space, as Mbeki searched for excuses – such as a controversial investigation into whether HIV is indeed associated with AIDS – to not implement the parallel importation or generic production options.
But even if in retrospect it was pyrrhic, the joint struggle by the South African government and the activists over Gore and the pharmaceutical corporations was telling. In short, the David-v-Goliath battle against pharmaceutical companies – and the White House – was won. Yet Mbeki quickly grabbed defeat from the jaws of victory, and the broader war against AIDS took a quick turn for the worse. Mbeki desperately needed, as a result, 'Voluntarism & Activism'.

To understand how far the government must go to downgrade alliances with the Left, consider a 1996 ANC discussion document, which concluded with these lines:

The democratic movement must resist the illusion that a democratic South Africa can be insulated from the processes which characterise world development. It must resist the thinking that this gives South Africa a possibility to elaborate solutions which are in discord with the rest of the world, but which can be sustained by virtue of a voluntarist South African experiment of a special type, a world of anti-Apartheid campaigners, who, out of loyalty to us, would support and sustain such voluntarism.

But the Medicines Act of 1997 is, activists insist, precisely such a 'voluntarist experiment'. It was, indeed, only sustained by virtue of appeal, by local activists, to 'a world of anti-Apartheid campaigners' who 'out of loyalty', militantly demonstrated in favour of the Act.

**Conclusion**

This is where, finally, the argument comes to a head. So far, we have taken seriously the extent to which Mbeki says he wants to change the world, even if the rhetoric has often confused listeners, the strategy is dubious and the tactics have not been effective. Central to this problem, is who Mbeki most comfortably allies with. The social forces represented in the last example are emblematic of the challenge, for they evoke enormous potential for real solidarity, for changing the balance of forces.

Mbeki must realise who the genuine allies of the South African people are, for he has invoked the Seattle phenomenon as a kind of threat, as a way of telling audiences that there is a more revolutionary option if they do not meet his demands. Speaking to Washington elites at Georgetown University in May 2000, Mbeki quoted from Shelley’s line ('O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being'):

> It may be that the protesters who besieged the negotiators at Seattle were, in their way, our own West Wind. What they said, if they spoke for the pestilence-stricken multitudes, yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red, was indeed that since Winter was already upon these multitudes, Spring was not far behind.

Even more so, to a different audience of social-democratic activists at the IUSY festival, Mbeki was resolute in his commitment to nurture challenges from the grassroots:

> All of us, but most certainly those of us who come from Africa, are very conscious of the importance that all tyrants attach to the demobilisation of the masses of the people. At all times, these tyrants seek to incite, bribe or intimidate the people into a state of quiescence and submissiveness. As the movement all of us present here represent, surely our task must be to encourage these masses, where they are oppressed, to rebellion, to assert the vision fundamental to all progressive movements that – the people shall govern!
The problem is that this kind of support – Mbeki generously citing demonstrators for raising consciousness – is not, in fact, mutual. For consciousness-raising is only a small fraction of the concrete challenge that many of the leading protest movement organisations have set for themselves: the essence of that challenge is to shut down the WTO, World Bank and IMF. Mbeki’s approach is the precise opposite: to gain greater admittance.

Serious Reform

The radical strategy is multifaceted, but at the end of the day is not merely destructive or protectionist, as Erwin and Manuel repeatedly posit. Recall the first great reformer of the IMF and World Bank: a key co-founder, John Maynard Keynes. When Keynes failed to persuade the dominant US negotiators of the need for a more politically-neutral institution at the 1944 Bretton Woods and 1946 Savannah conferences, he was despondent. As one account has it, ‘Keynes had argued so bitterly at Savannah with US Treasury Secretary Fred Vinson and was so distressed by the course on which the Bank seemed to be set that his friends blamed the meeting for the heart attack he suffered on the train back to Washington, and for a second, a month later, which killed him at the age of 63’ (Caufield, 1997).

It may be useful to conclude, as a result, with the kind of problems faced by Keynes, co-founder of the IMF and World Bank. For these words are – if one only added ‘political solidarity’ to the list of globalization goods – perfectly consonant with the radical strategy noted above:

I sympathise with those who would minimise, rather than with those who would maximise, economic entanglement among nations. Ideas, knowledge, science, hospitality, travel – these are the things which should of their nature be international. But let goods be homespun whenever it is reasonably and conveniently possible and, above all, let finance be primarily national (Ibid. p. 47).

This is, to be sure, the kind of ‘either/or’ formulation that may well be objectionable to a ‘both/and’ dialectitian of Mbeki’s accomplishment. Keynes was not only perhaps a more active, successful and visionary shaper of global circumstances than Mbeki – albeit from a stronger power base in Britain, yet also ultimately a subservient and frustrating base. But in that 1933 maxim he also captured the essence of a bumper-sticker slogan that is often heard in the contemporary international social justice movement: ‘The Globalization of People, not of Capital!’ It is that slogan which says so much more about strategy, tactics and alliances than can Thabo Mbeki, and in turn hints more profoundly about why he probably won’t, notwithstanding his ambitions, integrity and best efforts, change the world.

Patrick Bond, University of Durban-Westville. This article was originally presented as part of the University of Durban-Westville’s inaugural Fanon Lecture, in August 2000.
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Cry for the Beloved Country:  
The Post-apartheid Denouement*

John S. Saul

A tragedy is being enacted in South Africa, as much a metaphor for our times as Rwanda and Yugoslavia and, even if not so immediately searing of the spirit, it is perhaps a more revealing one. For in the teeth of high expectations arising from the successful struggle against a malignant apartheid state, a very large percentage of the population – among them many of the most desperately poor in the world – are being sacrificed on the altar of the neoliberal logic of global capitalism. Moreover, as I had occasion to remark during a recent stint spent teaching in that country, the most striking thing I personally discovered about the New South Africa is how easy it has now become to find oneself considered an ultra-leftist! For to talk with opinion leaders or to read their public statements was to be drowned in a sea of smug: this is the way the world works; competitiveness is good; get with the program; get real. One does not know whether to laugh or cry at this kind of realism – ‘magical market realism’, as I have termed it elsewhere. For there is absolutely no reason to assume that the vast majority of people in South Africa will find their lives improved by the policies that are being adopted in their name by the present African National Congress (ANC) government. Indeed, something quite the reverse is the far more likely outcome.

Why this sad denouement? Are we mourning here the state of the world of globalization, marking soberly the wisdom of Adam Przeworski’s famously bleak aphorism – ‘Capitalism is irrational; socialism is unfeasible; in the real world people starve: the conclusions we have reached are not encouraging’ – and accepting (albeit with less glee than some of them do) the oft-stated premise of many members of the new South African elite: There Is No Alternative (TINA)? Or are we marking, instead, the failure of South Africa’s popular movement or even, as some would have it, a betrayal on the part of the ANC itself? The answer may well be that both emphases contain some truth, although just how one weights them will depend a great deal on what one believes regarding the art of the possible for nationally-based political movements and parties under present worldwide (and continental) conditions generally – or in South Africa more specifically.

* This essay is reprinted with the kind permission of both the author and Monthly Review. We hope that it is the first of what will become a regular series of lengthier contributions which aim to give a wider perspective of key aspects of the African political economy.
The Dual Transition

We must, of course, be circumspect. In South Africa, the 1990s witnessed the transition from a system of racially driven authoritarian rule toward an outcome far more peacefully defined and democratically realized than most observers would have predicted at the end of the previous decade. Given the difficulties of such a transition, the relatively peaceful consolidation of a functioning liberal-democratic system must be deemed a considerable achievement. Nonetheless, we must also ask ourselves just what are the most appropriate criteria for evaluating this dramatic process of change. One point of reference might be the mid-1980s formulation from Magdoff and Sweezy with which I began my interim report of the early 1990s (in *New Left Review*) on South Africa’s then-fledgling democratic transition:

[South Africa’s] system of racial segregation and repression is a veritable paradigm of capitalist superexploitation. It has a white monopoly capitalist ruling class and an advanced black proletariat. It is so far the only country with a well developed, modern capitalist structure which is not only ‘objectively’ ripe for revolution but has actually entered a stage of overt and seemingly irreversible revolutionary struggle.

Magdoff and Sweezy did leave open the possibility of other, less palatable outcomes, but noted, by way of summary of what was at stake, that ‘a victory for counterrevolution – the stabilization of capitalist relations in South Africa even if in somewhat altered form – would ... be [a] stunning defeat for the world revolution.’ Unfortunately, if measured in the year 2000 against such a standard, defeat would seem to be an appropriate description of what has transpired during the past decade in South Africa. For ‘the stabilization of capitalist relations’ is, by any measure, one clear attribute of the country’s transition.

True, the cause of ‘world revolution’ has taken a fearsome beating since Magdoff and Sweezy wrote the above words only a decade and a half ago, and perhaps South Africa will not now seem the most serious of the defeats that the presumed revolutionary-cum-socialist alternative has suffered in those years. Indeed a more basic question might well be whether invocation of the ‘S’ word itself can any longer provide us with a very relevant reference point against which to measure the direction and pace of change these days. After all, the world was a very different place in 1986, and not just as viewed through the eyes of a Magdoff or a Sweezy. While there was already plenty of scope for pessimism of the intelligence on the left, there still seemed then to be room for a certain optimism of the will. Much of this optimism has been lost in the intervening years, public pronouncement and academic writing alike reflecting the notion that an ineluctable and transcendent process of globalization is crushing the very plausibility of proactive states and meaningful national jurisdictions. And even when some quasi-left observers grant more room for maneuver to states and nations, it can consist of disciplining globalization only just enough to advance the competitive interests of elements of national capital. To think to act, nationally or globally, in order to challenge the underlying logic of capital or to realize some more social and humane purpose is, at best, seen as merely naive. Thus Hirst and Thompson write, without apparent irony, of what they seem to consider the height of contemporary progressive aspiration:

*Such institutional arrangements and strategies can assure some minimal level of international economic governance, at least to the benefit of the major advanced industrial nations. Such governance cannot alter the extreme inequalities between those nations and the rest, in terms of trade and investment, income and wealth. Unfortunately, that is not*
really the problem raised by the concept of globalization. The issue is not whether the world's economy is governable towards ambitious goals like promoting social justice, equality between countries and greater democratic control for the bulk of the world's people, but whether it is governable at all.³

To paraphrase Margaret Thatcher: there is no society, only corporations and their intermediaries.

Are we then setting the bar too high in even thinking of evaluating South Africa's level of accomplishment against the criteria evoked by Magdoff and Sweezy? Not necessarily. After all, South Africa's dramatic transition to a democratic dispensation ('One Person, One Vote, in a United South Africa') has been twinned with a simultaneous transition towards an ever more sweeping neoliberal socioeconomic dispensation that has negated in practice a great deal of the country's democratic advance. We will return to this point below. But it is also important to repeat the point about just how much of an advance has in fact been made. Recall, in this respect, that nothing seemed very certain about moving beyond even the system of racial authoritarianism when I wrote the article in which I quoted Magdoff and Sweezy less than a decade ago (1991). At that point, it was apparent that the passage from an apartheid South Africa was fraught with danger – the country, in the early 1990s, still a killing field. And yet, through the 1994 election and its aftermath, South Africa has been able to realize and to stabilize the shift to a constitutionally premised and safely institutionalized democratic order – making peace without suffering the potentially crippling backlash from the right wing, both black and white, that many had predicted and without suffering the collapse into chaos or dictatorship that some had seen to be threatened by the establishment of majority rule. Moreover, this political stability was sustained through the five years of Mandela's presidency, reconfirmed by the very mundaneness of the 1999 election, and has been carried unscathed into the Thabo Mbeki presidency. A cause for celebration, surely, on a continent where apparently lesser contradictions have proven far more difficult to resolve.

It is true that the door to the transition was being opened by some behind the barricades of white power: it was becoming evident by the later 1980s to both dominant business circles and sufficient numbers within the ruling political elite that a situation of relative stalemate had been reached and that some steps would have to be taken to incorporate the ANC into the circle of legitimate political players. However, the full significance of this development would only become fully apparent in retrospect. What seemed more immediately pressing at the time was the fact that, in spite of the release from prison of Nelson Mandela in 1990 and the unbanning of the ANC, President F. W. de Klerk and his associates had still not reconciled themselves to the notion of the ultimate establishment of an ANC government. Well into the transition period (1990-1994), they continued to harbor hopes of safeguarding various attributes of the existing racial order within any new constitutional and political dispensation that would eventually emerge from negotiations. Moreover, de Klerk was almost certainly knowledgeable of various ongoing attempts by the South African military and police both to strengthen the hand of Chief Gatsha Buthelezi and his conservative Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) in the jockeying for political positioning that occurred and to actively undermine, in this and other ways (both direct and indirect), the capacity of the ANC to emerge as a hegemonic force in a new South Africa.

There was also a significant threat to a peaceful transition from further to the right within the white polity. Both the Conservative Party (CP) and more overtly fascist
organizations like the Afrikaner Weerstands Beweging (AWB) remained players to be reckoned with, committed as they were to rolling back the clock to the days of unqualified apartheid. As Jonathan Hyslop has convincingly argued, however, by far the greatest danger from the White Right was represented by General Constand Viljoen. He, not Ferdy Hartzenberg (of the CP) or Eugene Terreblanche (of the AWB), had lines into a security establishment not otherwise inclined towards putschist activity and also had a much better chance of linking up with potentially divisive forces in the African community (with Buthelezi, for example, and with the independent Bantustan governments of the Ciskei and Bophuthatswana). This was because, as a realist, Viljoen had concluded that the Afrikaners' last best hope lay in separatism, not apartheid overlordship. The foiling of white intervention to shore up Lucas Mangope's regime in Bophuthatswana narrowed Viljoen's options, however, and when the ANC skillfully allowed some space in the negotiations for the separatist notion of a Volkstaat to remain a possibility the general chose, late in the day but fatefully, to commit himself to the electoral process. Despite a spate of bombings on the eve of the elections, the white right was thus largely corralled into the fold of peaceful transition. And even though his own last-minute entry into the election did not create quite so peaceful a process in KwaZulu, Buthelezi's decision to participate must surely have been produced, at least in part, by Viljoen's decision to abandon his own resistance.4

One might argue that the ANC was equally adept in dealing with Chief Gatsha Buthelezi and Inkatha. The IFP brought to the table a bloody record of harassment of the ANC, often carried out hand-in-glove with the apartheid state. But it had also developed a significant base among many (although by no means all) Zulu speakers in the rural areas and squatter settlements of the KwaZulu bantustan and in workers' hostels especially on the East Rand. Small wonder that, despite Inkatha's eleventh-hour conversion to participation in the 1994 polls, fraud, violence, and considerable chaos marked the electoral process in Natal - with 'no go' areas for one or the other of the chief protagonists in the election, especially in Inkatha-dominated rural Natal, imposing a firm limitation on open campaigning, for example. In the end, no accurate count of the vote proved to be remotely possible in Natal: the result was, quite simply, diplomatically brokered and in the IFP's favor, this being a choice of tactic made by the national-level ANC in order to draw Buthelezi further into the tent of compromise. This result also meant that the IFP would form the government in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), one of nine such provincial units established within the new federal system affirmed in the constitutional guidelines produced by the interparty negotiations that preceded the elections.

Here Buthelezi found himself beneficiary of a process – that of constitution-making – that he had himself chosen to boycott. It was primarily white politicians, denied any more direct guarantees of minority privilege, who successfully held out for a federal division of powers as one means of hamstringing an ANC government that, they feared, might with victory seek to use the central government actively for progressive purposes. Another line of defense of established socioeconomic inequalities was the attempt to bind the ANC to a constitutionally prescribed protection of individual human rights, in particular of the right to property. In addition, the so-called sunset clauses safeguarded for a period the positions of whites in public employment. The agreement on a Government of National Unity meant positions for both National Party (NP) and IFP politicians (including both de Klerk and Buthelezi) in the cabinet formed by the ANC after its electoral victory, and an amnesty offered some protection to those who had committed various gross abuses of power in defense of apartheid.
(albeit an amnesty that was sufficiently qualified to prepare the ground for the subsequent establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC]).

There were other ways to interpret such constitutional compromises, of course. Take the tilt in the constitution toward a preoccupation with human rights. There were those within the camp of national liberation who themselves championed such an emphasis not in any counterrevolutionary spirit but rather to help safeguard against the danger of abuse of power by an ANC that was far from immune — given its own hierarchical, even Stalinist, past — to temptations towards hhighhandedness. There were also those who sought to balance any concession to the privileging of the right to property with the writing into the constitution of a much broader range of economic and social rights, rights designed to give validation to the ongoing claims of the impoverished in South Africa. Just how such rights (carefully qualified as they were) might be rendered operational in a post-apartheid South Africa remained to be seen (not easily is the simple answer) but that they appeared in the text at all suggests something of the balancing act between defense of privilege and demands for redress of historically embedded wrongs that the constitutional moment embodied.

Nor has the limited federalism of the constitution presented any real impediment to the ANC's undertakings. True, the provinces have provided space for the expression of a degree of diversity in South Africa, even if such diversity has not always been of the most enlightened kind. As noted, the KZN government became a formally recognized shelter for the IFP and the Western Cape government a similar outlet for the quasi-racist preoccupations of the white and Colored constituencies of the National (NP) and Democratic Parties (DP). Most often, however, the provinces have tended to become mere instruments in the hands of those who determine national-level budget allocations (and of a depressing brand of ANC infighting) rather than vibrant political sites in their own right. It is surely no accident that the ANC did not seem to push particularly hard in either the 1994 or 1999 elections to win the two-thirds majority that it would have needed in order to change unilaterally the terms of the constitution in this or any other particular (although on both occasions, it was actually very close to gaining just such a margin). If longterm constraints on the ANC's freedom of action have existed, or costs have had to be borne for the kind of negotiated transition that the movement did achieve, they have lain elsewhere than in the constitutional realm.

