Politics, History & Problems of Humanitarian Assistance in Sudan

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It is increasingly widely recognised that humanitarian assistance is broadly understood in two distinct ways: one is to see it as a part of foreign policy, which is the customary position of donating states; the other is to see it as independent of governments and a matter of relieving suffering without distinction and is embodied in the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross/Red Crescent family. The present authors argue that any intervention is necessarily a political event and they support this contention with an examination of assistance in Sudan in general and Darfur in particular. In describing the way in which donating states concentrated on the settlement between Khartoum and south Sudan to the detriment of intervention in Darfur in time to forestall massive human slaughter, the authors are pointing to political failure. They also maintain that the consequence of not recognising and examining the political nature of humanitarian assistance is to reduce people affected by emergencies of all kinds to the status of victim, which deprives them of the ability to be the principal agents of their own recovery.

Laments about the ‘politicisation’ of humanitarian assistance are not uncommon; they are to be heard from the great and the good among the administrators and governing bodies of those who finance assistance. NGOs, particularly those whose cultural heritage is of confessional origins and which have about them the odour of philanthropy, that most oppressive of good intentions, are especially prone to them.1 In this note, we will argue that not fully to understand, or to take into account, the political objectives of assistance, the politics of the causes of any given emergency and the political objectives of those who are afflicted by it, is simultaneously to reduce the effectiveness of humanitarian intervention, and to confirm the victimisation of those for whom assistance is intended. The argument will be made in the context of the crises in Sudan.

Sudan’s population of 34.9 million (2003) is ethnically among the world’s most diverse; common estimates suggest that it is home to between five and six hundred ethnic groups. In the case of Darfur, Prunier remarks that it has ‘a minimum of 36 to a maximum of 150 “tribes”.’2 About 38 per cent of Sudan’s population are ethnically Arabs and most of them live in the north.3 Although poverty is widespread and acute, the discovery and exploitation of oil means that it is not in the UNDP’s table of countries of ‘low human development’; in the UNDP’s indicators, it is ranked 141 in a list of 177 states. What is surprising about Sudan is that, despite fifty years of civil war, it has survived as a state, unlike Somalia which is no longer mentioned in the UNDP league tables and with which its history has so many parallels.
Humanitarian Approaches

Here it is necessary to enter a caveat: the politics of humanitarian assistance itself is, at most, a sub-set of politics in general. It is possible, though probably futile, to concentrate exclusively on internal politics in the delivery of assistance – the endless quarrel over the relationship between multi-lateral and bilateral implementation springs to mind as an example of one of the most prominent instances of such politics; it is organisationally important, but the disagreement is often chiefly a matter of ego and cash. The present authors’ position is that humanitarian assistance is an increasingly important part of international politics and that the situation in Sudan is a major instance of that umbilical connection. To make this point, they feel obliged to summarise cognate matters, even though such summaries may seem to be exercises in the obvious. The first of these is to draw attention to two, radically different, accounts of the nature and objectives of humanitarian action; both are political in practice and effect – the politics of each are simply different.

One is sometimes referred to as the ‘Wilsonian’ account (after Woodrow Wilson) of humanitarian assistance, the other as the ‘Dunantist’ account (after Jean Henri Dunant, the founder of the Red Cross). Very roughly, Woodrow Wilson saw such assistance as a necessary part of foreign policy, Dunant saw it as necessarily separate from such policies and as a matter of human justice. The first is essentially statist and depends on the view that the fundamentally protective structure for people is a functioning state; both assistance and all other negotiation are seen, at least in part, as principally matters of the interests of the assisting state and, unless the policies of the recipient state in interfere with those interests, it does not qualify the nature of that state. Woodrow Wilson’s bloody ‘assistance’ for the people of Haiti is an extreme example of assistance with the political objective of advancing the interests of the ‘donor’ state. The objective of the Dunantist position is the relief of suffering for all those who need it and for whom it can reach, regardless of affiliation and, for that objective, its organisations (the Red Cross and Red Crescent groups) have formulated their famous principles (neutrality, impartiality independence). They rarely compromise those principles in securing humanitarian access and their only judgement on the policies of the state in which they provide assistance has to do with that access. If their principles are threatened by external intervention, that is the refusal by any power to allow Red Cross/Red Crescent delegates freely to aid everyone at issue, then the organisation does not act at all and depends, instead, on its reputation and the effect of its withdrawal on public, or world, opinion to bring about compliance.

The distinction between the two approaches to assistance can be blurred, since the language of the Red Cross/Crescent movement (impartiality, neutrality and independence) has been adapted for use by many donor states whose position is that assistance is to do with, if not dictated by, foreign policy. ‘Politics’ is not the term of abuse that so many commentators make it. Oxford defines the word variously as ‘The science and art of government’ and ‘The political principles, convictions, opinions, or sympathies of a person or party’; it is clear that, if those fairly obvious definitions are accepted, then both Wilsonian and Dunantist positions are political. But the politics differ because the starting points differ. Whatever work the Red Cross/Crescent organisations may do to assist beyond the immediate relief of suffering, it is incorporated into that immediate objective and goes towards its sustainability. Assistance as foreign policy has, as the present authors hope to show in this account of assistance in Sudan, objectives which can, in the broader sense, be more to do with polity than with the alleviation of suffering. It is not completely to
overstate the case to suggest that, in the Wilsonian world, polity determines both the form and the location of humanitarian assistance.

The cogency of our argument, as it relates the Sudan, cannot be established without a brief consideration of the historical/political circumstance that led to international intervention.

A Rough Guide to Sudan’s Post-colonial History

Khatoum & the South

Sudan declared its independence from Britain on 1 January 1956. In the preparation of this event, the apparatus of government was increasingly concentrated in Khartoum at the expense of representation and influence from either the south or the west of the country. The nascent government had made early promises of a federal state, in which all the twenty-six states would be on equal terms, but they were swiftly abandoned. Five months before the declaration, the first civil war between Khartoum and south Sudan began; commonly known as the ‘Anya-Nya’ war, it arose from a reluctance of southerners to submit to a northern government heavily weighted in the direction of the major Islamic political party, the Umma – an Islamicist and Islamicising party; that war was to last for seventeen years. For the greater part of that period, Anya Nya controlled the rural areas in the south, but Khartoum occupied the major towns. An estimated 500,000 people died and ‘several hundred thousand ... hid in the forests or escaped to refugee camps in neighbouring countries.’ In 1972, the war ended with an agreement in which the south would exercise regional autonomy – in effect, it amounted to the establishment of the originally envisaged federal state.

The next significant unrest in Sudan came in 1979 and was largely unrelated either to ethnic or to religious differences. War, drought and escalating oil prices had been high among the causes of a rapidly increasing national debt and the government (led by Jaafar al-Nimeiry) turned to the IMF for help; the privations consequent on adopting the structural adjustment policies demanded by that institution were visited, as usual, on the very poor and, not unreasonably, they protested. One interesting side effect of the arrangement with the IMF was the response of the Islamicising tendency; it saw the Fund’s financial structures as flouting the provisions of shari’a against financial interest and aleatory contracts, its pressure on Nimeiry to conform to an Islamic agenda increased.

Since the foundation of the independent state, Sudan’s successive governments have teetered between fragile democracy, oligarchy and dictatorship; many of them, particularly the more authoritarian, have been enmired in corruption. Except for the occasional coup d’état, governments of each of the three kinds were elected, but the single consistent principle adopted by all of them was the retention of power in the hands of northern, Khartoum centred interests. The first independent government, and several subsequent governments, were dominated by the Umma. In 1983, during Nimeiry’s reign, that party pushed the government into introducing shari’a in all the states, including the largely non-Islamic south. Despite the 1972 agreement, it became clear that Khartoum had no intention of fulfilling its promise of regional autonomy for the south – a position which hardened in 1978, when oil was discovered in area around the town of Bentiu in the southern state of Wahda (in the following year, oil was also discovered in Southern Darfur – a point to which we shall return). Since politics had failed the south and since the imposition of shari’a
was widely resented, its leaders turned to insurrection; a southern political group, the Sudanese Popular Liberation Movement (SPLM), led by John Garang, created a guerilla force which became the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army (SPLA).

Elections were held in 1986, but the renewed civil war meant that they were not held in south Sudan. A northern coalition government survived for three years when, in June 1989, it was toppled by General Omar Hassan al-Beshir, who has remained in power to this day. In 1991, Beshir once again enforced shari’a, but only in the north; it would not be unreasonable to see this limitation as his recognition that, eventually, he would be compelled to deal with the SPLM as an entity, rather than as an insurgent party simply to be defeated. In 1993, the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) facilitated negotiations for peace which finally came to fruition in 2005 (the outcome is discussed below). As in the first civil war and, indeed, in all other wars, the chief victims of Sudan’s second civil war were civilians. In it, untold numbers died or were displaced; estimates vary from the CIA’s relatively modest ‘tens of thousands of deaths and nearly two million displaced’ to Wikipedia’s view that ‘Roughly 1.9 million civilians were killed … and more than 4 million have been forced to flee their homes’.

There are many reasons why, in recent years, international attention to the problems in Sudan was principally focused on the wars between north and south. Among them was the dismal story of a disintegrated Somalia, that most collapsed of ‘failed states’; not surprisingly, other proximate African states made substantial efforts to prevent the same thing happening in Sudan, not the least because such precedents are contagious. Motives were, inevitably, mixed: geopolitical issues, particularly since the opening of the Bentiu oil-fields and China’s dominant position in purchasing their product, ran alongside humanitarian imperatives. One major consequence of this concentration of attention was a general failure fully to recognise the eruption of the humanitarian crisis in Darfur. Since international diplomacy was involved in preventing the separation of south Sudan from the north, and since the slaughter in Darfur, which erupted in 2000, was largely backed by the Khartoum government, it is not unreasonable to draw the conclusion that the donor states were reluctant to put pressure on Khartoum for fear of muddying the waters for a possible north-south rapprochement.

Khartoum & Darfur

In the mass media, the conflict in Darfur is frequently presented as one between pastoralist Arabs and black African settled farmers. It is unquestionable that the traditional negotiations between pastoralists and settled agriculturists, which, no matter how uneasy, only occasionally erupted into violence have broken down in the wake of recurrent and catastrophic Sahelian droughts; but the Arab/black African categorisation of the overall conflict does not bear examination. Over the centuries, both in south Sudan and in Darfur since its incorporation into Sudan, ‘Arab’ increasingly became a cultural rather than an ethnic description, but was used differently depending on the region, ethnic origin and occupation of the user. It was an affirmation of belief among Muslims, whatever their colour or ethnic origin, but it was also a term of opprobrium when used to describe those enforcing Khartoum’s periodic religious campaigns. The consequence is that there is a sizeable population of black ‘Arabs’ who are Muslims, they are matched by a significant number of ethnically mixed people, including Arabs, who are neither Muslim nor pastoralist. Another distinction must also be borne in mind: it is between the ‘Baggara’ tribes to be found in Southern Darfur and Kordofan, whose
members are pastoralists and the Zaghawa who are largely settled farmers; yet again, it would be unwise to see these as ethnic categories, since both of them include a wide range of ethnic or tribal groups. The point here is to counter the tendency of the media to simplify the conflict by suggesting that it is between two opposed ‘tribes’, or between Arabs and black Africans.

From 1916 until Sudan’s independence, Darfur had been completely neglected by the colonial administration; independence changed little and Darfur was left to its own devices with almost no support from Khartoum. The region was remote, agricultural or pastoralist and, until the 1970s, without much in the way of economic enticement. For a long period, it was enmired in the complex political stratagems of Sudan, Libya and Chad, even to the point when, for a brief period, Libya and Sudan jointly considered uniting Darfur with the Libyan province of Al Kufrah. A number of other disparate factors, which occurred at different stages of the relationship between Khartoum and Darfur, not all of them connected one to another, began to alter matters: among them the droughts to which we have already referred: in 1979, oil had been discovered in Southern Darfur and more was also suspected in Western Darfur; but the major conditioning factor was the absolute economic and social neglect of Darfur by Khartoum. Neglect added to the difficulties produced by successive droughts and all the factors, taken together led to substantial protest to which Khartoum responded by increasingly violent repression.

Darfur, like all other provinces, had a provincial parliament which, for a brief period in the 1980s, was led by a remarkable figure, the provincial governor Ahmed Ibrahim Diraige, who, in 1963 had founded the Darfur Development Front (DDF) and subsequently, as governor, did his utmost to create an even-handed parliament in which all the principal religious, secular and ethnic groups could unite. The province also had representatives in the Sudanese government and there were many Darfuri, including intellectuals and politicians as well as migrant workers, to be found in Khartoum where they formed an intermittently effective opposition. The influence of Diraige and the DDF on them was considerable, but his major legacy appeared in the years 2001-2, when the Darfuri Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) and its armed wing, the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) emerged. The SLM/A was the successor of the Darfur Liberation Front, a secessionist movement formed during confrontations with ‘Arab’ militias (Janjaweed) in the late 1980s; collectively the SLM/A was, and still is, dedicated to Diraige’s objectives – the creation of a secular, multi-cultural and democratic state within a federal and ‘united democratic Sudan’; the Movement also campaigned for an equitable distribution of resources and for greater Provincial autonomy. It hardly needs to be said that such a movement would, if successful, constitute a serious threat to the oligarchs in Khartoum. A second movement, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), formed by factions within the SLM, by exiled dissidents and by Islamic fundamentalists, appeared shortly after the SLM/A became active. There is some evidence that it was backed by Chad and it began its public existence by claiming credit for one of the early attacks launched by the SLA, a claim it soon withdrew. Its campaigns have not been on the scale of those fought by the SLA and, from time to time, it has been attacked by the larger, secular movement. Nonetheless, it has created havoc in some areas, particularly along the border with Chad. An even smaller Islamicising group broke away from the SLM, formed a militia and subsequently refused, alongside the JEM, to agree to the settlement in the recent peace talks – rapine would seem to be its principal objective.
A force which certainly has particularly to be reckoned with is the janjaweed; which first appeared in 1998. It was a militia recruited from pastoralists and is armed and supported by the Khartoum government. Its early forays were minor compared with its resurgence in 2003. The Government of Sudan had determined that a military response to the SLA and, to a lesser degree, to the JEM, was necessary; but its armed forces were still heavily engaged in south Sudan and were also involved in occasional low-level conflict with Eritrea and Egypt. So the Government supplemented its military presence by formalising its relations with the janjaweed which effectively became its ‘special forces’. Financed by the Government, exceptionally brutal and supported by airforce bombers, it became, and continues to be, one of the greatest causes of massive slaughter and displacement. Darfur has become a ‘complex’ humanitarian emergency as great as that in south Sudan.

The details of the acute emergency in Darfur, continuing despite the soi-disant peace agreement, are well known. Rates of death and displacement and the numbers of people ‘affected’ by violence are the conventional measures of the degree of suffering in an emergency, but accurate figures are hard to come by. This is partly because many, and varying, parts of Darfur are rendered inaccessible by violence and reports from the traumatised displaced are unlikely to be specific. The Emergency Relief Coordinator estimated that, in the eighteen months prior to April 2005, 180,000 people had died from hunger and disease. In April 2005, the Coalition for International Justice estimated that, since February 2003, 140,000 had died violently and that the total excess deaths were in the order of 400,000. By October 2004, the number of displaced people within Darfur was estimated at 1.6 million and, at the same time, there were 200,000 refugees in Chad. Those who were ‘conflict affected’ (principally people who had not been displaced) amounted, by September 2004, to 2.2 million. By August 2005 the ‘affected population’, living in 338 locations, was recorded at 3,381,646.

Accompanying the direct violence was the loss of assets caused not just by displacement, but also by marauding asset strippers; by failing production, both agricultural and pastoral; by collapsing markets; by the inaccessibility of resources (water and land) and the difficulty of getting remittances from migrant workers – central to fragile rural survival – to those who relied on them. The direct consequences of violence, common to all such emergencies, were exacerbated by extensive droughts; famine was, and is, inevitable. We have objected to the tendency of some elements in the media to reduce the conflict to one of tribal war, or a war between pastoralists and settled farmers, but in the struggle to survive in the face of drought and in the absence of outside assistance, ‘negotiation’ about water and land-use has become violent. The international response to the emergency as a whole, to which we shall return in a comment on the political manoeuvres at issue, was both late and vapid and still appears not to be meeting the need.

At present, there is a laudable attempt by some international organisations (the most comprehensive account is to be found in the ALNAP Annual Review, 2005), to concentrate on plans for the restoration of livelihoods in Darfur. It is part of a change in direction for humanitarian thinking, which is moving from concentrating principally on saving lives to ways in which those saved lives can continue – salvation from death in an emergency, which results in subsequent death by inanition because livelihoods have been destroyed, is not to be contemplated. The problem is real, but thinking about it and response to it seems to be limited. Drought, violence and consequent famine (with some support from HIV/AIDS) have
combined to do two things: massive long-term displacement jeopardises title to land; drought and a failure to cultivate, or to use, land in earlier sustainable patterns leads to severe environmental damage; the latter to a point where the ‘restoration’ of livelihoods is frequently impracticable.

These are not problems peculiar to Darfur or to the rest of Sudan – from similar, or from other, causes they appear throughout the continent and particularly in the Greater Horn of Africa. The principal consequence is an extremely rapid urbanisation and the dispersal of IDPs, a situation which became very obvious in an evaluation of assistance for IDPs in Somalia. Environmental degradation, combined with increasingly uncertain weather patterns, will mean the continued growth of an already substantial phenomenon. This does not undermine the need, where possible, to pay attention to the restoration of livelihoods, but it does mean that an entirely different analysis and, perhaps, a different mode of support must attempted. It will be one which must recognise that, for a substantial proportion of the population, the ancient rural patterns and modes of reproduction are no longer viable.

The biggest influence on some future resolution of the disaster in Darfur is the discovery of oil; an event which brings in other massive forces. Production has been underway for some time in south Sudan, but, because of the levels of violence, it has been slow to start in Darfur. It is common knowledge that, so far, southern production has largely been contracted by China; the US, because it maintains sanctions on Sudan, is in some difficulty, but would dearly like to oust China from its position, but the sanctions make it illegal for a citizen of the US to invest in Sudan. This led to a mildly ludicrous story in which a ‘Briton’ purchased substantial exploration rights in Darfur’s oil: his name is Freidhelm Erond who, until the purchase became a possibility, had been a citizen of the US. His swift adoption of British nationality and a consequent passport solved the problem. What seems certain is that the scramble for what are thought to be Sudan’s substantial deposits of oil have affected, and will continue to affect events. It is reasonable to see the considerable increase in violence against the Darfuri, since Khartoum’s agreement with the south, as directed towards preventing any possible future agreement in Darfur from alienating control of the oilfields: it is also, by means of massive displacement, a way of ensuring that local interests do not interfere with that control.

These brief and very truncated histories of the rise of the emergencies in south Sudan and Darfur are a necessary preamble to considering the politics of international humanitarian assistance in both regions. There were four principal warring parties: the Government of Sudan, the SPLM/A, the SLA and the JEM; at intervals, many others were drawn in, though, with a few exceptions, not as direct combatants. In 2005, the African Union sent a small peace-keeping force to Darfur, which the UN is proposing to replace towards the end of 2006. But, in general, international responses to Darfur’s emergency have treated it as if it is a phenomenon distinct from the emergencies in south Sudan and Nuba. This has partly been a result of chronology, but principally is a victory for the Sudanese Government, which has consistently tried to mask its attempts at social (and, therefore, economic) control and engineering. It is the present authors’ contention that the half century of bloody engagement can only be understood as events in a single, widespread campaign, assisted by devastating drought and famine.
Resolution?

Support for the talks, in the Kenyan resort of Naivasha, between Khartoum and the SPLM/A, was a political act and, effectively, part of humanitarian assistance, even though such support probably came from budgets other than humanitarian aid in the various foreign ministries. They ended, in January 2005, in the agreement to the ‘Naivasha Protocols’. It is an agreement riddled with inequities: the war-criminals of Khartoum are not to be held to account; Khartoum agreed to withdraw a substantial part, but not all, of its forces from the south over a period of two and a half years, but the entire SPLM/A forces were to be removed from the north within eight months. The greatest inequity was the determination of the international negotiators to prevent the agreement from encompassing Darfur – this from fear that to demand it would result in the absolute collapse of the talks.\(^{32}\) The Protocols include the establishment of a southern democratic regional government and the beginning of a national programme of democratisation; the south was to be given a share in national power through a system designed to introduce parity in major cabinet posts; a share in oil revenues would accrue to the new southern government. Following the subsequent, and still unexplained, death of the southern leader, John Garang, only one of these commitments (the establishment of a regional government) has been met. Minor ministries in central government – Animal Resources, Transport and Wildlife and Tourism – have appointees from the south, but no senior ministry has a southern appointee.\(^{33}\) One major commitment in the agreement has not been honoured by either government – that women’s rights should be recognised and accepted – neither has been prepared to deal with customary law and tradition which allow women very few rights. Not very surprisingly, southern organisations are reporting growing demands for complete independence.\(^{34}\) The Protocols allow for a referendum on southern independence, but it is not expected until 2011 and Egypt is determined that independence shall not take place.

Talks designed to resolve the conflict in Darfur were begun in Abuja early in 2004 and which, with the exception of the JEM and the small break-away group from the SLA who both rejected the agreement, were declared successful on 10 May 2006. A central issue in the agreement was that Khartoum would disarm and restrain the Janjaweed; at the time of writing, no evidence of such action has come to light and even the cautious bi-weekly situation reports from the UN suggest that little has changed. The International Crisis Group has remarked that the ceasefire is ‘in tatters’ and that an even greater threat is the possibility that conflict in Chad will spill over the border into Darfur; Chad has already declared itself to be in a ‘state of belligerence’ with Sudan and has tried to establish ties with Darfuri rebels.

Before we pull the elements together, other factors should be borne in mind: one is a general observation about sovereignty, the other is specific to Sudan. State sovereignty has repeatedly been offered as the reason why internally displaced people have remained beyond the reach of international aid. The post-1945 world order is founded on the principle of sovereign states which enjoy formal legal equality, regardless of differences in power and wealth (Article 2.1 of the UN Charter). But sovereignty is not just a protection for the state against coercion by other states; it is also the means of locating responsibility for the protection of people and property and for the exercise of governance in a territory within each state. Yet most discussions of sovereignty take place in the context of, and concentrate on, internal displacement and the problem of sovereign states which block access to IDPs. What can be overlooked is that weakened or lost sovereignty (the latter is the ‘failed state’) and, hence, the absence of a controlling authority, can equally be a
source of danger. The corollary of sovereignty is non-intervention in the internal affairs of another state. Only self-defence or grave threats to international peace can justify a breach of national sovereignty. There are intimate connections between state sovereignty, the responsibility of the state for the welfare of its people under law and the legitimacy of the state. Sovereignty cannot easily be taken away but it can be thrown away.

The insurgent opposition in south Sudan was, and the various oppositions in Darfur are, a threat to sovereignty. But they are fighting in a situation in which no previous undertaking, given by Khartoum to the south, has been honoured and the lack of real progress in a little over a year after the Naivasha Protocols were agreed, does not inspire confidence that anything will change. The present authors believe that international politicians are terrified by the prospect of people re-arranging their own national borders – they see it as a consummation devoutly to be abhorred. The policies of both the United Nations and the African Union are committed to protecting the territories of existing states, at least in Africa.35 Two disasters were apparent from 2000 to 2005, in south Sudan and in Darfur, when increasing volumes of humanitarian assistance were pumped into Sudan and talks in Naivasha were proceeding; indeed the point at which the two Darfuri opposition groups launched their military campaigns virtually coincided with the beginning of that period. The difficult assumption in the positions adopted by the various participants in the Naivasha negotiations is that a failed state is a worse condition than preserving a murderous, racist and rapacious oligarchy, which, together with its predecessors, has consistently resisted any devolution of government – the present authors think that there is, at least, a question to be addressed. Sudan takes its present geographical shape as much from a series of colonial adventures as from its ancient history. Opposition to Khartoum, both in Darfur and in the south, is principally formed by secular and well organised forces with, at least, some determination to achieve a democratic society, and the wars have overlapped to a degree which renders absurd the determination to see them as separate issues. If the north cannot be democratised and, therefore, remains hostile to a democratic federal state, then precisely for the enfranchisement of the people, there is a case for supporting the independence, severally or collectively, of either or both of the two oppressed regions.

The question is raised to illustrate a point, rather than to advocate independence. Interests more powerful than the Government of National Unity (a recent soubriquet adopted by the Government of Sudan) and the Government of Southern Sudan will determine the issue. Sudan’s total external debt stands at US$26 billion and would certainly qualify for debt relief under the enhanced HIPC procedure; but the debt includes arrears in payments to the World Bank’s International Development Association amounting to US$354 million. The Bank has recently opened an office in Sudan but, at the time of writing, it is refusing to provide new funds until the arrears have been paid, though, in a joint press release from the Bank, the UN and the IMF, dated 10 March 2006, it offered encouragement to donor states who have yet to fulfil their promised funding for post war recovery.36 The occasion of the release was the first meeting, which took place in Paris, of a new body called the ‘Sudan Consortium’, at which about twelve representatives of the two Sudanese Governments and ‘130 partners from the international community ... including eight ministers of international development’ were present.37 In a masterly misuse of understatement, the authors of the release remark that ‘It was agreed that the situation on the ground in Darfur remains critical and has created a sense of crisis’.
The circumspect dealings by the international financial institutions (IFI) are, of course, based on a specific model of development – the incorporation of Sudan into the ‘globalised’ economy which, it hopes, will lead the country out of poverty; a hope based on the risible proposition that some ill-defined phenomenon, usually referred to as ‘the market’, can solve all problems: a sub-set of that message is that the forces largely responsible for impoverishment are the best equipped and the most likely to introduce a general, if polymorphic, enrichment. That, in itself, is a profoundly political position which is open to a very wide debate which belongs elsewhere. At the centre of the campaign to incorporate Sudan into this questionable ‘world market’ lies the matter of oil. If Sudan’s reserves prove to be substantial, and the degree of interest shown both by China and by the US suggest that they may be, then powers greater than the IFIs will bear on the country: with the extremely dubious exception of some of the wealthy middle-eastern oil producing countries, there is no instance of oil production improving the living standards of the Third World poor; not the least because oil-corporations find bribery a simpler and cheaper means of furthering their ends.

Humanitarian Assistance for Sudan

During the famine of 1988-9, the UN (UNICEF was its agency for the purpose) established a programme of relief called ‘Operation Lifeline Sudan’ (OLS) which worked, in part, out of Khartoum, but principally from its logistical base in Lokichokio, a small Kenyan town near the border with Sudan. UNICEF’s mandate was to address the problems in all the areas of conflict in Sudan, but, in practice, it was confined to working in the south. At the time of its operation, Khartoum was also waging a savage war in the Nuba mountains in Southern Kordofan and, although it is just north of the informal border between north and south Sudan, the SPLA was active in the region. The Nuba people were attacked on their own account, but also because of the presence of the SPLA. The OLS was prohibited by the Government of Sudan from bringing assistance to the Nuba except in areas under government control and, for fear of a ban on its activities, OLS at no point either challenged the Government, or made any attempt to assist without permission. In 1992, considerable restrictions were also imposed on OLS activity in ‘garrison towns and peace camps’. It is obvious that such prohibitions endanger the humanitarian principles of independence and impartiality; de Waal and Ajawin suggest that political compromise seriously limited both the effectiveness and the legitimacy of the UN operation.

That limitation is, of course, an inevitable consequence of the UN’s structure and powers. Article 2 of its Charter sets out the principles on which it can act and the first of these is that ‘The Organisation is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members’ – a principle which is jealously guarded and, oxymoronically, constantly breached by the permanent members of the Security Council. When UN agencies provide humanitarian assistance for sovereign states, the only compulsion available to them is the threat of withdrawal if they are inhibited in giving that assistance to the people who actually need it. If the UN negotiates an agreement to operate with a state which is concerned only to enforce specific conditions on its citizens, regardless of culture or need, then compromise is inevitable. It is necessary only to recall the UN’s dismal performance in Rwanda.

From the beginning of the OLS to the end of the civil war in the south, the funds for humanitarian assistance and the ways in which they were used, the diplomacy of
the donor and of the IGAD nations have all been directed towards the preservation of a united state. We have suggested that their motives were a mix of support for the Egyptian position and a belief that since Khartoum would accept no less, then such an agreement would be the only means of ending a devastating emergency. It might also prevent a possible collapse of Sudan into the position of a ‘failed state’. Simultaneously, it was also necessary to pretend that the massive slaughter and displacement in Darfur were either not happening or were a completely separate issue from that of the south; a position which, in effect, gave carte blanche to the Sudanese Government.

International pressure, sometimes concerted, from states with diplomatic representation in offending countries has been known to have some effect, at least for a short period. In the case of Sudan, for example, The Netherlands, in 1992, led a protest mounted by a number of embassies in Khartoum, against the Government’s campaign of bombing Nuba villages. This was followed by a resolution against the bombing from the US Congress and these gestures did, marginally, increase humanitarian access, but little else changed.41 It is worth recalling that recent newspaper reports have remarked that events in Darfur are threatening to replicate the Rwandan monstrosity – history has yet to relate whether or not the Darfuri will be as comprehensively abandoned by the rest of the world as were the Rwandans. Concerted international pressure in opposition to tyrannical behaviour by a member state of the UN is relatively rare, more common is unilateral action which is sometimes passed off as ‘negotiation’. Negotiation can, of course, include military operations: Clausewitz’s famous cliché springs to mind and the most recent dubious examples of negotiated assistance may be seen in the Bush/Blair ‘salvation’ of the Iraqi people from Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship and in the same duo’s ‘liberation’ of Afghanistan.42

Co-operation between states, particularly wealthy western states, in providing humanitarian assistance for those afflicted by emergencies is fairly common. For the purposes of this note, the present authors are dealing with ‘complex’ emergencies, but much of what is said of them is true also of ‘natural’ disasters. Co-operation is hedged about by substantial political issues; the most obvious one is the relationship between donor governments and their domestic constituencies, the taxpayer must always be borne in mind. Diplomatic negotiation with the state in which the emergency is occurring is necessary and, quite frequently, continuous; relations with the UN (both the General Assembly and the Security Council) have to be kept in mind. But underlying this is a major political division embedded in the ‘humanitarian imperative’, which insists that all assistance should be impartial and neutral – an adoption from the Red Cross/Red Crescent (ICRC) position to which we have already referred; but both adjectives are dependent on what is being examined and how it is classified. This is not an argument against the validity of the qualifications, merely an observation about their limitations.

Donor governments are often quite open about their policies, but they are frequently fragmented and even contradictory; some clarity emerges if we look at what the donors do, rather than at what they say. In the case of Sudan, two issues must be considered – we must first look at the nature of the assistance (Table 1) and then at specific people for whom it was provided. In recent years, humanitarian assistance for Sudan has increased substantially, the reasons are varied: the increase in the scale of the emergency created by the war in south Sudan, despite the presence of OLS, was one; another was probably the growing tension caused by Egypt’s fear that
an independent south might result in interference with the flow of the Nile. During the period 2000-2004, international donors allocated US$1,155,250,114 through the UN Interagency Consolidated Appeal for the Sudan Assistance Programme (ASAP). The Principal donors were the United States, the European Commission (including ECHO), the United Kingdom, Japan and The Netherlands. Most of those funds were used for food aid (66 per cent of the total – see Table 1), but because transport communications are so poor throughout Sudan, a large part of that 66 per cent was absorbed by the costs of delivery. Food aid is the largest sector plagued by transport problems, but not the only one – a good example of parallel problems may be seen in the situation in Wau prior to the Naivasha agreement. Wau was a garrison town in south Sudan controlled by Khartoum, but completely surrounded by territory under the control of the SPLM/A; the only access or egress was by air. Much of the population had fled at different stages of the wars and few resources or human skills were available. One implementing NGO, whose vehicles had suffered from the war-damaged roads in the enclave and who could find no skilled help in the town, was compelled to pay for the air transport of vehicle parts on an air system which limited packages to 25 kilograms – the costs were necessary, but absurdly high.