One place where a more obvious price has been paid can be found, many would argue, in the ANC leadership's tacit support for the demobilization of those popular energies that had been so crucial to the weakening of the apartheid state in the first place. To be sure, these energies did find political expression from time to time during the negotiations. Thus, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the country's largest trade union organization and a key ANC ally, effectively manifested its unease at late-apartheid government policy initiatives (and at its own absence from the formal negotiations process) with a dramatic two-day general strike against a proposed new value-added tax, among other actions. And negotiators were further reminded of the mass presence beyond the conference halls when, at a crucial moment, a series of rolling mass demonstrations (climaxing in the Boipatong massacre and the shooting by Ciskei soldiers into a large group of protesters marching on Bisho) were employed by the ANC together with COSATU to reactivate stalled talks. But, as Jeremy Cronin of the SACP put the point forcefully at the time, there was a tendency to view the latter kind of 'mass action' primarily as a 'tap' to be turned on and off at will by the ANC rather than as a foretaste of ongoing popular
empowerment. Another ANC activist, Raymond Suttner, had a similar sense of the direction in which things were going:

*JS (Joe Slovo) is absolutely right to underline the massive victory we have scored at the negotiations. He fails, however, to mention that the past three years have also seen the transformation of our organizations, particularly the ANC. This transformation could have a serious, long-term impact. In particular, the negotiations have had a dissolving effect on mass organization, a tendency for our constituency to become spectators. If we conduct the coming election campaign in a narrow electoralist manner, the dissolution could be deepened. Whatever the victory, we should not underrate the strong sense of demoralization in our organizations.*

In fact, elections have been, as Suttner feared, fully revelatory of what little has come of popular mobilization in South Africa – as has been the virtual collapse of the ANC as a mass political organization (although not as an electoral machine) since 1994. True, the 1994 election had the distinction of being a freedom election: one could not have asked for much more than that such an election would ratify, through a massive African vote for the ANC, the coming into the political kingdom of a population that had been denied any such voice for centuries. By 1999, however, it was difficult to miss the significance of the fact that the election had become a mere popularity contest, the ANC still floating to a considerable degree on its legitimacy among Africans as a successful liberation movement, rather than on any record of delivery on popular expectations during its first term in office. Meanwhile, the vote in KZN continued to fall along quasi-ethnic lines (producing, once again, a narrow victory for the IFP) and the vote in Western Cape along racial ones (producing a NP and DP government, with the two parties since merged into a new Democratic Alliance). Nationally, the DP became the official opposition (albeit with only 11 percent of the vote compared to the ANC’s near two-thirds poll): it did so, significantly, on the basis of a campaign pitched, to whites, Coloreds, and Indians, in terms of issues of crime, corruption, and the dangers of abuse of power inherent in a one-party dominant (read also, African-dominant) political system, issues that were given, tacitly, a racist spin.

Of course, this tendency may also have reflected the fact that there was not so very much more to campaign about. The DP hewed to a particularly business-friendly, neoliberal line as regards socioeconomic policy during the election but, by 1999, this did not much distinguish the party from the ANC itself in policy terms: on many potentially important strategic issues the space for democratic disagreement and contestation had by now been papered over by a crippling consensus among the main political contenders regarding the presumed imperatives of economic orthodoxy. Small wonder that some observers have found it difficult to avoid a relatively narrow and unenthusiastic reading of what, substantively, was actually being accomplished in South Africa in democratic terms. Thus, David Howarth distinguishes the ‘democratic transition’ South Africa has achieved from the ‘democratic transformation’ that it has not really attempted – using the term ‘democratic transition’ to refer ‘to the process by which negotiating elites manage to oversee the installation of formal liberal-democratic procedures, whereas [democratic transformation] designates the longer-term process of restructuring the underlying social relations of a given society.’ Since, in South Africa, these ‘underlying social relations’ encompass a measure of socioeconomic inequality that is virtually unparalleled elsewhere in the world (only Brazil and Guatemala are ever mentioned as being in the same league on the GINI scale), it is not difficult to see what Howarth is driving at.
Some have viewed the aforementioned incorporation of Buthelezi into the national fold as one particularly graphic instance of the high price paid for the kind of transition that has occurred. Certainly, this is true if one takes seriously the preoccupations of Mahmood Mamdani who, in recent writing, has suggested that a clear distinction needs to be made between 'citizen' and 'subject' within the theory and practice of democratic struggle in Africa. In particular, he criticizes much thinking about democracy for focusing far too exclusively on urban pressures (by self-conscious 'citizens') for change and overlooking the importance, if genuine democratic transformation is to be realized, of simultaneously helping rural dwellers who are often still trapped as 'subjects' within quasi-traditional structures of authority to liberate themselves. Does reflection upon Mamdani's model not raise the fear that the ANC, in the name of peacemaking, has merely handed over the rural poor (and the poor who are resident in the many peri-urban shantytowns around Durban and Pietermaritzburg) of KZN to the ministrations of the caste of abusive chiefs and warlords who cluster around Buthelezi and his Inkatha structures?

This is, in fact, the argument made by Gerry Maré, the most articulate academic critic of Chief Buthelezi and his Inkatha project. Maré bemoans the extent to which the unsavory Buthelezi has apparently forced the ANC to accept him as political player more or less on his own terms. Thus, in spite of the fact that Inkatha won a mere 10 percent of the vote in 1994, and

\[\text{in spite of being named in the TRC report as carrying responsibility for 'gross violations of human rights,' Buthelezi has escaped with scarcely a blemish and with apparent absolution from the ANC itself… his position as elder statesperson acknowledged through the number of times that he has served as Acting-State President in the frequent absence of both Mandela and [then Deputy President] Mbeki.}\]

As for his cronies, people 'closely associated with horrendous acts of violence,' they have 'simply defied or ignored the storm and survived – often as members of various provincial parliaments or the central parliament, such as warlords David Ntombela and Mandla Shabalala, and the notorious prince Gideon Zulu.' True, some may argue that such an outcome merely epitomizes the success of a judicious strategy of incorporation, a legitimate tactical ceding of ground to a dangerous and decidedly ruthless opponent, a purchasing of peace in one important region of South Africa at some real but nonetheless acceptable cost to principle. And yet one might be more inclined to accept such an argument were this not merely an example of the more general pattern of ANC peacemaking efforts: an across the board following of the line of least resistance towards centers of established power, a continued broadening of the scope of mere elite-pacting to consolidate, on every front, a turning away from the interests of the poorest of the poor.

Buthelezi has not been the only, or indeed the central, target of such appeasement tactics. Far more important in this respect have been the wielders of corporate power who have lived to tell the tale of the dual transition with increasingly self-satisfied smirks on their faces. There can be little doubt that, in the end, the relative ease of the political transition was principally guaranteed by the ANC's withdrawal from any form of genuine class struggle in the socioeconomic realm and the abandonment of any economic strategy that might have been expected directly to service the immediate material requirements of the vast mass of desperately impoverished South Africans. This was to occur in a society where, as noted above, the gap between rich and poor has been, and remains, among the widest in the world: a society in which, as one mid-1990s survey demonstrated, 'the poorest 60 percent of households share of
total expenditure is a mere 14 percent, while the richest quintile's share is 69 percent' and where, across the decade of the nineties, a certain narrowing of the income gap between black and white (as a growing number of blacks have edged themselves into elite circles) has been paralleled by an even greater widening of the gap between rich and poor.9

Granted, the negotiations in the sphere of economic and class relationships were far less public than the formal meetings of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) and the Kempton Park negotiations. But they were, perhaps, even more important. As one close observer wrote in 1994:

*Since 1990, when the democratization process began, some foreign governments, notably the US and some of its allies – Britain, Germany, Italy and Japan – successfully induced the ANC to move away from its socialist economic policies, including that of nationalization. Instead, they succeeded in persuading the movement to embrace Western-style free market principles which the ANC increasingly, albeit reluctantly, adopted. It is interesting to note, for example, that Mandela's evolving position on fiscal responsibility was a direct response to pressures from foreign investors and governments.*10

Moreover, this brand of compromise was merely part of a decade-long process of accommodation, one hailed in retrospect by no less a source than South Africa's corporate think tank par excellence, the Center for Development and Enterprise (CDE):

*The evolution of the ANC's policy position was ... influenced by foreign perceptions and pressures (from foreign investors, potential investors, the World Bank, IMF and others). Other important policy influences were the Growth for All document of the South African Foundation (representing the country's fifty largest corporations) published in February 1996.*

The result: 'Throughout the 1990s the ANC's economic policies have shown a clear shift towards greater acceptance of the market ... (one sealed) finally in the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) proposals of June, 1996.'11 But if 1996 was the crucial year for putting the finishing touches on the ANC's capitulation to neoliberal orthodoxy, it seems plausible to argue that the die had already been cast during the transition period itself. As Hein Marais observes, 'by 1994 ... the left had lost the macroeconomic battle.'12

**Liberating Capitalism**

This defeat was no accident. As anticipated above, from the mid-1980s the cooler heads in the camp of capital had begun to develop a counterrevolutionary strategy designed to shape the socioeconomic transition that would now parallel the political one. The trigger: the near revolutionary mobilization of popular forces against the established system that marked the 1980s. Faced with so serious a political crisis, Anglo-American business executive Zac De Beer enunciated his classic warning *(Financial Times, 10 June 1986)* that 'years of apartheid had caused many blacks to reject the economic as well as the political system.' His corollary: 'We dare not allow the baby of free enterprise to be thrown out with the bathwater of apartheid.' Armed with this sensibility, capitalists, both worldwide and local, prepared themselves to sever the marriage between the structures of capitalist exploitation on the one hand and of racial oppression on the other that had proven to be so profitable in the past. Indeed, increased interaction with Nelson Mandela in prison and Thabo Mbeki and
others in exile merely helped to confirm the growing sense that the ANC might be a potential participant in (and even possibly the best guarantor of) a transition that safeguarded the essentials of the established economic system. The fact that a powerful stratum of Afrikaner capitalists had by now joined the upper echelons of South Africa's business community was also important here. This group increasingly became protagonists within the NP for reformist strategies for a deracialization of capitalism that began to jettison the interests of those Afrikaners – less well-off and most vulnerable to colorblind competition for jobs and other privileges – who had once formed its chief political base. The fact that de Klerk held out until quite late in the day for more firm guarantees of continuing racially defined privilege proved to be much less important to the outcome of negotiations than this underlying pull on the part of capital towards the granting of extensive concessions on the racial-cum-political front.13

Intriguingly, this preemptive strategy was twinned to the saliency of a related perspective on the crisis the late-apartheid economy was deemed to be confronting, a perspective that served further to underscore the need for reform. For South African capitalism was increasingly viewed not only as prisoner of an outmoded (and increasingly politically dangerous) racial ideology but of an outmoded economic strategy as well: in an ever more neoliberal age, the racially motivated interventions of the South African state were merely one way in which that state was now deemed to be unduly intrusive into the sacrosanct domain of the market and therefore a drag on economic progress. Thus, in its last years, the NP government itself had moved a long way towards the embrace of neoliberal orthodoxy, a trend most clearly manifested in the centrality of ‘privatization, trade liberalization, spending cuts and strict monetary discipline’ to the Normative Economic Model (NEM) that it released in 1993. But, as has already been suggested, the most significant conversion to such orthodoxy was to take place, under intense pressure from the world of capital, within the ANC itself.

There were some countertendencies to this outcome. True, many within the ANC were caught flatfooted in the sphere of economic policy in 1990, with only some vague if progressive nostrums from the Freedom Charter ('The mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole') to fall back upon. Perhaps it was this that allowed Nelson Mandela to state militantly immediately upon his February 1990 release from prison that 'the nationalization of the mines, banks and monopoly industry is the policy of the ANC and a change or modification of our views in this regard is inconceivable' – a position Mandela himself would soon so distance himself from that by 1994 he could tell the US Joint Houses of Congress that the free market was a 'magical elixir' that would produce freedom and equality for all!14 But even if Mandela himself was not to be counted upon in this respect, there was also available a more considered expression within the ANC of a radical sensibility relevant to thinking about the macroeconomic sphere – one grounded, for example, in early position papers developed by the Research Department (with the assistance of such figures as British Marxist economist Lawrence Harris), among other sources. This sensibility produced chiefly a kind of dirigiste neo-Keynesianism perhaps, but it nonetheless contained the possible seeds of a deepening challenge to capital's prerogatives in favor of a prioritization of popular needs in the sphere of production. Its impact was best exemplified by the then-prominence of the proposed guideline 'growth through redistribution' in ANC circles.
This perspective also found early voice in the ANC's new Department of Economic Policy (DEP), in its very first major policy pronouncement (the 'Discussion Document on Economic Policy' of 1990) in fact:

The engine of growth in the economy of a developing, nonracial and nonsexist South Africa should be the growing satisfaction of the basic needs of the impoverished and deprived majority of our people. We thus call for a program of Growth through Redistribution in which redistribution acts as a spur to growth and in which the fruits of growth are redistributed to satisfy basic needs.

Such emphases were reinforced by the report of the Macro Economic Research Group (MERG) crafted, between 1991 and 1993, by ANC-aligned economists working with progressive counterparts from overseas. And it found significant public expression in such claims as that made in 1992 by then-DEP economist (and presently governor of the Reserve Bank), Tito Mboweni:

the ANC believes that a strategy of 'growth through redistribution' will be the appropriate new path for the South African economy. ... In our growth path, accumulation depends on the prior redistribution of resources. Major changes will have to take place in existing power relations as a necessary condition for this new growth path.

This logic appeared momentarily compelling. After all, the vast majority of South Africans were (and still are) desperate in their poverty for a wide range of the simplest goods and services on the one hand, and a very large percentage of people (most often the same people) were (and still are) equally desperate for jobs, on the other. Why, the ANC seemed poised to ask, can't those two key pieces at the center of the South African economic puzzle simply be put together? Why must they be joined so indirectly and inefficiently through the circuits of global capital and the process of generating surplus value (profits) for those few who have the power to dictate terms and guarantee their massive cut of the action? But any such questions were very soon lost from view as Mboweni and other young ANC highfliers - in a rightward shift which was also congruent with that being made, alongside Mandela himself, by older heavyweights like Joe Slovo and Mac Maharaj - increasingly looked elsewhere for economic cues.

The voices raised against anything like the 'growth through redistribution' model were ferocious, with attack dogs for capital like the notorious business economist Terence Moll quickly labeling it 'macroeconomic populism' and 'a dangerous fantasy.' Moreover, a wave of much more capital-friendly scenarios (the Mont Fleur proposals, for example, and the recommendations of both the Nedcor and Old Mutual 'Professional Economists' Panel' [entitled Prospects for a Successful Transition] and insurance conglomerate Sanlam's own Platform for Investment] soon washed over the macroeconomic debate - even as other global players 'arranged for key ANC economic advisers and politicians to receive training at business schools and international banks and investment houses in the west where they were fed a steady diet of neoliberal economics.' As DEP economist Viv McMenamin put the point frankly at the time, ANC economic thinking now registered 'a shift away from policies that may be morally and politically correct, but which will cause strong adverse reaction from powerful local and international interests.' Ironically, even COSATU, which would eventually prove a rather sharper critic of burgeoning neoliberalism in South Africa, found itself wrongfooted in this early going. Thus, its own team of academic advisors (the Economic Trends Group and the Industrial
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Strategy Group) began by advocating various interventionist measures vis-à-vis capital but soon found itself so taken with models of shaped and competitive advantage and with supply-side and external-market driven preoccupations, as to offer advice that fit quite comfortably within the rising tide of orthodoxy. In the end, ex-United Democratic Front (UDF) activist Trevor Manuel, instrumental in pulling the DEP to the right in the early 1990s, and ex-trade-union militant Alec Erwin, patron of the COSATU academics, would become, as Ministers of Finance and of Trade and Industry respectively, the principle protagonists of the global conformism that had come to characterize ANC economic policy at the turn of the century.20

One last throw of the dice by the left within the Mass Democratic Movement was the document that became, in effect, the electoral manifesto for the ANC in the 1994 election campaign, the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP). To a considerable degree driven from below by the trade unions and civic organizations, and adopted only rather more opportunistically by the core group of ANC senior leaders, it emphasized the centrality to the planning process of both the meeting of the populace’s basic needs and the active empowerment of that populace in driving its own development process. Nonetheless, the central chapters on macroeconomic policy were already markedly compromised in the direction of free-market premises, the document as a whole being at best (as I wrote at the time) ‘less what it is, than what it might become’ in the context of further class struggles. Unfortunately, it was the rightward pull that proved predominant, reinforced (as Asghar Adelzadeh has carefully recorded) in a range of government documents, each more neoliberal in tone and substance than the last, that ran from the RDP White Paper of September 1994, through the draft ‘National Growth and Development Strategy’ of February 1996, to the ‘Growth, Employment and Redistribution, a Macroeconomic Strategy’ document of June 1996.21 As Marais notes of the latter,

Rhetorically, attempts were made to align [GEAR] with the socially progressive objectives of the RDP. But the central pillars of the strategy were fashioned in accordance with standard neoliberal principles – deficit reduction, keeping inflation in single digits, trade liberalization, privatization, tax cuts and holidays, phasing out of exchange controls, etc. (171).

And in March of that same year, the RDP Office, until then strategically located in the President’s Office as cabinet-level overseer of what was left of a popularly driven development mandate, was closed – its activities folded, ostensibly, into the various line ministries.

For many of the government’s most sympathetic critics, it is the extreme, precipitate, and unqualified nature of the ANC government’s move towards a neoliberal strategy that is so surprising. As Adelzadeh suggests, what has transpired appears to be in significant part a self-inflicted wound, an ‘adoption of the essential tenets and policy recommendations of the neoliberal framework advocated by the [International Monetary Fund] IMF in its structural adjustment programs’ which is:

all the more remarkable in view of the limited, even negative impact of such programs, especially in southern Africa, the lack of any leverage that the international financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank have over South African policy makers, the lack of any dramatic shifts in economic and political environment to warrant such major shifts in policy orientation, and the lack of a transparent and fully argued justification for


What there is, Adelzadeh concludes, is merely 'a lame succumbing to the policy dictates and ideological pressures of the international financial institutions.' Moreover, the pronouncements of these documents have been paralleled by a range of concrete policies that epitomize just such a 'lame succumbing.' Crucial in the constitutional negotiations per se – alongside the property rights clause – was the agreement to guarantee formally the 'independence' of the Reserve Bank, a reassurance to capital that removed from government hands any real leverage (especially in facilitating expansionary policies) over crucial monetary decisions. Moreover, as a member of the caretaker South African government, the Transitional Executive Council, the ANC spent most of 1993 signing on as party to a range of decisions that firmly cast the die for future policies once it was in power: inking an extraordinarily market-friendly letter of intent to the IMF in order to guarantee a balance-of-payments loan, for example, and joining the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of this latter move was the fact that it set the stage, after 1994, for the ANC government to remove tariffs in key areas much faster than even GATT required – with catastrophic effects on many local firms. Moreover, Patrick Bond argues that the same kind of 'moral surrender' to the market was evident in an ongoing propensity to cut back corporate taxation and in such decisions as those 'to repay in full apartheid's twenty billion dollar plus foreign commercial bank debt and to phase out exchange controls in the name of attracting new foreign finance.'

These, and a number of other choices made in the early going, were crucial ones, rendering cumulatively more difficult and more unlikely any opting for the plausible alternative policies that existed at the outset of the transition. Left critics would argue that many of the ANC's more recent claims to be powerless in the face of the marketplace have a disingenuous ring when measured against the fact that the movement itself had, early in the game, thrown away so many of the instruments that might have been useful in crafting a more assertive strategy towards capital. Instead, and ironically, the ANC has come, full circle, back to the late apartheid government's NEM. The central premise of South Africa's economic policy now could scarcely be clearer: ask not what capital can do for South Africa but what South Africa can do for capital. This meant an overwhelming preoccupation with foreign investment, an (at best) trickle-down approach to development more broadly conceived, and an attendant encouragement of a culture of stock markets (with even many trade unions becoming substantial players in the game through their own investment companies) and, for more marginal players, of institutionalized lotteries and other games of chance. All of this done in a context where a sophisticated case can and has been made against the continued prioritizing of supply-side economics and for an approach ('growth through redistribution') that highlights the far more central brake on economic growth that exists on the demand side of the equation.