A number of crude distinctions are made in humanitarian assistance, they apply in both natural and complex disasters; since the emergency in Sudan is complex, we shall use the expressions for the latter. The period of active conflict, widespread destruction and continued displacement is usually referred to as an ‘acute emergency’; it can be succeeded by a period in which nothing much has been resolved, people remain in many forms of need, displacement almost becomes permanent and the absence of political solutions means that there is a constant danger of acute intervals – this period is generally referred to as a ‘chronic emergency’. It is assumed that, at some point, a resolution of the conflict, or conflicts, will be found and the transition from chronic emergency to development can begin. These distinctions are far more definitive in theory than they usually are in practice, but they follow from the initial radical distinction, held in the minds of donors and of many people and organisations in the industry, between disaster and development. We introduce them here because they bear on the interpretation of the data presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Total contributions 2000-2004 (US$)</th>
<th>Percentage of total contributions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>768,909,471</td>
<td>66.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-ordination &amp; support services</td>
<td>85,216,452</td>
<td>7.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-sector</td>
<td>81,339,787</td>
<td>7.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>61,132,394</td>
<td>5.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water &amp; sanitation</td>
<td>31,402,158</td>
<td>2.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection / HR / Rule of Law</td>
<td>28,382,704</td>
<td>2.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not yet specified</td>
<td>25,515,785</td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>17,808,326</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>13,630,187</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic recovery &amp; infrastructure</td>
<td>12,134,685</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mine action</td>
<td>10,732,851</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>10,541,427</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family shelter &amp; non-food items</td>
<td>8,503,947</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,155,250,114</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Differences between the allocations of funds listed are largely differences of classification, what matters is recognising the pattern of support. Food aid, water and sanitation, health-care (general), security and family shelter are all sectors necessary in acute emergencies, in emergencies which have become chronic and in the transition period in which a return to whatever counts as normality is taking place; the remaining sectors are appropriate only in the chronic and transitional stages. Since it is not possible to isolate expenditure on the four essential sectors for an acute emergency from the expenditure for the same sectors in the post-acute phases, it follows that the greater part of funds for all sectors were devoted to the re-establishment of ‘normality’ – a prime example of a political end for assistance.

It should be borne in mind that international attention to Darfur was late in occurring. Most of the observations in this note have had greater application to events in the south than to Darfur or, indeed, to Chad. Evaluations of assistance for displaced and refugee Darfuri have repeatedly found that assistance was ‘too little and too late’. The violence was such that implementing agencies and organisations could operate only in certain secure areas, and that security was, and is, only relative, but even in such areas there were far too few implementing bodies. What has become known as the ‘CNN effect’ came into play, television coverage of the horrors, which sparked memories of Rwanda, was almost certainly an element in getting the donor states to pay some attention to Darfur. Unfortunately, the common pattern of large promises, but poor delivery became the norm: substantial sums were promised by wealthy governments for assistance in Darfur, but few of them were fulfilled. For example, while the present authors were in Northern Darfur, the WFP in both El Fasher and Kebkablya, was compelled to halve its already minimal food distributions for lack of promised funds. Such promises are a matter of domestic politics; a cynic might suggest that the failure to fulfil them is a sop to those taxpayers who are less sympathetic to the world’s distressed. The net result is that the warnings uttered by the UN’s Under-Secretary of State for Humanitarian Affairs, Jan Egeland, multiply – and are still largely ignored.

Conclusion

In summary, a number of political strands are apparent. International humanitarian assistance for Sudan has two objectives: the first is to save and secure lives; the second, which conditions the first, is to support the unity of the state and thus to avoid the chaos of the kind exemplified by Somalia. An uncertain peace exists between Khartoum and the south, but a war continues in Darfur; both regions have large secular movements intent on a federal state and Khartoum’s long history of opposing such an end means that a peaceful solution is by no means certain – added to this is the gravely uncertain situation in Chad. Oil has ensured that powerful and wealthy nations, together with the international institutions which they largely control, have become increasingly interested in the future of Sudan. There are several other strands, not least, for example, the use of religion to enforce cultural and political conformity, including all forms of discrimination against women. That discrimination is a matter of power in which the distinction between religion and politics simply vanishes.

One under-researched issue in humanitarian assistance is that of the socio-political impact of implementing agencies and organisations in the acute stage of an emergency. Most attention is given to the quality and reliability of ‘inputs’ and, some minimal recognition of indigenous social and cultural structures apart,
implementers concentrate on their own responsibility in immediate relief. To their credit, many of them take great care not to offend susceptibilities and, where possible, they employ indigenous workers, but, unlike developmental activity, extreme circumstances seem to call for managerial responses rather than cooperation. The theory and practice of management are both formed by culture and politics and differ widely between societies, most particularly between industrialised societies and societies in which the modes of production are wholly rural (and ancient). The most obvious consequence of this is that control over survival itself is seen to lie in the hands of others who have only a cursory recognition of social, as opposed to individual, trauma. At the beginning of this note, the present authors also referred to the ‘political objectives’ of the afflicted. These are inevitably conditioned by political, military and climatic events, but the survivors, particularly the displaced and refugees, will become more and more aware of the limitations on what is possible as the acute stage of the emergency continues. Given that the affected populations are so large and that, in some form or another, their effect on indigenous politics will be considerable, further examination would seem to be called for.

It is possible separately to describe each of these strands, including humanitarian assistance, but it is not possible to disentangle them and any attempt to do so would make little sense. The present authors would contend that a failure to understand assistance as a political phenomenon is to fail to understand both the predicament in which people affected by disaster are placed and the reality of their communal and individual political importance. That failure commonly translates into the reduction of people to the status of ‘victim’ and their consequent infantilisation by many otherwise well-meaning interventions. A final note may be worth making: governments in many countries wealthy enough to produce intervening organisations take great care to ensure that they do not engage politically; should they do so charity laws are invoked and they loose their tax exemptions – a simple, if crude, device to ensure political conformity.

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Endnotes

1. A point which the present authors have made before (Middleton and O’Keefe, 1998).
3. selfdetermine.irc-online.org. This source, the International Relations Centre, gives the following population estimates: Nuba, about 5 per cent, Beja about 6 per cent and then lumps all other ethnicities under the term ‘Black’ who, it claims, make up 52 per cent. We must assume that the impossibility of the total is due to rounding.
4. This useful distinction was made by Macrae and Harmer, 2003, p. 27, but they did so in a discussion of NGOs and so also distinguished those organisations based on religious affiliation.
6. ‘Independence’ and ‘impartiality’ are qualities which many donor states are demanding in the implementation of the interventions which they support. For example, in the Terms of Reference for an evaluation of its aid to Sudan, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs repeatedly referred to the
need to assess the extent to which its assistance was, variously, independent, impartial, neutral and humane (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 2005).


8. In 1991, the twenty-six states were amalgamated into nine, which were then sub-divided into provinces and local government areas.

9. A mutiny by soldiers in Torit, Eastern Equatoria, who were about to be disbanded, is generally seen as the spark which led to Anya Nya. Umma means the community of believers.

10. The states included in South Sudan are: Western Bahr-el Ghazal, Northern Bahr-el-Ghazal, Wahda, Upper Nile, Wahab, Jonglei, El Buheyrat, Western Equatoria, Bahr el Jebel and Eastern Equatoria. Despite the administrative changes of 1991, these older borders are still used as indicators, both nationally and internationally (e.g., *The Times Atlas of the World*, 2000).


14. ‘The Intergovernmental Authority in Development (IGAD) is a regional grouping of seven Eastern African countries of Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia [Sudan] and Uganda. It was created in 1986 by the Heads of State and Government of member states as the International Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) following the recurrent and severe droughts and other natural disasters that caused widespread famine, ecological degradation and economic hardship in the Eastern African region … its Head Quarters (sic) [are] in Djibouti’; www.igad.org.


16. Prunier, 2005, pp.4-6. Darfur had been an independent Sultanate for about five centuries before it was incorporated, by Britain in 1916, into Sudan, which, itself, was under the control of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium.


18. It was not until 2003 that the SLA began major operations (ICG: www.crisisgroup.org).


20. *Janjaweed* can variously be translated as ‘evil horsemen’ or ‘ghost riders’.


22. ‘Complex’ as an adjective attached to emergency is the conventional means of indicating a disaster primarily caused by conflict.

23. www.cij.org

24. This figure subsequently increased. Different authorities cited conflicting totals, but some, including OCHA, eventually agreed on an estimate of about 1.8 million IDPs in Darfur.

25. Humanitarian Information Centre, Darfur.


30. Libyan and Chadian forces both made small but significant incursions into Sudan (Prunier, 2005).

31. The failure of the western donor nations adequately to support this African initiative was a significant element in its collapse. There is a substantial argument which suggests that if this move
by the African Union had been adequately financed, a major precedent and model for coping with future emergencies in the continent could have been established.


34. See, for example, www.southsudannation.com and www.southsudan.net.

35. Oliver and Fage (1974) give a comprehensive account of what they describe as ‘The European Scramble for African Colonies’, which left the continent with irrational borders for countries largely created by European peculation.


39. De Waal and Ajawin, 1995, pp. 242-4; ‘Peace camps’, in theory retreats for returned SPLA fighters, were, in practice, prison camps for large numbers of people whom the Government forces had displaced. Terror and rape were the weapons of control and compulsory conversion to Islam was the norm.


41. Ibid. p. 332.

42. ‘War is nothing but a continuation of political intercourse, with a mixture of other means’, Clausewitz, Carl von, 1968 (English edition consulted), p. 402.


44. ‘Multi-sector’ includes contributions to humanitarian agencies, framework agreements and contributions to the ASAP and Emergency Appeals.

45. That this is frequently little more than a pious aspiration is illustrated by the situation in Somalia, where three-quarters of the country has been without a government for fifteen years and the other quarter, Somaliland, has an authoritarian and repressive government which is unrecognised by the rest of the world.

46. It should be noted that donor nations tend to put aid for the refugees in Chad into the same allocation as funds for Darfur itself. This is in spite of the virtual impossibility of implementing a united operational presence.

47. In 2005, the present authors were part of an evaluation of The Netherlands’ aid to Sudan as a whole. It was one in a series of evaluations of Dutch aid world-wide. At the time of writing, the findings of the evaluation in Sudan, contained in the overall publication, were approaching publication (The Hague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

48. Médicins sans Frontières did succeed in operating, completely on its own, in Western Darfur in an area where not even the UN was to be found. It maintained that a strong NGO presence resulted in diverting violence elsewhere and was an effective protective measure.

49. This note has not referred to the issue of the large number of Darfuri refugees in Chad, and the ways in which aid for them has been extended to aid for impoverished Chadians in the vicinities of the camps. This has been both a humanitarian imperative and a necessary step to circumvent further political and security repercussions.

50. Although tangential to the arguments in this note, it is of importance to recognise that discrimination against women has increased in a period in which the traditional roles of men are rapidly disappearing.

51. The use of the word ‘impact’ varies, particularly when it is used as one of the criteria of evaluations. We use it here in the sense that the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1999) gives it:
'positive and negative changes and effects caused by aid intervention.' These differ considerably between the Wilsonian and the Dunantist accounts of humanitarian assistance, but an analysis of that difference belongs elsewhere.

**Bibliographic Note**


**Prunier, Gérard** (2005), *Darfur, the Ambiguous Genocide*, London: Hurst.


We write against a background of depressing news items. The latest round of WTO negotiations over trade tariffs and subsidies has been suspended amid mutual recrimination by the EU and USA. At the same time, as unauthorised landings of desperate and destitute African migrants on the southern shores and outposts of the European Union reach an annual peak, EU countries are concluding multi-lateral and bi-lateral ‘sustainable fishing’ deals with governments along the West African coast for access to their waters by EU trawlers. There are also reports of destructive floods in Ethiopia, Somalia and Burkina Faso; continuing (maybe even worsening) conflict in Nigeria’s Niger Delta; electoral tension in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and menacing demands by Chad’s Idriss Deby for an immediate 60 per cent majority stake (currently held by Petronas and Chevron) in the local oil producing consortium. By comparison, last year’s ‘bad’ news was dominated by coverage of post-drought floods, locust infestation and famine in the Sahel, alongside Zimbabwe’s Operations Restore Order and Murambatsvina; remarkably, forced evictions and demolitions affecting several million urban Nigerians failed to make the international news.

Clearly, the challenge for ROAPE remains, as always, how to use environmental issues to bear witness to Africa’s complicated political struggle, while not ignoring the cultural and other forms underpinning that struggle in particular environments. It is an undertaking which is complicated by the increasing mainstreaming of the notion of sustainability in environment and wider development policy and debates, particularly as there are distinct traditions of sustainability. The first is ecological, and refers to sustainability at either the genetic, species or ecotome level. The second derives from conventional market economics, and attempts to guarantee both the stock and flow of resources. The third seeks to explore the political economy of the environment, recognising that environmental conflict is usually a proximate cause of deeper problems in the body politic. It is this third tradition, with its emphasis on capital, class and power, which has traditionally preoccupied us at ROAPE. And, as the ten main contributions in this issue show, it continues to inform our deliberations, albeit to varying degrees and in different ways. It is worth taking the opportunity presented by this, ROAPE’s third ever issue devoted specifically to environment-related questions (and first of the current century), to reflect on the evolution of the environment debate in the journal and more widely.

ROAPE’s Environmental Roots

Nearly twenty years have elapsed since this journal first devoted an entire issue to the African environment. The subject had shot to global prominence in the wake of widespread and recurrent drought-famine, and the publication of Africa in Crisis...
(Timberlake, 1988) and the Brundtland Commission’s *Our Common Future* (WCED, 1987), among other things. ROAPE No. 42, 1988, appeared at the height of what Timberlake (1988) had described as Africa’s crisis of environmental bankruptcy, and in an era when ‘few critics had paid attention to the environmental aspects of capitalism’s impact on rural livelihoods in the Third World’ (Turshen, Barker and O’Keefe, 1988:1). In the event, a preoccupation with neo-Malthusian explanations for a perceived increase in the incidence and intensified impact of drought, famine, desertification and deforestation – seen collectively as constituting Africa’s environmental crisis – came in for sharp criticism. This was seen as delaying the emergence of more progressive alternative analyses involving both the production of environments under capitalism, and the latter’s impact on livelihoods. Issue No. 42 thus set out to ‘reshape the environmental debate by seeking to place it in a new analytical context’ (Ibid. p.2).

That context was two-fold. First, the ‘naturalness’ would be largely taken out of so-called ‘natural disasters’. And, second, environmental deterioration would be understood as an integral part of the process of capitalist development, and not as the unwanted side-effect of development-as-modernisation. Consequently, Issue No. 42 framed Africa’s environmental crisis as a side effect of the articulation of capitalist with peasant modes of production and non-capitalist institutions (O’Keefe and Wisner, 1977); and as the product of underdevelopment which, in eroding local control over resources, frequently undermined the physical basis of natural resource-based livelihoods, notably those of women and/or the poor in society. ‘In the end’, the editors concluded, ‘it would seem that the logic of capitalism, which is private profit, and the long-term conservation of the environment, which can only be managed collectively, are mutually exclusive’ (Turshen, Barker and O’Keefe, 1988:4).

By the time ROAPE revisited the subject of the links between nature and society a decade further on in 1997, the notion was already well established that environmental crises were part of the overall process of the production of uneven development, and thus ‘the product of long-term political and economic policies and systems’ (Timberlake, 1988:x). This was due, as Figure 1 suggests, as much to advances in political economy and political ecology thinking (Blaikie, 1985; Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987; Smith and O’Keefe, 1980; Watts, 1983), as to an expansion in the literature on the moral economy (Hewitt, 1983; Sen, 1981); it was also a reflection of the heightened role which ideas about individual and group vulnerability and entitlements (O’Keefe, Westgate and Wisner, 1975; O’Keefe and Wisner, 1977; Sen, 1981) had come to assume in discourses on the environment, alongside increasingly influential thinking on local knowledge and institutional economy (Chambers et al. 1989; Fairhead and Leach, 1996; Leach and Mearns, 1996; Richards, 1985). Yet, not even the shift from seeing environmental disasters as ‘acts of God’ to understanding them as ‘acts of wo/man’ succeeded in eliminating either neo-Malthusianism, or the restrictive/exclusionary policies and punitive practical interventions it informed, from mainstream environmental discourse and praxis (Wisner, 2005).

Not surprisingly, this persistence served as a useful starting point for subjecting environmental orthodoxy anew to close scrutiny and critical challenge, notably in its manifestation as crisis narrative which both blamed the poor for land degradation and identified overpopulation as the root cause of environmental crisis. Thus Issue No. 74 did not only raise searching questions about the ‘efficacy of scientific explanations for Africa’s environmental crisis’; it also advocated a wider stock-taking of both ‘characterisations’ of this crisis and the strategies suggested for
its amelioration (Bush, 1997:503). Appearing as it did in the wake of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, UNCED), the Issue underscored two key shortcomings of the post-Rio environmental orthodoxy. When applied to Africa, the ‘universalising’ of environmental problems did ‘nothing to help an understanding of different … crises, or whether they [we]re crises at all’; also, such a ‘globalising’ discourse failed to address

how particular … solutions [could] be promoted without simply accepting the agenda of the environmental crises set … by the donor community (Bush, 1997:504 and 505).

Nonetheless, UNCED was

the first summit meeting to have been held on important environmental issues and one of the few designed, at least in theory, to pay attention to the problems of world poverty (Middleton, O’Keefe and Moyo, 1993:1).

In reality, the roots of the post-Rio shortcomings lay as much in the specifics of the local politics, biology and economics of a complex and dynamic African environment, as in the global political economy of the attempted mainstreaming of environment-development discourses. Integral to this mainstreaming were, inter alia, Brundtland, Rio and, before them, the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. Indeed, Stockholm ’72 helped to set the early tone for a global agenda which would cast a shadow stretching all the way to Rio and beyond. Notably, it highlighted an increased incidence of environmental problems; emphasised the close links between poverty and environmental destruction; and contributed to the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), a multi-lateral ‘watchdog’ with responsibility for environmental protection, monitoring and improvement (Middleton, O’Keefe and Moyo, 1993). For its
Our Common Future was comprehensive in its coverage of environment-development concerns and was uncompromising in its conclusion that ‘a world in which poverty and inequity are endemic will always be prone to ecological and other crises’ (WCED, 1987:43-44). Furthermore, it reaffirmed ‘the necessity of making a decent standard of living possible’ for all the world’s poor, in addition to popularising the concept of ‘sustainable development’ (Middleton, O’Keefe and Moyo, 1993:16).

Above all, perhaps, in the promotion of environmentally sound socio-economic development, and its insistence that current development needs should not be met at the expense of those of future generations, the Brundtland report both profoundly influenced ideas ‘about the state of the world’, and ‘set the limits to contemporary thinking about development’ (Ibid. pp. 17 and 21). This influence was evident, for example, in the convening of the Rio Earth Summit as a follow-up to, and update on, progress with the goals and aspirations of Our Common Future. Similarly, the language of, and claims in Agenda 21, one of five documents adopted at Rio, are reminiscent of the Brundtland report, as the following excerpts from the preamble show:

[W]e are confronted with a perpetuation of disparities between and within nations, a worsening of poverty, hunger, ill health and illiteracy, and the continuing deterioration of the ecosystems on which we depend for our well-being. However, integration of environment and development concerns and greater attention to them will lead to the fulfillment of basic needs, improved living standards for all, better protected and managed ecosystems and a safer, more prosperous future.

Agenda 21 addresses the pressing problems of today and also aims at preparing the world for the challenges of the next century. It reflects a global consensus and political commitment at the highest level on development and environment cooperation.

No nation can achieve this on its own; but together we can – in a global partnership for sustainable development (IISD, undated, a).

A significant and lasting outcome of UNCED was its role in shifting the focus of ongoing debate from Southern concerns with development (or people), which had been at the heart of both Our Common Future and the Stockholm Declaration (UNEP, undated, b), to the environment (or things), which was overwhelmingly a Northern preoccupation (Middleton, O’Keefe and Moyo, 1993). In the process, it did not only privilege problems linked to biodiversity loss, climate change, forest clearance, energy, desertification, overfishing and marine pollution; it also (re-)framed these as pressing global environmental concerns, to the detriment of questions of poverty, equity, aid, trade, debt, etc. (IISD, undated, b). In particular, and like Brundtland before it, Rio failed to ‘question the role of the world’s dominant governments and institutions in preserving the conditions in which environmental and developmental problems arise’ (Middleton, O’Keefe and Moyo, 1993:20). Regrettably, too, while Stockholm, Brundtland and Rio between them undoubtedly ensured that considerations of the environment and development became inextricably (and irreversibly) linked in policy, academic and practical circles, they omitted – without exception – to set out the means for radically altering the structures and processes which underpinned the unequal relations which they appeared to decry. Evidence of Northern cynicism? Many who thought so (and still do) are hopeful that the recent collapse of the WTO trade talks might serve as impetus for the emergence of just such an alternative in Africa.
Adopting the limitations of this post-Rio environmental orthodoxy for Africa as a focus, then, Issue No. 74 argued strenuously that the continent’s environmental difficulties were related to its intractable underlying development crises (unequal aid and trade regimes, heavy primary commodity dependence, poor infrastructural development, etc.); and that the reification of an international environment-development agenda, particularly one founded on orthodox neo-liberal principles, would neither improve the understanding of local environments nor enhance Africa’s ability in shaping its own environmental destiny. And, in calling for the opposition between nature and culture to be transcended in this way, the Issue effectively returned us to ROAPE’s environmental roots identified in Issue No. 42, notably its concern with justice, equity and resource (re-)distribution; structural explanations of poverty and underdevelopment; and the value of nuanced understandings of the social production of the environment, including the ‘political practices and economic institutions’ which precipitate environmental degradation and crises (Bush, 1997:505). Furthermore, the hope was expressed that future issues of ROAPE would continue to explore the social and environmental consequences of capitalist growth and expansion, and strategies for ameliorating environmental problems.

21st Century Perspectives on the Environment

Much has happened in the nearly ten years since, providing ample justification for another of ROAPE’s periodic explorations of the complex links between nature and society. For one thing, a recent more optimistic update on Lloyd Timberlake’s vision of a continent in crisis has recently appeared (Wisner, Toulmin and Chitiga, 2005), as has a less sanguine assessment of progress with the agenda agreed at Rio (Middleton and O’Keefe, 2003). For another, South Africa played host to the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), which reviewed progress since Rio, in addition to planning for a sustainable future for both nature and society. Furthermore, Africa was in the spotlight of international policy attention during 2005. Our Common Interest: An Argument, the report of the Africa Commission was published. The Commission was set up by Tony Blair to review Africa’s development experience and examine the contribution of the rest of the world to this history. The year also saw the convening of the G8 Gleneagles Summit in Scotland, at which Africa and climate change were on the agenda. Concurrently, the Make Poverty History protests and Live8 concerts were held at various locations around the world, with the aim of pressuring G8 leaders for increased aid, fairer trade and debt cancellation for poor African countries. Finally, although the continuing aftermath of the ‘War on Terror’ has been complex and diversified, it has not been without direct and indirect environmental implications in Africa, as elsewhere, although this was clearly not the primary consideration which drove the United States to insist on the inclusion of terrorism as a threat to sustainable development at the Johannesburg summit. However, while the implications for nature and society of several of these events have already been the subject of recent critiques in ROAPE (Furniss, 2005; Hoogvelt, 2005; Keenan, 2005), a notable exception thus far has been the WSSD.

In addition to acknowledging a debt to the principles and plan of action of sustainable development established at Rio, the WSSD affirmed a commitment to the implementation of Agenda 21 and the achievement of the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs). Its Programme of Implementation identifies a need for integrating ‘the three components of sustainable development – economic development, social
development and environmental protection – as interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars’ (UNO, undated). Yet, declarations of intent aside, and despite a pre-summit promise by organisers to focus on action and detailed schedules for implementing previously-agreed goals, post-summit assessments suggested widespread disappointment and disillusion among NGOs and Southern governments. For not only was there an unmistakable tendency toward unilateralism and self-interest by rich countries, notably with regard to climate change, trade liberalisation and subsidies, etc., but there was also a noticeable failure to agree clear timetables and firm targets for poverty reduction, increased renewable energy consumption, expanded access to potable water and improved sanitation, and reduction in biodiversity loss, among others (UNEP DTIE, 2002). However, while there was particular dissatisfaction with a perceived lack of progress on environmental questions, the most important issues addressed were, unlike Rio, both environmental and developmental. Nonetheless, like Rio before it, the WSSD was emasculated, with ‘[t]he needs of many … once again compromised to accommodate the demands of a powerful few’ (Sharma, Mahapatra and Polycarp, 2002:25).

Like UNCED, too, while there was open acknowledgement of the growing threat posed to sustainable development and global stability and security by an increased polarization of wealth and associated power and influence, there was also an absence of acceptable and truly radical alternatives to dominant economic, political and policy structures and processes. Instead, official declarations and statements of intent opted for promoting the notion of partnerships for sustainable socio-economic and environmental development, which encompassed governmental and non-state actors and interests in a variety of arrangements involving links within and between African countries, and between them and the rest of the world. Thus the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation identified NEPAD (the New Economic Partnership for African Development) as an African-owned and driven framework for sustainable development. NEPAD’s programmes, partnerships and initiatives were presented as worthy of strong support from an international community committed to the implementation of Agenda 21 and, more generally, Africa’s pursuit of sustained economic growth. Represented as a suitable complement to development frameworks embodying poverty eradication measures (including Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers), the implementation of the NEPAD ‘vision’ was also considered potentially valuable in conflict prevention and resolution, economic integration, HIV/AIDS prevention and care, debt management and relief, etc. (UNO, undated).

At least four key issues arise from the foregoing. First, the ‘non-natural’ basis of environmental crises is acknowledged in the observation that essential requirements for sustainable development include poverty eradication, the modification of unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, and the protection and management of the natural resource base for economic and social development (UNO, undated). Second, ‘solutions’ proposed for preventing and ameliorating environmental crises, often prescriptive but just as frequently imprecise, increasingly reflect recognition of the implications of this complexity for the nature and content of environment and development intervention. Third, sustainable development in and for Africa is represented as one of the benefits of a process of ‘fully inclusive and equitable’ globalisation (surely a contradiction in terms!!), whose wheels are oiled by partnership structures and processes like NEPAD and the development agenda of Our Common Interest. Fourth, the adoption of national sustainable development strategies was recommended by the WSSD as part of wider
country strategies for economic growth and poverty reduction. But, despite their slow and distinctly uneven implementation by African countries since 2002 (UNDESA, 2006), their incorporation in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) has elevated them into a mechanism for the de facto mainstreaming of the environment in development policy, planning and implementation, given that PRSPs constitute the main means for negotiating access to technical and financial assistance (Anon, 2005).

Within this overall context of globalisation (little discussed in Rio) and the transformation of sustainable development into a policy objective at all levels, the role reserved for the sustainable and wider development agendas appears to be a primarily enabling rather than transformative one, reflecting an overarching vision designed to serve rather than contradict global capitalism (Fraser, 2005; Harrison, 2004; Hoogvelt, 2005). Indeed, through facilitating political and economic liberalisation (particularly privatisation), bi- and multi-lateral partnerships like NEPAD and PRSs (both incorporating an environment initiative), the US Africa Growth and Opportunity Act, the Strategic Partnership with Africa, and the Tokyo Agenda for Action help to create sustainable markets and environments for capital. In the process, as discussions at the 2003 ROAPE conference on Partnership as Imperialism demonstrated, they foster corporate expansion into environment-related (and other) activity. The investment of South African corporate capital in mining in Ghana and Sierra Leone; or the new petroleum boom in West Africa; or the recent influx of new international mining investors in the Democratic Republic of Congo following World Bank-driven mining sector reform, the introduction of a new mining code, and a constitutional referendum (Bailey, 2006) – all readily attest to this. Alternatively, there is the operation of China’s new capitalist model for accessing natural resources in Africa, described by an African ambassador in Beijing as follows:

*They just come and do it. We don’t start to hold meetings about environmental impact assessment, human rights, bad governance and good governance. I’m not saying that’s right, I’m just saying Chinese investment is succeeding because they don’t set high benchmarks* (Hilsum, 2005a).

The resource and environmental politics implied here can be both complex and contradictory. Take the case of Robert Mugabe. Quoted as saying of the WSSD, at which China participated, that its ‘focus was profit, not the poor; the process was globalisation, not sustainable development; while the objective was exploitation, not liberation’, he has himself become a direct beneficiary of China’s ‘new mission in Africa’ (Sharma, Mahapatra and Polycarp, 2002:27), with its sometimes less than rigorous approach to environmental and other considerations. China has become the biggest source of investment for a bankrupt (in more ways than one) and ostracised Zimbabwean regime engaged in, among other things, the destruction of the lives and livelihoods of its urban poor (Hilsum, 2005b). Further examples of such contradiction from Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo involve the World Bank. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, serious concern has been raised regarding the Bank’s failure to effectively police the activities of mining companies and local elites in the wake of market sector reforms it has itself instigated and/or supervised, particularly in the absence of either environmental safeguards or impact assessments; whereas in Cameroon, it is the violation of environmental safety standards and regulations by the Bank-supported Chad-Cameroon Pipeline (CCPP), Africa’s largest public-private partnership project, which has attracted
attention for its potentially disastrous environmental and social consequences (Keenan, 2005).

**A ROAPE Perspective**

The papers in this issue reflect some of these 21st century developments, although to varying degrees and in different ways. Ramsamy examines low cost housing programmes financed by the World Bank in Zimbabwe, indicating that access to urban housing ranks alongside access to employment as a major survival challenge. And, in a powerful critique of the World Bank, he notes that Structural Adjustment contributed to structural collapse in Zimbabwe, while arguing a case which shows that the current crisis of squatter removal is closely linked to the Bank’s policy framework. Indeed, Bracking (2005) has recently ventured even further to argue that it was initially forced and then unplanned liberalisation which hastened descent into the kind of authoritarianism which resulted ultimately in these evictions.

The papers by Middleton and O’Keefe, and Marchal, act as timely reminders that there are sometimes cross-border dimensions to environment and development problems. The former shows how the crisis of self-selection to enter camps for security reasons in Darfur can be traced directly to the political economy of access to resources in Sudan, while the latter’s explanation of the diverse origins and varied trajectories of the linked crises in Chad and neighbouring Darfur insists on their complex and dynamic transnational character. While undoubtedly political in origin, both papers argue, these crises also have clear ‘natural’ components to them, notably the interplay between demography, recurrent drought and tenure (land and water) conflict. In addition, the discovery and exploitation of oil has contributed to the outbreak and/or funded the continuation of conflict in one as in the other case. At the same time, conflict has in turn prompted environmental degradation and disrupted livelihoods, with major implications for the scope and nature of both humanitarian assistance and political mediation. All three authors would no doubt agree that their analyses amount to a case for a continuing transboundary approach to conflict resolution, humanitarian intervention and the management of natural and societal resources of a kind which, as the paper by Jones shows, is more usually associated with the conservation of wildlife and their habitat.

Another environment in which oil plays a central role is Nigeria’s Niger Delta, a favoured study area of ROAPE authors. Idemudia and Ite offer an ‘integrated explanation’ of the causes of ongoing conflict, indicating how past development efforts have been compromised by single-factor explanations. In their place, the authors suggest the adoption of an approach to the design and implementation of development efforts for the region which is both cognisant of

the triple pillars of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental sustainability);
and capable of addressing the components of the ‘economic-environmental nexus to the conflict … the role of poverty, the geography of oil and the economic impact of environmental degradation on host communities.

In a new departure for ROAPE, Witt, Patel and Schnurr critically examine the export monoculture of genetically modified cotton in South Africa, where the commercial potential of smallholder production is only now being explored. What emerges clearly is that continued GM cotton production depends partly on a lack of alternative crops, and partly on the fact that agricultural institutions, including those for credit, are geared to serving multinational interests. Any claim to an
African GM success story would thus be demonstrably premature, given overwhelming evidence suggesting that the realities, lives, livelihoods and wishes of ordinary people are ignored. Development assistance institutions are also the focus of Whitfield’s paper, which argues that they are one of the main protagonists in resource conflicts between the state and its citizens. Her illustration of the role of politics in urban water reform in Ghana shows how the embedding of private and public institutions (including overseas donors) in political conflict underlies much socio-economic struggle. Water privatisation is one area where development partnerships have advanced the fortunes of corporate capital in Africa, often against strong local and international opposition, and an area which also acts as a useful reminder of neoliberalism’s continuing influence in debates about environmental resources and their role in development, sustainable or otherwise.