In light of such circumstances it is difficult not to feel, with Adelzadeh, that the option for neoliberalism was, first and foremost, an ideological one. For in strictly economic terms, the underlying premises of this wholesale capitulation to the market have been desperately shaky. As Colin Leys and I have recently concluded in Monthly Review (July/August, 1999) from our survey of the capitalist prospect in Africa, the likely result is
relegation to the margins of the global economy, with no visible prospect for continental
development along capitalist lines. ... Africa's development, and the dynamics of global
capitalism are no longer convergent, if ever they were.

The point stands, I fear. And what of South Africa itself in this regard? In his own
analysis of Africa, the eminent sociologist Manuel Castells sees somewhat more room
for South African maneuver within global capitalism than is the case elsewhere on the
continent.

Castells argues this because of the country's size and relatively sophisticated
economic structure compared with other African countries ('South Africa accounts
for 44 percent of the total GDP of all sub-Saharan Africa, and 52 percent of its
industrial output,' he reminds us). And yet even Castells must conclude his
discussion of South Africa by evoking the possibility of South Africa falling, like 'its
ravaged neighbors,' into 'the abyss of social exclusion.' As he writes, 'the real problem
for South Africa is how to avoid being pushed aside itself from the harsh competition
in the new global economy once its economy is open.'26 Not easily, is the most
plausible response, a point reinforced by numbers that indicate not the dramatic
increase in employment figures forecast by those who launched GEAR but a spiraling
downward trend in that regard (a loss of at least a half a million jobs between 1994 and
1999, it has been estimated). These figures are paralleled by evidence in such spheres
as GDP growth, investment, savings, exports and interest rates that 'virtually all
GEAR's targets were missed' and missed by a very great deal.27 Indeed, it is difficult to
escape the conclusion that, in the summary of one analyst,

GEAR has been associated with massive deindustrialization and job shedding through
reduced tariffs on imports, capital flight as controls over investments are relaxed, attempts
to downsize the costs and size of the public sector, and real cuts in education, health and
social welfare spending.28

To highlight such negatives, it is sometimes said in South Africa, is to indulge in
' Afro-pessimism.' But it can much more easily be argued that the real Afro-pessimists
are those who state that South Africa has little choice but to tag along behind a global
capitalism that actually offers it very little by way of development prospect. Colin
Bundy, the South African historian, acknowledged some years ago that to continue to
hold out the prospect of a socialist transformation in South Africa might seem to
require something of a 'leap of faith.' But, he continued forcefully,

to imagine that a milder mannered capitalist order can secure a decent future for the
majority of South Africans – or that deracializing bourgeois rule will meet the aspirations of
exploited and oppressed people – or that South Africa can somehow be absolved of its
economic history and enter a future like that of Sweden or Taiwan: now that really requires
a leap of faith.29

Surely there are stronger grounds upon which to build an ' Afro-optimism' than
through such a feckless flight to the right.

Meridional Thatcherism
Interestingly, the sensibility evoked by Bundy parallels the thoughts of leading left
political economists like Greg Albo who also, in their more general work on such
themes, juxtapose self-consciously the claims of 'utopian capitalism' against the
promise of 'realistic socialism.'30 For Albo, the latter objective would focus (among
other things) on 'more inward-oriented economic strategies' and the devaluation of 'scale of production as the central economic objective,' goals that:

can only be realized through re-embedding financial capital and production relations in democratically organized national and local economic spaces sustained through international solidarity and fora for democratic cooperation.

Not that the precise nature of such an alternative can readily be sketched in blueprint form. It would have to be specified in practice by those social forces who might yet mobilize themselves to place a more progressive agenda on the table in South Africa. Perhaps, as I have suggested in earlier writings, the growth through redistribution emphasis that floated momentarily through the movement could still provide the starting point for a process of structural reform with longer-term transformative potential. But there would also have to be a greater willingness to embrace the fact that the existent market-dominated global order – driven by 'a minority class that draws its wealth and power from a historically specific form of production' – is (in Albo's words) 'contingent, imbalanced, exploitative and replaceable.'

Unfortunately, this is precisely the kind of sensibility that the ANC's present leadership has continued to devalue in South Africa. It is true that, for all their talk of TINA, this group most often does not present itself as the reluctant slave of the imperatives of the global marketplace but rather as its enthusiastic, born-again protagonist. Still, many explanations of the neoliberal turn the ANC has taken are cast in terms of the structural determinations upon their actions that are defined by economic necessity. For Ann Bernstein and her big-business backers at the CDE, there is no doubt, given the strength of capital and the (benign) workings of the global economy, that 'at the turn of the century, there is not much choice for South Africa. ... There is only one road to follow if we want to ... put the country on a sustained high growth path.' Evoking the example of 'Britain's Tony Blair [who] has led the Labour Party away from its socialist and union-dominated past ... [and] is ruthless in ensuring that key members of the cabinet and party "toe the new line"', the CDE suggests that, similarly in South Africa, 'a certain degree of toughness is ... required to impose the new vision on the party and follow through with the chosen policies.' And despite concerns about too slow a pace to privatization and too little government action to meet the need for greater 'labor flexibility,' the CDE survey is nonetheless pleased to cite the fact that 'business leaders who have met Mbeki are positive' and affirm, with minimal qualification, that 'South Africa is fortunate to have a person of Mbeki's quality to lead it into the next century.' Or, as one banker stated even more frankly in the wake of the 1999 elections: 'The ANC are not fools. They know where the balance of economic power lies.'

The more detailed specification of just how the differing demands of diverse fractions of capital have shaped the policy substance of the transition is more debatable. At the most general level, there is a commonsensical reading that it is the presumed imperatives of retaining in-country as much as possible of the investment funds of large-scale domestic capitalists and of attracting fresh investments from abroad that determines government thinking. Some observers also emphasize a less South Africa-centric logic to the choices made, suggesting the drive of certain key sectors of domestic capital to free themselves from the shackles of their South African siting as sufficient impetus to impose neoliberal policies on the government. Here the emphasis is on the crucial role of 'the Mineral-Energy Complex' (MEC) that Fine and Rustomjee have shown as being so central, both historically and contemporaneously, to the South African economy. The increasingly diversified global role of the main
components of this MEC (and, in particular, of the vast Anglo-American conglomerate) and the extent to which the substantial percentage of its assets are now held in potentially footloose financial form provide another strong reason for it to seek as open a horizon as possible for its movements. Did this factor give an added edge to the pressure on government to lift capital controls, for example, and to give its blessing to the decision of a significant number of key companies to relocate their corporate centers offshore?

For critics, the search for explanations continues, especially in light of the fact that the government's choice of strategy has been quite so unqualified and its capitulation to the world of market signals and market forces quite so complete. Not surprisingly, critics have sought additional explanations for the precipitous rush to go much further and faster to the right than even the most informed emphasis on the pressing nature of global constraints might seem to warrant. Was the ANC leadership pushed or did it jump? Is another structural determination not that of the 'imperatives' of class formation, the upper echelons of the ANC having bought quite comfortably into a common class project with the white bourgeoisie, both global and local? Here, it is suggested, the best point of reference for analyzing the South African transition might be Frantz Fanon's notion of a false decolonization: the rising African middle class, both entrepreneurial and political and bureaucratic in provenance, merely sliding comfortably into their political positions as, yes, intermediaries of global Empire and, from these heights, fending off the claims of the poverty-stricken they have left behind.

Such critics find evidence for this interpretation in statements like that of Nelson Mandela who, as early as 1992 (Star, 15 September 1992), was warning a journalistic interlocutor that 'we are sitting on a time bomb. ... their enemy is now you and me, people who drive a car and have a house. It's order, anything that relates to order [that's the target], and it's a very grave situation.' And they will find further confirmation in The Economist (12 October 1996) which could write (albeit more in glee than in anger) that

For all the fears that resentful ANC socialists would confiscate wealth, the new breed shares the same capitalist aspirations as the old. Though black incomes are barely a sixth of white ones, a black elite is rising on the back of government jobs and the promotion of black business. It is moving into the leafy suburbs, such as Kelvin and Sandton, and adopting the outward symbols of prestige – the BMW, swimming pool, golf handicap and black maid – that so mesmerize status-conscious whites.

Or to take another equally sobering account (that by Mark Gevisser in The Nation [29 September 1997]):

On an April evening almost exactly three years to the day after South Africans voted Nelson Mandela into power, you could watch, at a black-tie dinner in Johannesburg, the dynamics of South African power relations change before your eyes. The dinner celebrated the deal in which Anglo-American – the vast mining house that rules the South African economy – sold a controlling share of Johnnie, a $2 billion company with blue-chip industrial holdings, to a group of black businesses and trade unions called the National Empowerment Consortium (NEC), led by Cyril Ramaphosa. 'I think', said Anglo-American's Michael Spicer when introducing Johnnie's new head, 'we can call you chairman Cyril rather than comrade Cyril.' Replied the former trade unionist who led the mineworkers' charge against the company a decade ago: 'It's wonderful to have Anglo as a minority shareholder!' Ramaphosa, the man most responsible for organizing the working
masses into the collective action that brought apartheid to its knees, now leads another charge: an advance, by the mushrooming black middle class, on the commanding heights of the economy. The corporate sector is crowing. 'Cyril Ramaphosa was the man who built the unions in the eighties,' one very senior Anglo-American executive tells me, 'and he'll be the one to break them in the nineties.'

Nor, despite Ramaphosa's own subsequent difficulties in keeping his place as a would-be captain of industry, is this an isolated incident. One can almost never find examples of prominent ANC personnel who, when resigning or being removed from office, announce their return to the ranks of the popular movement. Like prominent former ANC provincial governors Tokyo Sexwale and Mathews Phosa, they tend to wind up following such pursuits as the diamond business or casino development in Mozambique. Small wonder that the authors of one careful analysis of the transition could conjecture that,

on the one hand, the government seems, in a way very reminiscent of equivalent groupings such as [South West Africa People's Organization] SWAPO in Namibia or [Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front)] ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe, to resemble a club of old party militants who are more concerned to reap the rewards of their own earlier sufferings than to effect major changes in society. On the other hand, with the disappearance of the revolutionary vision which undoubtedly spurred such militants on in the past, what is left is largely a class promotion project, the promotion of a new class of wealthy and powerful African movers and shakers.35

One could easily overstate the significance of this trend in broader developmental terms, of course, whatever its implications for class formation within the country's black population. Structurally, black capitalism has proven to be quite a weak force, especially since the Asian crisis of 1998 and subsequent falling stock prices and rising interest rates that confounded black capitalists' hopes of repaying the loans with which they initially purchased shares in various enterprises. Recently, too, 'black empowerment enterprises' (often fronts for white enterprises in any case) have had a sharply declining share of Johannesburg Stock Exchange listed stocks (after an early high-water mark of 9 percent in 1996), with certain enterprises earlier devolved to 'black' ownership even reverting back to their original owners (like the Afrikaner economic giant, Sanlam). In this and other ways, contemporary South African capitalism actually offers little room for the emergence of a vibrant and transformative 'national [and/or 'racial'] bourgeoisie,' however much ANC statements (and certain of its affirmative action policies) may seek to imply otherwise. All the more startling, then, is the saliency of the discourse that has come to rationalize the role of this ostensibly rising class. In the most general terms, a key trope has been Thabo Mbeki's evocation of the 'African Renaissance' to describe the moment, continental and national, that he and his ANC now embrace. His speeches on this theme (notably his 'I am an African' address to the South African Constitutional Assembly in 1996 and his 'The African Renaissance, South Africa and the World' speech to the United Nations University in Tokyo in 1998) can sometimes sound notes of dramatic resonance.36

Equally often, however, such ideas have come to be attached precisely to the rather narrower definition of 'black empowerment' evoked above, a note struck most dramatically in a speech by Mbeki to a meeting of black managers late last year.37 There the emphasis was on the need to 'strive to create and strengthen a black capitalist class', a 'black bourgeoisie'. Since 'ours is a capitalist society', Mbeki continued, the 'objective of the deracialization of the ownership of productive property' is key to 'the struggle against racism in our country.'
There is a problem, however: 'Because we come from the black oppressed, many of us feel embarrassed to state this goal as nakedly as we should.' Indeed, Mbeki continued,

our lives are not made easier by those who, seeking to deny that poverty and wealth in our country continue to carry their racial hues, argue that wealth and income disparities among the black people themselves are as wide as the disparities between black and white. Simply put, the argument is that the rich are rich whether they are black or white. The poor are poor, whether they are black or white.

All of which, Mbeki continued, 'frightens and embarrasses those who are black and might be part of the new rich.' In short, the new black capitalist class are victims – of class analysis. Of course, structures of racial inequality are a continuing problem in South Africa. But can the issue of class formation and its longterm social and political implications really be finessed away so easily in the New South Africa? Like them or not, the statistics suggest otherwise: as it happens, 'the rich are rich whether they are black or white.'

One fears that as the celebrated African Renaissance comes to be more and more about the embourgeoisement of the favored few it becomes a very tawdry thing indeed.

Some hardboiled analysts of the ANC's history profess no surprise at such an outcome, having interpreted the ANC's entire history as a nationalist movement as the expression, first and foremost, of a narrowly petty-bourgeois project. Certainly the knot of assertive nationalism, middle-class opportunism, liberal-democratic aspiration, and all-too-Stalinoid socialist ideology that have come to define the ANC's politics over time remains to be further untangled. But recall, in this regard, Mbeki's own forceful assertion as early as 1984 that

the ANC is not a socialist party. It has never pretended to be one, it has never said it was, and it is not trying to be. It will not become one by decree for the purpose of pleasing its 'left' critics.

True, he saw fit to add that the ANC represented the 'notion of both an all-class common front and the determined mobilization of the black proletariat and peasantry', with this working class to be viewed as 'a conscious vanguard class, capable of advancing and defending its own democratic interests.'

Nonetheless, despite this latter utterance, Mbeki seems to have had little trouble in adapting comfortably to a bourgeois milieu. A columnist in the Washington Post last year (6 June 1999) reassured his readers by quoting a remark made to him by a prominent London-based investment banker:

Mbeki holds things close to his chest and makes decisions in a secretive way. However, he is not a populist, and has been a 'Thatcherite' in his fiscal ideas. His experience in exile introduced him to the financial world – he is unlikely to abandon the close ties to business developed in those years abroad.

Although there is no evidence of personal corruption, the account of Mbeki's preferred social circle, frequented on numerous occasions by shady figures from the soccer world and by business hustlers, in a recent (otherwise largely hagiographical) biography – in a chapter entitled, significantly enough, 'The Enigma' – also makes for sobering reading. As does the moment, at the public launch of GEAR, when he took particular delight in guying the left by himself declaring: 'Just call me a Thatcherite.'
The latter moment, in its self-conscious crassness, in its smug ultra-hipness, seems especially revelatory — its very bravado capturing eloquently the prevailing undercurrent of the ANC-dominated transition. Not the undercurrent represented by Mandela’s contribution to that transition, to be sure. As Andrew Nash has imaginatively argued, Mandela evoked a more traditional ethos (‘a tribal model of democracy,’ Nash terms it) in playing his own crucial role in the first five postapartheid years, muffling societal contradictions (for both good and ill) within a mythos of consensus. Beyond structural determinations (of economy, of class formation), here was one way in which variables defined in terms of politics and personality must also be made part of the explanation of outcomes in South Africa. But Mandela’s was not a politics that the younger generation, epitomized by Mbeki, either could or would choose to play. Their sense of self-importance bore no quasi-traditional markings. It was auto-produced: having pulled off the impossible, the overthrow of apartheid, they are very pleased with themselves indeed. Too smart now to be mere ineffectual lefties, they expected to play the only game in town (capitalism) successfully. It is this kind of coolly self-satisfied, self-righteous, and profoundly ideological thrust on the part of the new ANC elite (‘sellout’ is much too crude a term for it) that is the single most depressing attribute of South Africa’s transition.

It is worth bearing in mind, of course, that such cadres had seen some kinds of ‘socialism’ in tatters — in Mozambique, in the Soviet Union — and sensed the dangers of the fierce discipline, economic and political, that global actors might inflict upon South Africa if it stepped too far out of line. They also saw some of the weaknesses of the institutions of the state that they had inherited and the limits these might impose on any attempt to undertake too heroic a collective project. Such considerations (including as well the very pointed sense of just what risky work it would be for them personally and collectively to choose to swim against a worldwide tide) may also have helped counter any misgivings some might have had about the nature of the global capitalist system to which they now pledged allegiance. For there have been signs of such misgivings. Consider, for example, Mandela’s own statement at the 1999 Davos forum that brought together heads of state and of multinational corporations to discuss the question: ‘Is global capitalism delivering the goods?’ According to press reports, Mandela (30 January 1999) was prepared to ask some questions of his own: ‘Is globalization only to benefit the powerful and the speculators? Does it offer nothing to men, women and children who are ravaged by poverty?’ Or take Mbeki’s 1998 observation to the twelfth heads of state meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (3 October 1998) that ‘the ‘free market’ path of development … has failed to live up to the expectations of the people of the South.’ And what is one to make of Mbeki’s pronouncement the same year that South Africans ‘must be in the forefront in challenging the notion of “the market” as a modern God, a supernatural phenomenon to whose dictates everything human must bow in a spirit of powerlessness.’

Note, however, that this latter assertion, for all its seeming radicalism, was immediately fleshed out by Mbeki’s praise for the IMF, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization (WTO) as examples of the kind of ‘human intervention’ that is needed to anchor any such challenge! Note, too, the tenor of this year’s celebrated tour by Mbeki of world capitals when he touched base with the Clintons, the Blairs, the Schroeders, and the doyens of the International Financial Institutions, the WTO, and the global business community. It is true that at every stop his emphasis, invariably well-received, was on poverty alleviation. Yet this is a seemingly progressive trope that is actually not such an uncomfortable one for those at the top, looking down, to
swallow. Who could deny the existence of poverty in Africa (including South Africa) and who would not be, charitably, against it? But what if the problem were named differently: as a deepening polarization of social classes across the color line and around the world that is reinforced by the very logic of capitalist-centered development strategies? Unsurprisingly, this is not a language that either Mandela or Mbeki have cared to employ, let alone to use as reference point for drawing any more assertive conclusions for domestic policy from their occasional (and apparently quite fleeting) expressed suspicions regarding the magic of the market. More often such murmurs of dissent about global contradictions seem designed to make it that much easier, in terms of local mass consumption, to shuffle off responsibility for any lack of economic progress in South Africa to rather more shadowy forces deemed to be beyond the ANC's control.

Indeed, in the context of a particularly subtle analysis of 'how the ANC has reproduced its power since 1994,' Hein Marais has identified such displacement of responsibility for the slow pace of change as one – albeit only one – dimension of the hegemonic narrative that ANC leaders have skillfully woven together. But there is also the legitimacy, slow to dissolve, that accrues to the ANC as the historical agent of black liberation and African nationalism – as well as the legitimacy that springs from the movement's continuing evocation of a project of racial redress. Moreover, despite its ambiguities in class terms, this latter project does have real resonance: after all, there continue to be cadres within party and state who have dedicated themselves to the betterment of conditions of their fellow South Africans and availed themselves of the fresh opportunities opened up by deracialization and democratization to work for positive improvements in the lives of their fellow citizens. Perhaps such militants have too often taken comfort in the notion that half a loaf is better than none, but Marais suggests they have nonetheless staffed programs in a range of sectors that have had some pertinent and positive effects. '[T]he often-valid critiques of ANC delivery mounted by the left – especially its impact on levels of inequality and poverty – have tended to play down its many notable accomplishments,' he writes, and then cites a range of encouraging official figures for areas such as water, electricity, telephone, nutrition, housing availability, and some spreading of welfare benefits to back up his point.

Yet Marais himself is also forced to admit that 'sadly, some of these claims lose their luster once scrutinized.' Certainly, the squeeze on expenditure arising from fiscal conservatism and the prioritization of deficit reduction has been linked to such realities as the often rapid breakdown of what have turned out to be merely jerry-built services, the rising backlog in the quantity of public goods actually delivered, and the parallel decay of many public health and educational programs (in a context where private facilities have begun to multiply geometrically for the well-to-do). Moreover, many possible areas for innovative policies seem merely untouched, land reform for example, where 'fewer than 20 of the 23,000 land claims lodged with the statutory Land Commission have been settled [and] ... less than 1 percent of South Africa's farmland has been redistributed to poor, African households.' There is, of course, the obvious question: why has the backlash to such realities (and to other, even more central ones, like the desperately high rate of joblessness) been so muted? Here Marais introduces another variable, what he suggests to be a shared and tolerant understanding on the part of the populace as to just how long the road to redress of widespread penury must be in a situation such as that inherited by South Africans from apartheid. As he puts it,
the majority of South Africans know that the road to freedom and a better life will not take just five (or ten) years ... [this is] not fatalistic patience ... but the residues of knowledge accumulated through countless personal and collective struggles.

The country did not actually feel like that to me during my stay there, I must confess. On the left, there was the sense that the road, however long, is not actually running in a very promising direction. But more generally, and even more striking, was, yes, quite a lot of fatalism (and/or cynicism). And, equally marked, the weakness, not the strength, of any sense of shared purpose – together with clear signs that the ANC, reluctant to facilitate a substantial mobilization of people for any more transformative purpose than fairly passive vote delivery, is content to allow the profoundly individualizing logic of a market society to help actively to demobilize and to neutralize the mass of the population. No doubt this outcome has been facilitated by the fact that South African society is so deeply (albeit unevenly) marked by capitalist development, that it is a society in which a profoundly (if frustrated) consumerist culture, especially in the sprawling urban areas, now seems far more resonant than any presumed residue of the much-discussed traditional and collective-oriented spirit of ‘Ubuntu’. Yet the ANC’s choice against mobilization and for neoliberalism has also helped deepen this culture, a culture which has become, in turn, a crucial ingredient of the ANC’s hegemony: the common sense of a South Africa that is, at least for the moment, only narrowly politicized. Can there be any doubt that this represents a sad denouement for South Africa’s mass democratic movement, a movement that in its march to victory promised so much more in terms of sustaining positive social purpose and releasing social possibility? Here, surely, will lie one of the harshest of the verdicts ultimately rendered by historians regarding the ANC: that (to return to our opening paragraphs) it chose to sacrifice so much of that promise on the altar of the marketplace and, in doing so, squandered an opportunity of world-historic proportions.

Starting from Scratch?

In focusing upon the terms of ANC hegemony, we should avoid any underestimation of the hard edge that Mbeki and his party also maintain in order to lock their project firmly into place – the iron fist beneath the velvet glove of their undoubted legitimacy, as it were. The truth is that many members of that leadership group are people of limited democratic sensibility who simply do not like to be crossed. Most importantly, Mbeki’s own approach to the exercise of power is far less avuncular and ‘chiefly’ than Mandela’s, a style of top-down control and micro-management already visible during Mandela’s term when Mbeki effectively orchestrated much of the hands-on functioning of the state apparatus. Mbeki’s peevishness was also on display during that period. It was he, for example, who seemed principally responsible for the ANC’s initial rejection of the TRC’s final report, an approach, based on a demagogic and willful misrepresentation of that report’s mild critique of the ANC’s own abuses of power in exile, that undermined much of the positive resonance that report might have been expected to have. As president, Mbeki has further centralized things in his own hands, the fact that virtually no leading ANC politician would publicly critique his stubborn attempt to contradict progressive consensus on the question of the link between HIV and AIDs may provide some indication of just how far the writ of his own authority runs. But his very stubbornness on this issue may also suggest exactly what one would be up against in daring to cross him: in consequence, an air of considerable trepidation scars official circles, with only the occasional bold soul (like Johannesburg councilor Trevor Ngwane, recently suspended from the ANC for
choosing to defy the government's sweeping privatization schemes for the city) daring to risk career prospects in defense of principle. Moreover, this distaste for disagreement has proven to be even more pronounced with respect to the policy-making centerpiece of the Mandela and Mbeki presidencies, the commitment to meridianal Thatcherism epitomized by the adoption of the GEAR strategy document. Recall that from the outset this document – although never publicly debated, nor even, it would seem, vetted by Mandela himself – was declared 'non-negotiable'. Recall, too, the tone adopted by both Mandela and Mbeki in defending it. At the 1999 conference of the South African Communist Party (SACP), the ANC's ostensible partner (along with COSATU) in a formally institutionalized political 'Alliance', both men produced paroxysms of rage against any who would have the effrontery to criticize the policy. The language used to whip its allies into line was harsh, variously described by Southscan (10 July 1998) as 'markedly aggressive', as a 'scathing ... barrage', and as a 'public onslaught'. Mbeki accused SACP leaders of 'fake revolutionary posturing', terming them 'charlatans' and 'confidence tricksters' attempting to build their organization 'on the basis of scavenging on the carcass of a savaged ANC.' As for Mandela, he stated firmly that 'GEAR, as I have said before, is the fundamental policy of the ANC. We will not change it because of your pressure.' And he hinted darkly of the consequences that might well follow from any continued criticism of GEAR.

Although the rhetorical fury unleashed by Mandela and Mbeki at that conference was particularly vitriolic in tone, this kind of attack has been linked to an offensive also directed in recent years against criticisms by the ANC's other major ally, COSATU and its affiliates. A particularly startling example was Mbeki's 1998 address to the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) congress where he contemptuously characterized the membership as a 'bunch of drunken and ill-disciplined teachers' and lashed out at their union's expressed skepticism about GEAR:

\emph{The members of SADTU stand out as competent practitioners of the toyi-toyi. We [Mbeki sardonically used the associative 'we' in making his points] come across as militant fighters for a better pay check at the end of the month. We are seen as excellent tacticians as to when to disrupt the school program so that we can extract from the Government the greatest material benefit for ourselves. ...We behave in a manner which seems to suggest we are alienated from the revolutionary challenge of the education of our youth and masses and greatly inspired by the value system which motivates the traitor and the criminal.}\footnote{

Flash forward to 2000 and the ominous report that now-President Mbeki 'has lost patience with COSATU's and the SACP's opposition to government's market-friendly policy', with the union's national strike (May 2000) 'against spiraling unemployment and grinding poverty (being) the last straw for the President'. 'What irks Mbeki most', the Financial Mail (19 May 2000) continues, 'is the COSATU and SACP contention that his free-market economic policy mix is to blame for rising unemployment and poverty.'

Not surprisingly, perhaps, this virus of contempt for dissenters has been catching among ANC ministers. In 1998, Derek Hannekom, then land affairs minister, launched an attack on the National Land Commission when that non-governmental organization (NGO) advocated the scrapping of the property rights clause in the constitution in order to facilitate land restitution. He accused it of being 'stubbornly frivolous' and 'ultra-left,' the latter being precisely the phrase used about the same time by constitutional affairs minister Valli Moosa to dismiss a campaign by the South
African Municipal Workers' Union (SAMWU) against the privatization of water and municipal services. And when, a year later, Public Service minister (and SACP member) Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi – dubbed 'Thatcher-Moleketi' by a sympathetic conservative Sunday newspaper for her pains – also used that phrase in coldly backing down the wage and antiprivatization demands of public sector workers; she even proposed that they read Lenin's 'Left-wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder! Meanwhile, at COSATU's 1999 conference, Terror Lekota, minister of defense and chairman of the ANC, delivered a speech on behalf of Mbeki in which he warned the union darkly that 'the recent trend on the part of some highly-placed comrades of ascending platforms or by other ways criticizing or agitating against policies and actions of the movement, inside and outside government, smacks of a lack of revolutionary discipline.' ‘Sharp and uncontrolled criticism merely confused the masses’, Lekota continued, while also creating a climate ‘in which agents provocateurs can thrive and advance their counter-revolutionary agendas’ (Southscan, 20 August 2000).

Here is the 'one-party dominant system' so feared by many liberal observers in South Africa showing its teeth, albeit teeth that are more often flashed at those on the left than those on the right. Not, as we have seen, that the ANC has much to fear from the political right. But then, at the moment, some would argue that it really hasn't too much to fear from the left either. Thus, despite the raw treatment they often receive, the unions have clung to the Alliance, once again acting uncritically at election time in 1999 as a key political tool in mobilizing votes for the ANC. It is true that some labor-linked analysts have seen COSATU, with this strategy, as continuing to be a potent player in the transition, still armed within the Alliance and within fora like the tripartite (government-business-labor) National Economic Development and Labor Council (NEDLAC) to carve out space to force a class compromise upon capital that is, at least in some of its particulars, to labor's advantage. These analysts cite, for example, certain progressive aspects of postapartheid labor legislation in support of their further hopes in this regard and suggest that, in any case, the world for COSATU outside the Alliance with the ANC would be even colder than that which currently seems to exist within. And it does seem likely that COSATU will accept at least this latter premise for the foreseeable future – despite the pounding it has taken and despite a certain amount of open debate within the labor movement as to the costs and benefits of the Alliance.

Perhaps all they can realistically hope to gain in this way is a bit of time, however. Thus, early in 2000, born-again neoliberal columnist Howard Barrell writes (in a column in the Mail and Guardian [21 July 2000] about Mbeki entitled 'Talking left and doing right') that the new President will certainly sustain the party's conservative trajectory even if he may do so somewhat more surreptitiously than some (including Barrell) would like. Why? In order

*to avoid disturbing the ANC's left-wing Alliance partners ...[since] an open declaration of the depth of its resolve to privatize, rationalize, downsize and liberalize may provoke an unhelpful [sic] response from trade unionists, communists and some in the African National Congress. So much better just to slip things past the awkward squad, if at all possible, with a few pat or ambiguous phrases and empty reassurances.*

Nonetheless Barrell concludes, 'government economic measures are unlikely ... to be any less decisive for the stealth with which they may be implemented.' Small wonder, then, that a figure like Saki Macozoma, identified as chief executive of Transnet, one of South Africa's biggest soon-to-be-privatized companies, and a former senior ANC
leader, could hail Mbeki’s ascension to the presidency by suggesting that his ‘term will be an opportunity to revisit legislation of the past, like making labor regulations more business-friendly’! Certainly, legislation that favors greater ‘flexibility’ in the labor market (with the threat this poses of eroding gains already made by workers in terms of minimum-wage guarantees and other related provisions) seems likely in the future. So too does a continuation of the wearing grind of policies of privatization and retrenchment and of macroeconomic strategies (fated to produce, at best, jobless growth) that have become so marked a dimension of the South African labor scene in the post-apartheid period.

Inevitably, some will judge that trade-union leaders have remained unduly naive and/or unduly timorous vis-à-vis the ANC and the Alliance. Their approach has not dictated absolute passivity, however. In May, the trade unions (COSATU, together with its allies in other, smaller federations) were able to organize a day-long stay away in protest against joblessness that pulled over four million people away from work and produced demonstrations by hundreds of thousands of workers in major cities. And despite ANC’s threats, COSATU vows to continue with its critical role:

Undeterred [COSATU general secretary Zwelinzima] Vavi says he has put in place a second program of rolling mass action if government and business fail to respond positively to COSATU’s demands to stem job losses, stop privatization and for the state to play a direct role in correcting market ‘imbalances.’ ‘The economy is not working for us. GEAR is not working. How can we support this?’ Vavi asks (Financial Mail, 19 April 2000).

True, the unions have been weakened by the postapartheid drain of trained personnel to government and to business and they have paid a price for defensiveness and for the difficulties they have had in defining a countervailing political economy for South Africa. But they continue to criticize and even to keep alive a debate about macroeconomic alternatives as in their 1995 report ‘Social Equity and Job Creation’ and the exhaustive 1997 report (to that year’s sixth National Congress of COSATU) of its own in-house September Commission. In particular, the latter commission sharply attacked GEAR (49-50) as spawning

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economic policies \text{ that are likely to lead to the strengthening of vested economic interests which have their roots in the apartheid era...[thereby promising] to strengthen capital, and specifically its financial interests, and weaken labor [and to offer] very little redistribution of wealth and economic power in our society.}
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The report also evoked the possibility of a ‘new kind of struggle’ and of more ambitiously progressive economic strategies that would ‘reclaim redistribution as the fundamental goal of economic policy and as an instrument for generating economic growth.’ Moreover, trade unions have the numbers, revenues, and level of organization that will continue to make them the most important players on the left in South Africa.

But not the only players. Indeed, in terms of such potential as still exists on the left in South Africa, it may be that the most immediate question for COSATU is not what to do with reference to the (capital 'A') Alliance (made up of ANC, SACP, and COSATU). At least equally important is the question of how to reach downward and outward to actors in other sectors who also feel the pinch of neoliberalism: to dust off the language, so potent in the 1980s, of ‘progressive and working-class civil society’ in order to rebuild, from below, a movement of resistance to the strategic direction that
postapartheid South Africa has taken. One should certainly not romanticize the possibilities of reconstructing such a base and forging, in effect, a new (small 'a') alliance. The popular forces start at a low ebb, as an important article by Shamim Meer has recently reminded us:

*A striking feature of the post-election period has been the demobilization of civil society. As the anti-apartheid struggle has waned, the organizations that sustained it have lost ground and influence in public life. Trade unions, civic associations, youth and women's organizations - in which the struggle was grounded - are all weaker.*

Is rebuilding an effective popular movement therefore a matter of starting all over again, from scratch?

Not quite. As Meer also reminds us, 'the poverty and inequality associated with apartheid – and which fueled the struggle – remain.' And it is not only trade unionists who have begun to reanimate their efforts to question this outcome. Take the churches, for example. In 1998, Anglican Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane was himself slammed by Mandela for questioning the gospel according to GEAR. Nonetheless, the churches returned to the charge at the tri-annual conference of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) later in the year. There that redoubtable campaigner against apartheid (and former secretary general of the SACC), Dr. Beyers Naude, argued that 'while GEAR is a "party political issue", when it affects the poor, the church has no option but to intervene.' At the same meeting, Mzwandile Nuns, representing the worker ministry in KwaZulu-Natal, noted the government argument that they are 'cutting social spending in favor of lower company taxation which will subsequently create an environment for more companies to invest.' But, he continued, 'what we see on the ground is different. The bulk of poor people remain where they were many years ago.' The lesson? As another delegate to the conference, Professor Takatso Mofokeng, put the point, the churches 'should go back to the trenches, because it seems that is the language the government understands:' 'People should demand what they are entitled to and use the methodology that works. GEAR didn't come up for referendum. If people are not happy about it they must stand up against it.'

This kind of sensibility continues to percolate through church circles, providing some of the clout for the growing strength of a local Jubilee 2000 campaign that focuses on the question of apartheid debt, for example. While it is true that the formerly prominent South African National Civics Organization (SANCO) is among those organizations hit hardest by postapartheid institutional decay, circles of township militants, focused on issues of schools, health facilities and services, remain. New voices are beginning to be heard that ask tough questions and may give more dramatic life to broader township-based initiatives (although it is too early to say whether the recently-minted National Association of Residents' and Civics Organizations [NARCO] will prove to be a promising case in point in this respect). Some fledgling reactivation of grassroots women's organizations – significantly demobilized both by too sanguine assumptions about the extent of the victory for feminism achieved with liberation and by the movement of many militants into the state – has occurred around struggles over such issues as the state's child benefit grant. Peasant-linked NGOs like the influential National Land Committee and the Rural Development Services Network have taken fresh energy from recent developments around the land issue in neighboring Zimbabwe. Moreover, these latter two organizations are among those feeding into an assertive umbrella body, the South Africa National Non-Governmental Organizations Coalition (SANGOCO), which has taken a number of
signal initiatives including, in the past few years, a revealing set of nationwide public Poverty Hearings and the establishment of an Economics Commission of its own in order to seek to design a new framework for economic and social policies.

Can such initiatives begin to add up, giving real thrust and substance to the kind of (small 'a') alliance of organizations of the dispossessed hypothesized above? Fortunately, there are some signs that this is already beginning to happen. Thus, a recent news item on 'New Seeds of Opposition' by William Gumede in the Financial Mail (19April 2000) highlights the fact that 'organizations aligned to the ANC-led [A]lliance have regrouped into a formidable lobby, which, judging by their frustration with government policy, could develop into SA's real political opposition,' this underscoring the point that 'the real opposition in SA is not to be found in parliament, but in extra-parliamentary politics – as was the case before the ANC's unbanning in 1990.' COSATU, Jubilee 2000, and SANGOCO are among those identified as key actors in this initiative, with the spirit they exemplify captured in the words of SANGOCO executive director, Abie Dithlake, a key figure in the group: 'The debate on economic and social policy needs to be broadened. We need a reconfiguration of the nature of politics in SA. A realignment of politics will allow space for fresh input into the economic debate.' As the Financial Mail's report continues,

The new grouping argues that with the lack of a serious black-led opposition to the left of the ANC, an alternative group is one of the few means of pressuring the government. ... The May 10 national strike against job losses and rising poverty, led by COSATU, should be seen as the grouping's first direct action. A steering committee comprising representatives of COSATU, SANGOCO and civic bodies has been formed to take the campaign further. It is demanding greater openness and inclusiveness in economic policy formation. Quiet but authoritative, Dithlake captures the mood of the new grouping. He quotes Reserve Bank statistics to show that the income of the poorest 40 percent has dropped by 21 percent in recent years. 'Figures like this prove that the social responsibility of the state is eroding. We (SANGOCO) need a close link to COSATU to present a consolidated front on macro-economic policy', says Dithlake. 'With the State's delivery infrastructure being put into private hands, or corporatized and expected to make a profit, it will be increasingly difficult to win the war on poverty', he says. 'Unless urgent measures are implemented to improve the standard of living of the unemployed, the social cohesion of our society will be threatened.'