In an intriguing argument over the use of environmental impact assessment (EIA) and public participation in environmental decision making in South Africa, Death explores the limits of a positivist western, scientific tradition to settle environmental dispute surrounding nuclear power generation. It is a sharp critique of how the state attempts to avoid environmental conflict by the use of EIA methods, which include a presumption that there is a single correct answer to the complex problems of the political economy of energy provision. While the argument shows clearly the value of engaging with as wide a range of opinions as possible to ensure that interests beyond those of predominantly white middle class environmentalists are represented, it makes the equally important point that its environmental regulation role and appeal to popular participation notwithstanding, EIA is not necessarily an effective tool for resisting neo-liberal hegemony. Convery provides a case study of Mozambican forest resource use, detailing the worldview implied in resource management which underlies traditional (but not unchanging) local thinking about the interaction between nature and society. It can be considered a response to the call in *ROAPE* No. 74 to engage with the cultural forms underpinning particular environments, in this case a rural forest environment in which the *Régulo* system, with its complex institutional structures, acts as broker in environmental resource claims and guide in resource allocation and use.

While Convery prefers the notion of the production of ‘lifescape’ to that of the more familiar ‘landscape’, the latter continues to attract much attention, as in the piece by Jones. She summarises major debates in, and changing practices of wildlife conservation using political ecology as her organising framework. Her task, to chart the politics of struggles over the control of, and access to natural resources in ‘conservation environments’, highlights ‘the importance of considering ways in which power and meanings conferred on the landscape play out in the realm of conservation’. The fraught question of balancing the competing interests of private-public partnerships and public-community partnerships encountered here is analogous to that confronted by Whitfield in the context of urban water privatisation in Ghana. In both cases, too, there is a clear sense of global impulses being mediated through local prisms, raising once again the complex issue of the contested nature, dynamics and outcomes of development partnerships. These are of course subjects in which *ROAPE* has a long and continuing interest, as indeed it also does in conflict resolution and post-conflict recovery. Kimble uses the peace process in Angola to highlight how an economy based on two natural resources, oil and diamonds, poses formidable political challenges for the delivery of a sustainable development transition. Thus repeated government crackdowns on informal commercial activity, ostensibly on public health and traffic circulation grounds, have particularly
negative effects on poor urban women and their dependants. Similarly, state privatisation of land is resulting in a land grab by elite groups, but with no commensurate increase in tenure security for the vast majority of peasant producers (but particularly women), and without eliminating the prospect of land conflict. Kibble concludes that whether and to what extent the country embarks on widespread economic recovery and poverty reduction would depend, even if only partly, on world oil prices and the local pursuit of its capitalist model by China which, as in Zimbabwe, Chad and Sudan, is a significant development partner.

Overall, these papers represent a first concerted response to the challenge thrown down in No. 74, for ROAPE to continue to explore the socio-environmental consequences of capitalist growth and expansion, even if ameliorative strategies receive only limited coverage. In particular, the selection provides confirmation of the continuing close links between environment and development; highlights the complex and dynamic role of politics and economic institutions in precipitating environmental degradation or aggravating environmental crises; and reinforces the long-standing impression of persistent underlying environment and development difficulties, despite policy and other interventions designed to promote liberalisation and globalisation. Moreover, there is a suggestion that modernisation thinking and practice, so comprehensively discredited in both Nos. 42 and 74, has persisted in new guises, sometimes as a cover for oppressive policies, undemocratic interventions or disempowering practices. Above all, perhaps, the extent of autonomous African input into the international agenda which drives global and local responses to the continent’s multiple and interlocking environment-development problems remains unclear.

**Producing African Environments By & For Africans?**

Radicals have historically approached the study of the environment from the perspective of several distinct academic traditions. Figure 1 summarises one of a number of possible mappings of these traditions. While much of this radical scholarship has represented a significant contribution to the literature, there have also been inevitable absences. For example, the local knowledge and institutional economy literature often lacks detailed treatment of political process, while there is generally an absence of analyses of economics in discussions of political ecology. Similarly, moral economy arguments celebrate political activity which is grounded in local struggle, but there is generally an absence of broader global trends. Nonetheless, a shared concern of all was, and remains, how to determine what kind of African nature African people wish to produce.

This appears to be one of the functions of the UNEP Africa Environment Outlook Reports (AEOR-1 and AEOR-2). Published respectively in 2002 and 2006 as part of a process for promoting sustainable environmental management within the context of PRSPs and NEPAD, they offer ‘a comprehensive scientific assessment of the [continent’s] environment, policies, and environmental management programmes’; represent valuable monitoring and reporting tools; and provide inspiration for dialogue within and between countries and (sub-)regions around the linked themes of sustainable development and Africa’s insertion into a globalising world economy (UNEP-DEWA, undated). Not surprisingly, press releases for the launch of AEOR-2 emphasise its value as a tool for defining realistic environment-development policy options, strategies and programmes (Sanyang, 2006). They also highlight the report’s role as a showcase for priorities and initiatives requiring private and other
investment, preferably of a kind encompassing creative market instruments like
debt-for-nature swaps and tax incentives which balance economic concerns with
environmental ones (Steiner, 2006). At the same time, the content of AEOR-2 which
was, like that of AEOR-1, compiled by African scientists and researchers, includes
repeated suggestions of significant and continuing African input to sustainable
development policy and programme design and content at all scales as well as in all
priority areas identified in NEPAD’s Environmental Action Plan.

Not surprisingly, in tracing changing African policy and legislative attitudes to the
environment and its place within development thinking and practice, the report
attributes this evolution equally to the influence of Stockholm, Brundtland, UNCED,
the MDGs and WSSD, on the one hand, and the impact of the Lagos Plan of Action,
a rejuvenated African Union, renewed regional integration and a NEPAD credited
with ‘seek[ing] to balance the neoliberal economic reforms it is promoting with
support for social services, particularly health and education’, on the other (UNEP,
2006:28). Indeed, this theme of African ownership of the policy process and, by
extension, the authority to represent the hopes and aspirations of the continent’s
people pervades the report. But while the report might well represent an
authoritative view on sustainable development, does it also encompass an
exhaustive picture of the different kinds of nature which Africans of all categories
wish to produce? For example, while it notes that an increasing number of countries
currently grow or are field-testing genetically modified crops, and is complimentary
about the role of citizens’ juries in facilitating female participation in local GM
debates, the report is silent on the rejection of the idea of introducing these crops
during some of these non-binding civil society consultations (Anon, 2006).
Similarly, the Islamic Courts Union in Somalia has recently imposed what is the
latest in a number of recent (and thus far ineffective) bans on the largely unregulated
and unrestricted export trade in charcoal and wildlife (principally live birds of prey)
to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States on environmental grounds, citing an
overwhelming need to counter the threat of desertification and biodiversity loss
(BBC, 2006). Yet the questions this raises are as much to do with sustainable
environmental management, as with governance and popular representation under
conditions of state collapse. In one as in the other example, however, livelihood
concerns of various kinds appear to be the key to explaining the dynamics at work.
It is significant, therefore, that both AEOR-1 and AEOR-2 acknowledge the central
role of livelihoods in the pursuit of sustainable development.

A subsidiary question raised is thus whether and to what extent livelihood thinking
can be a useful tool in studying the political economy of the production of nature.
Notably, livelihoods received passing attention in ROAPE Nos. 48 and 74, the two
previous ‘environment issues’. They have also been the subject of substantive
articles in recent issues. Above all, perhaps, livelihoods have emerged as an integral
element of the ongoing mainstreaming of the environment in development theory
and practice, even as the concept and its application undergo continuing
refinement, with a view to sharpening their focus on inequality and power relations
as complements to existing strengths in the areas of vulnerability, marginalisation
and sustainability (de Haan, 2006). There might be room therefore for fruitful
interaction between political economy and livelihood studies, notably in exploring
the uneven production of society and nature in the pursuit of economic and
environmental goals within the current context of globalisation (Ifeka and Abua,
2005). Now that would be environment and development mainstreaming to truly
conjure with.
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Demystifying the Niger Delta Conflict: Towards an Integrated Explanation

Uwafiokun Idemudia & Uwem E. Ite

The conflict in the Niger Delta region in Nigeria has lasted for more than a decade, with little or no attempt at an analytical explanation. As a result, the situation has made effective conflict resolution difficult, and perpetuated the confusion of fiction over fact. This paper sets out to correct the shortcomings in existing literature by proffering an integrated explanation of various factors responsible for the conflict. The paper concludes that political and economic factors are the root causes of conflict in the Niger Delta, with environmental and social factors as the proximate and trigger causes, respectively. Given the nature of the relationship among the myriad factors responsible for the conflict, what is required is a comprehensive approach to conflict resolution that pursues development in the Niger Delta on the basis and principles of social, economic and environmental sustainability.

An epoch in the history of the Niger Delta region (Figure 1 over) was marked by the discovery in 1956 and the subsequent exploration of crude oil in Oloibiri, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Since then, oil production and its socio-economic and environmental impacts transformed the Niger Delta from a relatively insignificant region into one of significant geopolitical importance at the national and international levels. Unfortunately, this has more to do with the negative impact of oil production on local communities, than the widely expected positive benefits of oil production. Over the years, the Niger Delta has moved from a relatively peaceful enclave in the 1960s, to a region prone to sporadic low-level conflict in the 1980s, and finally to an outright unstable region with persistent violence since the 1990s. It is evident that if the communities in the Niger Delta are not in conflict with the oil multinationals over land rights or compensation for environmental damage, they are in dispute with the government over access to oil wealth and resource control, or they are locked in conflict with one another over claims to ownership of areas where oil facilities and accompanying benefits are sited (Zandvliet and Pedro 2002). As such, the general attitude in the Niger Delta is not whether there will be more trouble, but it is a question of when and where (Ibeanu, 2000).

The conflict in the Niger Delta has been attributed to a myriad of factors – often the subject of multiple interpretations. Some scholars attribute the conflict to marginalisation and frustration among local communities (see van Dessel, 1995; Welch, 1995; Ukeje, 2001; Ifeka, 2001; Fleshman, 2002; Ikelegbe, 2005), while others focus on the clamour for more oil revenue (see Obi, 2001; Ross, 2003; Omeje, 2004). Yet, others have explained the situation within the broad context of oil extraction and the resultant environmental degradation (Naanen, 1995; Okoh, 1996; Onduku, 2001).
Perhaps the most sophisticated explanation has been to link the conflict to differences in perception and understanding of security by both the Nigerian State and the indigenous people (see for example, Ibeanu, 1997; Obi, 1997; Ibeanu, 2000; Olojede et al. 2000). These explanations are not necessarily incompatible and no doubt improve our understanding of the conflict along different lines. However, because their focus may be on either one or two variable as the ‘explanation variable’ for the conflict, most are unable to provide a complete picture of the nature, causes and dynamics of the conflict. A complete picture is, however, needed for the design of an effective policy geared towards conflict management and resolution. Ibeanu (2000) asserted that while the Niger Delta conflict is often said to be caused by a multitude of factors, what has been lacking is their integration into an explanatory system to enable us make sense of empirical data and support effective policy intervention. He went on to argue that it is not often clear if all the factors that are said to be responsible for the conflict are causal or mediatory, or if they are all causal factors, which are principal, secondary and tertiary. It is also not clear which factors are trigger, pivotal, mobilising or aggravating. These shortcomings make conflict management and resolution in the Niger Delta an uphill task.

Any attempt to resolve the foregoing shortcomings demands asking one fundamental question: what is the possible relationship among the factors responsible for the conflict? Even though the conflict in the region has gone through a trajectory, which demonstrates that different factors at different times has accentuated the conflict, it is difficult (if not impossible), to demonstrate in practice that one factor is more responsible than another and therefore the explanatory variable for the conflict. The failure to explicitly address the question of how factors responsible for the Niger Delta conflict are interlinked has contributed to the reason why most previous studies are unable to proffer viable solutions beyond general recommendations.

Filling this gap in existing literature would require a critical probing of historical evidence and contemporary events shrouding the Niger Delta conflict, with a view to highlighting how the factors responsible interact with one another. Against the above background, this paper argues that the Niger Delta conflict in its present form is the result of the cumulative effect of the synergetic interplay among conflict-generating factors that have at various times worked together or individually to tilt state-society relations towards the outbreak of conflict (Figure 2 opposite). Although Obi (2001) implicitly made similar suggestions by asserting that the Niger Delta conflict could best be understood in terms of the analytical fusion of economic, political, social and environmental consciousness, he failed to develop the idea any further. As such, the aim of this paper is to suggest an integrated explanation that draws on the relationships among the different factors often deduced to be responsible for the conflict.
Towards Explaining Conflict in the Niger Delta

It is evident that the best scholarly studies of internal conflict are powerful precisely because they do not rely on single-factor explanations. Instead, they try to weave several factors into a more comprehensive argument. Similarly, the explanations that follow from here have the advantage of avoiding the shortcomings inherent in single variable explanation of natural resource conflict. For example, Watts (2005) criticised Collier (2000) and Ross (2001) on the grounds that many of the dynamics they noted between oil and conflict did not emerge from oil per se, but also from the centralisation of oil revenue. He also argued that both ignored how oil’s contribution to violence builds upon pre-existing (i.e. pre-oil) political dynamics. Similarly, the conception of political and economic factors as the root causes of the Niger Delta conflict is supported by the assertion by Agim (1997) that the remote cause of the friction between oil companies and their host communities can be traced to be deep-seated historical discontent with governance in Nigeria. However, it is also important to note here that the chosen approach (i.e. integrated explanation) does not assume to address the entire issues surrounding the Niger Delta conflict nor does it portend to provide a foolproof explanation. Rather, what it achieves rests on its ability to highlight hitherto neglected relationships among the factors responsible, and therefore provide a basis for pursuing effective conflict resolution.

Political Factors

The role of political factors in the Niger Delta conflict is inextricably linked with the interplay of ethnicity, statehood formation, corruption and the contradiction inherent in ‘black gold’. The quagmire has its roots in the 1914 union of two different protectorates (i.e. Northern and Southern) to give birth to what is now called Nigeria. Critics have referred to this tenuous union as an error of design, with Chief Obafemi Awolowo (a prominent Nigerian statesman), consequently arguing that ‘Nigeria is not a nation, but a mere geographic expression’ (see Olojede et al. 2000:7). Political scientists have corroborated these assertions when they argued that given the processes of state formation in Europe and America, African states are state-nations as opposed to being nation-states. According to Rejia and Enloe (1969), in 19th century Europe, the nation preceded and created the state, whereas in developing countries this relationship is reversed, so that the state is creating the nation. The multi-ethnic constituents of Nigeria, the religious division that permeates the state, coupled with the forced nature of its union make Nigeria a true state-nation. One of the deficiencies inherent in the state-nation has now taken an expression in the form of the Niger Delta crisis.

The existence of multi-ethnic nationalities and different religious groupings do not by themselves constitute an issue with political consequences. However, it is the process of social change that elevates the interest of the different ethnic groups to the political realm (Babangida, 2002). This elevation fosters competitive communalism, where each ethnic group competes to maximise the benefits it can derive from the Nigerian state. As competitive communalism flourishes, the state gradually disap-
pears (Zalik, 2004). Ultimately, winners and losers emerge and a sense of identity is reinforced (i.e. majority-minority), with conflict as the likely outcome.

From pre-independence, members of the Ibo and Yoruba ethnic group have dominated the people of the Niger Delta. By virtue of their population, the ethnic nationalities of the Niger Delta became a minority in relation to the two dominant ethnic groups in the two regions (Naanen, 1995; Obi, 1997). Since regional politics was basically primordial and often defined in terms of ethnicity, competitive communalism flourished, with the consequence that the Niger Delta minority ethnic groups suffered neglect under the rule of the two major ethnic groups. They lacked basic socio-economic and developmental infrastructure that could be considered to be at par with that in other parts of the region. For example, the Ogonis were so embittered that the chiefs complained to the Governor of Nigeria during his visit to the Eastern Region in 1956, that they were being denied access to scholarships, jobs, important positions, and other socio-economic opportunities. Naanen (1995) described this scenario as a case of ‘internal colonialism’. Similarly, minority status within these regions meant the people of the region suffered political exclusion. It is on this basis that one can fathom why at independence, they clamoured for a region of their own, out of fear of further political marginalisation and socio-economic exclusion. This agitation lead only to the setting up of the Willink Commission in 1958, which conducted a study and reached the conclusion that the region was poor, backward, neglected and a harsh terrain to live.

Based on the above, it could be argued that from the pre-independence era, the people of the Niger Delta never had any substantial control over their destiny. The inability to significantly influence the course of their destiny owing to a lack of political influence meant backwardness, poverty, illiteracy, and more recently, social instability flourished. Ethnic politics at the national level also gave little or no room for issues concerning the people of the Niger Delta to be addressed. Rather, such issues were relegated to the background of the national agenda or at best recommendations were made but never implemented. The politics that shrouded the setting up of the Niger Delta Development Board in 1960, and its eventual demise in 1966, attest to the disdain treatment of issues concerning minorities at national level in Nigeria.

However, two independent events brought a ray of hope to the people of the Niger Delta, albeit, a false one. First, the aftermath of the Civil War (1967-1970) saw the creation of states in Nigeria. It was believed that state creation would engender conditions that would eventually allow the people more room for political participation and economic benefit from the centre. Second, the discovery of crude oil allayed fears that development and modernisation might never reach the region as oil was being extracted in the region. Unfortunately, these two events in the long run turned out to be diametrically opposed to the aspirations and expectations of the people. What eventually happened was the effective replacement of Ibo and Yoruba dominance with Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Ibo dominance at the centre (i.e. federal level). State creation only weakened the regions vis-à-vis the centre, centralisation purchased by oil wealth allowed corruption and competitive communalism at the centre to deny the people of the region the benefits of oil production. Although successive governments defended their various centralisation policies on the grounds of forging a sense of nationhood, Rejia and Enloe (1969) pointed out that the reason for this kind of top-downward process of cultivating nationalism was due in
part to the pre-existence of the state, which is trying to bolster its own legitimacy and also deliberately quell upward development of nationalism out of fear of heterogeneity.

Furthermore, as oil rent flowed directly to the state coffers, those who controlled state power and occupied strategic positions not only used their office as an instrument to control oil, but also as a means of amassing wealth (Obi, 1997, 2001). Issues of corruption, competitive communalism, and over-dependence of other tiers of government (i.e. local and state) on the centre (i.e. federal), made the contradiction inherent in ‘black gold’ inevitable. Government failure to provide the expected development benefit, despite huge returns from crude oil sales, became a major driving force for the antagonism between the state and the people of the Niger Delta. Watts (1998) noted that the dependency on the centre for petrol-dollar by the different tiers of government (i.e. federal, state, local) permitted the centre to enforce a certain degree of political cohesion within the federation, but oil simultaneously produces conditions that directly challenged and questioned the very same hallowed tenets of nationalism and development. In essence, government failure to deliver developmental benefit in the face of perceived political and economic marginalisation created a sense of disenchantment within the region.

Given that there was little or no belief that redress could be sought for their grievances in the existing state structures, clamour for self-determination and resource control that the people saw as a means of reversing decades of political and economic marginalisation became the order of the day. Unfortunately, such demands are not only a threat to the legitimacy of the government in power, but also a threat to the idea of ‘nationalism’. Hence, such agitation and clamour were largely misconstrued as ‘separatist tendencies’ that must not be tolerated (Okoh, 1996; Omeje, 2004). To make matters worse, Nigeria has predominantly been under military rule (see Table 1) which was largely authoritarian, totalitarian and often lacked grassroots support. This meant that they were often already immersed in a crisis of legitimacy. Since democratic instruments, including those of conflict management and conflict resolution are more or less suspended under the military rule, there was almost no room for state-society dialogue.

With growing frustration, bitterness and a widespread sense of powerlessness, public protest became a viable means for the people of the Niger Delta to vent their grievances. Unfortunately, such expressions of grievances were not only worsening the legitimacy crisis of the military government, but also became a threat to their personal wealth accumulation schemes. The Nigerian-petrol-state saw the stakes in such agitations as too high for any kind of retreat, because it would totally erode the basis of its rule, legitimacy and continue reproduction (Obi, 2001). Hence, due to its militarilistic tendencies, the state continually used the armed forces to snuff out opposition that effectively ensured the militarisation of the Niger Delta region and fuelled the breakdown of state society-relationship (see also Frynas, 2001). For example, Osaghae (1995) attributed the Ogoni uprising and the incessant violence between 1990-93 to the unprecedented repressive character of the Babangida military administration. The predominance of military rule in Nigeria was therefore one singular political factor that drove the people of the Delta to express their grievance through violence. The inability of the Nigerian state to maintain internal order with minimum use of force, and its inability to meet its social responsibility to the people earns Nigeria the status of a failed state, and conflict is endemic to a failed state. This failed state status, therefore, represents the political dimension to the Niger Delta conflict.
Table 1: Chronicle of Political Leadership in Nigeria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period of Rule</th>
<th>Head of State</th>
<th>Type of Govt.</th>
<th>Ethnic Origin</th>
<th>How the Rule Ended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960-66</td>
<td>Balewa</td>
<td>Civilian</td>
<td>Hausa</td>
<td>Attempted Coup/Assassination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Ironsi</td>
<td>Military</td>
<td>Ibo</td>
<td>Coup/Assassination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966-75</td>
<td>Gowon</td>
<td>Military</td>
<td>Angas/Middle Belt</td>
<td>Coup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-76</td>
<td>Mohammad</td>
<td>Military</td>
<td>Hausa</td>
<td>Attempted Coup/Assassination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-79</td>
<td>Obasanjo</td>
<td>Military</td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>Elections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979-83</td>
<td>Shagari</td>
<td>Civilian</td>
<td>Fulani</td>
<td>Coup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-85</td>
<td>Buhari</td>
<td>Military</td>
<td>Fulani</td>
<td>Coup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Shonekan</td>
<td>Civilian</td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>Head of Interim Govt, Coup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-98</td>
<td>Abacha</td>
<td>Military</td>
<td>Kanuri</td>
<td>Presumed heart attack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-99</td>
<td>Abubakar</td>
<td>Military</td>
<td>Middle Belt Group</td>
<td>Elections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Obansanjo</td>
<td>Civilian</td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Fynas, 2000

Economic Factors

Economic factors engendering the conflict can be thought of in terms of two nexuses (i.e. political-economic and the economic-environment). The political-economic nexus to the conflict in principle rests squarely on oil revenue allocation, which directly heightened the sense of relative deprivation among the people of the Niger Delta. For example, Obi (1997; Obi 1999) and Ibeanu (2000) affirmed that the bulk of the oil revenues generated from the region should be returned back to the region on the basis of fairness, compensation and self-determination is at the heart of the Niger Delta struggle. Other politico-economic factors include the rentier status of Nigeria (Yates 1996) as well as the national economic crisis of the 1980s (see Collier, 1987; Obi, 1997).

Commercial oil exploration turned Nigeria’s political economy into a mono-commodity economy upon which the state heavily depends. The expansion of the oil industry saw the corresponding decline of other sectors of the economy, a classic symptom of the ‘Dutch disease’ (Auty, 1993). This situation, according to proponents of the rentier state thesis was due mostly to the ready availability of rent revenue, and the fact that oil rents reduce the political and economic significance of the taxpayer, as it allows the state to be less dependent on taxation. These incentives
made rent seeking a principal preoccupation of the Nigerian state, which allowed for the manifestation of the predatory tendencies inherent in the state. According to Lewis (1996), predatory rule denotes a personalistic regime ruling through coercion and material inducement. This type of regime tends to degrade the institutional foundation of the state, as well as its economy. Within the context of this paper, the rentier-predatory status of the Nigerian state contributed to the conflict in the Niger Delta in two main ways.

First, the rentier status, with the associated effect of ‘Dutch disease’, allowed the various state and local governments in Nigeria to become heavily dependent on the federal government for economic sustenance. Khan (1994) made allusion to this, when he stated that the state governments abandoned any pretence of a productive identity and relied unashamedly on federal government handouts. Given that competitive communalism had already taken a strong hold on Nigeria politics, issues of oil revenue allocation became a hotly contested terrain. Oil revenue was effectively a ‘relatively accessed goods’ such that the amount that accrues to any actor depends on the amount that accrues to its competitor (see Hasenclever et al. 1996). The relative accessed nature of oil revenue, among the tiers of government made increases in access to oil wealth for the people of the Niger Delta extremely difficult, which within the context of marginalisation, gave room for the development of a ‘worse off’ feeling among the Niger Deltans, in relation to other major ethnic groups in Nigeria.

An exploration of the implementation of the principle of derivation on which revenue allocation was initially based makes very obvious the unevenly accessed nature of oil revenue and its contribution to inciting a sense of relative deprivation within the Niger Delta region. Under the derivation principle, 50 per cent of the proceeds of any mineral extracted from any region are paid to that region. According to the African Network for Environment and Economic Justice (ANEEJ, 2004), the principle of derivation accounted for the rapid development and healthy competition among the regions from 1960 to 1966. For example, the Northern region produced cotton, hides and skin and was renowned for groundnut production and the Eastern region produced palm oil and petroleum. On the other hand, the Western region and mid-western regions produced cocoa, rubber, timber, palm oil and petroleum. Each region got 50 per cent of the proceeds of its produce under the derivation principle. However, as Nigeria gradually attained its rentier status, the principle of derivation was gradually abandoned. For example, by the late 1960s, population, need and equity principles were invoked; in the 1980s social development and internal revenue were included, and by the 1990s, the weighting criteria fully metamorphosed into population (30 per cent), equity (40 per cent), land area (10 per cent), social development (10 per cent), and internal revenue (10 per cent).

The abnegation of the principle of derivation meant that the five southern oil-producing states that accounted for 90 per cent of oil revenue received 19.3 per cent of allocated revenue, and the five northern non-oil producing states conversely received 26 per cent of the allocated federal revenue (Ikporukpo, 1996). Despite its vast oil resources, the Niger Delta region still remains poor, with its GNP per capita and educational levels below national average, and 70 per cent of its people living below the poverty line (NDDC 2004). The successive revision of the principle of derivation from a whopping 50 per cent to 20 per cent, 0 per cent, 2 per cent, 1.5 per cent and 13 per cent in 1975, 1979, 1982, 1984, 1992 and 2001, respectively, thus remain the biggest single economic blow dealt the people of the Niger Delta.

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The second contribution of the predatory-rentier status of the Nigerian state arises from its inability to perform its traditional role of mediating conflicting and competing interest among the various strata of society as an unbiased umpire. Olojede et al. (2000) noted that since the Nigerian state is enmeshed in the crisis of accumulation, it could not extricate itself from social antagonism because the state, by implication, cannot be an impartial arbiter as it is a direct stockholder. In turn, this undermined the credibility of the Nigerian state within the polity of the Niger Delta. In the Niger Delta, Nigeria is seen as a privatised entity that has been parcelled out as a means of production serving ethnic, personal and other interest at the expense of the people of the region (Obi, 1997).

There is no doubt that revenue sharing and allocation are politically sensitive issues in Nigeria. This is further compounded by the lack of consensus on the criteria of distribution, the absence of reliable socio-economic data, the rapid rate of constitutional and political change, and the extent to which revenue distribution is tied to perceptions of regional ethnic dominance. The continued appropriation of a disproportionate share of the Federation Account by the Federal government at a time of expanding administrative costs and increasingly unsustainable spending obligations at the state and LGA levels have galvanised fervent nationwide opposition to the revenue sharing system.

The above perception is underpinned by the fact that for over 40 years, oil wealth has brought nothing to the people of Niger Delta, except ecological catastrophe, social deprivation, political marginalisation, and a rapacious company capitalism in which unaccountable foreign oil companies are seen to be granted a sort of state immunity (Watts, 1998). Given the perception by the people of the Nigerian state as biased against their interest, the chances of the state being able to manage internal contradiction without recourse to force were significantly diminished. The Nigerian state was in essence confronting a people that have lost confidence in its existence, and that it sees as threat to its economic security. While Ibeanu (2000) sees this as the aggression of the state against a targeted group of people, Fleshman (2002) provides a more critical insight when he asserted that community violence and kidnapping provided a sort of justification for the state to seek military solutions to civil problems.

The economic-environmental nexus to the conflict relates to the role of poverty, the geography of oil and the economic impact of environmental degradation on host communities. Watts (1998) noted that insofar as oil is state property, then the relationship of oil producers (and citizens in general) with the state becomes an object of debate. In other words, oil as a subterranean and territorial resource that is highly centralised and a property of the state necessarily channels claims over nature (‘our oil’) into a sort of right talk. As Obi (2001) points out, the location of oil in the region of the ethnic minority gave the people leverage provided by ‘economic power’ to adopt an oil-owning identity and claim special rights. Hence, ‘oil’ minority rights reversed the perceived political and economic insignificance of the Niger Delta people by increasing the bargaining power of the people vis-à-vis the state. This sense of ownership of oil strengthened the peoples’ resolve and provided the impetus for the people to demand political inclusion and for the state to meets its social responsibility to them.
Environmental Factors

The relationship between the environment and political conflict has been a subject of debate since the dawn of history. However, in recent years consensus began to emerge that environmental factors cannot by themselves alone be the cause of conflict. Hence, the role of environmental factors in the Niger Delta conflict can only be understood in terms of being a proximate cause (see Figure 2). Besides, given the dynamics of the conflict, it is difficult to see how environmental factors could contribute to conflict without interacting with pre-existing conflict generating factors. After all, political and economic factors are partly responsible for environmental degradation within the Niger Delta.

The vulnerability of the Niger Delta ecology and the dependency of the people on their environment for livelihood sustenance are the basis for explaining and understanding the contribution of environmental factors to the conflict. The environmental dimension to the conflict can be understood in terms of an environmental-political and environment-economic nexuses. Environmental change may take any of three forms: overuse of renewable resources, overstrain of the environment sink capacity, i.e. pollution, and the impoverishment of the space of living (Libiszewski, 1992). This conception of environmental degradation allows for a much broader understanding of the role of environmental changes in fostering conflict in the Niger Delta, which goes beyond the narrow focus of most analysis that focus exclusively on oil pollution and gas flaring.

The people of the Niger Delta are predominantly engaged in farming and fishing for their livelihood sustenance. Although there is scant empirical data on changes in agricultural production and land use due to environmental change, anecdotal evidence suggests such changes have occurred. According to Moffat and Linden (1995), issues of seasonal flooding and erosion have also been known to cause the loss of scarce arable lands. Available evidence also suggests that the fish stocks in the Niger Delta are being depleted from overuse. It also suggests that official catch figures exceeded the maximum sustainable yield for at least twelve of the last fourteen years, and this was attributed to over fishing.

Issues of oil pollution and gas flaring have frequently been cited as the most formidable challenge confronting the people and environmental sustainability in the Niger Delta region. This is not surprising given that between 1976 and 1996, there were a total of 4,835 incidences of oil spill of at least 2,446,322 barrels (102.7 million US gallons), of which an estimated 77 per cent were lost to the environment (see Ogri, 2001; Adenikinju, 2002; Ojefia, 2004). Jike (2004) has argued that most other causes of the environmental change become insignificant when pitched against the consequence of oil spills and gas flaring that occurs on a daily basis in the Niger Delta. There is no doubt that the impacts of oil spills have been devastating in environmental and, therefore, economic terms for community members. According to Okoh (1996) and Olojede et al. (2000), oil spills jeopardise the occupation and means of livelihood of community members, and indirectly fuel competition for scarce arable land among community members.

Studies have shown that areas that are constantly exposed to repeated or consistent spills or leaks, like the Niger Delta, frequently exhibit long-term environmental problems as oil spills cause permanent damage to both fauna and flora. In contrast, Moffat and Linden (1995) argued that no scientific evidence has been found to support these claims. However, they fail to take into consideration the politicisation
of science and the power relations between oil companies and their host communities in the Niger Delta. Thus, given the average number of spills that have been recorded in the Niger Delta, environmental degradation due to oil spills is certainly more profound than that suggested by Moffat and Linden (1995). Nevertheless, the extent to which oil spills alone has accentuated environmental degradation in the Niger Delta remains an open debate.

Oil companies are known to acquire scarce arable lands for the construction of oil facilities or the laying of pipelines. Such land use often brings with it issues of compensation claims that very often lead to corporate-community conflict. Ibeanu (2000) argued that while the government and oil companies often portray communities as greedy, corrupt and unpatriotic as regards issues of compensation, such statements are simplistic and reductionist, in the sense that they mask the key issues at stake, and reveal very little about the relationship between the various stakeholders in the Nigerian oil industry. He argued that conflict over compensation is very often either about the type and amount, the procedures for making such payments, or the skewed nature of how compensation is distributed. These issues pertaining to environmental degradation arose partly as a result of government failure to effectively regulate the oil industry and its externalities, as well as due to the pursuit of self-serving cost cutting policies by the oil companies. The environment-political nexus to the conflict therefore hinges on the poor performance of government, and the social irresponsibility of oil companies in the Niger Delta (see Ite, 2004, 2005; Idemudia and Ite, in press).

The environment-economic nexus relates to the interactions of poverty and environmental change. While poverty in the Niger Delta is certainly not due mainly to environmental change, environmental degradation did endanger conditions of poverty as well as accentuates the impact of poverty on communities. Community conflict in the 1960s and 1970s was perhaps low as people of the region could still engage in subsistence farming and fishing and, therefore, afford to be complacent. The expansion of the oil industry since the 1970s meant oil companies acquired more lands to build installations, oil production infrastructures, and lay pipelines on the few arable land. According to Human Rights Watch (2002), since the implementation of the statute that vested land ownership on the state, over 10,000 families and another 4,500 people (in 1995 alone) lost their farmland to either installations of oil infrastructure or to oil spills. Unfortunately, poor levels of education and the capital-intensive nature of the oil industry meant most people displaced from their land could not find jobs in the oil industry. Consequently, by the 1990s the oil industry had effectively turned out to be more of a burden than a blessing, and interest in its survival was non-existent in local communities. By this time, inter- and intra-community competition for available renewable resources was now pervasive. Kemedi (2003) attributed this dimension of the conflict to the twin effect of land seizure by the state for oil companies and oil pollution by the companies.

The consequence was that widespread environmental problems in the region became a useful variable that the elites could use to mobilise the youth and gain grassroots support for their confrontation with the Nigerian state. Since everyone felt the impact of environmental degradation, environmental factors made it possible for the cost of violence to be distributed widely, therefore making the cost of inaction seem to outweigh the cost of any violent action. Environmental factors thus widen the opportunity structure for collective violence, and made the prevailing condition unacceptable. According to Jike (2004), part of the fulcrum for social
activism in the Niger Delta stems from shared experiences and aspirations by those who find themselves in deprived social conditions. Similarly, Osaghae (1995) argued that environmental degradation and in particular the destruction of farmland and fishing via oil pollution, provided a new basis for the forging of closer ties among the Ogonis to deal with a common problem during the Ogoni uprising in the 1990s.

**Social Factors**

The contribution of social factors to the conflict in the Niger Delta includes proliferation of the sense of relative deprivation, mass youth unemployment, and increased awareness that oil is a finite resource. Since independence, the number of educated people in Nigeria’s rural communities has been on a steady increase (Ibeanu, 2000; Ukeje, 2001), with an associated increase in awareness of the sense of relative deprivation. More people in the Niger Delta now realise that they were, and are, living in worse conditions than people from the majority ethnic groups (i.e. Yoruba, Hausa) in other parts of Nigeria, partially due to oil production in the Niger Delta. When elders and youth from the Niger Delta region travelled to big cities like Lagos and Abuja in search of jobs and a better life, they often brought back news and stories that the people were living in conditions not comparable with what is obtainable at home. Ibeanu (2002) asserted that political rallies such as the one organised by Abacha in 1998 graphically showed participating unemployed youth from the Niger Delta, the stark contrast between opulence in cities like Abuja, funded by oil revenue, and pervasive squalor in their home communities. This spawned a deep sense of relative deprivation, frustration, and a feeling of rejection that are expressed at the slightest opportunity through violence.

The realisation by the communities that oil was a finite resource given the experience from Oloibori where oil was first explored also brought a sense of urgency to act. According to Okoh (1996), the inhabitants of Oloibiri whose town was once a major hub of oil production now live a solitary and depressed life. Electricity, good roads and pipe-borne water are non-existent in Oloibiri. Two things remind the people that oil was drilled from their soil. The first is the presence of abandoned pipes and oil exploration equipment at the numerous sites that served as oil wells and flow stations. The second legacy is the infertility of their land. This situation has led many people in the Niger Delta to ask the question: what will be the fate of their community when oil wells finally dry up? (Okoh, 1996). Obviously, the answer to this question is not far fetched, as most people believe that history is bound to repeat itself. Hence, the Niger Delta people increasingly became less willing to sit it out and instead opt to take their future into their hands, making confrontation with the Nigerian state and the oil companies an inevitable outcome.

The problem of unemployment in the region has also been another social factor accentuating conflict in the region. Ibeanu (2002) asserted that youth unemployment in the Niger Delta is the highest in the country. As a consequence, a huge number of youth roam the streets feeling alienated and powerless – waiting to get even with the larger polity at the slightest opportunity (Jike, 2004). Unemployment made youth activism, militancy and rebelliousness a common phenomenon in the Niger Delta. In addition, these jobless youth became a useful tool for political elites pursuing self-seeking interest, which often results in clashes between different groups. Joblessness and militancy have made oil pipeline bunkering a professional occupation for many youth in the region. Proceeds are the used to buy weapons that effectively help
sustain the militarisation of the Niger Delta. For example, it has been alleged that Ijaw youths are linked with the criminal syndicates who illegally bunker substantial oil flow (anywhere between 100,000 to 300,000 barrels per day) from remote and vulnerable pipelines. This situation has enabled Ijaw youths to bring into their confrontation with the state, new assets such as rocket propelled grenades, AK-47 rifles, machine guns, satellite phones and speed boats (Cesarz et al. 2003; UNRIN, 2003). As such, social factors therefore constitute a trigger cause of the conflict in the Niger Delta, by deepening and expanding the feeling of relative deprivation among the people, and making the tool and means for confrontation with state and oil companies readily available.

According to Ronnfeldt (1997), the term ‘relative’ should be perceived in a fourfold sense, referring to either a comparison with a situation in the past, to other social groups, to what the actors feel they expect, or to a mix of the preceding three. The mix of the preceding three captures succinctly the situation in the Niger Delta. Political and economic marginalisation meant the people of the region felt worse off than people from the majority ethnic groups. The environmental change in the Niger Delta made sustaining livelihoods via traditional means untenable with no ready alternative, while the failure of the oil boom to provide modernisation meant widespread expectations were not met. Gurr (1970) noted that the greater the deprivation an individual perceives relative to expectations, the greater his discontent, the more widespread and intense is discontent among members of the community, the more likely and severe the civil strife will be. Hence, while political and economic factors provide a fertile ground for conflict formation by inciting a feeling of relative deprivation via marginalisation, environmental factors altered the opportunity structure for violence by distributing the cost of violence, and social factors provided the tools for violence. It is this interplay among these factors that has lead to the conflict.

Synthesis & Conclusions
The integrated explanation proffered here suggests that the Niger Delta conflict is a product of structural deficiencies inherent in the Nigerian state, and systemic anomalies within its society. Hence, any genuine attempt to resolve the crisis must address the root causes of the conflict that arose from structural deficiencies, proximate, and trigger causes that are due to systemic anomalies within the Nigerian society. The ramification of the foregoing understanding for conflict resolution in the Niger Delta is that addressing only one issue (e.g. political, social, economic or environmental) would not guarantee peace within the region. Rather, several interrelated problems responsible for the violence in the region must be vigorously and simultaneously addressed, given that the pursuit of development within the Niger Delta has been the dominant strategy employed by various key stakeholders to address the crisis in the region.

On the one hand, the Federal Government of Nigeria has at various times established several institutions for the purposes of development in the Niger Delta. These include the Niger Delta Development Board in 1960 and the Oil Mineral Producing Areas and Development in 1993. To further demonstrate its commitment to development in the region, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was established in 2000, with a mission to facilitate the rapid, even and sustainable development of the Niger Delta, and to transform the region into one that is economically prosperous, socially stable, ecologically regenerative and politically peaceful (NDDC, 2004).
On the other hand, the oil and gas industry is the most important private sector group in the Nigerian economy in general, and the Niger Delta, in particular. To contribute to development of the region, many of the companies (e.g. Shell, Chevron, Exxon Mobil) have well-established community development programmes through which they provide and support socio-economic development activities and initiatives for local communities in the areas of their operation in a bid to improve corporate-community relations. However, this has not been sufficient to resolve and reduce the conflicts. If anything has changed, it is the case that conflict within the region has increased in intensity and scale, with sophisticated weapons now being readily deployed by the communities in their confrontation with the Nigerian state and the oil companies. The failure of past development efforts in the Niger Delta has largely being inevitable because the key stakeholders (e.g. government, oil companies) have often not realised that addressing the Niger Delta crisis requires going beyond filling institutional gaps, or the simple provision of social infrastructure. A focus on human development on the basis of economic, social and environmental sustainability is an imperative for enduring peace to return to the Niger Delta.

As Renn et al. (1998) noted, sustainable development is a complex undertaking. A region offers reasonable homogeneity in population characteristics, in agricultural and industrial practices, and in the configuration of the environment. In addition, a region has suitable political institutions and regulatory mechanisms for legitimising sustainability by implementing measures, monitoring their observance and enforcing them. Such political institutions generally do not exist at the international level. To be realistic, approaches to sustainability must make good ecological sense and be politically and economically feasible and both aspects are best pursued within the confines of a region. This paper maintains that the pursuit of sustainable development will help address the proximate and trigger causes of the conflict in the Niger Delta. Since sustainable development is a continuing process, its pursuit and implementation in the Niger Delta must be guided by the principles of social, environmental and economic sustainability.

Among other issues, sustainable development in the Niger Delta would require innovative constitutional and institutional reforms, and some kind of ‘reinvention of the wheel’ of governance in Nigeria. The quest for ‘unity in diversity’ must be balanced against the need for a fair and just society in which individual security and freedom is guaranteed, and spaces are created for the voices of minorities in the design and implementation of national political and economic agenda. To achieve this kind of balance would require social and technical ingenuity, political will at all strata of government, and a true sense of nationalism. Conflict resolution, management and sustainable development in the Niger Delta calls for a collective response and acceptance of responsibility from the Nigerian government, the oil companies and the Niger Delta communities.

It is clear from the analysis in the preceding sections that political and economic factors constitute the root causes of conflict in the Niger Delta region. At the same time, environmental and social factors have emerged as the proximate and trigger causes of the conflict, respectively. Striking a balance between the demands of economic development and the history, culture and environment of the Niger Delta, therefore, poses a considerable challenge to all stakeholders with regard to the future level and pattern of development in the region. This is particularly the case as previous government attempts to undertake development and alleviate poverty in
the region have often ended in failure due to the absence of continuity, the isolated actions of different actors with attendant duplication, lack of complementarity, low transparency and accountability. Given the nature of the relationship among the factors responsible for the conflict, what is now required is a comprehensive approach that pursues sustainable development on the basis and principles of social, economic and environmental sustainability.

The foregoing analysis suggests that the solutions to the Niger Delta crisis does not rest only in the hands of oil multinationals, but rather in the hands of the Nigerian government at all levels (i.e. federal, state and local) and the host communities themselves. The Nigerian government needs to provide the enabling environment for sustainable development to take root in the region. The current 'buck passing' mentality and the culture of dependency now permeating the region must be transformed by carefully designed policies backed by concrete action. It is the failure to simultaneously address the triple pillars of sustainable development (e.g. economic, social and environmental) in the design of developmental efforts for the region that has contributed immensely to the reason why past attempts to resolve the Niger Delta crisis has failed to yield the desired result. Peace and sustainable development in the Niger Delta is (and will continue to be) a collective responsibility. It can only be achieved on the basis of the Nigerian government meeting its social responsibility, the oil multinationals addressing their corporate social responsibility as well as reciprocal responsibility on the part of the host communities.

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Bibliographic Note


Resisting (Nuclear) Power?
Environmental Regulation in South Africa

Carl Death

This article considers the resistance potential of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and their effects upon existing power relationships. It focuses upon the blocking of Eskom’s proposed new test nuclear reactor by the environmental NGO Earthlife Africa, at Koeberg, South Africa, the site of Africa’s only existing nuclear power plant. This was achieved through their engagement with, and contestation of, the South African EIA process. It occurred within a context of a globally uncertain future for the nuclear industry, and broader questions over the possible role of nuclear power in sustainable development. Whilst initially appearing as an example of environmental resistance against a big development project, by approaching the case through the lens of Michel Foucault’s concept of governmentality the article suggests that Earthlife Africa’s challenge reinforced existing power relationships and legitimised an essentially pro-development EIA process. This is particularly evident when considering the relationship between EIAs and established scientific authorities, and the problematic role of public participation. However, by regarding the EIA as an example of ‘bearing witness’ some sense of its resistance potential can be reclaimed. The article concludes by suggesting that a broader debate on nuclear power in South Africa is desirable, and that environmental NGOs should seriously consider the degree to which they accept and participate in the EIA process.

Environmentalists are commonly regarded as presenting a counter-cultural critique in all sorts of ways: in their rejection of a modernist domination of nature, their questioning of capitalist wealth and growth, their exposure of the inability of sovereign nation-states to deal unilaterally with global environmental problems, and their enthusiasm for environmental regulation of the free market (Hajer and Fischer, 1999; Mason, 2005). Since their introduction in the US in the 1970s, environmental impact assessments (EIAs) have emerged as a significant form of environmental regulation in numerous countries, and as such are frequently presumed to act as a constraint upon economic expansion or development, and thus as a tool of resistance against neo-liberal capitalist hegemony (Annandale and Taplin, 2003; Lawrence, 1997). Furthermore, their stress upon popular participation also implies an element of radical democracy, and a potential challenge to the power of entrenched elites (Eden, 1996). At first sight the case examined in this article seems to confirm the status of EIA as a potential technique of resistance. The environmental NGO Earthlife Africa used the EIA process to block the development of a new nuclear Pebble Bed Modular Reactor (PBMR) by Eskom, South Africa’s energy giant, at the existing Koeberg nuclear site, 30km north of Cape Town. A straightforward
good versus bad, David versus Goliath story seems self-evident here. In the context of South African environmentalism however, and the broader nuclear debate, the issues become more complicated. Furthermore, by approaching this case from a Foucauldian perspective, I argue that EIAs are a technique of *eco-governmentality*, and as such are fundamentally compatible with, rather than opposed to, the development process. By showing how their reliance upon scientific experts and public participation can both challenge and reinforce existing power relationships, this article complicates a simplistic identification of EIAs as a technique of resistance. It concludes by considering the notion of *bearing witness*, and through this reassesses the potential resistance capacity of the EIA process.

**Earthlife Africa vs. Eskom**

The African continent’s first and only nuclear power plant was built at Koeberg in the 1970s by a French-led consortium, and began operation in 1984. In March 1993 President de Klerk admitted that South Africa had built six nuclear weapons during the 1980s (Fig, 2004). It seemed that both nuclear power and atomic weapons were closely identified with the apartheid regime, and the ANC stated in 1994 that ‘the nuclear industry should be phased out in the shortest possible time’ (quoted by Lakhani, 2002:2; and Worthington, 2000:5). In the late 1990s however, nuclear development programmes were back on the agenda, with Eskom’s plans to test the new PBMR technology at Koeberg, for eventual industrial export. Environmentalists have been dismayed by this possibility, and have voiced suspicions that South Africa is being ‘asked to support the international revival of the nuclear industry through a costly experiment with public money’ (Fig, 2004:6). This also seemed to contradict hopes that South Africa would become a leading example of environmentally friendly sustainable development in the global South.

In 1994 there was much optimism that democracy would lead to a racially harmonious, economically prosperous and environmentally sustainable Rainbow Nation (Cock, 1991). The new constitution enshrined citizens’ right to a healthy environment, and EIAs, as set out in the 1998 National Environmental Management Act (NEMA), became mandatory for most major developments. However, in the context of continued massive inequality and poverty, the environmental agenda has often lost out. Trade unions, for example, have been beset by a long-standing ‘jobs versus environment’ dispute, in which environmental gains are typically set against job losses (Lukey, 2002). The team responsible for devising EIA procedures for South Africa noted that the specific form of assessment adopted was heavily influenced by the fact that ‘as in most developing countries, the promotion of economic growth and development are essential national goals in South Africa’ (Sawman, Fuggle and Preston, 1995:53). When combined with a perceived historical continuity between racist apartheid conservationists, and the largely white, middle-class environmental lobby in South Africa, environmentalism occupies a controversial and contested terrain (Khan, 2002).

It was in this context that an EIA was conducted on Eskom’s proposal to build a new test reactor at Koeberg. EIAs are conducted by consultants employed by the developer, who present their report to the South African Department for Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) for final approval. In this case Eskom appointed a panel of 13 consultants, including representatives from Poltech, Netrisk, Afrosearch, Nuclear Consulting International, Andersen, and Africon, to work on the scoping phase during 2000 and 2001, and the Environmental Impact Report
(EIR) phase, which was completed in June 2003 when the Report was approved by the Director-General of DEAT (Poltech, 2002:xvii). The scoping phase sets out the nature and extent of the proposed development, considers possible alternatives, gathers background information on the local area, identifies and provides information to interested and affected parties (I&APs), and records their comments and concerns (Wood, 1995:5-6). When the scoping report was approved by DEAT the consultants began the EIR phase, which involved studies of the social, economic, biophysical impacts and technical aspects of the development, and also incorporated comments by the I&APs.

The final 435-page Report concluded overall that it ‘identified no significant environmental risk(s) or adverse impact(s) in part or on the whole that cannot be adequately managed and mitigated over the life of the Plant’ (Poltech, 2002:xxvii). Specifically, it concluded that the information provided by the test PBMR would help guide future strategic decisions on the use of the technology, and would potentially help broaden the national energy mix for electricity supply (xx). It noted that the development did not necessarily conflict with local and regional energy policy, but that these policies needed clarification (xxi). There was a ‘pressing’ need for ‘a national policy on management of radiological waste’, but the Report concluded that its absence ‘does not represent a fatal flaw’ (xxi-xxii). The consultants asserted that ‘no radiological impacts exceeding the standards stipulated by the NNR [National Nuclear Regulator] have been found’, and that the greatest potential adverse impacts would occur during the construction phase, necessitating a construction Environmental Management Plan (EMP) (xxii). There was also a need for an operational EMP, to cover radiological surveillance programmes, disaster management systems and Eskom’s HIV/AIDS policies (xxii-xxiii). The Social Impact Assessment, conducted by Afrosearch, highlighted the importance of risk assessment and perception, and concluded that the absence of ‘a coherent national nuclear energy policy’, or particularly a ‘national policy regarding the disposal of nuclear waste’, contributed to a ‘dread risk perception’ (xxiv). There was therefore a need for better and non-biased information from both the pro- and anti-nuclear lobbies, and better communication between Eskom, the government and the public (xxv). The EIR also noted the need to maintain and upgrade Tygerberg Hospital’s ability to cope with nuclear incidents and disasters (xxv). Economically, it concluded that the PBMR would provide 1,400 local jobs during construction and 40 permanent jobs, it would support the national goals on science and technology, and would ‘have limited transient negative impact upon tourism’ (xxvi). The cumulative impacts would mainly concern the nuclear High Level Waste being stored on-site, but in general these impacts would fit into Koeberg’s existing nuclear footprint. The EIR therefore recommended that, subject to authorisation from the NNR, the implementation of the EMP, and financial provision for waste storage and plant decommissioning, DEAT should approve the development (xxvii).

In June 2003 DEAT issued its formal Record of Decision (ROD), which fully endorsed the EIA process, the conclusions of the EIR, and approved the development (Olver, 2003). However, there was opposition from NGOs and individuals to both the PBMR proposal and the way the EIA process itself had been conducted. Leading the opposition was Earthlife Africa, a non-profit, voluntary environmental organisation. In September 2003 their Cape Town branch formally challenged Eskom and the PBMR development through the law courts, beginning a High Court application to overturn the ROD, primarily on procedural grounds. In
November 2004 the judge found in favour of Earthlife Africa, and set aside the ROD, ruling that the EIA process was 'procedurally unfair' (Griesel, 2005:58, 76). Despite losing a subsequent court case over access to Eskom’s board minutes, and the initiation of a new EIA by Eskom for an expanded PBMR in 2005, Earthlife Africa have, at least temporarily, halted the PBMR development. The delays to the development, and the wider challenge to the project, have had considerable economic costs, both in terms of operational delays and in discouraging potential investors (Thomas, 2004:11).

This legalistic challenge was the tactical form of Earthlife Africa’s opposition to Eskom, but it was within the context of an attempted broader debate over nuclear power in South Africa. Opposition to the PBMR has drawn upon the strength of the environmental justice discourse in South Africa, which unites environmental concerns with social justice goals, and engages enthusiastically with the participatory opportunities offered by the EIA process (McDonald, 2002). Earthlife Africa describe themselves as ‘environmental and social justice activists’, and their approach stresses that environmentalism is more about people’s lives, than it is about nature and wildlife in isolation.¹ The environment, as expressed by the founder of South Africa’s Environmental Justice Networking Forum (EJNF):

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includes our workplace, home, hostel, town, village and city as well as areas of natural beauty.
Thinking of the environment in these broad terms makes it clear that South Africa’s high infant mortality rates, industrial accidents, road and mining accident deaths, violence and township pollution are all environmental issues (quoted in Cock, 2004:7).
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This discourse draws attention to the many ways in which the risks and damages associated with environmental degradation disproportionately impact upon the economically and socially disadvantaged – for example during debates over the location of the dump for Koeberg’s nuclear waste in 1979, consultants looking at Namaqualand ruled out areas less than 50km removed from white settlements, although there are indigenous villages (such as Paulshoek) located within 24km of the Vaalputs site they eventually selected (Fig, 1991:124). As with civil rights movements, this discourse has often campaigned through legal-activist attempts to uphold constitutional rights. In South Africa, the Bill of Rights enshrines the right of people ‘to an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being’, and it is this, together with the legal requirement to conduct EIAs and consult those affected by developments, that has encouraged environmental justice groups like Earthlife Africa to contest developments like the PBMR (Glazewski, 2002). Groups drawing upon this discourse have expressed their opposition to the PBMR most prominently in terms of safety concerns and over the dubious economic benefits of the technology.

Eskom proudly states that ‘the PBMR does not require any of the traditional nuclear safety systems that actively guard older generation reactors against radiation release’, and that it is ‘inherently safe’.² However, this assurance has been publicly questioned, especially given that the last operational reactor of this type, in Germany, was ‘closed on the orders of the safety regulator’ (Worthington, 2000:10). Earthlife Africa have called for ‘a full independent review of the plant’s status and safety’ based on ‘grave concerns’ highlighted by their own technical review (Earthlife, 2004). This was in part prompted by several incidents at the existing Koeberg nuclear plant which have raised doubts about Eskom’s safety record, and company policy on liability and disclosure of accidents. In 1998 The Cape Times uncovered a radiation accident in 1997 that had been concealed (Worthington,
2000:14). The case of Ron Lockwood also reached the national media. He is a former worker at Koeberg who was diagnosed with advanced lymphatic leukaemia several years after being persuaded to take early retirement. He subsequently uncovered evidence that, as early as 1986 (ten years before retiring), Koeberg medical officers had known of his condition, and had falsified official medical records (EJNF, 2004b). Most recently, damage caused by a loose bolt to one of the reactor turbine blades in December 2005 led to the enforced shutdown of one of the two Koeberg reactors, contributing to power shortages and blackouts in the Western Cape (Mining Weekly, 2006). This incident encouraged questioning of not only the safety but also the economic and technological reliability of nuclear power.

The profitability of the nuclear power industry has been in doubt ever since its emergence, and many environmentalists have expressed frustration with the way nuclear energy continues to absorb disproportionate amounts of state funding. In South Africa, nuclear development programmes consumed two-thirds of the Department of Minerals and Energy’s annual budget in 1997, but only generated about 5 per cent of the national electricity supply. This is in a country where, by the end of 2000, only 70 per cent of households were connected to the grid (Bond, 2002:310-333). Despite this, the PBMR is designed for its eventual industrial export potential, rather than for domestic power generation. Eskom have defended the development claiming ‘tens of thousand of permanent jobs will be created through the multiplier effect if the export potential of the PBMR is realised’, but the permanent workforce at the module will only be 40-50 people.3 Furthermore, foreign investors seem reluctant to provide funding for the project. The EIR referred to British Nuclear Fuels Ltd., even after they had effectively pulled out of the project due to their own insolvency (Poltech, 2002:2). The American giant Exelon withdrew funding for the project, arguing that the PBMR was three years behind schedule ‘and that the whole project was too speculative’, and other US investors have been almost impossible to attract after the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission refused to approve the PBMR, stating in 2001 that its design was ‘seriously flawed’ (Fig, 2004:60-61). This means that the bulk of the risk is being borne by the South African taxpayer. Independent academic research concludes that the current PBMR demonstration module ‘will inevitably be a heavily loss-making project’, and emphasises the significant risks of the project, given the doubtful world market for PBMR technology (Thomas, 2004:4-5, 29-33).

Whilst Earthlife Africa tried to raise these issues, it was made clear by the judges during the court case that ‘our decision does not express any opinion as to the merits or demerits of the proposed PBMR, in particular, nor of nuclear power in general’ (Griesel, 2005:79). Environmental groups in South Africa who have called for a parliamentary ‘nuclear summit’ to debate these broader questions have not been successful.4 The court case therefore rested upon particular bureaucratic arguments regarding EIA procedure, with Earthlife Africa arguing that EIA law had not been properly followed. The broader challenges posed by the environmental justice discourse were not addressed. Whilst this form of resistance was successful in halting the reactor, at least for the time being, it becomes more problematic when considered in the light of its implications for existing power relationships, and when the relationship between power and freedom is re-theorised.
Eco-governmentality

Michel Foucault’s concept of ‘governmentality’ has been influential in re-theorising the links between political power, domination and resistance (Foucault, 2000a; Gordon, 1991; Rose, 1999). It takes as its starting point the assertion that political power defines the extent to which ‘some men can more or less entirely determine other men’s conduct – but never exhaustively or coercively’ (Foucault, 2000b:324). For Foucault, power is everywhere, and constitutes relationships between individuals. Power produces society, forms of knowledge, institutions and even our own identities. Power is thus not merely repressive, nor is it a normatively good or bad concept. Yet there are various types of power relationships – ranging from the fluid, shifting relationships that exist between individuals, to the sedimented, coercive relationships that characterise domination. In between these extremes are forms of power Foucault describes as techniques of government, established systems for regulating the conduct of conduct (Foucault, 1997a:298-299). These techniques of government have been referred to as manifestations of governmentality, or the rationality of government.

This concept draws attention to the numerous ways in which conduct is regulated – through our internalisation of certain roles (such as the economically rational individual, or the responsible citizen) and the advice of authoritative experts, in order to render society efficient, safe and productive. Therefore, for Nikolas Rose, freedom and government are mutually dependant within traditional Liberal political thought, since ‘to dominate is to ignore or to attempt to crush the capacity for action of the dominated. But to govern is to recognise that capacity for action and adjust oneself to it’ (Rose, 1999:4). This view of power, freedom and government has implications for the way we conceive of resistance, in particular rendering concepts like emancipation and liberation problematic. Since power is productive and everywhere, and government works through freedom, a power-free utopia is clearly impossible. Thus resistance in this article implies simply an unsettling or challenging of existing power relations (Darier, 1999).

Foucault’s exposition of the concept of governmentality was primarily concerned with the way the government of a population – its security, reproduction, productivity and stability – became a concern of the nation state (Foucault, 2000a). However, the concept has been extended both spatially and in terms of scope (Larner and Walters, 2004). The concept of ‘eco-governmentality’ has been used by both Timothy Luke and Michael Goldman to describe the ways in which nature and the environment is governed by techniques of ruling from a distance (Luke, 1995, 1999b; Goldman, 2001). Here I will use the term eco-governmentality to describe the ways in which nature and the environment is governed by techniques of ruling from a distance (Luke, 1995, 1999b; Goldman, 2001). Here I will use the term eco-governmentality to describe the ways in which nature is managed, regulated and governed in order to guarantee its security, reproduction, productivity and stability. This rationality can be seen in John Locke’s modernist assumption that ‘land that is left wholly to nature, that hath no improvement of pasturage, tillage, or planting, is called, as indeed it is, waste’ (quoted by Kuehls, 1996:xii).

Eco-governmentality works through identifiable techniques and tactics, such as EIAs. These forms of power are productive in that they discursively articulate ‘the environment’ through acts of measurement, regulation, valuing, and control. For example, EIAs seek to define a particular, bounded ‘environment’, analyse its ‘baseline’ characteristics, and predict and control changes to it (Wood, 1995:6; Poltech, 2002:204, 213). As Paul Rutherford asserts, ‘regulatory ecological science does not so much describe the environment as actively constitute it as an object of
knowledge and, through various modes of positive intervention, manage and police it’ (Rutherford, 1999:56). Furthermore, EIAs rely heavily upon governmentalising strategies such as scientific consultants who frame the study, and by eliciting public participation. They are not therefore repressive, since they seek to elicit citizen involvement in order to manage nature more efficiently and rationally, but they do seek to regulate conduct through expert knowledge. The mutual interdependence of the expert and public participation is characteristic of a governmental rationality, since to be free is ‘to be bound to those engineers of the human soul who will define the norm and tutor individuals as to the ways of living that will accomplish normality’ (Rose, 1999:76).

When considered as a form of eco-governmentality therefore, EIAs seem less obviously a tool of resistance against a modernist, economic development mindset, than a key technique of modern methods of regulating the conduct of conduct, notably through their reliance upon authoritative experts and the internalisation of government. The following sections will investigate the ways in which the Koeberg EIA process both reinforced and unsettled existing power relationships.

The Scientific Expert

The science of environmental management is increasingly pervasive in the global development industry, and most obvious in the worldwide proliferation of EIAs. An EIA is carried out by environmental management consultants, ‘members of private professional firms who are hired to look after the EIA process and report its findings’, using scientific, technological, geographical and risk assessment methods (EJNF, 2004a:9). In this case a consortium of consultancy firms were involved, who investigated the development’s predicted economic, social, biophysical impacts and technical aspects, and formulated an Environmental Management Plan to control and mitigate impacts (Poltech, 2002:xv-xvii, 396). The process is often championed as an example of objective scientific enquiry that can independently report upon the impact of a development. The EIR noted that it operated on the principle that ‘the truth is told at all times even where this involves bad news’ (xxv). However, during the November 2004 court case, the judge agreed with Earthlife Africa’s claim that:

> although Eskom’s consultants were notionally ‘independent’ in the sense that they were not institutionally part of Eskom, they were employed by Eskom to act as its agent and the purpose of their engagement was to obtain the authorisation Eskom sought ... The consultants were, in other words, clearly aligned on Eskom’s side and were not independent consultants employed by the decision-maker to assist him in making his decision (Griesel, 2005:70).

This judgement casts doubt on the objectivity of almost all EIAs worldwide, since it is normal procedure for the developer to hire the consultant. EJNF advise government and local communities that they should ‘not rely unquestioningly on the independence of the consultant’ (EJNF, 2004a:11), and an Earthlife Africa activist, Muna Lakhani, observed that the ‘statistically impossible zero no-go recommendations’ that EIAs return in South Africa suggests that consultants are not really independent (Lakhani, 2001:4). The structural difficulties of achieving an objective and independent process when the consultants are being paid by the developers are considerable, as Michael Goldman concludes based on his analysis of World Bank environmental assessments, where there is ‘an enduring and comfortable relationship between the loan managers and the project’s reviewers’,
and ‘it is never easy to get support for a long-term study unless investors are certain there will be a project at the other end’ (Goldman, 2001:196-200). Perhaps even more surprising is the fact that Maurice Magugumela, the Chief Executive Officer of the South African NNR (the body responsible for setting industry nuclear safety standards), has been a long-term employee of Eskom and the PBMR’s safety and licensing manager.