It is, of course, far too early to evaluate the prospects of any such attempt by various forces in South African civil society – including trade unions but also organizations of women, the church, the environmentally engaged, and those focused on issues of land or education or community concerns, among others – to link up more self-consciously, within and across sectors, in a popular alliance from below. But if it proves possible to do so, they can be expected to take strength from each other and encouragement to think beyond parameters of their separate assertions – and also to take further steps to crystallize the institutions of a (heretofore often only implicitly) shared theory and practice of struggle. Perhaps in this project, one that is still fugitive and under construction but also increasingly visible and marked with tangible potential, we can begin to see the seeds of the kind of 'structured movement' that Canadian trade union activist Sam Gindin has recommended in his own country: 'something transitional that is more than a coalition and less than a party,' as he puts it. Indeed, Gindin argues forcefully that the much-debated 'party question' (the New Democratic Party? a new party?) be postponed for, say, five or six years in Canada while the left movement and alliance – without abandoning its immediate concerns regarding self-defense and more appropriate policies – give priority to the
development of its ‘political capacities’ (specified by Gindin in terms of ‘our understanding, our ability to win others over, the creation of new forums and structures for studying, working and fighting together’).  

For South Africa as well, this kind of analysis may suggest a downplaying, at least for the moment, of divisive and repetitive debates over the merits or demerits, from a progressive perspective, of working with and through the ANC itself and/or the Alliance. It bears noting, for example, that the new grouping evoked above is still described by the Financial Mail as being located ‘within [the] ANC family’, and it seems almost inevitable that this should be so, at least for the foreseeable future. As for the longer run, it is quite simply premature to say where a revived popular movement of the sort anticipated here might eventually fit into the South African political equation. There have been those within COSATU (especially within the National Union of Metalworkers) who speak, from time to time, of the possibility of forming a new workers’ and socialist party outside the Alliance and to the left of the ANC. This seems an unlikely, certainly precocious, demand for the time being. Yet the fact remains that the ‘official’ ANC has by now been pulled so far to the right that, whatever the degree of (sometimes grudging) legitimacy it may retain among the mass of the population, it would be unwise to consider it automatically to be some kind of natural, necessary, or exclusive home for progressive assertion. The current party leadership has surely sacrificed that mantle, even if one believes that the ANC could once have laid claim to it. Thus, if not now then eventually, the question will have to be asked as to whether and to what extent the universe of the ANC and the Alliance provides a fruitful context within which to advance a rejuvenated popular movement and, in Gindin’s sense, ‘an alternative politics.’

Of course, within the Alliance, some continue to argue the case that a promisingly radical role can be played by the SACP—even though the latter’s self-definition as an (ostensible) political party that is at once both mere cheerleader for and occasional left critic of the ANC seems a near-impossible one (and one that must also be a contributing factor to the party’s currently sharply declining membership figures). The fact that many of the most rightwing figures in the ANC government are senior SACP leaders provides additional grounds for skepticism. True, the party can produce some radical-sounding pronouncements of its own, SACP general secretary Blade Nzimande’s recent calls for a deeper commitment to socialism and for more state action in the economy offering interesting cases in point. It is also true that in the party – as in many other sectors – a cadre of younger activists, their number still small but growing, is emerging that is less wedded to time-honored icons and homilies. Still, it is difficult, on past and present performance, to feel any great confidence in the SACP’s vocation for driving a revolutionary revival.

How likely is it, alternatively, that any new stirrings of organized mass-based dissent will find effective expression within the ANC and even, possibly, begin to push that organization in a more leftward direction? This is not entirely implausible perhaps, and one is occasionally jolted by a surprising development or two on that front. There was, for example, the 1998 publication of an internal ANC discussion document entitled ‘The State, Property Relations and Social Transformation’. It is true that the document (whose precise provenance is not entirely clear, although it appears on the ANC’s official webpage [October, 1998]) ridicules any tendency ‘within the NLM [the National Liberation Movement] … to propose solutions that would be way out of line with current realities, such as punitive taxes.’ Yet it is just as uneasy about an equally ‘dangerous tendency … to be so awed by financial capital that we throw the NLM
prostrate in front of this sector as if in pagan prayer.' More specifically, the document allows the notion of 'the developmental state,' so much maligned by recent critics of the early years of postindependence experimentation in Africa, to assume centrality in its formulations:

... in terms of the broad array of economic and social policy, information and even political integrity, the state has lost much of its national sovereignty. This applies more so to developing countries. While on the one hand they are called upon to starve and prettify themselves to compete on the 'catwalk' of attracting the limited amounts of foreign direct investment (FDIs), they are on the other hand reduced to bulimia by the vagaries of an extremely impetuous and whimsical market suitor!

Can a developmental state survive, let alone thrive, under such conditions? The answer is yes! The starting point should be that constructors of this concept should not live in a fool's paradise. They cannot pretend that they operate in an environment entirely of their own making. … [However] what is of even greater significance is that many forces, both within and outside the government, both in the developed and developing world, do appreciate the disadvantages of the dictates of the multinationals and particularly the predatory nature of international financial capital. A significant sector of humanity is honestly searching for answers to these problems; and the ANC alliance is part of this global movement.

In consequence, the document suggests, not only should this developmental state 'use the resources that it commands to ensure redistribution of wealth in the interest of the poor and disadvantaged' but 'it should put in place regulatory and other mechanisms that not only seek to obviate market failure, but also afford the state the capacity to intervene in a proactive way to facilitate growth and redistribution.'

The significance of such formulations should not be overstated. Overall, the message of this discussion document is much more cautious and balanced than some of the above quotations, taken alone, might suggest; it is circumspect in particular (albeit not altogether mistakenly) about the limits of institutional capacity and shortfalls of effective leverage that must qualify the rebirth of a more transformative government strategy in South Africa. Does it reflect, nonetheless, a South African version of that souring of the neoliberal honeymoon that has become more of a worldwide phenomenon than might have been hoped even a few years ago, a tack that could begin to put not just the 'developmental state' but even socialism back on the agenda? In the event, the press told us (Mail and Guardian, 23 October 1998), any such signs of second thoughts within ANC official circles was 'not roundly welcomed by economic hawks like Deputy President Thabo Mbeki and Minister of Finance Trevor Manuel'. Still, by mid-2000, there was the curious case of Kgalema Motlanthe, the ANC's secretary general, who contradicted the government's own condemnation of COSATU's May 10th national strike by calling on union members (Mail and Guardian, 12 April 2000) to 'intensely hate capitalism and to struggle against it' and who affirmed that 'the ANC is not a bourgeois organization. The country's leading socialist minds are in the ANC. Anyone who argues for socialism will find allies in the ANC. But it is equally true that Motlanthe's reported statements have often been quite contradictory (he is much given to dismissing out of hand those he calls 'limbo socialists ... who write resolution from armchairs') and there seems an opportunist underside to his emphasis that 'the unions should hold the capitalist system's transnational units accountable for job losses in the country – not the ANC or government!'
Can we take more seriously the even sharper comments one hears (albeit as often as not in private conversation) from some party militants that 'the ANC is itself a site of class struggle' – and that, given the party's continued popular legitimacy, it is actually a privileged site of such struggle, one not to be cavalierly abandoned by the left? Can we also take heart from rumblings that the stars of the Mbekis, the Manuels, and the Erwins may have begun to wane somewhat within the ANC or from accounts (for example) of the emergence of a deepening left-right division cutting across the ANC in vitally important Gauteng province (Mail and Guardian, 19 May 2000)? I have suggested above that it would be wise for the left to approach the ANC, as presently organized and led, with great suspicion. And yet one does sense that within the ANC there are indeed militants who have begun to grasp that the leadership's macroeconomic strategy does not and cannot work. And they may also suspect that, in the absence of material advance and with the ruling out of court of a class-based politics, the situation is unlikely to stand still: it can quite easily get a very great deal worse, deepening already existing conditions of social distemper and producing further morbid symptoms of both the freefall into 'the abyss of social exclusion' so feared by Castells and the threat to 'the social cohesion of our society' invoked by Dithlake. There is, as a direct reflection of socioeconomic polarization and communal decay, the precipitous rise in the crime rate (much of it crime of an extremely violent nature). There is the cruel decline of health standards, most marked, albeit not exhausted, by the escalating HIV/AIDS pandemic.

There is also, Marais suggests, the danger of much more dramatic expressions of loss of 'social cohesion', one of these inherent in the ANC's own propensity – recall our earlier discussion of the cooptation of Gatsha Buthelezi – to shore up its hegemony by pandering to local chiefs, in KwaZulu and beyond, whose power is rooted 'in a blur of ethnicized tradition, coercion and clientelism'. As Marais then argues,

*the constant disbursal of tangible benefits is one way of easing [the resultant tension].* 
*Drawing the subjects and their leaders into the fold is another – hence, for example, the ANC's courting of the IEF, and the salary hikes for chiefs and kings decreed by the ANC government shortly before the recent election.*

The problem: 'If this largesse cannot be sustained, the tension between the modern and the traditional will increase, allowing politicized ethnicity to regain its muscle.'

Add to this the fact that the venal Winnie Mandela can still find fertile ground for her racist populism in the gangrenous inequalities that lie untreated in an untransformed South Africa – even as, at the other extreme, some whites seek, in the more 'privatized' racism of their guarded suburbs and schools, defense against the leveling so necessary in such a society – and one gets a further sense of just how potentially dangerous are the tensions that seethe beneath the surface in that country.

Such facts further underscore the need to generate an 'alternative politics.' But is the ANC itself (like some latter-day PRI in Mexico) not more likely to fall back on ever more authoritarian methods as its preferred means of seeking to contain (rather than resolve) the contradictions that now scar the South African social formation? Time alone will tell what the Mbeki years can bring. Still, one senses that for all his cocky self-confidence, Mbeki is not always quite certain himself as to just how best to ride the whirlwind he has helped create. Despite his apparently unqualified commitment to his chosen role as architect of South Africa's appeasement of capitalism as presumptive engine of South African economic transformation, one can still find him bobbing and weaving rather uncomfortably – as he did in the run up to last year's election when he permitted himself some pretty radical-sounding formulations of his
own. One such instance (*Southscan*, 12 June 1998) saw his revealing attack not only on wealthy whites (afflicted, he said, by 'social amnesia') but also on a 'black elite' that abuses 'freedom in the name of entitlement.' This latter group, he charged, 'seek to hijack the sacrifices which millions of ordinary people made to liberate our country for noble purposes, in order to satisfy a seemingly insatiable and morally unbound greed and personal thirst for wealth and comfort, regardless of the cost to our society.' And he concluded by warning of 'the danger of a mounting rage to which we must respond seriously.'

An intriguing statement with which to conclude this essay, then, but perhaps as much for what it says about present-day South African society as for what it tells us about Thabo Mbeki himself. Does the slightly desperate tone of such pronouncements suggest, for example, an uneasy sense on the part of the leadership of just how impossible it will be to overcome the grim legacy of racial inequality on a capitalist basis? And perhaps, too, a certain subliminal suspicion that even when local elites do everything possible to conform to global market dictate, the dependent capitalism they seek to facilitate simply cannot be expected to lift off the ground as once it (sometimes) did. Moreover, even if Mbeki and his team can continue, by and large, to dodge these realities, there are others who have begun to recognize that it is precisely in the failure of the promise of neoliberal deliverance that lie both the tragedy of South Africa itself (as evoked at the outset of this essay) and the broader global resonance of the South African case. We have also posed a further question: if the current leadership of the ANC cannot be expected to act upon any such understanding – cannot be expected to respond to the looming South African crisis by focusing 'mounting rage' and potential political volatility into positive and transformative popular energy – who (if anyone) can? Whatever the answer to this question, the stakes are certainly high: for the phrase 'socialism or barbarism' rarely has had more meaning than in contemporary South Africa.

**Endnotes**

1. John S. Saul, 'Magic Market Realism', *Transformation* (Durban), 38 (1999); I have adapted some paragraphs of this text in writing the present essay, a version of which (including a much fuller set of footnotes and bibliographical references) will also appear as a chapter in my *Millennial Africa: Capitalism, Socialism, Democracy* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001).


4. See Jonathan Hyslop, 'Why was the white right unable to stop South Africa's democratic transition?' in Peter Alexander et al. (eds.), *Africa Today* (Canberra: HRC, 1996), 145-165.


9. As cited in Asghar Adelzadeh, 'Loosening the Brakes on Economic Growth', *Ngqo!*, 1, 2 (February, 2000).


12. In his important volume (soon to be issued in a new edition), *South Africa: Limits to Change: The Political Economy of Transformation* (London and New York, and Cape Town: Zed Books and University of Cape Town Press, 1998), 156; as Marais quotes Anglo-American executive Clem Sunter: 'Negotiations work. Rhetoric is dropped, reality prevails and in the end the companies concerned go on producing the minerals, goods and services' (147).


14. Cited in Andrew Nash, 'Mandela's Democracy', *Monthly Review*, vol. 50, no. 11 (April 1999), 26. Mandela's reversal of ground on the nationalization question was actually quite rapid after 1990, such that by 1994 he could assure *Sunday Times* readers (1 May 1994): 'In our economic policies ... there is not single reference to things like nationalization, and this is not accidental. There is not a single slogan that will connect us with any Marxist ideology' (quoted in Marais, op. cit., 146).


20. As columnist Howard Barrell wrote in *The Mail and Guardian* (18 June 2000), at the time of Mbeki's announcement of his new cabinet: 'Both [Erwin and Manuel] have won the confidence of the markets and their presence in their current portfolios is seen as a measure of the government's determination to stick to its current economic course.'

21. Asgar Adelzadeh, 'From the RDP to GEAR: The Gradual Embracing of Neo-Liberalism in Economic Policy', *Transformation*, 31 (1996); the accounts of the rise and fall of the RDP in Marais (op. cit.) and Bond (op. cit.) are also essential.

22. Adelzadeh (Ibid. 67). As Patrick Bond has summarized this pattern, 'Much of South Africa's national sovereignty continued to be offered up on a plate to impetuous and whimsical local and international financial markets' (op. cit., 216).


24. A point underscored for me most forcefully by South African economist Oupa Lehulere in private communications.
25. The point is convincingly argued, and linked to the extreme inequalities of economic power and income that exist in South Africa, by Adelzadeh, 'Loosening the Brakes on Economic Growth' (op. cit.).


28. Lucien van der Walt, unpublished communication (July, 2000).


32. CDE (op. cit., 145).


35. Freund and Padayachee (op. cit., 1179). As they continue, 'If there was a phrase that captured the imagination of South Africans black and white within a year of the ANC taking power it was that of "the gravy train."

36. The speeches are included in the final section of Adrian Hasland and Jovial Rantao's useful biography of Thabo Mbeki, *The life and times of Thabo Mbeki* (Rivonia: Zebra Press, 1999).


38. Closer to the truth, in fact, may be the frank and quite unequivocal statement of a brash emergent African entrepreneur, Tumi Modise, interviewed by David Goodman (in his strong volume, *Fault Lines: Journeys Into the New South Africa* [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999]): 'Race is not the issue anymore', she told Goodman, 'It's class'.

39. I have cited this statement (from 1984) and explored other questions posed in seeking to divine the historical character of the ANC in my 'South Africa: the Question of Strategy', *New Left Review*, 160 (November, 1986).

40. Hasland and Rantao, op. cit., ch. 7.

41. Quoted in Bond, op. cit., 83.

42. 'Statement by Deputy President Mbeki at the African Renaissance Conference', Johannesburg, 28 September 1998 (ANC website).

43. Albeit not too much responsibility: on balance, Mbeki’s South Africa seems quite content to propose itself for the role of the US and global capital’s tribune (and gendarme) on the African continent; for the way this role has begun to play itself out in southern Africa see, for example, Larry Swatuk, 'Bully on the Block?' *SAR*, vol. 15, no. 3 (2000). Recall also the warm tone adopted by Mandela during his presidency towards dictators in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Saudi Arabia who often were not only key targets for South African arms sales but also to become important contributors to the ANC’s electoral war-chest in 1999.
44. Hein Marais, 'Topping up the tank: How the ANC has reproduced its power since 1994', Development Update, vol. 3, no. 1 (October, 1999), from which the quotations in the next two paragraphs are drawn.

45. For a parallel argument, see the article in the Mail and Guardian (9 June 2000) where educator Sipho Seepe describes Mbeki as 'a president who is ultra-sensitive, unable to accommodate others and who is impatient with differing opinions. ... A president who is unable to accept that he could be mistaken, and has conveniently surrounded himself with sycophants.'

46. Quoted in Salim Vally, 'Education on Trial: The Poor Speak Out', SAR, vol. 14, no. 1 (December, 1998), 27; it is Vally who suggests that the reader note 'the disarming use of the associative "we", Mbeki apparently seeking in this way to signal his affinity with the teachers even while mercilessly castigating them.' As for the 'toyi-toyi', it is a vigorous dance step engaged in collectively and associated with demonstrations.

47. As quoted in Norm Dixon, op. cit.


49. The quotations in this paragraph are drawn from an article by Wonder Hlongwa, 'Church asked to fight Gear from the trenches', Mail and Guardian, 10 July 1998.

50. Sam Gindin, 'The Party's Over', This Magazine (November, 1998), 15. This has been further defined by Gindin (This Magazine (July, 2000)) as a politics that differs from the practices of currently established political parties in Canada (but also, we might add, from the practices of the ANC in South Africa) in terms of 'how it organizes, educates and mobilizes; the depth of its challenge to the status quo; the emphasis it puts on developing a counterculture; its faith in the potential of ordinary people.'

51. See, for example, Blade Nzimande, 'Towards a socialist South Africa', Mail and Guardian (18 February 2000), 39, and also his 'State should drive the economy', Business Day (29 May 2000), 10.

52. Note, however, the terms in which such criticism is sometimes cast on the center-left of the party. Emphasizing that encouragement by the current ANC leadership of the ever deeper penetration of monopoly capital in South Africa may actually contradict that leadership's claim to be expanding the scope of a nascent black bourgeoisie, such critics suggest that the least compradorial elements of this bourgeoisie might therefore be recruitable to a class alliance capable of redirecting the party to the left (see Z. Pallo Jordan, 'Ruth First Memorial Lecture', Witwatersrand University, 28 August 2000 for a particularly clear statement of this position). The temptation visible here to merely recycle the ANC's old 'national-democratic revolution' concept at the expense of a more working-class-centered definition of ongoing revolutionary struggle illustrates once again the difficulties of conceptualizing a left-project from within the ideological universe of the ANC.

53. Marais, 'Topping up the tank' (op. cit.), 27.
Briefings

Playing Civil Society Tunes: Corruption & Misunderstanding Nigeria’s ‘Real’ Political Institutions

Caroline Ifeka

Mamdani (1996) argues that the contemporary African state is bifurcated between (modern/progressive) urban society configured with civil institutions and individual rights, and on the other, traditional/backward) rural society ruled by custom and common rights. This naïve view, recently critiqued by O’Laughlin (2001) in regard to Mozambique, is influential.

Donors share some of this vision. They believe contemporary wars in Africa, communal violence, poverty and AIDS reflect bad governance practices with customary roots, e.g. dictatorships, child labour, persisting superstitious beliefs as witchcraft and ritual sacrifice of human beings, and endemic corruption. ‘Good governance’ requires modernisation of African societies by a revival of dilapidated democratic institutions and civil society.

A sine qua non of progress is open and free elections, justice, equality before the law, and an educated informed citizenry who demand major improvements in government’s capacity to bring the benefits of democracy to the grassroots. For the World Bank and its acolytes, social funds (participatory development) will empower local authorities to push forward the strengthening of ‘community driven’ civil society (Parker, 2000).

Drawing on her experience of NGO participatory activities with poor communities and local government authorities (LGAs) in Cross River State and the Niger Delta, the writer argues that donor driven government ‘reforms’ reflecting a Euro-American view of ‘civil society’, that is, the space where where state and citizen negotiate power by the ballot box – are generating ‘masquerade’ democracies. Donors have misunderstood and continue to misunderstand clientelism (Szeftel, 2001). They assume that Euro-American style democracy can subdue clientelism’s capacity to enmesh formal political institutions in the hierarchical, inter-personal and at times highly consensual ‘cash and carry’ relations of Nigeria’s ‘real’ political system.

Donor Funded ‘Good Governance’ Programmes

One civil society tune is state government reform. International donors such as Britain’s Department for International Development (Dfid) are pumping considerable sums into ‘reforming state governments’ in Nigeria. Dfid’s aim is to ‘demonstrate that reform can deliver practical benefits for the poor’ as a 10% growth in GDP by 2003 is linked to ‘pro-poor budget allocations between and within sectors’ (Dfid, 2000).

Dfid’s ‘civil society and governance’ seven year programme will expend over £22 million of taxpayer’s money in projects attached to four ‘reforming state governments’: Benue, Jigawa, Ekiti and Ebonyi. The latter is the home state of the Senate President Anyim Pius Anyim who reportedly pressed President Obasanjo to persuade Dfid to site their money there and not in neighbouring Enugu state.
(Both men belong to the ruling People's Democratic Party [PDP] party, and that patronage and clientelism will shape 'state reform' in Ebonyi from the outset; indeed players see 'state reform' as a wonderful opportunity to do 'plenty fine business').

Dfid has earmarked £35 million for development assistance to Nigeria in 2003. Programmes will focus on 'building capacity' rather than transferring significant financial resources. NGOs, small donors and government officials frequently ask themselves:

why is Dfid spending so much 'aid' money on mega-corrupt governments? On what and on whom will this money be expended?

Our NGO's experience is that Dfid's aid will not include substantial assistance to enable proven NGOs as ours to equip themselves in the skills necessary to facilitate technical training, management skills, information dissemination and the like among very backward and corrupt LGAs and impoverished semi-literate or largely illiterate village communities. So will annual expenditure result in more costly curtains for more Dfid expatriate managers' mansions? and more black tinted glass four-wheel drives for senior expatriate officials? Who is corrupting whom? (Private Eye, 2001).

Another civil society tune comes from Washington, DC. The World Bank is supporting social funds for 'local governance' strengthening and decentralisation of responsibilities and powers to local governments (Parker, 2001). The EU is singing the same song. It is targeting local government authorities as the site where social fund type projects modelled on participatory community development will liberate communities from poverty. Social funds enable people to plan for their own development, therefore people will be empowered to liberate themselves from poverty and push forward into a better life. Self-reliant development will strengthen civil society, making citizens everywhere guardians of accountability and transparency.

Decentralisation & Ruling Party Patronage

The Bayelsa State government's ostensible political decentralisation makes the state look almost like a model 'reforming government'. The Governor maintains he is moving government down from Yenagoa, the state capital, to remote communities surrounded by water and linked to the capital only by boat. The Governor boasted recently of 'creating 24 LGAs' that Bayelsa State government supports by monthly allocations from state revenue supplemented by the state's 13% share of the Federal Government's oil revenues.

Really, has not Governor Alamieyesiegha funded 24 ruling PDP party cells, predominantly youth and middle-aged males, who he 'feeds' monthly via LGA allocations? Reliable reports confirm that Brass LGA (Bayelsa State) in the Niger Delta receives from the state government N10 million a month ($73,000), while Akassa LGA receives N20 million a month ($147,000).

Brass Council chairmen and executive council officers observed by the writer were as proverbially brazen before our visiting NGO team about how they spend these funds as they are to their estimated 5,000 citizens. Schools, health centres, roads, boats, information dissemination, HIV prevention are paltry indeed. But, from the state government's point of view, control over remote and dispersed settlements is very much secured – through clientelistic cash-greased relationships between the Governor, his immediate subordinates, and ever-widening circles of dependents down to the smallest hut – and he and his ministers are almost assured of re-election in 2003. Meanwhile, what price the much vaunted
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political decentralisation? In Cross River State LGA chairmen/women many described by local observers as ‘bushy’ (that is, lacking in refinement and sometimes tertiary education) – are now paid a princely N150,000 per month ($1,200) compared to the basic minimum monthly wage of N5,000.

The masses feel resentful of such munificence, recognising that the PDP is bestowing serious patronage to maintain central (federal) control of political power in a period of officially approved ‘decentralisation’. Most rural people do not expect that decentralisation will generate more accountable local government and better services; they find that a donor driven and funded dream rather a joke, and note consultants’ expensive four-wheel drives, fine houses and costly life styles.

Government is also engaging in double speak, playing up the ‘central (federal) government is your benefactor’ card, pretending that it is achieving much more than most Nigerians can see. Newspapers recently reported the Minister of Power and Steel’s bold assertion that by 31 December 2001, ‘nearly all Nigerians will have electric power’ (vast tracts of Cross River State have never been close to a NEPA cable) (Saturday Tribune, 28 July 2001). People know in their daily struggles to ‘manage’ the extent to which infra-structural and social development is still a chimera. They are very frustrated by formal decentralisation; after decades of waiting, they expect the central (Federal) government to connect them immediately to the national power grid, to the national telephone company, and to federal highways.

Enterprise Culture

Donors are promoting small and medium enterprises, and attempting to revive the manufacturing sector which since the Babangida regime’s Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the late 1980s, early 1990s, has operated at 20% and less, on average, of full capacity. The talk today is of poverty reduction, job creation and IT access. It is also of dismantling remaining tariffs so as to open the economy to global market forces, to stimulate rapid economic growth; talk is of privatising electric power and telecommunications. Improved power supply will lower the private sector’s operating costs – currently high because of using generators, maintenance and daily diesel costs. The result, it is predicted, will be rapid economic growth and, if linked to pro-poor redistributional measures, an improvement in living standards for many.

However poor and remote from cities – supposed source of justice, equality and individual rights, that is, civil society – all Nigerians experience their lives predominantly through clientelism wherein all benefits are measured in cash values. In northern Cross River State, as NGO workers, we experience daily the pressures of patron-client relations and expectations. But as analytically minded observers, we can stand back and investigate rationally the values, beliefs, expectations and identities of the extended family and ‘community’. These socialities authorise as ‘good’ sectional sharing in the material rewards of clientelistic relationships. In these relations, exchange of cash for ‘services’ builds up social capital, for whom patronage defines participation in the wider community and indeed polity and is therefore a form of civility, though one whose ethno-religious and familial bonds restrict participants to less than full citizenship.

Clientelism is the armature of the commercial economy, the basis of ‘cash and carry’ exchange relations between transnational corporations and gatekeepers positioned in government offices, who function as ‘contractors’ or ‘fixers’ linking federal, state or local government to service providers. There is an historical and dialectical relationship between
clientelism and the exchange orientation of the Nigerian economy, in both formal and informal sectors.

Exposing Pecuniary Corruption

Appropriating public funds for private gain is being (slowly) exposed by daily newspaper reports and televised hearings of the Human Rights Violations Investigations Commission, chaired by Justice Chukwudifu Oputa. Hearings are closely followed by urban masses and elites with television facilities, but doubts are expressed about the Commission’s lack of power to arrest, detain and pursue persons named as corrupt.

The National House of Assembly recently adopted the white paper on the Brig. Gen. (retd) Oluwole Rotimi led Commission on the verification of federal government properties by the Federal Executive Council (Oji, 28 July 2001). The Federal Government approved the forfeiture of properties acquired illegally in the past decade and more by 52 persons from federal parastatals such as the National Electric Power Authority; their names and the original owner of the forfeited property are cited with many more remain to be named and one day may be. (A Commission member commented to the writer on members’ exhaustion after 21 months of investigations across the country, and remarked that they were only touching the tip of the iceberg).

These exposures constitute one level of political practice that donors believe will empower the public to press continuously at all levels of government for greater accountability and transparency. Anti-corruption should push Nigerian political institutions into a ‘formal democracy’.

Conclusion

International donors’ preoccupation with ‘social funds’ and political decentralisation is superficially laudable. ‘Social capital’ or institution building is supposed to restructure (clientelistic) African polities into ‘formal democracies’ sustained by strong civil societies. Political institutions (elected legislature, accountable transparent executive, honest judiciary) will guarantee individual rights, poverty reducing government programmes, and property ownership opportunities for the majority of citizens.

The Obasanjo regime and its supporters are engaging in old fashioned modernisation by social engineering: costly consultants tour the country’s cities holding ‘ethics’ workshops for the political class and launch ‘social funds’ or participatory development projects for the impoverished. In these participatory development programmes NGOs, communities and local authorities are billed as tripartite partners. Donors say ‘good governance’ reforms including decentralisation should enable ‘community driven development’ for mass empowerment and civil society strengthening. But they are reluctant to put their hands deep into
their pockets and support the critical player in this tripartite relationship – community based NGOs. They need to be equipped with the skills, expertise and funds with which to engage their community partners in sustainable development. Thus, donors' commitment to community based development in practice (as distinct from tune playing) is suspect.

Likewise, so is the commitment of LGAs. Those known to the writer go through the motions of interest when they are paid to go on tour of prospective sites of contracts, e.g. building a primary health care centre or access road. But little emerges of benefit to the masses. Instead, officials engage in massive chopping on public revenues. Actually, in our experience, donors are throwing good (taxpayers) money after bad, rewarding the corrupt for their brazen acts of selfish consumption at the expense of health, Aids awareness education, roads, schools etc. Is not donor support for already corrupt governments – albeit in the name of ‘reforming state/local governments’ – a travesty of justice? Surely it constitutes a virulent form of corruption?

This Briefing has stressed the intellectual dishonesty (corruption) of some ‘civil society’ tunes being piped by the Obasanjo regime, its coterie of international donors and ethics re-configurers as Transparency International whose Nigerian chapter boss is a retired major-general.²

However ‘refreshed’ by tunes of accountability monitoring, formal institutions in Nigeria have long been captured – and continue to be so captured – by vertical ‘cash and carry’ relationships between patrons and clients who are using foot-holds in government offices, at all levels, to achieve a horizontal spread of mutual interest. In July 2001 many high ranking politicians and state government ministers from the Muslim core north, Muslim-Christian middle belt and Christian south met in a secret parlay to develop their strategies for retaining power in the 2003 elections.

Endnotes
1. The shopping basket of basic perishable commodities in central Lagos markets costs twice as much in July 2001 compared to April-May 2001: meat costing N200 in April now costs N600, a Schnaps bottle of palm oil that cost N50 in April costs N100 in July, a 50kg bag of garri (ground cassava, the preferred urban and rural staple) cost N1,500 then and costs N4,000 today. For many it is cheaper to buy imported rice (popularly enjoyed on festive occasions but nowadays not relished by labourers as a staple on account of its ‘lightness’ in the belly).

2. Major-General Ishola Williams, based in Lagos.

References


Note: This Briefing was written in Cross River State, without access to libraries and the Internet, therefore some references are incomplete.
Money Laundering: The Nigeria Connection
David Pallister, Jamie Wilson & Ed Harriman

More than a year after first asking British authorities for help to recover billions of pounds looted by former Nigerian leader General Sani Abacha and laundered through London banks, the Nigerian government is still waiting empty handed. Nigeria’s democratically elected president Olusegun Obasanjo is not happy. ‘These are criminals so we want criminal action against them. They stole the money from our country and we want it back,’ he said last year.

In Switzerland, the United States, France and Luxembourg authorities have been quick to ‘name and shame’ banks and individual employees who processed the dictator’s stolen cash. They have also frozen accounts, begun legal action against the banks, and published compromising internal bank documents on the internet for the world to read.

In stark contrast, British authorities working through the mutual legal assistance section at the Home Office have handed over nothing to Nigeria and its legal team. Despite Britain’s supposedly draconian anti-money laundering legislation and the government’s commitment to cleaning up the City, General Abacha’s criminal accomplices have used the full protection of British law and lawyers to prevent financial disclosure.

This week a high court judge is hearing more lawyers representing the Nigerian businessman Abubakar Attiku Bagudu and General Abacha’s son, Mohammed Sani, argue that the Home Office should not hand over any evidence to the Swiss or Nigerian authorities. They claim the pair, having returned some money, obtained an immunity deal from a prior Nigerian administration.

Treasurer

Mohammed Sani Abacha is in jail in Nigeria awaiting trial for conspiracy to murder. The Nigerian authorities describe him as ‘the family treasurer’. They describe Mr Bagudu as probably the most important member of the organisation after Gen. Abacha himself and his elder son Mohammed, and say that he provided money laundering contacts in the Nigerian and international banking community. Today Mr Bagudu, indicted but so far untried in Switzerland and Nigeria, remains free, and has a large flat in Kensington, west London.

In June last year Swiss lawyers representing Nigeria met secretly at the serious fraud office in London with officials from the Home Office, SFO, City of London police, national criminal intelligence unit, and the financial services authority. They formally requested British assistance to investigate accounts at London banks. When the lawyers made similar request to the Swiss, French, Luxembourg and Liechtenstein banking authorities, within a short time these governments were handing over fat dossiers.

But in Britain the Home Office instead began a painstakingly slow investigation. Almost a year later the then home secretary, Jack Straw, agreed that the results could be handed over to the Swiss (who are carrying out their own investigation) and to the Nigerians. Mr Bagudu and Abacha’s son’s lawyers immediately objected, leading to yesterday’s judicial review proceedings. In March the financial services authority published a press release on its three-month investigation. It found that 15 banks had what it calls ‘significant control weaknesses’ including ‘potential breaches of the money laundering regulations’. Some could face criminal charges under current legislation.

But the FSA has not begun legal proceedings. Nor does it name the offending
banks, even though the 1987 Banking Act to which the FSA refers, does not prevent them. Instead it has set up a taskforce ‘to coordinate immediate remedial action’ for seven of the worst banks which are ‘being set strict deadlines by which to rectify the problems’.

The FSA will not say what the deadlines are. The taskforce is made up of unnamed City accountancy firms paid for by the banks, although the FSA sees no conflict of interest. As for possible prosecutions, the FSA will only say that it has shown its files to the serious fraud office, which refuses to comment. The FSA says this is all going to change when its new powers under the Financial Services and Markets Act are fully enabled in the autumn. But the FSA will retain enormous discretion over whether to prosecute and whether to ‘name and shame’ banks.

To the Nigerians it looks like a classic British cover-up, that ensures the continued confidentiality of London bankers’ dealings with their international criminal clients, while government worthies and City gents preach good intentions.

It’s a way of saying that the City of London is still competitive. One US lawyer involved who asked not to be named said: ‘Today if you want a shortlist of places to launder money, Switzerland is no longer on it. They’ve changed the rules of the game totally.’ But ‘London will always be an attractive place to place laundered assets’.

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**Economic Justice / Market Forces**

*George Monbiot*

*As free traders shelter behind repressive regimes, GM crops are being driven into reluctant markets.*

I’ve always been a little uncomfortable about the term ‘Frankenstein food’. It smacks of both sensationalism and trivialisation. In politics, as in shopping, the cheaper the device, the less likely it is to last. But the label is becoming ever more germane. For not only are GM crops cobbled together out of bits of other organisms, but they have also begun to demonstrate a ghoulish ability to rise from the dead, given a sufficient application of power.

A year ago, the biotech companies’ grave had been dug. They had failed repeatedly to refute the three principal arguments against deployment: that GM crops enhance corporate power by allowing companies to patent the food chain; that the long-term safety tests to establish whether or not they pose a risk to human health have never been conducted; and that consumers don’t want to buy them. The companies might bluster about children in the developing world turning blind if we don’t eat up our GM cornflakes in Europe, but there’s no shortage of evidence to suggest that corporate control of the food chain has devastating effects on nutrition. But, though we have won the argument, we are losing the war. For the GM companies have re-discovered the old way of dealing with reluctant customers: if persuasion doesn’t work, use force.

The new opium wars are being waged in the fields of North America, where many farmers are beginning to shy away from engineered seed. GM crops, they have found, are harder to sell. There is evidence that some varieties yield less while
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The new opium wars are being waged in the fields of North America, where many farmers are beginning to shy away from engineered seed. GM crops, they have found, are harder to sell. There is evidence that some varieties yield less while
requiring more herbicide. But farmers are swiftly coming to see that the costs of not planting GM seed can greatly outweigh the costs of planting it.

Last month, lawyers warned a farming family in Indiana that the only way they could avoid being sued by the biotech company Monsanto was to sow their entire farm with the company’s seeds. Two years ago, the Roushes planted just over a quarter of their fields with the company’s herbicide-resistant soya. Though they recorded precisely what they planted where, and though an independent crop scientist has confirmed their account, Monsanto refuses to accept that the Roushes did not deploy its crops more widely. It is now demanding punitive damages for the use of seeds they swear they never sowed. The Roushes maintain that they are, in effect, being sued for not buying the company’s products. So next year, like hundreds of other frightened farmers, they will plant their fields only with Monsanto’s GM seeds. Like the opium forced upon a reluctant China by British gunboats, once you’ve started using GM, you’re stuck with it.

But the solution proposed by the Roushes’ lawyers was a prudent one. In April, a Canadian farmer called Percy Schmeiser was forced to pay Monsanto some $85,000, after a court ruled that he had stolen Monsanto’s genetic material. Schmeiser maintained out that the thinly-spread GM rape plants on his farm were the result of pollen contamination from his neighbour’s fields, and he had done all he could to get rid of them. But Monsanto’s proprietary genes had been found on his land whether he wanted them or not. Following the time-honoured convention that the polluted pays, Mr Schmeiser was forced to compensate the company for what he insists was invasion by its vegetable vermin.