Arguably even more significant than the close institutional relationship between particular consultants, developers and government, are the scientific assumptions at the heart of the EIA process which condition the scope, framework and nature of the assessment. This can be seen in the Koeberg EIA’s failure to seriously discuss the role of nuclear power in South Africa’s energy policy, the broader economic context, alternative technologies, or the disposal of radioactive waste.6 One of Earthlife Africa’s contentions against the Director-General of DEAT, Crispian Olver, in the November 2004 court case was that ‘he failed to properly address the problems posed by nuclear waste and he abdicated responsibility to properly consider safety issues by deferring to the national nuclear regulator’ (Griesel, 2005:77). Olver had previously defended this restricted scope, claiming ‘it is not the job of an impact assessment to deal with the question of whether South Africa should pursue nuclear energy, nor is it in my ambit to decide on matters of nuclear safety’ (quoted by Gosling, 2003). The health impacts of the development were based upon a survey of international literature, and safety and security information submitted by Eskom to the NNR was not made available in the EIR (Poltech, 2002:57, 126-133). Approval for the Eskom development was given despite the absence of a national policy on the management of radioactive waste – a startling example of scientific hubris and blind faith in progress (Olver, 2003:1). Furthermore, it was alleged that alternatives such as renewable energy were not actively considered, and that their viability was ‘misrepresented’ by senior Eskom representatives in public meetings (Worthington, 2000:27; Fig, 2004:65). Even more surprisingly, attempts to independently assess the economic viability of the development were frustrated by Eskom, who ‘continually refuse to answer questions on the programme’, stating that the EIA covered only the PBMR demonstration phase, not the long-term economic prospects (Thomas, 2004:4, 8-10, 14).

In general, the overly technocratic scope of EIAs is a frequent weakness, with Peter Ngobese and Jacklyn Cock targeting the South African process in particular for ‘a serious neglect of social impacts’ (Ngobese and Cock, 1995:265). Lakhani alleges that ‘socio-economic issues, health and attendant costs, etc, are generally ignored’ by EIAs in South Africa, and only a narrow definition of ‘the environment’ is applied (Lakhani, 2001:26). Many criticisms of EIAs address their project-specific focus, and their inability to consider the effects of cumulative developments (Burns and Canter, 1997).

This is hardly surprising since, particularly in the context of the South African development priorities noted above, EIAs are designed to facilitate rather than block projects. Those responsible for the South African form of EIA state that rather than ‘focussing on the negative aspects associated with the proposal’ the process should emphasize ‘the positive aspects of the proposal, identifying appropriate mitigatory measures … Furthermore, only key issues should be investigated to avoid costly delays required to investigate and prepare lengthy reports’ (Sawman, Fuggle and Preston, 1995:53-54). This view, of EIAs serving to facilitate development, was evident in the South African Government’s reaction to the court decision delaying
the PBMR: ‘the result of which is that the country’s development programme will be hamstrung, in a manner that could undermine good intentions of ensuring that environmental concerns are taken into account’ (DEAT, 2005). There is a thinly veiled threat here, warning against any environmental obstruction of the PBMR nuclear development.

These institutional and structural factors clearly pose significant limitations to scientific objectivity. However, they do not necessarily compromise the basic principles of EIA – since presumably the process could always be improved. However, Foucault’s notion of eco-governmentality draws attention to the way knowledge is always implicated in power relations, indeed ‘there is no knowledge without a particular discursive practice; and any discursive practice may be defined by the knowledge it forms’ (Foucault, 2002:210). The science of environmental management is at the heart of the EIA process, and like all forms of knowledge it works to exclude and diminish alternative knowledges, and reinforces established power relationships between ‘experts’ and ‘non-experts’ (Wynne, 1996:45). Those involved with the South African EIA process have criticised the overly technical language of documents, and note that the responsibility rests with the public to ask for more time, find and pay for their own consultant if they cannot understand the information submitted by the developer’s consultants (Lakhani, 2001:9; EJNF, 2004a:7). During the Koeberg EIA it was alleged that ‘communities in the vicinity of nuclear installations were never fully informed of proposed developments in their own languages and in a manner appropriate to their levels of literacy’ (Fig, 2004:65).

Moreover, especially when considering complex situations and risks that evade normal sensory perception (such as dangerous radiation levels or the risk of nuclear meltdown), we become entirely dependant upon scientific measurement (Beck, 1992:162). In the Koeberg EIA the refusal to consider the possible health impacts of the development on local communities was based upon Eskom’s assertion that ‘no credible scientific correlation has been established between health effects and the routine operation of commercial nuclear facilities anywhere in the world’ – which Earthlife Africa disputed with their own scientific evidence and expert testimony (Earthlife, 2004). The EIR concluded that ‘epidemiological study and health monitoring of the public for the proposed Plan is not recommended or required’ (Poltech, 2002:xiii-xiv). Despite some serious qualms, local health authorities have relied upon Eskom’s scientific testimony and no epidemiological studies on the local population have ever been carried out (Fig, 2004:34). For the sociologist Ulrich Beck, being forced to accept science’s premises in order to contest scientifically induced hazards leads to a ‘Kafkaesque experience of protest’ which is like arm-wrestling oneself (Beck, 1995:60). The hegemony of modern science is such that there is a ‘political and cultural demand for scientific rationality’ in decision-making, and alternative forms of rationality are frequently ignored or devalued (Eden, 1996:190). Brian Wynne draws attention to the ways in which ‘lay knowledge’ is ‘inadvertently but still systematically suppressed’ by expert knowledge – and uses as his example public concerns over health risks arising from living adjacent to the Sellafield nuclear plant in the UK (Wynne, 1996:46-49). Similarly, in the Koeberg case, safety concerns brought forward by Earthlife Africa and EJNF were discredited as anecdotal and unscientific when compared to the lack of a universally and scientifically established causal relationship between nuclear facilities and health effects (Earthlife, 2004; EJNF, 2004b). The EIR starkly characterises positive reactions to the proposed development as ‘responses that show a strong leaning to logic (as opposed to emotion) and a pragmatic acceptance of statistical and calculated risk
assessment based on historic real risk’, implicitly devaluing negative reactions to the development by labelling them as irrational (Poltech, 2002:89). Beck argues that ‘non-acceptance of the scientific definition of risks is not something to be reproached as irrationality in the population; but quite to the contrary, it indicates that the cultural premises of acceptability contained in scientific and technical statements on risk are wrong’ (Beck, 1992:58). Rejection of alternative knowledge-systems is what Goldman terms ‘epistemic violence’, or the ‘subjugation of subaltern knowledges’ (Goldman, 2001:203), and Lakhani criticises the EIA process in South Africa on exactly these grounds:

There is an almost total lack of incorporating indigenous knowledge – even today, indigenous knowledge seems to be seen as only that relating to herbal remedies and plants and possibly some cultural information ... The preponderance of importance placed on Northern / Western scientific knowledge, to the exclusion of all other knowledge, is a kind of scientific imperialism, which needs to change. We need to challenge the basic philosophical principles that guide Western capitalist thinking (Lakhani, 2001:10).

This fundamental reliance upon scientific expertise limits the resistance potential of techniques like EIA since, as Eden observes: ‘extended scientific knowledge may increase the number of players in the environmental policy debate but it will not change how the game is played’ (Eden, 1996:195). However, through processes like EIA which specifically create space for public comment on, and criticism of, the premises and values underlying scientific expert conclusions, some undermining of dominant power relations is possible. The once-unquestioned authority of the ‘demigods in lab coats’ can be substantially eroded (Beck, 1992:164). A healthy scepticism towards the expert should not, however, become a simplistic valorisation of greater public participation.

Public Participation

The internalisation of governance through the creation of responsible eco-citizens is a primary technique of eco-governmentality, and works through the discourse of public participation. NEMA states that ‘the participation of all interested and affected parties (I&AP) in environmental governance must be promoted’ (NEMA, 1998:2-4-f), and it is noted that the public participation part of the EIA process is the only part for which no exemptions can be applied (Olver, 2004:8). In the Koeberg EIA over 2,600 I&APs were registered and involved in the programme, including NGOs, residents, businesses, various government levels and professional institutions (Poltech, 2002:4). The authorities were satisfied that ‘the public participation process followed as part of the EIA process conformed to the requirement of the regulations’ (Olver, 2003:9). It was this point that was contested by Earthlife Africa through the courts, with the charge that ‘insufficient information was put forward by Eskom to enable any meaningful participation’.7

Earthlife Africa’s central claim in the High Court was that their efforts to obtain access to relevant documents were repeatedly denied, and they were not allowed a proper hearing from the decision-maker, the Director-General of DEAT. According to the judge, the Director-General did not consider the extensive submissions made by Earthlife Africa on the draft EIR when reaching his decision (Griesel, 2005:12, 15, 18). The final EIR was not made available to I&APs for comment on, despite being ‘substantially different’ from the draft, with the Director-General unambiguously stating that Earthlife Africa ‘cannot comment on the final EIR as they had an
opportunity to previously comment on the draft’. The judge found this to be in contradiction to the spirit of the EIA regulations, which ‘provide for full public participation in all the relevant procedures contemplated in these regulations’ (56, 58 and 59). Others involved with the process also criticised Eskom’s openness and provision of information (Thomas, 2004:8-9, 38; Fig, 2004:65).

In this case Earthlife Africa won in the High Court because insufficient public participation was permitted by Eskom. However, a Foucauldian approach cautions against the simplistic belief that more participation equals a greater resistance potential. In particular we must consider who participates, what sort of participation is occurring, and the effects upon power relations.

Consultants hired by the developer are required to advertise public meetings, invite groups to register themselves as I&APs, and disseminate information to these groups (Poltech, 2002:375-384). In this case Earthlife Africa were the most prominent I&AP, but other environmental groups also participated in public meetings, including the Endangered Wildlife Trust, and the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (Kupka, 2001). Local community involvement was more patchy – the original protesters against the Koeberg nuclear facility in the late 1970s were apparently estate agents concerned about impacts on property values in the upper middle class white suburb of Duynefontein, and far better able to represent themselves than residents of nearby Atlantis, ‘a bleak dormitory settlement on the West coast, established by the apartheid government to house working class Coloured people employed in low paid government-subsidised industries’ (Fig, 2004:30). Since then, however, engagements with and protests against Eskom’s nuclear developments have mushroomed:

The proposal to develop the PBMR has regalvanised the anti-nuclear movement in South Africa as never before. The focus of the movement has spread rapidly from Koeberg to a critique of all aspects of the nuclear fuel chain. Its epicentre has extended from the Western Cape to embrace campaigns in Gauteng, North-West, Northern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Residents of Atteridgeville, Mamelodi, Diepsloot, Brits, Pelindaba, Atlantis, Table View, and various Namaqualand communities have begun to mobilise more actively. The campaign has also been taken to the port of Durban, entry point for future imports of enriched uranium, and communities all along the N3 highway to Pelindaba (66).

Whilst this is encouraging from the point of view of environmental resistance, there were problems with the participatory process. Lakhani notes that the National Union of Mineworkers (an Eskom union) was not invited to the EIA focus group stage, and alleges that the overall number of registered I&APs was relatively small, the same as that for a powerline in Gauteng province (Lakhani, 2001:2, 5).

Perhaps more significantly, the whole notion of participation as advanced in some ‘social learning’ perspectives is theoretically underdeveloped, and tends to posit a monolithic, homogenous state against a relatively unified ‘civil society’ consisting of discrete but homogenous, static and harmonious ‘communities’ (Wilkins, 2003:402; O’Riordan, 1996:145). This understanding of communities is simplistic, and straightforward appeals for community participation tend to conceal the power relationships and diversity of interests within communities (Cooke and Kothari, 2001:6). In the Koeberg process it was noted that ‘no provision has been made for balanced input at the workshops, or for effective access for (previously) disadvantaged communities’ (Worthington, 2000:27). Thus ‘opportunities to engage with a decision-making process enable relatively privileged groups to defend their position...
against the interests of less articulate communities' (Connelly and Richardson, 2005:404). The identification and involvement of I&APs in the EIA process is usually an unproblematised, under-theorised, bureaucratic process of groups identifying and submitting themselves in response to media announcements of an upcoming assessment, and the democratic accountability of these groups is highly questionable (Poltech, 2002:377; Mason, 2005:59-65).

Even when involved in the process, an equal voice for all participants is impossible. According to the South African Government, public participation means ‘furnishing interested and affected parties and the public with an opportunity to comment on, or raise issues relevant to’ environmental policies (Olver, 2004:8). This provision makes no promises that public comments will be listened to or even considered in the decision-making stage. There have been allegations that some voices are being ignored or stifled in the process, for example in the power relationships between local and national government:

> Until recently a number of Cape Town city councillors have expressed disquiet about the PBMR plans. The city council was highly critical of the EIA report’s conclusion that the PBMR would have ‘no significant environmental risks or adverse impacts’. However, following DEAT’s conditional approval of the EIA, and the summoning to Pretoria of some critical councillors, the city has been much quieter on this question, and there has been speculation that the national government has instructed it to accept the project, or at least defer criticism until after the April 2004 elections (Fig, 2004:66).

Thus EIAs can draw upon certain opinions, thereby legitimating the process by invoking ‘public’ participation, only to then stifle or ignore those views at the decision-making stage. EJNF warn I&APs to be aware of ‘planning decisions happening behind closed doors and EIAs being used to justify projects’ (EJNF, 2004a:14). Despite opposition from the environmental groups involved in the EIA, the Koeberg development was approved by DEAT. By participating in the EIA at all, Earthlife Africa and others were legitimating a process that may have anyway had a pre-determined outcome. This is suggested by the fact that by mid-2000 over 120 million Rand had been directly spent on the project in ‘a history of intensive state subsidy’ (Worthington, 2000:5-7). Eskom state on their website that the South African Government committed ‘a significant amount’ of funding to the project in the 2004 mid-term budget, and that ‘the Minister of Public Enterprises, Mr Alec Erwin, stated an intent to eventually produce 4,000 MW to 5,000 MW of power from pebble bed reactors in South Africa’. In the aftermath of Earthlife Africa’s court victory, Eskom have scaled up the PBMR development and begun a new EIA process (Mawatsan, 2006). Without a broader debate on nuclear power, the result of Earthlife Africa’s resistance may have only been to delay rather than block the development, and in so doing legitimate the EIA process.

Theorists warn that ‘bureaucratic agencies can turn participation techniques into tools for citizen co-optation’ (Bartlett and Kurian, 1999:423), and that ‘the very act of inclusion, of being drawn in as a participant, can symbolise the exercise of power and control over an individual’ (Kothari, 2001:142). By implication therefore, a refusal to participate becomes an act of irresponsibility, and there is ‘an implicit notion of deviancy for those who choose not to participate’ (148). Furthermore, the extension of participation also implies some shifting of responsibility from the state-national-structural level to the community-individual level, and thus ‘an emphasis on the micro level of intervention can obscure, and indeed sustain, broader macro level inequalities and injustice’ (Cooke and Kothari, 2001:14). Whilst this in one
context can be (rightly) seen as empowering, it also works to absolve institutions of responsibility, as well as excuse them from inaction on larger scale problems such as global warming or the disposal of radioactive waste, which cannot be solely dealt with on an individual level.

The manifold power relationships and vested interests involved in EIA processes tend to undermine the optimism of EIA practitioners and theorists that ‘through the use of reason and understanding, compromises on plans and work towards solutions which all sides can accept may be achieved’ (Wilkins, 2003:408; see also Bartlett and Kurian, 1999:422; and Kakonge, 1998:297). Whilst there may be a procedural value to greater participation, this is not a sufficient condition for consensus on political issues. For Adams, the stress on participation is evidence of a naïve failure to ‘address the political economy of the development process’ and consider concrete issues of the inequality of resource distribution (Adams, 2001:115).

Such arguments are frequently and forcefully stated by opponents of participatory or reformist resistance, such as Patrick Bond who concludes that ‘militancy pays, it seems, because mild-mannered lobbying and project or policy-work inputs by experts are, simply, incapable of raising the costs of business as usual’, and that ‘reformist and technicist critiques … are clearly insufficient to foster momentum for change’ (Bond, 2002:415, 420). These critiques tend to polarise tactics as either radical, where ‘militant environmentalists present sweeping critiques of contemporary society, live lives which challenge widespread assumptions about meaningful experience, and undertake actions which concretely enfeeble forces which harm the Earth’; or reformist, which involve ‘compromising principles in an effort to gain political legitimacy and to be pragmatic within a context of plausible policy options’ (Wapner, 1995:301-304). From this perspective, Earthlife Africa’s reformist opposition did more harm than good.

Despite this, there is still a sense that a stated commitment to participation may well open up some sort of political space for resistance; even Uma Kothari remains hopeful that ‘there is a possibility of resistance or subversion through people’s performances in participatory exercises’ (Kothari, 2001:151). There is the possibility that the discursive spaces which participatory processes open up can be used in ways that are unexpected, and that undermine existing power relations. The openness of liberal governmentality to internal critique is both its greatest strength and greatest weakness.

**Bearing Witness**

Despite the inadequacies of the EIA processes, their reliance upon established scientific discourses and experts, and the inability of participatory techniques to overcome established power relationships, it remains clear that Earthlife Africa did significantly disrupt Eskom’s nuclear programme, and has introduced alternative dimensions (environmental, social, and health) to the nuclear debate that may threaten the project’s overall future (Thomas, 2004:11). The November 2004 court case was highly visible, as was recognised by the judge: ‘the very sensitive and controversial issue of nuclear power, which potentially affects the safety and environmental rights of vast numbers of people … has generated considerable local and national interest’ (Griesel, 2005:32). Furthermore, the EIR acknowledged that:
a proportion of the public have little faith in the ability of regulatory mechanisms or Eskom’s assurances that members of the public are at no significant risk to radioactivity. For this reason, Eskom’s visible compliance with the measures for ensuring that the public is at no significant risk is deemed to be of utmost importance. It is required that such compliance is made ‘visible’ to surrounding communities on a participative basis through the development of a community-based environmental indicators project (Poltech, 2002:74).

Through this demand for visibility, EIAs do potentially provide an opportunity for various groups to contest developments on different grounds from those usually debated. This is a form of bearing witness, the strategic approach of environmental groups like Greenpeace.9 It rests on the assumption that ‘having observed a morally objectionable act, one cannot turn away in avoidance. One must either take action to prevent further injustice or stand by and attest to its occurrence’ (Wapner, 1995:307). Bearing witness is a central part of the discourse of environmental justice, which seeks to introduce considerations of justice and morality into the technical and instrumental discourse of the scientist and environmental manager.

By the act of assessing and measuring environmental (and social) impacts of developments, developers and the state implicitly take responsibility for those impacts. It is possible for them to cover-up, or not act upon the assessments they receive, but having carried out an assessment they have no justification for avoiding their conclusions. South African environmentalists stress that the ‘government is not allowed to ignore what an EIA says about the negative impacts on the environment’ (EJNF, 2004a:13). Assessments may be flawed, narrow-minded and partial, but they open up the fields of environmental and social impacts as possible sites of contestation and resistance. Beck observes that what cannot be predicted cannot be prevented, and conversely by attempting to predict impacts (through an EIA) there is an assertion of the desire to control and prevent (Beck, 1992:34). This is certainly an extension of the modern ‘will to power’ whereby, according to Descartes, humans are ‘lords and possessors of Nature’ (quoted in Lanthier and Olivier, 1999:67), but an assertion of such control means thereafter it is impossible to avoid action (or conversely blame for damaging consequences arising from inaction). In this sense bearing witness is itself a form of governmentality, but one which, to paraphrase Foucault, is not necessarily bad, but certainly dangerous (Foucault, 1997b:256). One of its strengths, but also one potential danger, is specifically the moral and ethical element of the environmental justice discourse. Although this is positive in relation to the apparently amoral, technocratic and instrumentalist rationality of techniques of eco-governmentality, it can always threaten to descend into the antagonistic and absolutist language of right and wrong, or good and evil (Harvey, 1999:175-176).

Arguments over the resistance potential of certain tactics and strategies tend to oscillate between those favouring reform, and those preferring revolution. The resistance potential of processes like EIA raise this question directly, since they represent a modernist desire to monitor, predict and control. Low and Gleeson ask ‘if modernity is characterised by the striving for control over nature and people, and modernity, with its increased capacity for control, is also producing the ecological crisis, then how can we possibly resolve the crisis by adding more control?’ (Low and Gleeson, 2001:9) Yet an outright rejection of modernity is clearly impossible, since ‘philosophers have made us aware that we cannot describe the period in which we happen to live, since it is from within its rules that we speak and think, and since it provides the basis for our descriptions and our own history’ (Escobar,
In working through the law courts and with the government, Earthlife Africa are clearly not revolutionaries, but neither can they be described as fully co-opted. Likewise, EIAs are neither a clear-cut tool of counter-capitalist resistance, nor an ineffectual example of corporate greenwashing. As Foucault advised in response to precisely the same debate over reform versus revolution:

*We need to escape the dilemma of being either for or against. One can, after all, be face to face, and upright [debout et en face]. Working with a government doesn’t imply either a subjection or a blanket acceptance. One can work with and be intransigent at the same time* (Foucault, 2000c:455-456).

**Conclusion**

The future role of nuclear power in global sustainable development, and particularly in the development of the industrialising countries, is contentious and the debate is often highly emotive. The World Bank’s policy on nuclear energy is sceptical, refusing to fund nuclear power plants because of their costs and risks, and labelling them ‘white elephants’ (Worthington, 2000:19). Yet with the mounting evidence of human-induced global climate change many governments and even environmentalists have begun to reconsider nuclear power as a potentially cleaner alternative to fossil fuels. However, the unresolved issue of radioactive waste disposal, as was highlighted by Earthlife Africa in their comments on the Koeberg EIA process, remains problematic, and environmental justice activists have warned against the exploitation of poorer countries as the dumping ground for the industrialised world’s nuclear waste (Ibid. p. 18; see also Fig, 2004: chapter 6; and Lakhani, 2002:24). Doubts over the safety record of PBMR technology, and the existing reactors at Koeberg (re-ignited by the reactor shutdown in December 2005), also stir up the recurring spectre of nuclear catastrophe, and questions over whether the benefits of nuclear power outweigh the risks of another Chernobyl or Three Mile Island. The Koeberg PBMR development could well be a focal point for the nuclear debate not only in South Africa, but also for the future role of the nuclear industry in Africa, other industrialising countries, and in global sustainable development.

Given the environmental justice discourse’s antipathy to nuclear power, the blocking of the Koeberg development by Earthlife Africa can appear at first as a successful example of environmental resistance against a modernist and capitalist drive for power (quite literally). However, by re-thinking the nature of political power through an engagement with Foucault, the EIA process can be re-interpreted as an example of a modernist rationality of control and manipulation, or eco-governmentality. In the types of scientific knowledge it relied upon, and the technical scope which excluded broader policy, safety or waste disposal questions, the Koeberg EIA reinforced existing power relationships, whereby expert knowledge renders lay knowledge invalid, and political issues are reduced to technical problems. Moreover, the limits on access to information, lack of influence upon decision-making, and potential for legitimising development through the co-opting of opposition complicate what is often simplistically presumed to be a straightforward correlation between greater public participation and resistance. Despite these caveats, Earthlife Africa’s challenge has again raised the nuclear debate in South Africa, as well as setting higher standards for openness and debate during the EIA process, and thus may be seen as a form of resistance through bearing witness. The balance of achieving effective environmental resistance, whilst neither becoming co-opted by existing power relationships nor becoming irrelevant, is extremely difficult,
far more so than is often assumed. Earthlife Africa’s temporary and partial success can only be furthered by a broader South African national debate over the future role of nuclear power, together with some serious qualifications of the degree to which environmental organisations accept the EIA process itself.

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Endnotes

1. www.earthlife.org.za
2. www.pbmr.co.za
3. Ibid.
5. Most World Bank development projects are now required to have EIAs conducted on them, and environmental science graduate degrees are widespread (Luke, 1999a).
6. See the qualifications of, and limits to, the report’s scope (Poltech, 2002:ii, vii-viii, x-xi, 2, 31-32, 63-65, 67-69, 191, and 350). Interestingly, the report does cover some broader issues, such as HIV/AIDS and the development’s impact upon tourism.
8. www.pbmr.co.za

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The Politics of Urban Water Reform in Ghana

Lindsay Whitfield

This article highlights the interaction between the domestic political system and the aid system in Ghana and the implications of this interaction for democratic governance. It is illustrated using the example of urban water reform as a case study of the policymaking process and captures the complexities of this interaction which the ‘choiceless democracy’ thesis fails to do. The term ‘aid system’ refers to all aid organisations and their regular operations within a specific country, where aid organisations include both official bilateral and multilateral agencies as well as international NGOs. The article examines the government’s plan for water privatisation and the public debate and opposition that it continues to generate. The politics of urban water reform is revealing about the politics of economic reform more generally.

The IMF and World Bank did not alter their structural adjustment programme following transitions to democracy on the African continent in the early 1990s. The Bretton Woods institutions were initially criticised for bolstering authoritarian regimes in Africa. With the advent of multiparty elections, these international institutions were then criticised for creating ‘choiceless democracies’ because the policymaking process was still externalised and because elected governments had little policy choice under structural adjustment (Mkandawire, 1999). The Bank and Fund did not reform their policy-based lending approach (i.e. conditionality) in order to adapt their lending operations to the new democratic dispensation. This reform came only at the turn of the century, and it came only partly in response to criticisms of undermining democracy in aid receiving countries. Even then the claim that the new Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) approach constitutes a real change from past practices is disputed (Whitfield, 2005b). For an argument that the PRSP approach and the emphasis on poverty reduction and good governance do mark a shift in the aid system from a ‘conservative neoliberalism’ to an ‘inclusive neoliberalism’, see Craig and Porter (2006).

Even if PRSPs do constitute a significant shift in World Bank and IMF operational procedures, has this change addressed the key problem of reconciling foreign aid modalities with representative democracy in recipient countries? The fact that institutions in African countries do not function according to the broad tenets of what is defined as representative democracy, or to Dahl’s (1998) somewhat less demanding theory of polyarchy, does not mean that democracy in African countries should be dismissed as a sham, a façade for a political system which functions by other rules, such as neo-patrimonialism. African democracies are still young compared to the West’s history with building democracy, and they are still works in progress. Democracy is arguably a process rather than an achieved form of government:

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Democracy is a continuing battle to hold those in power accountable, to protest the liberties of citizens and residents, to secure effective political representation, and to give people a say over the ways they are governed and the decisions which affect their lives. It involves defining, defending and creating the institutions and the cultures which promote these goals and facilitate debates about public issues, including the nature and condition of democratic politics (Williams, 2003:343).1

The nature of representative democracy in African countries and the performance of their democratic governments must be understood and evaluated within the context of the foreign aid regime. The aid system is not the only factor affecting the functioning of democracy in Africa, and arguably not the most important, but it is a significant factor that tends to be overlooked by scholars of democracy studies and by development practitioners. There is relatively little research on and exposition of the broad political impact of aid on democracy in African countries. The focus has been too narrow, looking either at the impact of democracy assistance or at multiparty elections and human rights.

This article highlights the interaction between the domestic political system and the aid system in Ghana and the implications of this interaction for democratic governance. It captures the complexities of this interaction, which the ‘choiceless democracy’ thesis fails to do. The term ‘aid system’ refers to all aid organisations and their regular operations within a specific country, where aid organisations include both official bilateral and multilateral agencies as well as international NGOs.

Aid dependency in the context of representative democracy considerably shapes the contours of contemporary politics in Ghana. Official development assistance to Ghana ranged between 24 and 33 per cent of government expenditure between 2002 and 2005.2 It is difficult to get an accurate picture of aid dependency across Africa using aid flow statistics, as figures and comparisons can be misleading. Furthermore, aid dependency is much more than budget dependence or aid as a percentage of gross domestic product. Much aid does not even go through the government’s budget or through the government at all. A broader sense of aid dependency emerges from the pervasiveness of aid organisations within the country and their effect on the perceptions and behaviour of Ghanaian actors, both state and non-state. Political reality in Ghana is more accurately captured by what we call the multiple interfaces of politics, rather than the state-(civil) society paradigm.3 This term refers to the multiple interfaces of political interactions among the Ghanaian government, Ghanaian citizens, donors and international NGOs, as well as within these different categories, and the various alliances they form.4 The policymaking process is a good window through which to view this multiple interfaces of politics.

In this article, we focus on the process of reforming the urban water sector and government’s policy of private sector participation. The process of urban water sector reform provides an apposite perspective from which to observe the relations among these categories of actors. The policymaking process spans about a decade, beginning in 1995 and ending in December 2004. Commencing not long after the return to multiparty constitutional rule in 1993, the process captures developments in the political system such as opening up policymaking beyond a small group in the executive, a change in ruling party after the 2000 elections, diminishing fear amongst citizens to criticize government policy and an increased use of media as a vehicle for public policy discussion. The National Coalition Against Privatization of Water and its criticism of the government’s policy of private sector participation
illustrate the substance and features of politics today. Finally, the reform process illuminates the pervasive role of donors in policymaking.

The story of urban water reform in Ghana will be told in the following way. We start by explaining the global context in which the debate over water privatisation in Ghana must be understood. We then present the story in three episodes. The first episode outlines the process of reform from its initiation throughout the progress of the private sector participation (PSP) policy under the Rawlings governments (1993-1996, 1997-2000). Episode two begins with the inauguration of the Kufuor government (2001-2004) which continues to support the PSP policy and describes the rise of the National Coalition Against Privatization of Water as the main antagonist. Episode three highlights the effects of global events on the reform process in Ghana and the story’s denouement. In concluding, we explain what this study of urban water reform tells us about contemporary policymaking and the politics surrounding it, as well as what this means for democracy in Ghana. This is based on interviews and documents collected during research in Ghana from April through September 2003.

Before moving on, it is necessary to clarify terminology regarding the forms of private sector involvement in water provision. While the textbook definition of privatisation stresses the transfer of ownership of assets from the public sector to a private operator, privatisation has been employed more broadly to mean the transfer of control over assets into private hands. We use the term ‘water privatisation’ to mean the partial or total transfer of managerial control of a water undertaking from the public sector to a private operator, usually a transnational corporation (Lobina and Hall, 2003:4). ‘Privatisation’ has been replaced in the policy literature and in the discourse of donors and recipient governments with ‘private sector participation’ or ‘public-private partnerships’. This substitution may indicate recognition of the narrow focus on ownership of privatisation policies in the 1980s and early 1990s and also respond to controversies stemming from the concept of privatisation and its implementation (Castro, 2002). Privatisation as defined here overlaps with the term private sector participation, which can assume a variety of forms (Finger and Allouche, 2002:81-2). In a concession, private operators arrange the financing and construction or rehabilitation of a facility and operate it for the period of the concession. They receive compensation through user charges. Under a lease, private operators take over the operation and maintenance of the system and are compensated with an agreed portion of the revenues. The public sector retains responsibility for system expansion and replacement of major assets. With a management contract, a private firm is hired to operate the utility with its own management team. Compensation is costs plus an operating fee. The contracting public sector institution usually retains most of the operational and commercial risks of the utility.

**The Global Push towards Water Privatisation**

The global private market in water services expanded rapidly during the 1990s, largely due to the creation of new markets in developing countries. The push towards private provision of water emanated from disappointing returns on investments made in the water sector by development banks, in contrast to perceived success of French transnational water corporations in France and in former French colonies and of the privatised water sector in the United Kingdom. Private sector participation is viewed by commercial and development banks as the means to
simultaneously open up water business worldwide, rapidly develop water services in developing countries and reduce risks to project viability (Seppala and Hukka, 2004:42-56). The 1992 United Nations Conference on Water and the Environment, which confirmed that ‘water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognised as an economic good’, was crucial for the expansion of the global water market (quoted in Castro, 2002:27) – the implication being that water should be provided according to commercial principles. Private sector investment in water between 1990 and 1997 increased 7,300 per cent on 1974-1990 investment levels (Morgan, 2004).

The global water industry is characterised by a marked concentration, joint ventures and difficulty of entry (Finger and Allouche, 2002: chapter 4; Lobina and Hall, 2003). In 2002, ten transnational corporations dominated the private market. Two French transnationals, Vivendi and Suez, controlled over half of the market. Attempts by Azurix, a company of the former US energy magnate Enron, failed to break into the water market, partly because of its inability to compete with the bids of these leading corporations. In 2000, German conglomerate RWE (Rheinisch-Westfälisches Elektrizitätswerk Aktiengesellschaft) had to take over UK-based Thames Water in order to establish itself in the market. Many of these transnationals display collusive behaviour, uniting their market power through coordination in order to restrain the action of other competitors.

Private sector involvement in the provision of water services is advocated by all major international lending agencies and most bilateral donor agencies (Seppala and Hukka, 2004). Official development aid and private investment capital have become increasingly intermeshed through the worldwide promotion of public private partnerships in the water sector (Morgan, 2004). A global network of actors supporting water privatisation emerged through initiatives linking multinational lending institutions and transnational water companies (Hall and de la Motte, 2004:7-12). Multilateral donor agencies promote water privatisation by combining pressure and persuasion through their ability to channel aid and investment finance to borrowing countries and through the creation of several advisory and promotion mechanisms (Castro, 2002; Lobina and Hall, 2003). The World Bank in particular has fostered the growth of transnational water corporations in the global water sector through its water management policy which emphasises private sector provision and through its predominant role in financing infrastructure in developing countries (Finger and Allouche, 2002: chapters 3 & 4).

Most privatised water services in Africa were located in former French colonies where water concessions had been granted to French transnational corporations. Expansion of the global water market led to a sharp rise in proposed and actual water privatisations in the late 1990s. There is limited published research on the impact of water privatisation in African countries. The most accessible work is produced by the Public Services International Research Unit (PSIRU), but this research is confined to countries where privatisation has been in place the longest – Côte d’Ivoire, Senegal, Gabon and Guinea. These studies conclude that privatisation has had a limited impact on the performance of water utilities, with performance depending on their condition when privatised and the wider economic context (Bayliss, 2001; 2002). Privatisation has generally failed to improve the financial status of the water sector, except for loans from donors received as a result of implementing private sector participation. In the case of Côte d’Ivoire, the private operator increased operational efficiency and technology, but it has not been able to
overcome problems of access of the urban poor and investment needed to provide such access (Finger and Allouche, 2002:154-8).

Water privatisation is not just a policy advocated for developing countries, but part of a global vision affecting Eastern and Central European countries as well as municipalities in the United States (Hall, 2002). As water privatisation transverses the globe, popular resistance to it has emerged, composed of diverse groups and characterised by a variety of forms of protest. The global campaign against water privatisation is a fluid network, originating from a larger social movement which mainstream media calls the ‘anti-globalisation movement’, but which is more accurately described as protesting corporate globalisation and as comprised of several different movements (Mertes, 2004). The global operations of transnational corporations create the nodes of this transnational movement, as disparate groups are linked by their similar relationships to corporations. Local groups opposing privatisation and deregulation link their campaigns to groups at the national and international levels, situating their local issues within the international economic agenda being enforced by the current global economic governance structure. The failure of national political parties and electoral politics to affect policies concerning global economic governance has led these activists to engage directly with transnational institutions.

The World Water Forum, organised by the World Water Council, is the main forum at which proponents of water privatisation push their agenda, so it has become the centre of attention for those opposing it. At the Third World Water Forum in 2003, the international coalition against water privatisation circulated a statement emphasising that the World Water Council is an unrepresentative and undemocratic body that derives its influence from an exclusive membership of international financial institutions, transnational water corporations, and non-governmental organisations tied to these interests. It also claimed that water is a public trust rather than a commodity and that the management of water services must not only remain in public hands, but be enhanced to include community and worker participation in order to democratise decision-making processes and ensure transparency and accountability. As will be shown, these claims echo through the arguments of the Ghana National Coalition against the Privatization of Water.

**Episode One: A Closed Discussion**

Although all actors acknowledged the problems plaguing the public water utility Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation (GWSC) and the need for reforms in the water sector, multiple solutions were available and the process of selecting the path of reform was contested, if rather late in the process. At the centre of contention are questions about why the public company failed and whether the only solution is private sector participation. Proponents of private sector participation claim that past attempts to reform the utility failed. A review of these attempts and of the problems facing GWSC is necessary before continuing. Economic decline during the late 1970s and early 1980s resulted in a severe deprivation of investment in the water sector and the loss of skilled manpower from GWSC leading to an unprecedented decline in operational efficiency and leaving one-third of the systems inoperable. Currency devaluations as part of structural adjustment caused further deterioration in the water systems and a backlog of capital works. The government was subsidising about half of GWSC’s operating expenditure and had placed a ceiling on the tariff level. In 1986, these subsidies were withdrawn and
GWSC was allowed to increase tariffs by 25 per cent annually. Since then its revenues have covered operating expenses but have not produced an annual positive income. Several reforms of GWSC were attempted with financial assistance from the World Bank. These projects focused mainly on rehabilitating and expanding the system in the capital city area, with projects in the 1980s and 1990s adding elements to address ‘institutional development’, such as seconding the services of five expatriate higher level staff for several years, a twinning arrangement with Thames Water (UK), and reforms using a foreign public administration consulting firm. Despite these reforms, GWSC continued to operate at a loss, with large percentages of unaccounted for water due to leakages and poor revenue collection. In short, financial recovery was hindered by the exodus of managers and professionals in all sectors in Ghana, a lack of adequate financing, and a lack of commitment of GWSC staff and external parties engaged in the managerial reforms as well as by political interference and corruption.

The decision to pursue private sector participation was taken in the context of this history of reform and the global push for water privatisation. In 1994, an Action Plan for restructuring the water sector was agreed between the Ministry of Works and Housing and the World Bank (World Bank, 1994). The Plan began with contracting consultants to assess the feasibility of restructuring options, of which introducing private sector participation was stated for possible consideration. The Ministry commissioned Halcrow, a UK-based consultancy firm, with terms of reference stipulating that it examine five options: (1) converting GWSC into a public limited liability company with decentralisation and private sector participation in selected key activities; (2) joint venture between GWSC and external company(s) in a new operating company; (3) GWSC produces and sells bulk for private sector distribution; (4) lease arrangement(s) of self-contained systems from source to end user; and (5) make the capital city area and largest urban centres into self-sustaining commercial entities and commercialize the remaining regions in a down-sized GWSC. The Halcrow Report recommended the lease arrangement, because it would introduce competition between operators and because it was among the options showing the best financial returns. International operators were claimed to bring efficiencies through the application of expertise and greater access to investment capital. Transnational water companies contacted by the consultants expressed very little interest, but the consultants believed that ‘given appropriate returns and with suitable packaging and marketing, it should be possible to make the opportunity for private sector participation sufficiently attractive’.

In 1995, the Halcrow Report was discussed at a workshop attended by members from relevant Ministries, Parliament, relevant state commissions and institutes, GWSC, the committee established for the restructuring process, as well as donors, private water operators and maintenance contractors from Ghana, UK, France and South Africa, two international NGOs (Action Aid and World Vision), and Halcrow consultants. Government representatives stressed the government’s desire to attract capital from the private sector and to divest itself as much as possible from operations in the water sector. The workshop proceedings indicate that the majority of participants were not interested in restructuring within a public utility framework. They affirmed the Report’s recommendation, which was then adopted by the Rawlings government. The government’s new policy of private sector participation included the following objectives: increasing access to water, making the water sector sustainable, achieving cost recovery from users, improving sector management and relieving the government of the financial burden of future capital
expenditures.\textsuperscript{11} An Advisory Committee was established to implement the lease arrangement, which subsequently created a Water Sector Restructuring Secretariat (Secretariat) to carry out the daily work.

Louis Berger, a foreign consulting firm, was commissioned to assist the Secretariat in developing the framework for implementing the lease arrangement. The Berger Report notes ‘uncertainty regarding the exact meaning of ‘lease arrangement’ amongst the various authorities in the Ghana water sector’, particularly surrounding the source of capital expenditure for future investment.\textsuperscript{12} Under typical lease arrangements private operators are not responsible for investing their own capital. Since one of the main motivations of the private sector participation policy was to secure finance for the water system which the government could not provide, the Advisory Committee selected an ‘enhanced lease contract’, where both the government and the private operator would bring capital investment. It was also decided to divide the urban water systems into two units to be run by different operators. The private operators would receive an operator’s fee and a guaranteed level of return on their investment to be determined through the bidding process (i.e. the lowest bid). The amount of investment required from the private operators would be stated in the bidding documents and confirmed in the contract with the selected bidder.

Water privatisation was only pursued for urban water systems. A new policy for rural and small town water provision was adopted through a process running parallel to the one described here. GWSC was restructured by making the community water and sanitation division an autonomous agency in 1998 and converting the remaining utility into a limited liability company, Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL), in 1999. The new policy emphasised community management and private sector participation, but in this case the private sector meant Ghanaian small businesses and local NGOs. However, rural water reform is another story and outside the scope of this article.

Preparation of the bidding documents took a long time. During the pre-qualification phase between 1998 and 2000, all the main transnational water corporations submitted bids.\textsuperscript{13} Just as the process was nearing completion in 1999, it was thrown off course by a scandal related to the government’s mishandling of a bid by Azurix.\textsuperscript{14} The World Bank threatened to withdraw its project financing because the government planned ‘to award a major contract under this programme in a non-transparent manner’ (World Bank, 2000a:31). Public protest over the deal led the government to withdraw the offer to Azurix, and the whole bidding process began again.

In 2000, the government held a donors conference to secure commitments for investment in urban water. A product of the conference was a plan to facilitate concessional financing to the sector, in which an estimated $400 million would be mobilised for rehabilitation and expansion in the first five years of the lease contract.\textsuperscript{15} Of this amount, the World Bank was to provide $100 million for rehabilitation of infrastructure through an Urban Water Restructuring project loan. However, the World Bank would not finalise the loan until the government had concluded contract negotiations with the private operators.

Before turning to the second episode of the reform process, we address the question of conditionality. Persons involved in the process stressed that the Rawlings government had of its own volition decided to invite private sector participation and
selected the form of that participation. They acknowledge that donors, led by the World Bank, demanded substantial restructuring in the sector before providing further funding, but claim that the Bank did not push a particular option. Nevertheless, one of the reasons for adopting the lease arrangement was to facilitate the continued flow of low-cost bilateral funding into the sector. Furthermore, ‘progress on divestiture of urban water services’ was a condition in the World Bank’s Country Assistance Strategy for Ghana 2000-2003 and in the Interim PRSP 2000-2002 (World Bank, 2000a: Annex 7; Republic of Ghana 2000:31). Several donors conditioned grants on progress with private sector participation and cost recovery policies. Bank and Fund lending arrangements from 1999 to 2003 included achieving ‘full cost recovery’ and automatic tariff adjustments in the utilities, a requirement which also served as a HIPC completion point condition. Even though the Rawlings government (and later the Kufuor government) claims the private sector participation policy as their own, they face extreme difficulty in reversing that policy decision once it has been agreed and written in donor documents (which is the intended effect). The point of conditionality, as it is expressed by the World Bank in Ghana, is to hold the government to their word. But this is mainly a discussion between donors and the executive government. What happens when a new government is elected? What happens when citizens mobilise to make their opinion on this issue heard?

Consultancy reports and examples of other African countries implementing similar reforms played an important role in encouraging water privatisation in Ghana. GWSC and Secretariat staff mentioned trips to other countries and highlighted the experiences of these countries as validating and informing the reform process in Ghana. Problems experienced in these countries were not mentioned, except by the former head of the Secretariat who argued that failures of previous water privatisation experiments can be avoided by more carefully designing the contract.

A combination of pressure through conditionality and persuasion through technical expertise and ‘neutral’ advice appears to have underlined adoption of the lease arrangement. Having to consult the World Bank and other donors on important decisions and the presence of donors in everyday meetings probably had a significant effect. This influential role of donors and foreign consultants in the policymaking process is the target of much criticism in the Coalition’s campaign against water privatisation.

**Episode Two: Enter the Anti-Water Privatisation Coalition**

Interrupted by the December 2000 national elections, the water privatisation process was reignited by the new Kufuor government. The somewhat candid story told thus far now becomes obscured. This muddling of the picture is partly due to the emergence of the National Coalition Against Privatization of Water which politicised the process and put the World Bank and the government on the defensive, and partly due to the lack of information made public during the bidding process. Documented information on the sequence of events is scarce, and sources report contradictory facts or vacillating figures about the amount of investment foreign operators would provide. Interviews with several government personnel were obtained, but the water specialist in the World Bank Ghana office refused an interview. This author could only speak to the Bank’s communications officer, who could provide limited information on the process.
To summarise what is certain, the amount of financing that transnational water corporations were willing to contribute substantially diminished over the course of the bidding process, so the bidding documents were constantly revised. There could not be private sector participation of the kind envisioned without the water corporations, as no Ghanaian company had enough experience or expertise to play this role. There was mention of creating an Operating Investment Fund, financed by the government from concessional lending provided by donors, from which the private operators would draw capital in the first three years at a very low interest rate. The World Bank was ‘willing to make available very large levels of near-grant resources and to mobilise similar resources from other donors to finance the capital costs of the system’, so that the full commercial cost of developing and maintaining the urban water system was not passed on as unaffordable tariffs. By 2003, it was clear that the private operator was to be responsible only for rehabilitation of the existing system, and the Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL) would undertake expansion of the system and extension into underserved areas. The government and donors had made efforts to address issues of access and affordability by the urban poor. A Ghanaian consultant, the former head of the Secretariat, was contracted in 2002 to facilitate the workings of a proposed Urban Low Income Group Water Unit which was envisioned as a transitional body in charge of developing policies and measures to ensure that the urban poor benefit from the lease arrangement. The Transaction Advisor, required by the World Bank for the project loan, had also undertaken work on the options for service to low-income households. However, this information and details of the options being considered were not made public. The only public evidence of the government’s efforts to consider the urban poor – besides its public statements discussed below – was in Ghana’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2002-2004 version), which mentioned the establishment of a unit to monitor the provision of water to the urban poor.

Phase two of the reform process is characterised by the emergence of the National Coalition Against Privatization of Water, its critique of the plan for private sector participation (PSP policy), its efforts to stall the process, and the nature of the engagement between the government and the Coalition. Why did the Coalition appear when it did? The principal answer is the alteration in ruling party that transpired after the 2000 elections. The entrance of the Kufuor government (and the exit of Rawlings) created expectations of more space for policy debate and tolerance of criticism. The Coalition’s appearance is also connected to the history of the Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC), a Ghanaian NGO, which organised a public forum in Accra in May 2001 to gain information about the new government’s plans for the PSP policy. ISODEC’s interest stemmed from its background as a volunteer organisation providing support services to low income settlements in Accra, its experience in rural water provision and community water management, and its focus on the micro-level impacts of macro-economic policies of the government and donors. It was informed about the PSP policy through a commissioned study it undertook for a donor on the perceptions of poor communities regarding the intended reform, but was not allowed to participate further in discussing its findings. The public forum organised by ISODEC consisted of two days of presentations giving voice to a variety of viewpoints on the reform process, including government representatives. Participants concerned about the proposal formulated a response, the Accra Declaration on the Right to Water, which they presented to the government. The Coalition was launched in August 2001 around this Declaration.
The Coalition was initially maintained by the efforts of a resilient few. In February 2002, the Trades Union Congress signed the Accra Declaration and its Secretary General took over as head of the Coalition’s national committee. The Congress brought to the Coalition’s membership a countrywide network of District Labour Councils, which each passed resolutions against the PSP policy. By this time, the Coalition’s membership was clear. It consisted of the old opponents of structural adjustment policies – the labour movement, some professional organisations and student unions. It also consisted of a new class of policy advocacy organisations which found their footing in the 1990s. This new class is partly led by former members of the ‘progressive’ organisations from the 1970s which supported Rawlings’ rise to power. These political activists have turned their attention from advocating revolutionary change to working within the liberal democratic framework to lobby the government on substantive issues. The socialist ideology of old has been replaced with the rights-based approach to development.

The Coalition’s efforts to overturn the lease arrangement employed several strategies. First, it aimed to engage the government directly by providing information and influencing strategic people who could then convince the government to change its position. Second, it tried to educate citizens and mobilise them into a critical mass that could exert popular pressure on the government. Third, it sought to lobby the international institutions which promote PSP policies and which make external finance conditional upon them. We address each of these strategies in turn, focusing on the issues raised by the Coalition, its success in mobilising popular pressure and its international solidarity network.

The first strategy involved submitting petitions and memoranda to the government, sending copies of press releases to key government officials, inviting foreign delegations, and using the media to explain its position. What exactly was that position? In short,

*The National CAP of Water seeks to promote public delivery, ownership and management through community participation to ensure equity and equal right to potable water and also advocate for constitutional reform to make water a right.*

The following summary of the Coalition’s arguments against the PSP policy does not capture all their nuances, but provides an overview of its position and the issues of contention. The first set of issues concerned the presentation of reform options as a dichotomy between public and private sector and the supposed benefits of private sector participation. The Coalition repudiates World Bank dogma that to be private is to be efficient and to be public is to be inefficient. The Coalition highlighted that no public sector option was seriously investigated by the Rawlings government and rejected the assertion that the only option left is private sector participation. They argued that World Bank-financed rehabilitation projects only kept the system from collapsing. Uncertainty over exactly what previous reforms have been tried was an issue. Publicly accessible World Bank documents do not present a detailed picture. The Coalition asked the Bank for details on Bank-supported reforms of GWSC and their impact, but received no reply. The Coalition contended that the inefficiency of GWSC has several sources, including a chronic lack of financial resources, of management incentives and of highly skilled personnel as well as the failure of urban planning, unaccountable top management and use of the company for political patronage. The Coalition did not reject the concept of private sector participation *per se*, but rather the involvement of transnational corporations whose corrupt practices and profit-maximising operations have proven detrimental for the
poor in other countries. It used the experience of other countries with water privatisation to argue that these corporations are difficult to regulate and unlikely to operate with a social conscience. Foreign private sector participation is associated with a regression back to colonialism and perceived as an impediment to development: ‘Development is about developing our own capacity to manage our enterprises’.27 In sum, the Coalition questioned foreign private involvement as a panacea for Ghana’s water supply problems.

The Coalition’s campaign also emphasised the potential negative effect of the proposed private sector participation on the affordability of water. This issue was the subject of much debate between those for and against the PSP policy. Poor households form the majority of people currently not served by Ghana Water Company and who have to buy water from private (locally owned) water tankers at prices much higher than the rates charged by the Company. This fact led the government and those for the PSP policy to emphasise that in the current situation the poor pay more for water than the rich and spend a much greater proportion of their income on water. Whether or not the lease arrangement would benefit poor households depends on the private operators’ responsibilities and performance criteria specified in the contract (the details of which would not be publicly available until the contract is signed). The Coalition pointed to experiences of other countries where transnational water corporations have found various ways to raise tariffs and even renegotiated the terms of their contract. They also argued that the poor will not initially benefit from the lease arrangement, pointing to a government/donor-funded consultancy report which recommended that the private operator should not be responsible for infrastructure expansion into ‘low-income communities’ in the ‘early stages’.28

The third set of issues raised by the Coalition involved the lack of transparency, accountability and public participation in the process of reforming the urban water sector. The Coalition stated that the 1995 workshop to consider the Halcrow Report did not represent public participation (contrary to claims made by the Secretariat), because it included a selected group of ‘stakeholders’. The findings of the study were not reported publicly, precluding public discussion on restructuring options. Second, the consultancy studies that formed an integral part of the restructuring process and the selection of the lease arrangement were commissioned and funded by the World Bank, Japan and the UK. The six consultancy firms employed are foreign and known to be favourable to privatisation, with some possessing a history of working with the transnational water corporations or for the World Bank on privatisation projects. These firms constitute a homogenising pro-privatisation force and benefit from the global push towards water privatisation. Third, the Water Secretariat is financed by a consortium of donors led by the World Bank. The Coalition views the Secretariat more as a tool of the donors than as a government body. Finally, the bid documents were not released to the public, and requests from the Coalition to see these documents were denied until the contracts were finalised and submitted for Parliamentary approval.29 Since preparation of the bid documents appears to involve negotiating until an agreement among the Government, the World Bank and the companies is reached, by the time they are finalised it would be difficult to change them. Coalition members called for full disclosure of all information and a broad public debate, in which they were joined by voices outside the Coalition demanding a public debate to clarify the issues. However, it is not clear what criteria define a ‘broad public debate’ and through what means it was to take place. The Coalition did suggest at one point that various options could be put to Parliament.
The Coalition wanted to present a public challenge large enough to overturn the government’s policy. To achieve this goal, they tried to mobilise communities through the formation of local action committees and to build public knowledge to increase the quality of public debate. The Coalition’s efforts tended to concentrate on social groups which are relatively organised, such as workers in trade unions and students on college campuses. The combination of poverty, unemployment and underemployment in the informal economy made it difficult to mobilise people who lack collectives in their occupation or participation in other organisational arenas. The Coalition’s efforts were also constrained by limited funds, by having to compete with other factors consuming people’s time, by difficulties translating policy documents into local languages, and by a widespread lack of confidence among citizens in public sector companies. As a result, popular mobilisation against the government’s policy was limited. The most active local action committees were located in Accra. For most of 2002, the Coalition’s attention was focused on debating the government in public forums (radio and television) rather than building a broad-based movement around the issue. The Coalition’s relative neglect of broad mobilisation is explained by the transnational topography in which the Coalition had to situate itself, by decisions it made concerning tradeoffs in directing its energy, and by the professionalised, Accra-based orientation of its leaders.

The Coalition positioned itself simultaneously in national and international arenas in order to address the multiple layers of power relations behind public policymaking in Ghana. This dual position was facilitated through linkages with organisations in Western countries, which put pressure on Western governments and multilateral financial institutions to stop pushing water privatisation in developing countries and increased public awareness in Western countries on this topic. The Coalition is also a member of the World Coalition against the Commodification and Privatisation of Water, acting as the coordinating organisation for the African region. Links with campaigns in other countries provided solidarity. For example, activists, academics and labour movements from other countries were present in Ghana at the initial public forum in 2001 that launched the Coalition and at the African Conference on the Right to Water in May 2003. Transnational linkages are also an important source of information which may not be accessible in Ghana. PSIRU research on water privatisation published on the internet has bolstered anti-water privatisation campaigns in African countries.

Activities of the Coalition brought the planned urban water privatisation into the public spotlight in late 2001. The Ministry of Works and Housing and the Water Secretariat initially responded with hostility to the growing public sentiment questioning the lease arrangement. Government officials perceived the Coalition’s stance on the PSP policy as confrontational and partisan. The exchanges in the media that ensued between the two sides were often characterised by misrepresentation of information and political spin by government spokesmen as well as Coalition members. On the part of the Coalition, its members did not have access to up to date information and most of what they did have was leaked from government insiders. However, attempts to simplify this issue and lack of understanding of the policy outside the capital city may also have been responsible for misrepresentation of information in the media and in coalition activities. The government’s response to the Coalition is difficult to succinctly portray. The following is a caricature of its response and of arguments made by proponents of the private sector participation policy.
The early response of government spokesmen and ruling party politicians was to deny the existence of the Coalition and to slander its lead organisations, ISODEC and Trades Union Congress, in an attempt to invalidate their arguments. When they did address the substance of critiques, their answers emphasised that the government was not privatising the Ghana Water Company, but rather soliciting private sector participation in which the public utility would retain ownership and control of the assets. Ghana Water Company, they said, lacked the necessary investment capital and that previous reforms had failed to improve the operational efficiency of the utility. They refuted the need for debate on reform options, citing the 1995 workshop, which selected the lease arrangement option, as an example of public consultation.

The Coalition submitted Memoranda outlining their arguments to the Council of State (advisory board to the president) and directly to high ranking government officials; these were ignored. An International Fact Finding Mission was invited to Ghana by several well-respected Ghanaians to investigate the planned lease arrangement, although the Coalition was behind the organisation of the Mission. The Mission’s report supported the criticisms levelled by the Coalition against the lease arrangement, but the government rejected the report on the grounds that the group was biased in its assessment. The Mission delegation was probably not neutral, given that the two people leading the Mission and several other delegation members were part of the Coalition’s international solidarity network.

The government later altered its approach, based on the perception that the PSP policy had become controversial because of ‘poor communication’, i.e. explanation of the policy. Under its ‘education campaign’, the government’s arguments essentially remained the same. A central issue in the debate was whether or not the private operator was bringing foreign investment. As mentioned earlier, the original rationale for choosing the enhanced lease arrangement was the need for private investment to rehabilitate and expand the urban water systems because the state did not have the capital. However, the amount of private investment to be brought in through the lease arrangement substantially declined. PSP proponents then pointed to the subsidisation of the tariff by donors over a transition period in order to ease the impact of increased tariffs, the creation of a policy to subsidise connections for the poor, and the responsibility of government (as opposed to the private partner) for extensions into unserviced areas as examples of how the government was addressing the issues of affordability and effects on the poor.

The World Bank describes itself as outside domestic public debate and political processes, yet its actions firmly place it within these arenas. The Bank defended the PSP policy at the public forum in 2001, and the following month participated in a seminar aimed to move the PSP policy forward. The Bank’s position and response to Coalition critiques of PSP can be summarised as follows. Water is a commodity because it is produced through an industrial process. The role of the state is not to supply water, but to ensure that safe water is supplied at a cost the poor can afford. The Bank has provided substantial financial and technical support to raise the operational efficiency of GWSC, but efficiency under public sector management has not improved. Bank experience is that private sector operation under contract has led to major efficiency improvements, including reductions in tariffs and improved service. The Bank acknowledged mixed results in some countries, but lessons from such failures can be incorporated into Ghana’s plans. The donor community in general has served more as a participant than a neutral bystander in the water sector restructuring process and the public discussion surrounding it. Several donor staff
dismissed the Coalition’s campaign as an expression of significant public voice on the grounds that its members represent a ‘vocal minority’. 34

Later in the debate, a common argument of PSP proponents was to challenge its critics to come up with an alternative. While space does not permit a satisfactory discussion of this issue, a few points must be made. Coalition members argued that increasing the accountability of the public utility managers was the way to increase its operational efficiency. They highlighted the link between effective and efficient public sector performance and democratic governance, pointing out that there was no public accountability in general, and of public companies in particular, under past military/authoritarian regimes. The Coalition advocated replacing the state utility monopoly and bureaucratic centralised system with a decentralised system that increases the accountability of the management to local residents. Its members argued that directors of public corporation must stop using these corporations for their private gain. The Coalition proposed rough sketches of a public sector option: regional public systems combining urban and rural subsidiaries would be able to adopt a proper mix of public distribution; community management and private sector procurement; and municipal/district water companies working in partnership with beneficiary communities. Coalition members cited the municipal water company in Porto Alegre, Brazil as a success story of community-public partnerships in water services. PSIRU produced research showing that public sector water undertakings have been successful in several transition and developing countries. 35 The Coalition’s suggestions were dismissed by government as too vague. Coalition members responded that it is not its responsibility, nor does it have the resources, to produce a cogent, detailed alternative. They further argued that the government should have taken a public sector option seriously and devoted resources similar to those spent on PSP consultancies.

**Episode Three: Shifting Terrains but Tenacious Policies**

The diminished interest of transnational water corporations in the enhanced lease arrangement in Ghana can be explained by events in the global economy since 2000 (including crises in East Asian economies, crash of the information technologies markets, macroeconomic collapse of Russia and Argentina, and the bankruptcy of Enron and Worldcom), which led several corporations to reverse their expansionist policies (Bayliss, 2002:15-6; Hall, 2003:5-6).

In 2001 and 2002, respectively, Vivendi and Saur stated that they will only participate in investments where consumers can pay enough to generate a ‘fair’ profit or where governments guarantee this level of profit. In January 2003, Suez announced no new investment in developing countries and its aims to reduce existing investments by one-third. This reassessment of corporate strategies also came in the wake of the collapse of water privatisations in Manila, Philippines, and Buenos Aires, Argentina, as well as problems in other countries which resulted in the cancellation of contracts. It became clear that the transnationals wanted guarantees for their investments and were unlikely to invest much of their own capital in developing countries.

Proponents of private sector participation in water services expected transnational water corporations to deliver better quality services at lower costs to the benefit of all consumers in developing countries (Castro, 2002). Growing empirical evidence shows that the benefits claimed of water privatisation have not materialised and that private sector participation in practice has often produced negative conse-
quences. Despite evidence of the limits of these corporations in rehabilitating and expanding water systems in developing countries, the World Bank, some donor countries and global water institutions have responded by arguing for the provision of stronger investment guarantees for transnational corporations. The World Bank began to advocate milder forms of privatisation that involved combining public ownership and private management through management contracts. It claimed that what matters is that utilities be run in a business-like manner and that the public sector cannot efficiently manage both service provision and regulation.

The third episode of reform process in Ghana parallels these global events. The World Bank met with the pre-qualified bidders for the lease contract during December 2002, at which time these corporations expressed that they would not bring investment under a lease, would provide no more than $1 million per year in working capital, and requested the government to provide risk guarantees through the Bank. Several bidders indicated interest in a less risky management contract before going into a lease. The Bank acknowledged that these corporations will only bid under ideal conditions and that there is no guarantee that they will honour their contracts if they begin to lose money. In these circumstances, the Bank proposed a management contract and presented the following options to the Kufuor government. If the government pursues a management contract, the Bank will provide $100 million and leverage other resources providing a total of $130 million. If no form of private sector participation is pursued, the Bank will provide a maximum of $30 million. Acting as interlocutor for the corporations, the Bank told the government that the enhanced lease was no longer an option.

The Kufuor government opted for the management contract and the World Bank Urban Water Project loan. The water situation had steadily worsened since 1995. The Ghana Water Company was starved of investment from government during the long preparation of the lease contract, and most donor loans and grants to the water sector were tied to the PSP process and delayed until its completion. Preparation for rehabilitation and expansion with the assistance of donor money only began in 2003, when the lease arrangement looked dead. Given this dire situation, the government was probably enticed by the larger amount of money attached to the management contract. Additionally, several actors involved in the PSP process believed that a management contract could be made to work if the contract included provisions to build up the skills of Ghanaian staff and eventually phase out foreign management.

The World Bank’s financial contribution to the Urban Water Project, approved in July 2004, is an IDA credit of $103 million. The total project cost is $120 million, of which the remainder is being financed by the government ($12 million) and the Nordic Development Fund ($5 million). The Project includes four components: rehabilitation and expansion of the water systems ($98.1 million), payment of the management contract operator ($6.5 million), technical assistance and training for GWCL staff under a training plan proposed by the private operator ($7.7 million) and severance pay for retrenched workers which constitute 40 per cent of the workforce ($11 million). The Private Sector Participation Framework states that the government intends to eventually enter into a long term arrangement with a private operator for the urban water sector, and that the government reserves the right to enter into an aftermage (leasing) contract before the five year management contract has expired. To ensure the financial stability of GWCL, the private operator will continue to benefit from the present partial government subsidy on electricity. The Project Implementation Unit will be staffed with a Bank-financed Project Director; a
Low Income Customer and Safeguard Officer financed by UK’s DFID (Department for International Development) may be appointed when the Project is effective. Responsibility for ensuring access of the urban poor was given to the Ghanaian multi-sector utility regulator. Its pro-poor programme included a life line tariff, which guaranteed a minimum amount of water before charges began; incentives for the private management team to increase new connections; and the regulation of existing water vendors and taker services which currently provided water to a majority of the urban poor.

Another exchange took place between the Coalition and government spokesmen over the planned management contract between August and October 2004. Arguing against the management contract, the Coalition highlighted the less than desirable results of past management contracts with Ghana Telecom and Ghana Airways. Coalition members emphasised the huge costs of employing a private operator to manage the utility and a private company to facilitate the retrenchment programme. They also pointed out that the draft Management Services Contract had been prepared by the World Bank and contained clauses which provided for tariff increases. Alternatively, the Coalition supported a performance contract with the present management. It argued that if the present management was provided with adequate investment in the water system, adequate logistics and a fraction of the monetary incentive package planned for the foreign management team, the Ghanaian management could also improve the services and financial standing of the utility. If the problem with Ghana Water Company is corruption and inefficiency, then the solution is to institute proper supervisory systems to ensure transparency and accountability, rather than handing over management to foreign corporate interests. The Coalition called for a debate on alternative financing. It suggested that the government should consult local expertise on devising alternatives and should reprioritise the budget in favour of the water sector, but admitted that these suggestions were only feasible with World Bank acquiescence. The Water Secretariat’s response was to reproduce the dichotomous argument of private versus public; to promise that the price of water would increase only along with inflation; to say that after the five year management contract the people could decide whether to continue PSP or revert to public management; to stress the expected outcomes of system expansion, increase in the hours water is available, and a decrease in unaccounted for water; and to insist that efforts have been undertaken to consult ‘civil society’ about the project.