Where the courts won’t enforce compliance, governments will. In ten days’ time, Sri Lanka will introduce a five-year ban on genetically engineered crops, while scientists seek to determine whether or not they are safe. The United States, worried that thorough testing could destroy the value of its biotech companies, has threatened to report the ban to the World Trade Organisation.

In Britain, the Welsh Assembly voted unanimously that Wales should be a GM-free zone. But the Westminster government has ignored the ruling and licensed trials of Aventis’s genetically modified maize there. The trials are supposed to determine whether or not the new variety is safe to plant. But Aventis has already received consent to grow it commercially, even if the ‘experiments’ show that planting is an ecological disaster. Welsh activists suggest that the purpose of the trials is to lend credibility to a done deal.

Monsanto will never repeat the mistake of seeking to persuade consumers that they might wish to purchase its products. In future, it won’t have to. Like the other biotech companies, it has been buying up seed merchants throughout the developing world. In some places farmers must either purchase GM seeds – and the expensive patent herbicides required to grow them – or plant nothing at all.

In March the EU environment commissioner Margot Wallstrom warned that the Union could be sued by biotech firms if it upheld its ban on the sale of new GM foods. ‘We cannot afford’, she explained, ‘to lose more years of not aiding the biotechnology industry’. Biotech companies have been pressing to raise Europe’s legal limit for the contamination of conventional crops with modified genes: in time, they hope, genetic pollution will ensure that there is so little difference between GM and ‘non-GM’ food that consumers will give up and accept their products. The US government has begun pressing for a worldwide ban on the labelling of GM food, to ensure that consumers have no means of knowing what they’re eating.
The monster has begun to walk. The technology which, we were promised, would broaden consumer choice is becoming compulsory.

This is the free trade which George Bush and Tony Blair have promised to the world. It is the freedom which, they have assured us, will overthrow vested interests, challenge market concentration, enhance competition and empower consumers. It is the freedom we must be forced to swallow.

When protesters against this forced emancipation were arrested by the freedom-loving police in Genoa, some of them were tortured, then shown a photograph of Mussolini. They were obliged to salute it and shout 'viva il Duce!' Presumably because this enthusiastic defence of market forces is compatible with free trade, neither Tony Blair nor Jack Straw saw fit to complain. Had they done so, they would have spoken to one of the most senior members of Italy's borderline-fascist government, the foreign minister Renato Ruggiero. Before he became minister, Renato was director-general of the World Trade Organisation, the body responsible for enforcing free trade.

Mr Ruggiero has not changed his politics: he has long upheld the right of the strong to trample the weak, of corporate power to crush human rights. The organisation he ran has now chosen as the venue for its next summit meeting one of the most repressive nations in the rich world. In November, WTO delegates will be discussing freedom in Qatar, safe in the unassailable fortress of a country which tolerates no dissent. This is the force behind market forces.

It has become fashionable of late to claim that we can buy our way out of trouble: that through the judicious use of shares and shopping we can force companies to change the way they trade. But it is surely
not hard to see that consumer choice is an inadequate means of curbing corporate power. Trapped inside PFI hospitals or sponsored schools, forced through lack of choice to buy cars, shop at superstores and eat GM food, we cannot escape the coercion which facilitates free trade. If market forces operate outside the market, then so must we.

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Five Decades of Liberation & Revolution: The Life of Comrade Abdulrahman Mohamed Babu

Lionel Cliffe

This International Conference to celebrate the life of Babu and held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (21-22 September 2001), was sponsored by the Global Pan-African Movement (Tanzania Branch) and supported by ROAPE. As a back-drop there was an exhibition of his life and work which outlined his five decades of activism and thereby provided a framework for viewing his contribution:

- Work in UK with the Movement for Colonial Freedom;
- Return to Zanzibar and involvement with the nationalist struggle there and in East and Central Africa;
- Minister in Government of the United Republic of Tanzania during the ‘Arusha Declaration Period’;
- Detention in Tanzania, 1972-78;
- Exile and involvement in Pan-African struggles – among the diaspora and in Eritrea.

The great majority of participants were Tanzanians. These included old comrades with whom he had grown up in Zanzibar and who were fellow cadres in the Zanzibar Nationalist Party and then the Umma Party, mainland Tanzanians who had interacted with him in government or as student activists 30 years ago, as well as younger people who were keen to learn about his legend and his ex-wife, Ashura, who ‘trained me as a cadre ... and remained my best friend to the end’.

But there were people from other African countries and from the African diaspora, including his partner and collaborator on books and projects, Amrit Wilson. This correspondent was fortunate enough to have known him in Tanzania in the ‘60s and in UK (and Eritrea) in the ‘80s and ‘90s.

The conference was opened by Haroub Othman who underlined that one purpose of the conference was not simply to celebrate and evaluate one man’s contribution but to revisit and revise some of the debates in which he and other Tanzanians and Africans had been involved, at a time when the ‘old ideologies and certainties were no longer there’.

Such a revisiting was provided by Issa Shivji’s Keynote Address, wherein he surveyed the specific Tanzanian dimension of the ‘great intellectual and ideological ferment’ around issues of revolution and liberation of the last decades – a ferment which was one of the well-springs of this journal. This was a tour de force, reminding an audience of an era where in Tanzania there was the most wide-ranging intellectual inquiry, now metamorphosed into ‘policy consultancy’, and where the country at least believed it was embarking on charting its own destiny rather than having policies foisted upon in the name of globalisation. There was some critique of the ‘scientism and marxism being overdone’ as texts were scrutinised to denounce non-conformists, a criticism about vehement correctness that Babu had made in his introduction to the volume on Debates on Imperialism in the 1970s. He and other contributors also welcomed the recent protests in Seattle and Genoa. But in the
not hard to see that consumer choice is an inadequate means of curbing corporate power. Trapped inside PFI hospitals or sponsored schools, forced through lack of choice to buy cars, shop at superstores and eat GM food, we cannot escape the coercion which facilitates free trade. If market forces operate outside the market, then so must we.

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Five Decades of Liberation & Revolution: The Life of Comrade Abdulrahman Mohamed Babu

Lionel Cliffe

This International Conference to celebrate the life of Babu and held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (21-22 September 2001), was sponsored by the Global Pan-African Movement (Tanzania Branch) and supported by ROAPE. As a back-drop there was an exhibition of his life and work which outlined his five decades of activism and thereby provided a framework for viewing his contribution:

- Work in UK with the Movement for Colonial Freedom;
- Return to Zanzibar and involvement with the nationalist struggle there and in East and Central Africa;
- Minister in Government of the United Republic of Tanzania during the ‘Arusha Declaration Period’;
- Detention in Tanzania, 1972-78;
- Exile and involvement in Pan-African struggles – among the diaspora and in Eritrea.

The great majority of participants were Tanzanians. These included old comrades with whom he had grown up in Zanzibar and who were fellow cadres in the Zanzibar Nationalist Party and then the Umma Party, mainland Tanzanians who had interacted with him in government or as student activists 30 years ago, as well as younger people who were keen to learn about his legend and his ex-wife, Ashura, who ‘trained me as a cadre ... and remained my best friend to the end’.

But there were people from other African countries and from the African diaspora, including his partner and collaborator on books and projects, Amrit Wilson. This correspondent was fortunate enough to have known him in Tanzania in the ’60s and in UK (and Eritrea) in the ’80s and ’90s.

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conference as a whole this reviewer at least would have liked to have seen more on the new intellectual basis for an anti-globalist internationalism for the millennium.

As part of looking forward, two scholar-activists, of whom Babu would certainly have approved, offered perspectives on key areas of struggle in today's Africa. Wamba dia Wamba, once Professor of History at the University of Dar es Salaam now President of one faction of the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Democratie (RCD/Kisangani), combined his involvement with what was a scholarly and fairly objective assessment of the multi-dimensional nature of the conflicts within Congo and impacted on it from outside. Ben Turok, once a technician in Babu's Ministry when in exile in Tanzania, and now an ANC MP in South Africa, raised critical issues about ANC's rule: what did its formula of being still both a party and liberation movement mean, for instance? And what would those who, very understandably are disappointed at how little social transformation has been achieved, do differently in the limited political space for reform that exists in South Africa?

Other contributors raised questions of the relevance of Babu's writings on 'Socialism in Africa' as opposed to 'African Socialism', but the issue of how far his undoubted differences in conceptualisation with Nyerere's formulation necessarily precluded tactical or even strategic alliances was not fully explored – an historical issue which for this reporter still has some contemporary relevance for a politics of the left which inevitably has to involve coalitions in this day and age (a readiness to join forces with those with a different perspective which Babu acted out in much of his political life).

But whatever the limitations in the discussion in two short days, the event was worthwhile in commemorating, without venerating, a committed, honest socialist and pan-Africanist, but also stimulating a very welcome debate about the legacy of recent African traditions of political thinking to the present.

At the end of the Conference, Salim Ahmed Salim, former Secretary General of OAU and who came under Babu's wing as a young man, launched a book, Babu: I Saw the Future and it Works: Essays celebrating the Life of Comrade Abdulrahman Mohamed Babu, 1924-1996, edited by Haroub Othman (available from publishers, E & D Ltd, P.O. Box 4460, Dar es Salaam). This volume consists of essays written by Babu at different periods of his life, together with obituaries by many international and Tanzanian figures, including some that appeared in ROAPE at the time of his death.

Editor's note: See also ROAPE no. 69, September 1996: 'A Tribute to A M Babu'. From 1976 until the year that he died, ROAPE carried a number of articles either by Babu or about him. See our website: www.roape.org for complete listings.
Prospects for Al Itihad & Islamist Radicalism in Somalia

Andre Le Sage

Following the terror attacks in the United States on 11 September, there has been growing concern over the role of Al Itihad al Islami in the financial and political networks that sustain Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda network. The UK's Daily Telegraph (2001) reported that 'between 3,000 and 5,000 members of the al Qa'eda partnership are operating [in Somalia], with 50,000 to 60,000 supporters and reservists.' The Washington Times (2001) cited US intelligence sources that, 'There are indications bin Laden is setting up a new base of operations in Somalia.' In response, Le Monde (2001) and other media outlets have indicated the potential for US military strikes against Somalia.

Thus far, international attention to Al Itihad has framed Somalia as a 'collapsed state' providing sanctuary for extremist movements. Al Itihad (the Islamic Union) seeks to establish an Islamic state in Somalia that adheres to a strict reading of the Koran, similar to the wahabi interpretation used by the Taleban in Afghanistan. Unconfirmed allegations link the movement to the killing of 18 US soldiers in Mogadishu during the 1993 UNOSOM intervention, and logistical support for the bombing of American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998. The Government of Ethiopia has accused Al Itihad of direct links with bin Laden, while militia leader Hussein Aideed has linked the movement to Somalia's newly formed Transitional National Government (UN-IRIN, 2001).

Without more detailed knowledge of Al Itihad, it is impossible to understand the place of militant Islamic movements in the wider Somali context. Further, policy makers will be ill-equipped to design a comprehensive response to the root causes of religious militancy. Based on the author's work and field research in Somalia, this briefing sets out to describe what is known of Al Itihad, its political trajectory to date, and its role in the wider Somali context of Islamic politics, clan lineage and state collapse.

Islam in Somalia

Somali society is organised according to segmentary lineage principles that divide communities into patrilineal clans. However, Islamic faith is one of the horizontal identities (including class, race and location of origin) that cut across clan lines (Besteman, 1999). In pre-colonial times, rural Somali communities recognised two distinct authorities, clan elders and religious leaders, whose responsibilities in the conduct of individual and community affairs overlapped to the extent that Islam was essentially assimilated into clan culture (Lewis, 1961). This symbiotic relationship has persisted throughout the colonial and post-colonial era.

Aside from mosques, Sufist tariqa are the oldest and most widespread Islamic organisations active in Somalia today. These sects emerged in Somalia during the mid-nineteenth century. They follow the teachings of various Islamic mystics and scholars, have no overt political agenda, and tend towards peaceful co-existence with secular political authorities. The Qadiriya, Salihiya, and Ahmadiya sects – found worldwide – are the most influential in Somalia today (Lewis, 1961). Of these, only the Salihiya sect is distinguished by its involvement in modern politics. In the early 1900s, the Salihiya leader, Said Mohamed Abdullah Hassan, led the resistance of the Dervishes to British and Italian colonial rule in what is now northern Somalia.

Modern political Islamic movements did not emerge in Somalia until the late 1960s, when Somali students (particu-
larly those studying at Al Azhar in Egypt) and employment seekers were exposed to the teachings and public support for political Islam in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries where Al Aqwan al Muslimin (The Muslim Brotherhood) was gaining widespread support. Upon return from abroad, many of these individuals formed parallel Somali movements to Al Aqwan, seeking to peacefully transform the Somali state to be based on Islamic law (sharia). Their beliefs led to public resistance to Siad Barre’s plans for ‘scientific socialism’, and ultimately to government repression. For instance, when followers of the movement publicly rejected the Family Law of 1975 for its recognition and promotion of the legal and economic equality of women, demonstrations were eventually put down by the execution of ten prominent clerics. Following the repression and fracturing of Al Aqwan, a period of relative inactivity followed when Islamist organisations were not prominent in Somali politics. However, instead of disappearing altogether, the remnants of Al Aqwan went to ground and began organising for their political return at a later date.

After the collapse of the Siad Barre government in 1991, a number of different movements developed in Somalia whose ideology and objectives cover a wide-spectrum of political philosophy. These include Al Islah, Al Tabliq, Al Takfir, and Al Itihad. Even a brief overview of the interests and activities of these various movements warns against any simple conflation of all politically organised Islamist groups as ‘fundamentalist’ or ‘terrorist’. For instance, Al Islah, whose name translates to ‘reconciliation’ or ‘mediation’, seeks to infuse Somali politics with a liberal reading of Islamic values through entirely non-violent means. Membership in the movement is generally drawn from the educated elite of the Hawiye clan, including former politicians and civil servants, academics, health and engineering professionals, and businessmen / traders. Their activities are focused in Mogadishu, including basic literacy training in Koranic schools, vocational training and higher education at Mogadishu University. Some humanitarian organisations, such as Mercy International, are integrally connected to Al Islah. Of the modern political Islamic organisations, Al Islah appears the most moderate and, due to its adherence to internationally recognised principles of human rights and gender equality as a member of the Peace and Human Rights Network, finds itself in confrontation with more militant movements such as Al Itihad.

Al Itihad al Islaami

Within this broader context of Islamic faith and organisation, there are very few examples of politically oriented Islamist movements advocating or engaging in direct violence to achieve their objectives. The primary exception is Al Itihad, which emerged as a tangible political force immediately after the collapse of the Siad Barre regime in 1991, and the ensuing power struggle between clan-based militia-factions across the country. The origins of Al Itihad are similar to those of any other militia-faction in Somalia, which found the mobilisation of opposition to Siad Barre and the procurement of light weapons an easy task after the end of the Cold War. While the militia-factions acquired financial support in the form of remittances from the diaspora in Western countries, Al Itihad received support from charitable Islamic groups in the Middle East. Al Itihad was distinguished from the militia-factions by their ability to construct a cross-clan and national movement based on the appeal of Islamist ideology as an alternative to a failed nationalism and divisive clanism.

In broad terms, the political trajectory of Al Itihad since the collapse of the Siad Barre regime can be broken down into three stages:

Military Movement: In the early days of the civil war, the strategic objective of Al
Itihad was to build power by taking control of key economic installations across Somalia. Al Itihad’s initial success came in Kismayo in January 1991, when the movement took control of the seaport, a lucrative transit point for taxing international aid and import/export goods. However, in March that year, General Farah Aideed advanced on Kismayo with his United Somali Congress militia (USC, drawn from the Hawiye clan). In exchange for the right to administer the town in the future, Al Itihad offered to fight side-by-side in defence of Kismayo with the secular Somali National Front faction (SNF, drawn from the Darod clan). The offer was not accepted and, amidst continuing divisions within the Al Itihad and SNF ranks, Aideed was able to capture the town.

After the fall of Kismayo, all Darod clans were targeted by harsh reprisals from the Hawiye militia – including summary executions, systematic rape and looting – due to their genealogical association with the former president. Following these events, much of the remaining trust between cross-clan allies was undermined, and Al Itihad broke increasingly along clan lines. Fleeing from Kismayo, Darod remnants of Al Itihad re-grouped in Bosasso and Garowe towns in northeast Somalia (now known as ‘Puntland’). In 1992, Al Itihad again attempted to take control of key commercial points in Bosasso. This led to a military confrontation with the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF, drawn from the Darod clan), in which Al Itihad was again defeated and forcefully displaced.

The movement re-located to the towns of Luuq and Dolo in Gedo region. There, it was able to court support from long-term Darod:Marehan residents (the guri) whose relations with the newly arrived Marehan communities (the galti) were tense. The galti clans formed the backbone of the SNF faction, leading to intra-clan competition between Al Itihad and the SNF in southwestern Somalia. Originally, Al Itihad participated alongside the SNF in the defense of Marehan territory from SNA-Habr Gedir incursions. Once victorious, Al Itihad found itself in control of the district administrations in Luuq and Dolo towns, and temporarily extended their influence to Bulo Hawo and El Wak.

Again, however, the group was seen as a threat to the authority of secular powers – this time both the SNF faction and the Ethiopian government. The latter, fearful of the importation of radical Islam into its restive southern regions, supported the SNF to overthrow Al Itihad. The movement was known to have links with both the Ogadeni National Liberation Front (ONLF), and accused of supporting the overthrow of the Ethiopian government following bomb attacks in Addis Ababa hotels during 1996. In that year and again in 1997, the Ethiopian military crossed into Somalia numerous times, defeating Al Itihad and driving them further south along the west bank of the Juba River (Menkhaus, 1999).

Social & Economic Consolidation: Following its military defeats, Al Itihad withdrew from direct military activity. It would, however, be wrong to assume that Al Itihad gave up on its ultimate political agenda. The movement is rumoured to maintain military training camps in both southern and northern Somalia (e.g. Ras Kiamboni in Lower Juba, El Wak in Gedo and Las Qoray in Sanag). Further, Al Itihad has maintained its military capabilities through temporary political alliances with other factions and foreign governments, for instance during the Ethiopian-Eritrean border war.

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However, these were alliances of convenience based on the logic that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend', and only lasted for brief periods of time. As such, *Al Itihad* shifted its tactics away from direct politico-military confrontation and concentrated on expanding nationwide influence as a grassroots movement for order, stability and moral rectitude. Rather than working against the grain of the Somali political economy, *Al Itihad* found new ways of working within the clan system to build a powerful, but latent network of support within different clans and business groups. This can be seen in its strong ties to *Shari’a* courts, its beneficial relationship with key traders and remittance banks, and its efforts to court support from Somalia’s poorest urban populations with offers of welfare services.

As early as 1994, *Shari’a* courts had already been established in some parts of Somalia without connections to *Al Itihad*. Their *modus vivendi* was to establish law and order in conjunction with the secular authority of local faction leaders. In Belet Weyne, the *Shari’a* court was an integral part of a relatively benign local administration that balanced clan interests among the Hawadle, Galjel and Jejele clans, and used independent court militia (which did not practice corporal punishment) as an impartial force to maintain security and order. In north Mogadishu, Ali Mahdi supported the creation of *Shari’a* courts to counter the insecurity of former militia who became uncontrolled *mooryaan*, or bandits. In both instances, criminal activity fell sharply for a time. However, the Belet Weyne court was undermined in 1998 following the failure of the Hawiye reconciliation conference and renewed inter-clan tensions, while the north Mogadishu courts were violently closed by Ali Mahdi when a rivalry for leadership ensued between him and the chief of the *Shari’a* court, Sheikh Ali Dhere. After 1997, however, a new round of *Shari’a* courts emerged in south Mogadishu and later in Merka with integral connections to *Al Itihad*. This owed a great deal to the failure of the militia-factions to provide a stable environment for the investment of the local business community. Following the failure of the Cairo and Sodere peace accords, as well as the short-lived agreement amongst Aideed and Ali Mahdi to establish the Benadir Administration in 1998, the secular militia-factions were unable to maintain the support of the business community. As an alternative means of establishing a stable environment for their business interests without the need to pay protection money to the feuding warlords, the elite of the Mogadishu business community – including a number of large-scale import/export traders and transporters of food aid for international relief agencies – supported key member of *Al Itihad* to establish *Shari’a* courts in south Mogadishu (ION, 1999b). These courts are founded on independent, clan-based agreements and only operate in particular quarters of the city. However, the network was eventually linked together into a single authority for the city. The Secretary General of the Joint Islamic Courts was Hassan Dahir Aweis, self-professed military commander of *Al Itihad*.

In addition to Somalia’s largest traders, remittance banks (also known as the *hawlidah* system) became a significant source of revenue and patronage for *Al Itihad*. In the mid-1990s, when militia-factions fragmented and turned against one another, direct remittance support for the factional struggle decreased. Instead, the diaspora increasingly channeled money directly to war-affected kin. Trust networks established on common commitments to political Islamist agenda gained Somali businessmen easy access to capital through connections to Islamist counterparts in Dubai and Saudi Arabia. Faith-based credit schemes left Islamist businessmen well positioned to take over Somalia’s $500 million per year remittance business. In order to conduct their business across the country, the remittance agencies slowly built a sophisti-
cated tele-communications network to serve their needs (Ahmed, 2000). This has created an independent and primarily legitimate financial sector in its own right. Yet, the remittance companies – as a source of profit sharing and a channel for foreign support – remain an essential financial asset for *Al Itihad* (ION, 1999c). In addition, these companies are considered to be sources of employment for devout, young followers of the movement.

The financial strength gleaned from these connections has been spent in two ways. First, *Al Itihad*'s has cultivated public support by delivering welfare services to the urban poor in major centres across the country. For instance, during the 1997/8 El Nino floods in Somalia, Islamic organisations were an essential and well-organised part of the relief response. This strategy is not different to that of *Al Islah*, except for *Al Itihad*'s concentration on the most disenfranchised communities susceptible to indoctrination to more militant agendas. Second, to build a patronage network within each clan by increasing the influence of like-minded individuals within each clan to assume the reigns of 'traditional' authority, This is evidenced during the recent constitutional crisis in Puntland. As President Abdulai Yusuf's tenure elapsed, *Al Itihad* used its influence within the Bosasso business community and financial payoffs within the Majerteen councils of elders to disrupt reconciliation with Yusuf and propose alternative presidential candidates.

**Political Marginalisation:** Following the Somalia National Peace Conference in Arta, Djibouti, a Transitional National Government (TNG) was created in Mogadishu in October 2001. *Al Itihad* and other Islamic movements have found the inception of the TNG to be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the TNG controls only a small portion of territory in the capital city, its strength depends on the financial contributions of businessmen who have been supporting the *Shari'a* courts for years (Le Sage, forthcoming). This provides the movement with potential influence in a weak and divided administration. On the other hand, the direct influence of *Al Itihad* has diminished as they are no longer the primary recipients of the business community's support. Further, the TNG has marginalised *Al Itihad* as it seeks to establish an independent character not connected to 'fundamentalist' elements that will endanger relations with Ethiopia and Western donors.

The TNG has endeavoured to build national and international support by re-establishing peace and security in Mogadishu. There are two significant implications of this effort for *Al Itihad*. First, the initial phase of this exercise was not demobilisation *per se*, but rather the conscription of former militia into training camps that form the basis for a national army. This deprived *Al Itihad* and the *Shari'a* courts of their financial base to support militia, and much of their fighting forces are now under the loose control of the TNG and its supporters. Second, although it is hardly active, the TNG judiciary system has provided a very weak institutional role for former *Shari'a* court members to administer the TNG penal system and sections of the police force. This weak inclusion of political Islamist elements in the TNG has served to neutralise their dissent during the transition period.

Given dissatisfaction with their turn of fortune since the establishment of the TNG, *Al Itihad* is likely to see the emotional turmoil following the 11 September terror attacks as an opportunity to re-create political momentum and build public support following its marginalisation under the TNG. This hypothesis is supported by recent events in Mogadishu, where anti-American and pro-Al Qaeda demonstrations have been organised. This appears a dangerous strategy if efforts to build public support also attract the attention of Western governments look-
ing to suppress militant organisations by force.

Conclusion

*Al Itihad* emerged as a politico-military force in Somalia after the fall of Siad Barre and the collapse of government institutions. However, its origins lie in opposition to the former dictator’s repressive state and bankrupt economy. Even when successful at manipulating tensions between sub-clans and making alliances temporary alliances with milita-factions, *Al Itihad* has not been able to marshal enough military strength and community support to sustain its temporary political gains. Instead, in the face of continuing pauperization in the hands of Somalia’s secular politicians, the movement grew by offering a mixture of security, meaning and economic opportunity to both the Somali business class and marginal urban communities. Although it has not been a central force behind developments in Somalia or the Horn of Africa region over the past decade, *Al Itihad* continues to lay the foundations for a more significant political struggle in the future. Its strategy is to use economic leverage, Islamic populism and clandestine patronage networks to manipulate leadership and communal tensions within Somalia’s nascent administrations.


Menkhaus, K (1999), *Studies on Governance in Gedo Region*, Nairobi: UNDOS.


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Eritrea in Crisis

Half the leadership of the movement that won Eritrea’s independence is now either in prison or ‘frozen’ – a peculiarly Eritrean form of political suspended animation. They are accused of undermining Eritrea’s national unity and jeopardizing its security during wartime (potentially ‘treason’ charges). The leader of the university student union is in jail for critical remarks he made in his valedictory address in July. All the private newspapers are shut down.

We urge the government of Eritrea greater respect for diverse opinions both at home and abroad, reinstatement of the private press and a clearly defined procedure regarding ‘due process’ for those accused of ‘political crimes’.

For further information the following addresses may be of use:

www.asmarino.com  
www.dehai.com  
www.shaebia.org  
akililu41@yahoo.de (editor, Asmara-based English-language weekly, Eritrea Profile);  
veronica@embassyeritrea.org (Information officer, Washington, DC);  
ncew@eol.com.er (trade union federation, Asmara);  
nuew@eol.com.er (national women’s union, Asmara)  
nueys@eol.com.er (national youth organization, Asmara)
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veronica@embassyeritrea.org (Information officer, Washington, DC).
ncew@eol.com.er (trade union federation, Asmara);
nuew@eol.com.er (national women's union, Asmara)
nueys@eol.com.er (national youth organization, Asmara)
Engendering Management of Water Resources in Southern Africa

Alice Kwaramba

Water resource management has, for a long time, been regarded as a male preserve, despite the fact that women utilise and manage most water resources at many levels in society. However, as southern Africa becomes more sensitive to water resource management as an integral part of socio-economic development and poverty eradication, gender takes on a more critical dimension.

The SADC region has made great strides towards integrated water resource management. It has put in place protocols, policies, budgets and an institutional framework, and recognised in varying degrees the gendered dimension of these issues.

Among the key gender issues in water resource management are concerns over deepening poverty especially among women, linked to structural and social inequalities caused by:

- processes that include limited economic opportunities and income;
- unequal power relations;
- low participation of women in decision-making structures; and
- limited control by women over basic resources, opportunity and information about water resources.

Gender is noted in key SADC policy documents as one of the issues that the water sector should take seriously. The Regional Strategic Action Plan for Integrated Water Resource Development and Management says:

In the SADC region, women are the main managers of environmental resources. The role of women in beneficiary organisations has proved instrumental in the success and sustainability of water supply and sanitation projects. In the absence of water supply and sanitation facilities, it is women who spend substantial portions of their time carrying water [and that] there is a need for women to participate in the planning and implementation of all water projects at all levels.

Various initiatives have been started at the regional level by governments, NGOs and private sector organisations towards enhancing public participation and mainstreaming gender into water resource utilisation and management including:

- strategic partnerships and alliances with gender-sensitive networks and organisations;
- capacity-building for key stakeholders through gender training workshops, and
- promotion of consultative forums to maintain a balanced regional water partnership.

One such forum is the Global Water Partnership-Southern Africa (GWP-SA), which is an independent network of institutions and organisations involved in water resource management, which convened its first annual consultative partners meeting in Harare 25 - 26 June. The meeting reviewed progress made in mainstreaming gender in SADC since the review process at the Second World Water Forum held at The Hague, Netherlands in March 2000.

As part of its programme, the GWP-SA has identified thematic issues, of which gender and water is one. The regional water partnership has worked to reach a gender balance in the participation and
contribution to their activities in the region.

It has set a 30 percent target for women’s representation at every GWP-SA meeting in an attempt to achieve gender balance in voices and participation in water resources utilisation and management. It also encourages the participation of country water partnerships in global and regional action plans on gender such as the gender project of the SADC Water Sector Co-ordinating Unit (SADC WSCU).

The programme on means to empower women in water issues, one of 31 projects in the SADC-WSCU Regional Strategic Action Plan, aims at empowering women to participate in water resources management through the creation of a conducive environment in the region. One proposed strategy is development and application of affirmative strategies especially for rural women to participate at all levels of water resources management.

Another strategy that is key in mainstreaming gender into water management is through forming strategic partnerships and alliances. The idea will find innovative and strategic ways of linking up with already existing gender networks in mainstreaming gender into water management.

The Harare meeting noted that there are strong and well-established gender networks in the region and the GWP-SA and the WSCU, needs to collaborate with them to draw on their expertise and information dissemination channels. The WSCU gender project on empowering women is being implemented jointly with the SADC Gender Unit based in Botswana. The Gender Unit is a structure mandated with ensuring that gender is mainstreamed into all of the region’s policies and programmes, making it a key partnership for the water sector.

The Gender Unit has already laid the groundwork by commissioning an audit on the SADC Environment and Land Management (ELMS) and WSCU, indicating the commitment of the intergovernmental body for engendered structures and programmes, especially in such sectors traditionally regarded as male preserves. The gender audit is to examine the extent to which gender was being mainstreamed in the sectors’ policies, budgets, programmes, protocols and institutional frameworks.

The Gender Unit is also a strategic partner because they have extensive regional gender networks with whom they work closely. These include the Women in Development Southern Africa Awareness (WIDSAA) programme, Women and Law and Development in Africa (WLDAF) and Women in Law in Southern Africa (WLSA), who operate at the national and regional levels and are committed to advancing gender equality in the region.

In addition, the GWP-SA plans to work closely with the Zimbabwe Ministry of Water Resources, which was mandated at The Hague Ministerial Conference, to coordinate efforts to mainstream gender into water resources management at the Africa regional level.

Gender and equity issues and the key role of women, both as users of water services and as party to the decision-making processes and in the whole process of socio-economic development, need to be kept in focus if regional efforts for water management are to bear fruit.

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The genocide in Rwanda, in which at least 600 000 people perished over the course of a few months in 1994, has been the subject of countless books and articles. Many explanations for the horror have been offered. To add yet another publication to the list and succeed in commanding international attention is a daunting goal to say the least. Mamdani nevertheless does succeed in offering a number of interesting points for reflection.

The central question which the author sets out to address concerns the perpetrators of the genocide. What shocked the world was not only the high number of victims, but also the fact that this genocide was not just the result of a state turning against part of its population (as was the case with the Holocaust in Germany). Many ordinary men and women actively participated in the killing, rape and torture of other ordinary people, some of whom were even neighbours or relatives. Mamdani does not seek to rationalise their behaviour as such, but endeavours to demonstrate what made the genocide ‘thinkable.’ That this is a somewhat ‘dangerous’ point of departure, is acknowledged by the author himself. While everyone knows that popular participation in the execution of the genocide was crucial, when it comes to numbers and motivations, there is perhaps more speculation than empirically sound analysis.

Mamdani claims that his approach differs from that of the bulk of ‘area’ or Rwanda specialists in two fundamental ways. First of all, he claims that from all the evidence that exists on the genocide, relatively few attempts have been made to generate a theory. In this regard, he specifically lashes out against Western scholars, though he specifies no particular works or authors. *When Victims Become Killers* is therefore not a factual or empirical account of the genocide; the focus is on theory. Secondly, he claims that little attention has been paid to regional developments. While these claims describe well the overall character of the book, it is a gross exaggeration to claim that no theoretical approach to the genocide exists or that no-one has focused upon regional dynamics. Mamdani’s chapters on Uganda and Eastern Congo provide very interesting material in themselves independent of the author’s own seal of recommendation.

The main, pertinent theoretical point Mamdani develops is related to what he has termed ‘the crisis of postcolonial citizenship’. While most analysis of violence in the post-colonial period has focused on the concept of ethnicity, Mamdani brings race back into the picture. Anyone who has followed the events in Central and East Africa closely can vouch for the fact that the so-called ‘politics of indigeneity’ have become a powerful factor in political developments. In many countries, the search for the ‘alien’, the ‘migrant’, the ‘non-citizen’, etc. is conducted with significant fervour, encouraging marked levels of violence. There is, for example, the case of the Banyamulenge in Congo (chapter eight) or the case of the Banyarwanda in Uganda (chapter six). And of course, the story of
the Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda which forms the bulk of the book.

Concerning the origins of the Hutu and Tutsi (particularly with regard to the geographical origin of the Tutsi), there is much scholarly disagreement. There exist both ‘Hutu and Tutsi versions’ of Rwandan history and even among Western scholars, the discussion is often passionate to say the least. In chapter two, Mamdani offers one of the better and more balanced reviews of the literature on the matter. He makes the important and crucial point that we need to distinguish between cultural, market-based and political identities. Wherever the Tutsi as a people may have come from, as a political identity, the Tutsi came to be during the colonial period. In other words, the Tutsi, as a category through which to effect political action, were created within the context of Rwanda. To fully understand the political meaning of Hutu and Tutsi we therefore need to understand how they relate to the formation of the (colonial) state (cf. chapter three). Moreover, we need to understand how Tutsi were created as a superior race, not ethnic group, during this period. The so-called Social Revolution of 1959 takes on a whole new meaning in light of this approach (chapter four). It was the victory of the true (Hutu) nation over an alien race. For the Tutsi of course, this date is remembered as the beginning of the genocide. The important lesson to draw is that (while turned upside down) the colonial logic of the different races was maintained and re-enforced by the post-colonial state. Mamdani questions how a peaceful nation can ever be constructed on such bases.

While the point he makes on the role of the colonial state in identity formation is not new, its merit lies in the link Mamdani makes with post-genocide Rwanda and with postcolonial politics in Africa in general. While the African state project is under attack from various sides, one of the biggest challenges remains the construction of a more inclusive form of citizenship. So-called post-conflict reconstruction in Rwanda goes way beyond material reconstruction and even reconciliation. It is about creating a common history upon which a common project for the future can be developed. Unfortunately, Mamdani’s prescriptions for Rwanda are also those of an outsider. In this sense, it may be easy to diagnose the problem, but the prospects of finding actors within the country who are willing and capable to take them on is unlikely in the current context of ongoing instability.

So far, little has been said about the genocide. And indeed, When Victims Become Killers does not get to the genocide until half-way through chapter seven. Similarly, the flaw of the book lies in the weak link made between the elaborate theory which is presented in it and the actual research question with which it begins (namely, why so many ordinary people participated in the genocide). Mamdani basically argues that the ideology of the alien other and the memories of subjugation by ‘the’ Tutsi were re-ignited through the war with the RPF. It instilled such fear on the population that killing Tutsi was an acceptable strategy to guarantee the survival of the Hutu race and democratic nation.

First of all, the genocide is a complex event, marked by two clearly distinguishable phases and by regional differences in participation, execution etc. There can therefore be no ‘one size fits all’ explanation for people’s participation. While we have many accounts of survivors which demonstrate similar patterns of execution, we have little empirical data of, nor insight into, the killers’ behaviour at the local level. Unfortunately, Mamdani gives only a survivor’s picture of these events, able to show little more than astonishment in response to the behaviour of some killers. While it is bon ton these days to criticise the scientific methodology of anthropology, some ‘before’ and ‘after’ anthropological knowledge about social
relations in rural areas would have provided some useful material. It is important to point out that hardly any social research is being conducted in the post-genocide Rwanda of today. We have hardly a clue as to the nature of social relations in rural Rwanda today. In order to provide a sound theory of motivations for participation in the genocide, clearly some more empirical data is essential.

Secondly, explanations based on cultural and economic factors, while dismissed by the author, are not necessarily wrong. They merely highlight the various aspects of the genocide. Any explanation which claims to explain the genocide in its totality and complexity is doomed to fail. While the ideology of race and the alien other contributes to an understanding of moral justification for participation in the genocide, it does not clarify why it happened at the particular time it did. It is therefore important to distinguish between ethnic violence and genocide. One does not necessarily lead to the other. It is not simply a question of scale or numbers, that is, a genocide being one quantifiable step further beyond ethnic cleansing. The genocide is an event which can be clearly demarcated in time and space. While the discussion of structural variables (i.e. the organisation of (state) power and transformation of identity) within Rwandan society can contribute to our understanding of the context of violence and ultimately of genocide, to explain the genocide as such we need to indicate specific key events and to identify most of all actors involved. The genocide was not the outburst of a frustrated society. Though Mamdani does not state the matter in as many words, his explanation might easily be interpreted in this way.

Ironically, the author would in all likelihood be in agreement on these points, since they are themselves contained (hidden) in the text. Mamdani does not provide a very convincing answer to the question as to why so many ordinary people participated in the genocide. But he has certainly highlighted the role which the politics of indigeneity have played in Rwanda. He has convinced us that this is a factor which will continue to play a role in the future of the country and indeed in the wider region.

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