In December 2004, the World Bank converted the Urban Water Project loan into a grant. Under the loan, the government was to borrow money from the World Bank to pay the private operator’s fee, an amount decided through the bidding process and stated in the Management Contract. Now the Bank is giving the government money free of charge to pay a foreign firm to operate Ghana’s urban water systems. From the statement of the Bank’s representative in the press release, it appears that the Bank seems desperate to implement private sector participation and to minimise its ‘reputational risks.

In July 2005, Saur, Veolia and Vitens/Rand Water submitted bids for the management contract. Biwater, a British water corporation, pulled out of the bidding process following a targeted campaign against the bidding process by the World Development Movement (WDM), a British international advocacy NGO. Vitens/Rand Water won the bid. The Coalition commented publicly that it finds it ironic that while the Dutch government passed a law in 2004 making it illegal for water privatisation (in any form) in the Netherlands, Vitens has come to Ghana to
engage in privatisation of Ghana’s water. While Ghana pushed ahead with its management contract, in May 2005 the Tanzanian government cancelled its ten year lease contract in Dar es Salam with City Water, a joint venture of Biwater, Germany’s Gauff Ingenieure and a local investor. The Tanzanian government stated that City Water had not invested the amount required in the first two years and that city residents persistently complained over the incompetence of the firm.

The Politics of Reform

Many observers of the public debate over water privatisation in Ghana commented disdainfully on the slide towards ideological arguments. Several factors which explain this ideological tone are revealing about the broader politics of economic reform. We briefly discuss these factors before concluding. In general, the history of structural adjustment is a prerequisite for understanding the motivations and (re)actions of those engaged in the debate.

As mentioned earlier, many Coalition members, including its leadership, had been members of urban political movements which supported Rawlings’ rise to power and his ‘democratic revolution’ in 1981. In particular, leaders in ISODEC and in the Trades Union Congress were involved in the progressive organisations of the 1970s. They backed Rawlings’ call for a more genuine democracy and development in the name of the people. After Rawlings turned to the Bretton Woods institutions for financial backing, he broke with this branch of his political support base. This personal history of Coalition leaders partly explains their reasons for forming the Coalition. ISODEC and other members of the Coalition are long standing critics of structural adjustment in Ghana. For them, the general thrust of structural adjustment was ill-founded. More recently, they argue that the economic situation has not improved enough under the tutelage of the Bretton Woods sponsored reforms and that these donors partly insulate the government from the demands of citizens. It was this history of its leaders combined with the Coalition’s connections with unions and leftist organisations in other African and Latin American countries that led the Kufuor government to brand ISODEC a leftist organisation opposed to private sector participation on ideological grounds.

Regardless of the degree of disagreement over the content of structural adjustment policies and regardless of arguments about whether such economic reforms are necessary to improve the economy and general well-being of Ghanaians, many Ghanaians view the process of structural adjustment which involved the externalisation of policymaking as illegitimate. One motivation behind participation in the pro-democratic movement in the 1990s, particularly that of the Trades Union Congress, was to end structural adjustment. Taking back control of the policy agenda was and is seen as quintessential to enhancing democratic governance and thus it remains a central motivation among many political activists such as those behind the Coalition.

Privatisation was a pillar of structural adjustment policies and a key target of critics. However it has a longer history in Ghana. The legacy of privatisation goes back to the IMF’s entrance into Ghana after the fall of Nkrumah. The National Liberation Council, the military regime set up after the 1966 coup d’etat, followed IMF advice of economic liberalisation, which hinged on selling off the numerous inefficient state-owned enterprises that Nkrumah had established too hastily (see Hutchful, 1987). The public responded bitterly to several privatisations and the military regime had to rescind (see Esseks, 1975:46; Pinkney, 1972:44). The role of foreign capital and
management was a matter of contention between several earlier regimes and the Bretton Woods institutions. Both the National Liberation Council and the Supreme Military Council (1975-78) used the discourse of private participation and partnership to describe their policies, which reveals the intensity of public disapproval of losing control over the economy to foreign interests. Given this history, privatisation policies are to a significant degree linked in popular imagination to the Bretton Woods institutions. The degree of similarity between the arguments concerning foreign investment and the behaviour of transnational corporations in the 1960s/70s and today is striking. As is the lingering anti-privatisation sentiment, which is fuelled by perceptions that privatisations in the past have not borne the promised fruit:

_We have been witness to instances in this country where foreign interests after taking over prized national assets do very little, and in some cases, nothing to add to existing structures. Water, we contend, is too sensitive a national asset to be made to go the way other strategic national assets have gone in the past (The Independent, 4 September 2001, p.2)._  

The debate over water privatisation often saw Coalition members pitting the private-public partnership model against their public-community partnership model. The latter emphasises that the provision of public services in an equitable way is a social responsibility of the government and that this provision should be decentralised in a way that increases the power of communities within in central-local governance relationship. This clash of models must be understood within the history of structural adjustment and Ghana’s experience with privatisation, as well as the contemporary global movements for and against water privatisation which have produced these rival models.

The World Bank’s policy position equally contributed to the ideological tone of the debate. The Bank argued publicly that water is a commodity, that the private sector is the bearer of efficiency and that the only way to improve the efficiency of the Ghana water utility is through increasing private sector involvement. Its insistence that the private sector is more efficient in the case of water provision seems to be based more on theory than empirical and historical evidence. Once embroiled in the debate, the World Bank had ‘reputational’ reasons for seeing the PSP process through. The water privatisation debate should also be seen in the context of the huge intellectual investment the Bank has made in promoting its vision of economic reform in Ghana – one of its earlier ‘star pupils’.

Policy formulation in Ghana has historically been the preserve of technocrats, ministers and government appointees. The long period of authoritarian and centralised bureaucratic governments in Ghana dissipated public policy debate from political culture. Both the Rawlings and Kufuor governments have generally perceived criticism of government policy as a partisan threat, or a threat to their power. These are the legacies that democratisation has to confront. A major impact of the Coalition was enhancing public awareness of the government’s water privatisation plan and encouraging debate on it. The Coalition was successful in forcing the government to answer questions about the PSP process and pressuring the government to scrutinise the PSP documents more closely. However, public debate was stymied partly by the intolerance exhibited by the government, partly by the meagre information available publicly, and partly by the spin tactics employed by both sides in the debate. The debate initiated by ISODEC in 2001 should have started in 1995, but the political climate then was completely different and the landscape of actors willing and able to undertake such an endeavour was relatively
void. The return of individuals since the inauguration of the Fourth Republic in 1993, the development of advocacy organisations (partly the result of an influx of funding from international NGOs and donors), new connections to the media, among other factors, have changed the landscape of the Ghanaian public sphere. The attempt by this re-emerging network of progressive leaders to demand a new debate on options for urban water reform was thwarted because donors and the government felt it past time to complete the process.

Notably, the debate on water privatisation did not focus relatively much attention on corruption in the Ghana Water Company. A committee was established in 2000 to probe allegations of malfeasance against top officials of the Water Company. Its report was not made public but it was leaked to some private newspapers which ran articles on its findings in late 2002. Following this publicity, ten officials were fired in 2003 for causing financial loss to the state. However, they were re-instated in 2005 after the Attorney-General exonerated them on the grounds that there was insufficient evidence for their prosecution. Ghana Water Company is a classic example of how partisan boards run down public corporations. They are accountable only to the president who gave them the job and are normally ruling party members who did not get a nice ministerial or ambassadorial appointment. They then set up companies which will be offered all the contracts for supplies to the public corporations, over-invoicing and under-cutting the public corporation.

The Coalition used the press reports to buttress its call to make the management of Ghana Water Company more accountable to consumers. However, the Coalition could have pursued the corruption agenda more fiercely, especially since the need for greater transparency and accountability in public management were themes in the Coalition’s argument for a workable public sector option:

*It is a notorious fact that public sector inefficiency and corruption has been part of the general problem of governance in this country and is not limited to the water sector … This is partly due to the long period of unaccountable rule perpetuated by military governments. Should we privatise these institutions because they are perceived to be corrupt and inefficient? We think the solution will lie in deepening democracy and finding appropriate models on which to restructure them.*

In contrast, the Coalition seemed to put more weight in its campaign on the role of donors.

In concluding, let us return to our starting point: the relationship between the domestic political system and the foreign aid system. This specific story of urban water reform paints a rather negative image of the aid system, and the World Bank in particular. But this story is just one among hundreds that could be told about the politics of aid in Ghana. If we had presented a broader picture of how the aid system operates in Ghana and how it interacts with the domestic political system, the reader would get a more balanced view of how foreign aid both supports and undermines the functioning of representative democracy in Ghana through its impact on liberal democratic institutions, policymaking processes and state-society relations (see Whitfield, 2005a; 2005b; 2006). However, this particular story does illustrate two important aspects of this broader picture.

First, political interactions among the Ghanaian government, Ghanaian citizens, donors and international NGOs, as well as within these different categories of actors, are increasingly complex as the aid system becomes more embedded within
Ghana. There are two aspects to this embeddedness. On one level, donors are embedded within the state. This position results not only from their financial contributions to the budgeting process. Donors have also routinised and semi-institutionalised the ways in which they interact with state institutions, and in which they participate in the design, implementation and monitoring of government programmes and policies. Traditional conditionality has become less necessary as donors become more closely involved with state institutions. The conditioning of funding on effective implementation of policy prescriptions has been superseded by the allocation of funding as an incentive to carry out reforms which are closely monitored. Although conditionality still exists and is still the site of negotiation, the politics of conditionality have become both more interventionist and less starkly coercive. On another level, the aid system is embedded through its impact on the governance processes in a recipient country. In this situation, donors and international NGOs influence the organisational landscape of the recipient society and the political and economic behaviour of citizens, through their funding of ‘civil society’ and their assistance to the ‘private sector’.

An embedded aid system does not mean that donors ultimately control governments, that they can always get their policy preferences implemented, nor that they are the most powerful actors involved in governance processes. It simply means that they are important and seemingly permanent players within the state, within policymaking, and within the political landscape. In this example of urban water reform, we see that some donors come together to lobby the Ghanaian government to implement that donor group’s policy preference. A group of Ghanaians then emerges to lobby the government to pursue a different policy. Because donors have greater influence over the government due to their greater financial and technical resources, the Ghanaian group turns to a transnational solidarity network in order to increase its leverage in this competition. Donors constitute another group in the politics of reform.

Second, as influential actors within the political landscape, donors necessarily affect the political process of bargaining between the state and citizens. This bargaining process is ‘the key to finding a balance between state effectiveness and accountability, and to identifying common interests around which arrangements can become institutionalised’ (Moore et al. 2005:45). The presence of donors as a third force shapes the political perceptions and actions of Ghanaian citizens. In this story of water privatisation, Ghanaian citizens are bargaining for greater accountability of public management and transparency in government. Donors, through the nature of their involvement in policymaking processes and public debate, obstructed those bargaining efforts. Furthermore, donors were the target of the Coalition’s campaign because of the immense influence they are perceived to wield over government. As a result, some (or a lot of) political energy is diverted away from holding government accountable. Other stories in the politics of aid in Ghana show how citizens use donors as intermediaries to get their government to act in a certain way or to justify its actions or policy position. Citizens demanding accountability from government leaders and those leaders seeing these demands as important for political survival are key features of democratic government. Donors acting as proxies for government or as intermediaries between the state and citizens can negatively affect the bargaining process and the development of institutionalised accountability mechanisms between state and society. Given that the development of such accountability mechanisms has been so difficult in post-independence African countries, this is a serious charge against the embedded aid system.
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Endnotes

1. For an elaboration, see Whitfield (2005a).


3. For a literature review on the use of the state-(civil) society paradigm in African studies, see Whitfield (2003). For a general critique of the state-society paradigm, see Migdal (2001).

4. Official aid agencies with operations in Ghana in 2003 include the IMF, World Bank, African Development Bank, European Union, organizations of the United Nations agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, FAO, WHO), Canada (CIDA), Denmark (DANIDA), France (AFD), Germany (GTZ), Japan (JICA), Netherlands (SNV), United Kingdom (DFID) and United States (USAID). Throughout the article, we use the term ‘donors’ as shorthand for these official aid agencies.

5. For examples of literature critical of the theoretical claims by, and privatisation policies of, the World Bank, IMF and other donors, see Cook and Kirkpatrick (1988, 1995) and Mkandawire (1994).


13. The exact list of firms is not clear. A presentation made by the Secretariat indicated that Suez, Bechtel, Vivendi and Saur pre-qualified in 1998 for both contracts. In a second round of pre-qualification held in 2000 for one of the contracts Biwater, Halliburton, Saur, Bechtel and Suez participated.

14. It is probable that Azurix was attempting to break into the global water market by offering a deceptively attractive contract and by bribing the Minister. There is no public documentation on the Azurix deal, but evidence of bribery was contained in the Financial Times, 12 February 2002, and mentioned in interviews and in several documents collected during research.


18. The exact price required to cover all costs is debatable (interview with Sarpong Manu), but as a policy, cost recovery means that consumers must pay the full cost of the operation and maintenance of the water utility.


20. Experience shows that companies have renegotiated the contract in their favour after the contract is underway (Lobina and Hall, 2003).

21. ‘PSP in the Urban Water Sector’.

22. Letter from Peter Harold to the Coalition.

23. ‘Water Sector Restructuring in Ghana: the decision, the framework, the issues’, Water Sector Restructuring Secretariat, undated.


25. For more on these progressive organisations, see Ray (1986) and Hansen (1991).

26. Statement at the bottom of Coalition letterhead.


29. Confidentiality of the bid documents in Ghana is not unique (see Lobina and Hall, 2003).

30. For an example, see ‘Ghanaians should ignore ISODEC’, advertiser’s announcement by the Ministry and Secretariat, published in several newspapers around 5 October 2001.

31. The content of the Mission’s report cannot be discussed here for lack of space. See www.isodec.org.gh/campaigns/water/index.htm for access to the report.

32. Interviews with Bagbin, Nkrumah, Sarpong Manu, Darkwa and Kofi Tsikata.

33. Peter Harold speaking at the public forum, recorded in the ‘The Water Dialogue’, ISODEC productions, 2001; and Letter from Peter Harold to the Coalition.

34. Cusack interview; internal World Bank document.

35. ‘Water in Public Hands: public sector water management – a necessary option’, by David Hall, PSIRU.

36. In addition to PSIRU research, a research project at PRINWASS, School of Geography and the Environment, University of Oxford funded by the European Commission illustrates this gap between expectations and performance.


39. Internal World Bank document on the water restructuring in Ghana, February 2003. Information on the position of transnational companies and Bank support for the management contract comes from this document. Much of this information can also be found in ‘PSP in Water Ebbed’, The Statesman (Ghana), 2 May 2003.

40. Tsikata interview.

42 Project Appraisal Document, p.71. The Project Information Document also mentions this *affermage*, and states that the management contract should establish a foundation for a more complex Public Private Partnership in the future that will bring private investment. *Affermage* is a French model which roughly corresponds to a lease arrangement that does not require major private capital investment.

43. Most of the Coalition’s arguments were contained in *Public Agenda*, a newspaper which is a subsidiary organization of ISODEC. The state-owned Daily Graphic largely, but not solely, contained pro-management contract articles.


48. Public statement issued by the National Coalition against Privatization of Water.

49. See similar arguments made by Harrison (2001, 2004) based on studies of Tanzania, Uganda and Mozambique.

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Darkwa, S., Interviewed 6 May 2003; Formerly with Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation, hydrologist; Ministry of Works and Housing, policy advisor on water sector reform; retired and director of Day Consult.

Nkrumah, E., Interviewed 2 May 2003; Water Sector Restructuring Secretariat, water engineer & acting Coordinator. Formerly worked for GWSC.


Tsikata, K., Interviewed 15 April 2003 & 2 May 2003; World Bank Ghana Office, Communications Officer.
Lifescapes & Governance: The Régulo System in Central Mozambique

Ian Convery

In many subsistence economies, local people rely on forest resources to provide varying levels of goods (Byron, 1997) and continued access to these resources allows basic needs to be fulfilled (Sen, 1981). The link between local communities and forest resources is emphasised by Howorth (1999:17), who argues that it is local people who create landscapes, they produce nature and it is the people/people relationship in a local place that is the critical variable. People and places are thus intimately interconnected. In Central Mozambique, régulos (chiefs) play a pivotal role in the relationship between people and place. The régulo mediates the relationship between the material world and the spirit world, the present and the past, and works alongside the curandeiros (traditional healers) to provide healing and protection from witchcraft. Respect for the primacy of the régulo is based on people’s belief in the ancestors, and in the legitimacy of the régulo as both ‘intermediary between the community and ancestral spirits, and at the same time as judge’ (Serra, 2001:13).

‘We are always in the process of making sense of the world’ (Bingley, 2002), a relationship where people influence place and place influences people. In this paper, I explore the complex role of the régulo (community chief) in a forest community (Nhambita) in Central Mozambique. First, however, I briefly consider the concept of lifescapes, which is a relatively recent theory (with a corresponding paucity of literature concerning its application in social science research). The concept of lifescapes has evolved within social anthropology (Nazaarea et al., 1989; Somé & McSweeney, 1996) as a way of framing the complex relationship between people, place and production system. Lifescapes are necessarily interactive, people and places are intimately interconnected (Howorth, 1999). Subsequent work by Howorth & O’Keefe (1999) highlighted the dynamic nature of lifescapes in creating places that offer livelihoods for the community.

As such, lifescapes provides an essentially phenomenological understanding of people – place dynamics. It also links with a substantial body of literature which explores the relationship between people and place. Authors have, for example, focused on the social construction of place, how place meanings develop over time and how people become attached to places (Agnew, 1987, Tuan, 1977, 1991, Massey, 1994, Bender, 2001, Brandenburg & Carroll, 1995, Ingold, 2000). Wilson (2003) has examined the importance of exploring non-physical dimensions of place, in particular those that do not exist solely on the ground, but are embedded within the belief and value systems of different cultural groups, placing emphasis on the social and spiritual aspects of place. Teo & Huang (1996:310) view place as an ‘active
setting which is inextricably linked to the lives and activities of its inhabitants. As such places are not abstractions or concepts but are directly experienced phenomena of the lived world.’ As Doreen Massey (1994, 2002) states, rather than thinking of places as areas with boundaries around them, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings. Thus any notion of equating place with local community is highly problematic. Boundaries between persons and things are osmotic and creative of one another, people, places and spaces are intimately linked and dynamic, so that landscapes work and are worked on many different scales (Bender, 2001). What then do forest places mean to individuals, who are also part of lineages and communities, with their own sense of continuity/discontinuity, values, spirituality, meanings and implied shared culture, and what is the role of Régulo in mediating this dynamic?

**Research Methodology**

This paper is based on research carried out in Mozambique between 1996-1999 to investigate the differential impacts of forest use at the household level. The research methodology developed for this study has its basis in ethnography and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques within an action-research frame. It is thus a mixture of participatory methodologies and social analysis. Ultimately, the goal was to try to understand place, the specificity of local realities in local terms. These techniques are all grounded in a working relationship between the Nhambita community and myself that spanned over two years whilst working as community forester on the GERFFA (Gestão dos Recursos Florestais e Faunísticos) project in Sofala Province, Central Mozambique. Slocum et al. (1995) discuss how participatory methodologies identify issues for both the researcher/facilitator and the community, and offer tools which are formulated, operationalised and tested in rural settings. Such an approach can assist long-term capacity building and empowerment for development agencies, local communities, and the individuals, households and institutions within those communities (Slocum et al. 1995).

Community contact began in early 1997 with an opening ceremony for Gorongosa National Park (GNP), and continued through to 1999 culminating with a community project set up between the community, GNP authorities and Si Lda (a private sector forestry company). The ‘formal’ research phase commenced with a community meeting, which served as an introduction to the aims of the project in general, as well as the research programme. Following this meeting, régulo Chicari (his ancestral name) was asked for a list of all households in the community. Numbers were assigned to each household, and then random numbers were generated to determine which households should be sampled (for the questionnaire and interview component of the study). The next phase of research activity included further community meetings, observation work, and open questionnaires/semi-structured interviews. During this time the research team (which consisted of two expatriate technical assistants and two Mozambican field technicians who all spoke Sena, the local language) lived in the community for a number of weeks.

**A Short History of the Régulo System**

Newitt (1995:382) defines the role of régulo as ‘petty chief or village headman’, though the history of the régulo system is rather more complex than this definition implies, rooted in both customary governance and colonial imposition. It has strong links with the system of governance developed by the Muenemutapan Empire, and
Negrão (1995) outlines the four main Muenemutapan administrative levels: the central administration of the empire; subordinate kings (mambos) who also had religious responsibilities; provincial (muzinda) areas under the control of a fumo; and chieftaincies (mushas), administered by the mwene (also known as mukuro). Assisting the Mambo was a council of elders, composed of the heads of the principal lineages, one or more spirit-mediums and the officers (sapandas).

The Portuguese colonial regime in Mozambique attempted to interact with the existing lineage structures by instituting a system of traditional authority (autoridade gentílica) based on régulos to control and tax the population – each of which had an area of jurisdiction, a régulado (Harrison, 2002:110).Crudely, they saw régulo and régulado equating to the existing systems of musha (chiefdom) and mwene (chief). In actual fact, the musha administered systems were structured upon alliances between rural families and lineages, and the musha area was delineated not by spatial boundaries, but by kin and marriage alliances between lineages (Serra, 1988; Negrão, 1995; Hanlon, 1984; Isaacman & Isaacman, 1983; Newitt, 1995).

Thus whilst to some extent the Portuguese system dovetailed into an older existing heritage (Anstey (2000), the interface between colonial state and lineage society created a range of outcomes. For example, régulos did not necessarily occupy the same lineage authority as the mwenes, and in many areas the Portuguese forced Régulos on existing lineages (Harrison, 2002). In the Zambezi delta, for example, the colonial authorities had great problems enforcing local chiefs to assume state administrative roles, and several methods were used to force them to accept their duties, including replacing them with Portuguese farmers, employing a Portuguese supervisor for each chief or discredit the local chief and recruit a local person to be in charge (Serra, 1988; Negrão, 1995). In general, however, the Portuguese were flexible in the application of the régulo system, and there were even some initiatives to understand and codify the customary law system (Negrão, 1995), though these ultimately failed due to objections from the catholic church. Speaking at the High Court of Justice, Archbishop Gouveia stated that:

to codify the barbarian uses and customs of the black race in Mozambique expresses a way of fastening the primitive civilisation, instead of moral raising of the native through the Catholic Missions (Negrão, 1995:164).

What united the system was that all régulos had to enforce ‘native policy’ designed to control peasant societies and extract surplus from them for the benefit of the state or colonial companies (Harrison, 2002). Put simply, in theory the régulo was the ‘traditional’ authority in accordance with customary laws, in practice régulos administered formal law, and to all intents, the régulos should have been considered government officers (Negrão, 1995:163). As Harrison (2002:114) indicates, régulos were the pivotal institution in the construction of a new colonial labour regime, yet the economic functions of the régulos were elaborated from existing lineage power, and the régulos continued to represent a level of spiritual authority. Thus, during the colonial era, families continued to organise traditional ceremonies through lineage groups, whose position ultimately rested on the existence and legitimacy of a régulo.

Much has been written about the post-independence marginalisation of the régulo system by the newly victorious Frelimo Government (Hanlon, 1984; Negrão, 1995; Serra, 1988; Roesch, 1992; Harrison, 2002). Though very much contested territory, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that Frelimo attempted to restructure this arrangement through the introduction of a new system of governance in which the
authority of traditional leaders was ‘simply ignored’ (Negrão, 1995). Hanlon (2000) writes that Frelimo’s modernisation programme was intended to mean an end to traditional law and the régulos, which were largely seen as colonial constructs. Frelimo assumed that colonial links would make régulos unpopular (and many were). But in some parts of the country many traditional leaders were respected and had important cultural and economic roles.

This situation was to change again with the advent of the civil war, where both Frelimo and Renamo were forced to seek the support of customary authorities. Renamo in particular sought to exploit resentment felt towards Frelimo post-independence by working with traditional systems of governance in rural areas in order to gain support. That people continued to see attending funerals, marriage ceremonies and initiation rites as more relevant to their lives than village Frelimo party meetings produced at least in part fertile ground for Renamo to build support (Harrison, 2002, Hanlon, 1984; Negrão, 1995 & Serra, 1988).

Geffray (1991) argues that Renamo offered to rural communities the promise of ‘recuperation of an insulted identity’, the opportunity to live according to ‘traditional social and cultural norms’ were marginalised by the (Frelimo) State, and according to Cabone (2003:4),

Dhlakama (the leader of Renamo) became an outspoken defender of traditional rules and leadership, of religious beliefs and of (especially non-southerner) rural communities. A self-proclaimed protector of all those who had been penalised or marginalised under Frelimo’s rule, which he viewed as ‘a state hostile to African society’.

The situation after the 1992 Rome Peace Accord is complex as the régulo system continues to operate as the de facto political administration in rural areas especially in the central, Renamo-dominated provinces, while Government has simultaneously re-established the state administrative system in urban and many peri-urban areas.

Study Community: Nhambita

Nhambita régulado is situated in Sofala Province, Central Mozambique Nhambita régulado was established as a relocation area for inhabitants of the GNP who were resettled in 1948 as human settlements were considered by the Portuguese to conflict with wildlife management. It covers an area of about 2,500 ha and is situated within the southern ‘buffer zone’6 of GNP in the administrative district of Gorongosa.

There are approximately 700 people living in Nhambita, mostly made up of locals and returnees post-civil war, although there are some immigrants. Within the régulado there are three administrative zones: Nhambita, Mussinhawa and Nhanganha. The Nhambita zone includes a small region known as Boa Maria, which was previously a cotton production and export area. Access to the régulado and the main administrative zone of Nhambita is via a minor road leading from the main Inchope road to Gorongosa Town road. The boundaries of the régulado are formed by the Pungue River, GNP and the road branching from the main Gorongosa Town/Inchope road leading to Chitengo (GNP headquarters) and the neighbouring régulado situated to the west of Nhambita.

However, whilst Nhambita régulado is characterised by natural boundaries, the régulo emphasised that there was no definite boundary to the régulado; ‘it is more important that families are here, it is not just rivers and roads’ (field notes, 5 August
People living in the neighbouring régulado could come to him for advice if they had kinship ties to Nhambita régulado (highlighting again that community does not simply equate with place, but is embedded in social, cultural relations and kinship ties). The main ethnic group (and main language spoken) in the study areas was Sena (often referred to as Cisena), which is linked to the Shona’ ethnic group. The Sena ethnic group dominates much of central Mozambique. Tinnion (1973) states that the Sena (Kararga – Shona) tribes arrived in Sofala around 1130 BP, as part of the trading Muenemutapan Empire.

In terms of settlement structure, individual family homesteads are spread out rather than concentrated in a specific ‘village area’. This is partly a result of the traditional fallow-farming practices that require larger areas of land, but is also linked to colonial times where people used this dispersed settlement pattern to help escape Portuguese taxes and forced labour (Finnegan, 1992). Confirming this, the régulo of Nhambita stated that ‘people live separately as a system of survival [during Portuguese times] and for cropping, you need space for machamba’.

The régulado and the régulo represent the highest level of an administrative system delineated by complex socio-cultural conventions and laws. Régulados were typically broken down into smaller zonas, presided over by m’fumos. A range of other spatial and administrative actors may or may not be present, depending upon the size, location, histories and lineages of the régulado. Aside from administrative tasks, the régulo typically fulfills two main (linked) roles; conflict resolution and religious/spiritual leadership. Traditional leaders from different levels of the political hierarchy held official meetings on a regular basis to resolve ‘community problems’. These tended to be male-dominated, with women usually only present if they (or a relative) have direct involvement in the issue being discussed.

As would perhaps be expected given the ambiguous position of the régulo system in contemporary Mozambique, régulos (and other traditional leaders) do not receive official payment for their duties from the State administration. However, they do receive payment from the local community, in the form of cash, agricultural produce, alcoholic drinks and livestock. According to the régulo, if two people come to him with a serious dispute – for example, theft, violence, adultery or witchcraft:

They must first give a chicken, some maize and MT 20,000 (MT 10,000 each). When the dispute is resolved, they must each pay 20 kg of maize, 5 litres of neepa alcohol and one large chicken. One part of this fee is for me, for my work … the rest is given to all those attending the hearing [usually other members of the leadership].
There is sometimes also a feast [using some or all of this produce, the régulo can stay and eat or take home as much of the feast as he likes].

My orders come from the District of Gorongosa, I report problems back to the district. Serious problems such as stabbing are addressed at a higher level. The most common problems involve stealing from other peoples machambas. If the chief can’t resolve this – in many ways it depends on the size of the problem, the m'fumo may sort it out and submit a report to the chief and it then comes to me. If a problem comes to me then we would all meet together with the person causing the problem. During droughts, people ask me to bring rain (they must bring régulo gifts of maize or sorghum), I must do a ceremony to bring rain (field notes, 10 August 1997).

Whilst some problems might be referred to the State system (for example, serious crimes like murder or people who are unable or unwilling to offer payment) some problems, such as witchcraft, can only be dealt with through the traditional system and also require the services of the traditional healer (curandeiro). Unlike the régulo, however, the curandeiro does not charge for his services ‘I don’t charge anything, but people tend to leave gifts like maize or nepa.’

Family composition in Nhambita was found to vary considerably, and included male-headed households, female-headed households and households without an adult head. The average family size per household for the study area was six individuals, and there were typically more females than males, a common characteristic of families living in rural areas of Mozambique (Boyd et al. 2000), particularly where polygamy is practised. Community demographics were influenced by the civil war period, as evidenced by the number of female-headed and ‘adult-less’ households (elsewhere in Gorongosa District (effectively the epicentre of the civil war), the war reduced the relative size of the adult male population, either through the forced conscription of adults and elder children into the armed forces, or by the movement of males of working age out of the areas in search of employment and education). Nhambita is also a very young community; young children (under 10 years) represented approximately one-third of the total population and over 60 per cent of family members were between 10 to 55 years old.

Respondents were also asked about the length of time they had lived in the régulado. Most (68%) had lived in the régulado for more than 10 years, though for many this had meant moving deeper into the forest during the worst periods of the war: ‘During the war we just moved deeper into the forest, we did not move away’ (field notes, 1997). There was a relatively small number of new settlers in Nhambita, most of whom had moved to the area to farm.

We moved here after the fighting stopped … I could not grow anything in Beira. Here I grow papaya and try to sell in Beira, but it is not easy because of transport.

It is not possible to have a good machamba in Beira, and there are no jobs anyway, so why stay there? Better to move here … my father’s family came from here so it was a good place to come to (field notes, 1997).

Whilst most people stayed within the régulado during the civil war, there was considerable population movement within the régulado and disruption to everyday life. As Unruh (1998:89) notes:

postwar recovery of communities and land use systems that have been dislocated from established resource use arrangements can involve a convulsive period as such arrangements
are reconfigured, with an associated change in how people see themselves and their relationships with others.

For those who did move away from Nhambita, there is likely to have been some reconfiguration of their relationship with the forest and/or farming systems, or perhaps more significantly, without the indigenous knowledge of senior adult family members. Of course, there is also the issue of the outside experiences and knowledges they brought with them when they either settled or returned to the area (Howorth, 1999; Watson et al., 1999; Whiteside, 1996), and the dynamic of returning deslocados, who may have developed new skills and political awareness whilst in exile (Ek & Karadawi, 1991; Basok, 1994).

However, whilst there may be considerable variation in terms of family structure and experience, the forest plays a pivotal role in the community lifescape, providing (at least in part) food, medicines, energy, housing, economic opportunity, recreation, socio-cultural functions and spiritual health. Earlier work (Howell & Convery, 1997) has discussed this relationship in some detail and highlighted the complexity and interconnectedness of forest place – people dynamics, emphasising that forest resources do not have discrete ‘end-uses’ but rather represent a nexus of interacting resources and needs.

Leach et al. (1997:233), have adapted the entitlements approach developed by Sen to explain how the consequences of environmental change and access and control over natural resources are socially differentiated. They argue that that resource claims are often contested, and within existing power relations some actor’s claims are likely to prevail over others. As already discussed, régulos hold an important role in managing resource claims and, under the system proposed by Leach et al. (1997), they effectively act as brokers for environmental entitlements. However, entitlements are also influenced by institutional structures, and in the recent history of Mozambique, have been subject to dynamic change. Forster (1999) highlights the reduced role after independence of the régulo system, which up to then had provided community discipline over natural resources through enforcement of customary law, spiritual principles and formal law, and Nhantumbo (2000:4) describes the existence of two parallel land tenure systems in the country: the formal system, which limited access and control over the use of the resources, especially in productive and protected areas, and the traditional (where it survived after independence) which establishes the collective rules still guiding resource allocation and use.

Given such a dynamic scenario, respondents were asked for their understanding of resource access rules and, in particular, their perception of land ownership. During community meetings there was a general level of bewilderment that the land could actually belong to anybody, though a number of people suggested that the land belonged to the régulo. The fact that the ancestors were buried in the area was of utmost importance to the community. Others believed that the land and forest belonged to the Government and the local communities ‘looked after’ the land on behalf of the Government. In most cases there was no perception of legal recognition of land rights or ownership by local communities. As part of the questionnaire study, respondents were asked ‘to whom does the land belong?’ The majority of respondents said that the land belonged to the ancestors, followed by God (23%) the Government (19%) and the régulo (10%). Whilst only a minority of respondents thought that the land actually belonged to régulo, it was clear from informal discussions that he was viewed as the central political figure within the régulado,
and that his authority extended to the control, management and resolution of resource conflicts (Howell & Convery, 1997).

The régulos perception of land tenure was that the ‘Government owns the land, I control it on behalf of the Government, but they can take it back at any time.’ For example, if a new family decide that they wish to settle within the régulado, under customary law they must seek permission from a member of the traditional hierarchy – normally the régulo or sapanda. Papers or a reference must be presented from the régulo where the family previously resided, providing information regarding the behaviour, participation and workmanship of the family. The matter is then discussed through the hierarchy with the Chiefs and the régulo and a decision is made as to whether the family may settle. The régulo will take the family to the edge of occupied machambas to an area where they can clear the forest and begin cultivation.

During the first community meeting, respondents differentiated between forest resources and machamba resources. Forest resources were perceived as common property and could be freely used by any member of the local community. Resources found within individual homestead or machamba areas were, however, perceived to belong to the family living on that homestead and/or working the machamba. Consequently, such resources can only be used with permission from that family. Aside from this, the régulo stated that there was no rigid system defining control of natural resources within the régulado, and that ‘it is only forbidden to use resources inside the National Park’. Though new families must gain permission from the régulo to settle in the régulado and clear land for a machamba, if an established member of the community wanted to extend their machamba area into the forest, this could be done without having to seek permission from the régulo.

**Spirit World – Sacred Forests**

Landscape has served as a repository for religious, magico-spiritual beliefs over many centuries (Cosgrove, 1993; Eliade, 1957/1987; Tilley, 1994). Recent work by Bingley (2002) has indicated how trees in particular have been drawn upon in literature, art and oral myth and history as reflections of the numinous. People are known to have traditionally associated particular places such as woodland groves and springs with the magical and the spiritual, creating shrines to deities and various sacred entities in these places (Morphy, 1995; Bord & Bord, 1995). Mircea Eliade (1957/1987) notes that in many cultures trees and stones, amongst other elements in the landscape, are traditionally invested with the sacred. Trees symbolise the connection between ‘heaven and earth’ as the *axis mundi*, with roots in the earth and branches reaching into the sky. In acknowledging how vital trees have been historically both as essential providers of fuel and shelter, and as powerful sacred symbols, it is perhaps not surprising to find that trees assume such significance for individuals and are readily mythologised culturally (Bingley, 2002).

As prominent features in a place, trees appear for some people to be an object upon which they can confer significance (Spirn, 1998). Rival (1998) notes the propensity for humans to confer profound symbolism upon trees, and argues that trees are not chosen randomly as objects to be projected upon; trees are part of a nature which is as independent of human life as much as human life is dependent upon it and vice versa. The practice of tree marriage, common of many Hindu in India (Parkin, 1997; Dumont, 1972; Greenwold, 1981) provides a useful example of the nature – culture nexus. Tree marriage serves a number of purposes; it may allow subsequent
marriage between humans in order to bypass religious or cultural restrictions, or as a fertility cult linked to the reincarnation of souls (there are often strong associations between the dead and trees, as growth and decay are united, unlike in the modern world where the living are separated from the dead).

The spiritual significance of trees in India is also highlighted by Jena et al. (1997), who studied the importance of the sago palm tree to the Kuttia Konda of Orissa (India). The tree has a pivotal role in Kuttia Konda society; it provides both palm wine, which is important both economically and socially, and a belief that there is a strong emotional and supernatural link between a tree and its owner. The yield of a deceased owner’s tree is important in determining social position, and sago palms are inherited only with the consent of ancestral spirits. Gurung (1997), in a study of indigenous knowledge and an ethnic group’s (the Rai) perception of its environment in East Nepal, writes that mountain farmers have developed substantial knowledge systems based on their cultural approximation of the real workings of nature, defined in part by their relationship with the supernatural – the Rai do not distinguish between the sacred and the secular.

Although generalisations are problematic, in many forest dwelling communities, indigenous knowledge about forests represents the principle of sociality, as social and cultural life is reflected in the forest surroundings (Seland, 1997). In such communities, the forest is not an environment and in a technical sense should not be considered in terms of natural sciences; they represent a local world. The forest is the people, in the same way that the ancestors are, in a sense, extensions of the living (Croll and Parkin, 1992).

In the context of many African cultures the concept of community includes both the living and the dead, and the spiritual is as much part of reality as the material. In this sense a sacred grove is not just a cultural relic, but an alternative way to transcend the divide between the local (or visible) and the universal (or invisible) (Virtanen, 2002:229). Virtanen states that traditionally protected forests can be divided into a number of socio-cultural categories according to burial grounds; places where deities or spirits are believed to reside; places for ritual; sites linked to special historical events or populations; and forests that surround natural sacred features like rocks, caves or ponds.

Forest symbolism was correspondingly strong in Nhambita. Many respondents stated that the land belonged to the ancestors, and there was a perception that ancestral linkages gave them customary rights of access to the land. The fact that the ancestors of many people were buried in the area was of utmost importance to those attending community meetings, and these sites were very much embedded in local cultural systems. Similar to the system described by Virtanen (2002:231) for the Shona, in Nhambita the spirits of the dead are preserved in a burial ceremony, and the burial place is considered to be sacred site.

The spirits of dead chiefs and other members of the ruling elite have a special status, as they are considered as the founding spirits of the community, who act as custodians of the land and its fertility.

As régulo Chicari intimated, ‘our ancestors are buried in the forest, it is the way to stay in touch with them, and people are still buried in the forest here.’ The harvesting of trees or other products is typically forbidden in such areas, along with setting fires and opening fields. There are also various behaviour related controls regarding
indecent language, sexual behaviour, and colours that can be worn (Virtanen, 2002; Serra, 2001).

In Nhambita, the sacred forest was very close to magi mapissa – hot springs which can only be accessed through the scared forest. The vegetation of the sacred forest area is different from that of surrounding areas, influenced by the geology and geothermal properties of the hot springs. Only men are allowed to enter the sacred forest, and resource use is generally forbidden as ‘it is a burial site for ancestors, including those who died during the civil war’ (régulo Chicari, field notes 15 August 1997). Only the traditional healer may visit the site and take medicines, as ‘some of the most powerful medicines are found here’ – including the most potent remedies relating to male sexual power. According to the régulo, people were buried here in order to stay in touch with the community; ‘people are buried with some possessions, but their money is given to the family’ (field notes, 15 August 1997).

During a women’s meeting, respondents were asked about the traditional laws associated with the forest. One woman stated that ‘it was bad for men and women to be in the forest at the same time, particularly if the woman was menstruating’; when questioned further, she stated that this was because it might offend the spirits, and that it was even ‘worse for men and women to have sex in the forest’. A meeting with elders also identified that it was unlawful to:

‘defecate on fallen or cut branches’ and that ‘if you are walking through the forest at night and you are tired, you must clap your hands, then you can sleep by the side of the path safely … but you must not climb up trees’.

An old man also mentioned that ‘when taking fish from the river, you must only cook it when it is dry, so that the spirits will be ok’. On the way back from a participant observation exercise accompanying two women from Nhambita to the health post, one of the women became increasingly anxious to return before sunset so that they would not have to walk through the forest at night:

*It is better to get back before sunset, that way we will not offend the ancestors … If we have to walk through the forest at night it is important to clap hands all the way through the forest until we reach home … they might undo all the work from the health post and we would have to return* (field notes, 14 September 1997).

When asked how walking through the forest might offend the spirits, she stated that it was the lion spirit she was particularly concerned about, but there might also be other ‘evil spirits or unhappy ancestors, and it was not good to be there at night, particularly without any offerings’. The régulo in particular appeared to follow a rigid series of conventions whilst in the forest. For example, when collecting fuelwood he would clap his hands all the way to ‘ward off bad spirits’ and allow the ‘good spirits to help him find fuelwood.’ As we walked through the forest he discussed various aspects of forest law:

*when someone commits a crime in the forest, the spirits (in the form of a lion) will seek vengeance. If someone mates in the forest, the lion may come and take grass from his roof during the night while he sleeps … the lion will not bite that person, only scare them.*

In such scenarios, the régulo must perform a ceremony involving hand clapping in order that the lion does not visit that person again. After the ceremony, ‘the lion will roar to show that things are back to normal (field notes, 15 August 1997). The régulo described the spirit lion as follows:
The lion is a spirit lion who lives nearby [Gorongosa National Park]. The lion has ‘colours around it’s neck, it is lucky’ and will only come out if there are problems; there are different kinds of lion, bad and good spirits, but the good lion protects … long ago, when the (good spirit) lion used to attack and kill buffalo, it would push the carcass close to families who needed it (field notes, 15 August 1997).

The régulo also stated his ancestral name of Chicari, a named shared by the first régulo of Nhambita which means lion in Sena. The lion ‘spirit guardian’ is pre-eminent in Nhambita, and is both a source of protection and justice, so that when somebody commits an offence, the lion may make that person ‘sick’, ‘make their spirit sick, this can be a great problem to cure, it needs the work of both the curandeiro and me’ (field notes, 15 August 1997).

Similarly, Serra (2001:13) identified that violation of spiritual and customary rules and norms were mostly sanctioned or mediated through ancestors. Serra found that sanctions varied from individual punishments, such as making the culprit lose their way within the forest, to collective responses where, according to respondents, the spirits are ‘very angry’. In such cases, drought may be sent, or large numbers of insect pests or baboons sent to invade fields. To solve such problems, ceremonies would be organised in order to seek ancestral pardon.

Régulo Chicari thus maintains a system of privileged access to both the ancestral spirits of the régulado and the lion spirit guardian of the régulado, and has a specific role in mediating the relationship between the material world and the spirit world. Thus, the basis of both religious and political power is transcendental (Bourdillon, 1987). Merleau-Ponty (1962) focused on the variable relations between lived and objective space, allowing for a deeper consideration of the relationship between the living and the spirit world, and reinforcing again that there are no fixed boundaries between what Sideris (2003:717) calls the Mozambican framework of understanding the world’ where ‘the individual and the social, the mind and the body, and the visible world and the spirit realm are not rigidly separated … social order, self and body are dialectically linked.

The following section explores this dynamic further through the use and management of traditional medicines. As early as the 1940s, Portuguese settlers noted that:

the remedies employed by indigenous doctors are numerous: they use them in many illnesses and at times with notable success. There is much to study in local plants, some of which may be of use (Santos & Barros, 1952:615).

Around 60 per cent of respondents stated that they regularly used traditional medicines (which is low compared to other literature). Some respondents (all male) admitted to collecting medicines from the forest, though in general people were reluctant to engage in conversation regarding the collection of traditional medicines, as this was seen to be the jurisdiction of the curandeiro and régulo (Howell & Convery, 1997). According to Meneses (2003), curandeiros typically refer to a calling by the spirits of their ancestors as the reason they became healers, and that when they work, the spirits work through them, momentarily occupying the curandeiro’s body in order to help him/her with the diagnosis of the problem, as well as the selection of the necessary medication. The curandeiro in Nhambita (field notes, 18 August 1997) stated that he mostly treats children and women, men are less regular:
they come for medicines for better erection [nufancori, bango, mucurolangera, scientific names unknown, all tree bark], or to make them attractive to women ‘so they can find wives’ [chungana, scientific name unknown]. ‘I have nothing to improve women’s sex drive, but I can give something to make them more fertile [chidsedsi]’.

For sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), he uses tchissio (acacia nilotica) and murumanhama (cassia sp.), but ‘sometimes medicines are not strong enough, the blood of the husband and women are not good for each other and they need to divorce’. However, the majority of adults within the Nhambita community also had some knowledge of plants that could be used to treat illnesses. Trees were frequently observed within the régulado where sections of bark had been peeled away for medicinal purposes. Roots of trees were also used; one respondent stated that ‘roots have strong medicinal value … to get a root I take soil from around the root of a tree or shrub, and then take a section of the root and replace the soil’. As stated earlier, some of the most potent medicines were located in the sacred forest, particularly those related to male sexual power.

Much of the work of curandeiros in Nhambita was linked to reproductive health. Research by Kambizi & Afolayan (2001) has also highlighted the role of traditional herbalists and other knowledgeable rural dwellers in Southern Zimbabwe in treating STDs. At least two plant species identified by Kambizi & Afolayan were also used by curandeiros in Nhambita; acacia nilotica and cassia abbreviata. Water extracts of both these species were found to inhibit bacterial growth, suggesting both species have broad spectrum antibacterial properties (Kambizi & Afolayan, 2001:7).

The curandeiro in Nhambita was also involved in treating problems related to infertility, a problem sometimes interpreted as having been caused by someone who does not want a woman to stay with her husband (often through the use of curses and witchcraft) and which is important to resolve due to its adverse impact on community ties (Meneses, 2003). Similar to the curandeiros of the Macua in Northern Mozambique (Gerrits, 1997), ‘relationship’ problems were broadly related to either spirit possession or ‘bad blood’, as the following extract indicates:

I can give something to make them more fertile (chidsedsi), but there are ways of making sure, the sperm of the man can be tested with the woman, but this is not my business … It is the family of the woman, they must do these things, but it might involve a witch … The régulo also performs a ceremony for fertility when people get married. There might also be problems with spirits, possession by bad spirits, but it is the régulo who must solve these problems.

Sometimes the blood of the husband does not go well with the blood of the woman … there are different medicines I can use. tchissio [acacia nilotica] and murumanhama [cassia sp.] are good for such problems. Sometimes medicines are not strong enough, the blood of the husband and woman are not good for each other and they need to divorce (interview with curandeiro, field notes, 18 August 1997).

Sometimes it is explicitly stated that the man’s blood is too hot and poisonous … when the woman suffers a lot of pain after sexual contact she and her family interpret this as confirmation that the blood of the man and the woman do not combine well (Gerrits 1997:44).

The curandeiro specifically linked witchcraft to infertility and other matrimonial problems. Witchcraft and curses can have a significant impact on health and well-being. According to Meneses (2003:11), witchcraft acts as a regulatory element of dissonate social pressures: ‘people today suffer much from bad luck, and even die as a result of jinxes, without deserving such a fate.’ In the Mozambican context, illness
is something abnormal in the body that alters the person’s normal balance. The ailment may be physical or spiritual, often derived from not fulfilling social rules, from the dead not having been properly buried or through the action of malevolent spirits (Meneses, 2003). Witchcraft in Nhambita was most frequently linked to envy and wealth according to the régulo (field notes, 15 August 1997). He stated that people would sometimes seek the services of a witch if they were envious of a neighbour’s good fortune. This was usually related to employment, harvest or marriage: ‘having more than one wife is a sign of wealth, and envy is possible.’

One incident during the fieldwork in a régulado some 60km from Nhambita further highlights the seriousness of witchcraft in Sofala Province. Whilst meeting the régulo one evening, there was an old woman working on his machamba. When asked if this was a member of his family, the régulo replied that ‘she was a witch who had been caught making spells … she must work for me as a prisoner … she will eventually be sent back to her family.’ Witchcraft was the second most frequent problem (the first being theft) dealt with by the local ‘court’ which consisted of the régulo, the sapanda, some m’fumos and the cabo de terra. The régulo explained the legal process:

*if someone wishes sickness or death on someone else, they go to a local witch and pay around MT 10,000 for a spell … if someone is suspected of consulting a witch, the Cabo de terra is informed, who will find both the person and the witch and bring them back to the régulo.*

The case may then be heard, and if the suspect is found guilty, the witch must pay all the money received from the arrangement to the ‘cursed person’. Other forms of punishment may then used depending upon the seriousness of the offence (Howell & Convery, 1999).

The régulado and curandeiro are also likely to work together when there is ‘spirit sickness’. Sideris (2003:716) highlights the importance of spirit sickness in Mozambique: ‘injury to the spirit is worse than those other things … if the spirit is hurt you get thinner and thinner.’ In particular, she describes how the Renamo-Frelimo civil war deprived people of the daily practices, kinship arrangements, social rules and obligations which gave them a sense of purpose and dignity and anchored their sense of who they were (Sideris, 2003:716). This loss of social belonging and sense of dislocation from the world invariably leads to spirit damage, ‘the land from which you were living has been taken away, your people have been killed, you are spiritually dead.’ Loss of social belonging and identity also has resonance with Merleau-Ponty (1962:286) who describes the importance of belonging, of having a place in the world, for one’s mental health, ‘they (events) enshroud me like the night and rob me of my individuality and freedom. I can literally no longer breathe; I am possessed’.

Moreover, Schreuder et al. (2001) report a high level of post-traumatic nightmares from a random sample of the population in Gorongosa District linked to the civil war. Many rural areas in the north of Sofala Province were Renamo strongholds, particularly in Gorongosa District, and there remains a fear of recrimination from Frelimo as well as very tangible links to conflict trauma. At times it was difficult to engage people in conversation about such issues; for example, during a community meeting an elder asked, ‘Why do you ask these questions? Are you from Frelimo?’ Despite community reluctance to openly discuss the conflict, there was a strong sense that the war cast a shadow over the community. The régulo (field notes, 15 August 1997) stated that people sought refuge from the conflict by hiding in the magi mapissa. Here ‘people died of starvation, we found their bones afterwards.’
Conclusions

At the start of this paper I posed the question of what do forest places mean to individuals, who are also part of lineages and communities, with their own sense of continuity/discontinuity, values, spirituality, meanings and implied shared culture, and what is the role of régulo in mediating this dynamic?

The paper has highlighted the significance of custom and religion in terms of community cohesion, and emphasises the role of forests as synergistic places, where needs and resources, the present and the spirit world, the future and the past coincide. Thus, issues of forest resource use do not sit apart from everyday life but (reflecting the work of Macnaghten & Urry, 1998) are instead accommodated within (and help shape) the social construction of local reality, emphasising the importance of ‘embedded social practices’ in understandings of nature and related local production systems.

Politics, and more specifically local governance, is a contested area in contemporary Mozambique, and there has been much debate regarding the role of the ‘traditional’ régulo system, particularly in relation to state structures of governance. The situation is complex, as the two systems are both connected and polarised by shared histories of colonialism and post-colonial conflict. But as Harrison (2002:115) indicates, it is the social relations which define lineage (and thus traditional governance) that changed in important ways with the advent of colonial rule rather than overt colonial imposition.

Though many people had remained in Nhambita régulado during the war, there had still been internal population movement to safe places within the forest and significant suffering. The research thus occurred during a dynamic time in the history of the régulado, which for many involved the reconfiguring of relationships with each other and with the land. régulo Chicari provided continuity and a link to the community lineage, and as such holds a fundamentally important role within the lifescapes of Nhambita régulado. He simultaneously acts as broker for forest resources and entitlements (particularly in relation to land allocation and conflict resolution), he operates as the spirit guardian of the whole régulo, he mediates the relationship between the material world and the spirit world, the present and the past, and works alongside the curandeiros to provide healing and protection from witchcraft. As Serra (2001:13) indicates, respect for these roles is based on people’s belief in the ancestors, and in the legitimacy of the régulo as intermediary between the community and ancestral spirits, principles which are ‘passed from one generation to another through parents and community elders, both through day-to-day practices, and in special ceremonies’.

In Nhambita régulado, systems of governance were bound to a complex web of linkages between the living and the dead, the production system, economy and the landscape, the political and the cultural. Access and control of forest resources has traditionally been mediated through customary laws, and the leadership of the régulo, as representative of, and connection to, the ancestors.

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Endnotes

1. My gratitude is extended to ETC UK and Debra Howell for allowing me to use data collected as part of the GERFFA project to write this paper.

2. The GERFFA (Gestão dos Recursos Florestais e Faunísticos) project was identified in March 1992 and designed in February 1993 by the Investment Centre Division of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO/UN) at the request of the Moçambican Government and the African Development Bank (ADB). The five-year project (1997-2002), based in Sofala Province, central Mozambique, was conceived to contribute to sustainable forestry and wildlife management, conservation of biological diversity, soil conservation and community focused forestry activities (social forestry), focusing on Gorongosa National Park and the Beira Corridor.

3. Overall, 56% of the questionnaires were completed by men, 35% by women and 9% by men and women together.

4. The oldest kingdom in South East Africa (and builders of Great Zimbabwe), which at its high point in the sixteenth century, was probably the largest and most powerful state across Central and Southern Africa.

5. Régulos could be existing lineage chiefs, existing lineage chiefs whose territory was expanded over other chiefs and villages, other individuals from the ruling family or individuals with no clear lineage connection to the people over which they presided. Some lineage chiefs resisted colonial rule, some aligned themselves with the colonial state (Harrison, 2002:110).

6. The buffer zone is a designated area that surrounds the entire park, extending between 10 and 20 km in diameter. There are approximately 6,000 people living in the buffer zone, and communities are subject to specific rules and regulations in terms of resource use.

7. The majority ethnic group in Zimbabwe, their homeland spreads from the south-eastern Zimbabwe highlands across an area just south of the Beira Corridor to the coastal region.

8. Homesteads typically comprised a series of buildings made of bamboo walls, sometimes covered with mud, with grass thatched roofs. There was usually one central area (sometimes only a thatched roof without solid walls) where the family congregated and where food was cooked on an open fire. Other buildings/structures included duck/chicken co-ops, grain stores and the latrine (Howell & Convery, 1997).

9. This term is used to refer to all officials associated with the régulo system. It is, however, fully accepted that the use of the term traditional in this context is problematic.

10. If, for example, a woman has a personal problem with her husband, she will seek help first from her family. If the wife’s family cannot resolve the problem, it will be referred to the régulo in the wife’s community.

11. Very strong spirit made from sugar.

12. Under the new Land Laws, communities have certain tenure privileges, but as Negrão (2000) indicates, it is not clear yet whether the new Land Law will allow communities to establish legal tenure.

13. Meneses (2003), writes that good health in Mozambique necessitates an internal balance. For many, the concept of health is very broad, ‘to have a good life’ are words which best summarise what is meant by being in good health. A good life translates into having a well-built house, enough food, money for clothing, for soap, for the children to go to school, for the hospital. Health in Mozambique is thus not a discrete entity, but rather it is an integral part of everyday life.

14. For example, Kambizi & Afolayan (2001) state that herbal medicine is well established in many cultures and traditions of Africans, and is still a way of life of almost 80% of the people in Africa (see also Jager et al. (1996).

15. Methanol extracts from both these species were also found to inhibit the growth of Gram-positive as well as Gram-negative bacteria. In addition, acetone extracts of the two species inhibited all Gram-positive and most of the Gram-negative bacteria. However, traditional preparation processes would not be able to extract the compounds responsible for action in the methanol and acetone extracts (Kambizi & Afolayan, 2001).
16. The shared view of male ‘blood problems’ is interesting as the Macua have a matrilineal kinship system group whilst the Sena are patrilineal.

17. The use of Murumanhama by the Nhambita curandeiro also alludes to a link between infertility and STDS, a relationship explicit in the work of Gerrits (1997).

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Chad/Darfur: How Two Crises Merge

Roland Marchal

Two recent events seem to indicate that, after three years of turbulence, the situation in this part of the continent would return to normal. The first event was on 3 May 2006 when Idriss Déby Itno was re-elected as president of Chad, with over 77 per cent of the votes. The second, two days later, was the signature of a peace agreement on Darfur in Abuja, the Nigerian capital. However, our analysis stresses that the crises in Chad and Darfur are closely related and that the situation will probably continue to deteriorate. It concludes that such deterioration will occur unless account is taken of the transnational aspects of these crises, which are also to be seen in the destabilisation of the Central African Republic.

Les crises politiques sont aujourd'hui manifestes au Darfour et au Tchad. Malgré leurs multiples différences, ces crises convergent pour constituer un véritable système de guerres qui ne présage rien de bon pour une mise en œuvre des accords sur le Darfour signés à Abuja le 5 mai pas plus que pour le dialogue national tchadien, officiellement inauguré le 28 juillet 2006. Cette donne signifie également à terme une fragilisation de la situation en République centrafricaine, sauf à espérer que la communauté internationale s'attèle à une résolution densemblable de ces conflits sans les cantonner dans les espaces nationaux où ils semblent pourtant se déployer.

Cet article essaie de rendre compte de certaines dimensions transnationales et régionales, qui depuis 2003 ont contribué à structurer les acteurs armés, à guider leurs comportements et à hiérarchiser leurs priorités. Il souligne en particulier le rôle prédominant que les régimes en place au Soudan et au Tchad ont eu sur la configuration politique et militaire depuis cette date.

On ne peut, en particulier, pas expliquer ces liens complexes par un simple effet de débordement du conflit soudanais au Tchad, pas plus que l'archéologie du conflit actuel au Tchad ne peut se résumer à la mention des événements traumatisants provoqués dès le début des années 1980 par la sanctuarisation au Darfour des oppositions armées tchadiennes luttant contre le pouvoir en place à N'djamena.

L'analyse doit donc au contraire sancrer dans un espace-frontière, un véritable terroir historique des révoltes depuis les indépendances contre les Etats en place et prendre en compte les transformations sociales qui, malgré la porosité absolue des frontières, ont marqué les trajectoires des groupes concernés. Les rapports aux deux Etats concernés et à l'économie-monde autant que les alignements politiques ou idéologiques ont ainsi joué un rôle autrement plus fondamental qu'une solidarité ethnique transnationale souvent plus mise en scène que réelle, comme le démontrent à l'été 2006 les affrontements entre Darfouriens ou les difficultés à concevoir un cadre commun pour un dialogue national au Tchad.
La description proposée suggère également les risques inhérents à la situation actuelle : une véritable guerre d’attrition dans l’Est du Tchad et la constitution d’un système factionnel militarisé au Darfour, incapable de mettre en péril le pouvoir de Khartoum mais véritable antidote à tout règlement sérieux de la crise dans l’Ouest soudanais.

Une telle conjoncture ne peut qu’inviter à réfléchir sur le rôle et les ambitions des Etats de la région, au-delà de ceux les plus directement impliqués et de la communauté internationale. Il est alors patent que, dans le règlement de ces crises, transparaît une compétition sans merci pour obtenir le statut de puissance régionale quitte à apparaître pour l’heure comme le possible spoiler d’accords de paix. La communauté internationale semble quant à elle avancer à reculons : elle n’a pas voulu voir la crise au Darfour et la reléguée pendant de trop longs mois à une seule crise humanitaire. Elle a préféré s’en remettre à l’ancienne puissance coloniale pour le règlement de la crise politique tchadienne, en faisant d’emblée l’impasse sur les stratégies transnationales des dirigeants soudanais et tchadiens et en en occultant les dimensions militaires.

L’article conclut en s’interrogeant sur la viabilité d’accords séparés qui ne permettraient pas de déconstruire ce système de conflits qui pourrait à terme inclure une bonne part de la Centrafrique.

As with the conflicts on the river Mano, a system of wars has developed, as armed conflict resulting from distinct national situations and involving different actors, methods and issues, have become connected with each other, spilling over the geographical, social and political borders that originally distinguished them. The conflicts overlap one another, with repercussions that affect their continuation and, above all, the confronting parties, the issues at stake and the aims being pursued. This complexity of civil and international armed violence thus constitutes a system.\(^2\)

We shall briefly summarise the reasons for our approach but without going into details on the structural causes of these two crises.\(^3\) It should not be thought that the Chadian crisis – that will be considered later – is just an extension of the Darfur crisis (as President Déby said in his speeches), any more than the war in Darfur is ultimately due to Déby’s Zaghawa origin, because his kinsmen are over-represented in the Darfurian military and insurgents (according to Sudanese security sources). The crises in Darfur and Chad have different origins and are unaffected by the same contradictions, just as they have become militarised in different ways. A priori there is no symmetry in the two situations, even if some of the actors appear to conform to this division (i.e. Arabs and non-Arabs).\(^4\)

The situation should be viewed from three different angles. The first is the crisis in Darfur and the military and symbolic issues that are taking shape as a result of the very difficult negotiations in Abuja. The second is the incapacity of the Déby regime to reform itself in order to broaden its social basis, for reasons linked to his own survival and to the assurances he has received from the French Government for many years. The third, only briefly tackled in this text, concerns the pattern of interests among the international community, especially the United States, Libya and France. The US want to settle the crisis in Darfur, the Libyans want to avoid an international presence there, while the French will protect Déby at any cost. If French policy in this matter remains unchanged (as, for example, in Ivory Coast, given we are in the last phase of the Chirac presidency), it will play a not insignificant role in the growing militarisation of the Chadian political crisis and in increasing the complexity between it and the Darfur conflict that is so difficult to resolve.
The War in Darfur

It should be immediately made clear that the Darfur crisis is a political one, which is caused by the way the Sudanese state has been functioning for many years as well as the deteriorating management of the eco-systems that have been undermined by desertification. Conflicts over land ownership, which have become more acute because of ecological and demographic tensions over the last two decades, could have had other outcomes than those prevailing since 2003. The primary responsibility for this lies with the Islamist regime in Khartoum which, faced with the difficulty of its negotiations with the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM), led by John Garang at the time, was incapable of avoiding a military escalation, or unwilling to do so.

Right from the beginning the preliminaries leading up to the Darfur conflict had important transversal dimensions and three of the main ones will be examined here. First, history: the present conflict in western Sudan is, to a large extent, linked to the events that shattered this region during the 1980s and whose actors are both Sudanese and Chadians. Next is the armed mobilisation of the ethnic groups situated along the frontier who, each in its own way, played an important role in prolonging the insurrection. Finally, the policies of the countries in the region have also considerably helped to strengthen the links between these two contexts.

A 20-year Old Conflict

It is important to stress, although this should be done cautiously, that the conflict that exploded in Darfur at the beginning of 2000 was heir to the tragic events of the 1980s. In an international context that was then very different, marked by the hostility of the Western countries and their allies in the region to the ambitions of Colonel Ghaddafi, Darfur became a sanctuary for Chadian dissidents. This was the time when Hissène Habré came to power in N’Djamena (in 1982) and the remains of the defeated Government of National Unity of Chad (GUNT) took refuge in this region as did Idriss Déby in 1989, not to quote the creation of the Front National de Libération du Tchad in Nyala in 1965. These events and their impact on the local society, as well as the intolerable drought of the mid-1980s, proved to be a dramatic period that exacerbated the end of the dictatorship of Colonel Nimeiri in Sudan.

The arrival, in April 1989, of Idriss Déby, chief of the general staff fleeing after an attempted coup d’état in N’Djamena, and his efforts to create a military force are at the origin in this region of a social and military polarisation, traces of which can still be seen today: Déby obtained his support from his ethnic group and the Arab militia of the Revolutionary Democratic Council. Conflicts multiplied, particularly between the Fur population (the main ethnic group of Darfur) and Arabs, facilitated by the military aid supplied by Libya to the partisans of Idriss Déby and by Chad to the local population who lost control over the land and water because of this militarised foreign presence. This was also a period of population growth that blurred national identities still further – already unstable in such a zone and situation. Aware that they would not receive any humanitarian aid from a regime that they were fighting, some Chadian Arab groups, who were now on the side of Khartoum, particularly Awled Zeyd and Mahamid, had by then consolidated their presence in Darfur, less for strategic reasons than for sheer survival.

This regionalisation of the war in Chad encouraged the ethnic group of Idriss Déby, the Zagawa, to unite behind him, first of all to protect themselves from the brutal
attacks by Hissène Habré in 1989 and 1990 across the Sudanese border. This unity was not however automatic, as can be seen today in the splits between the Zaghawa: internal divisions like those created by two different national histories had a profound impact on the Zaghawa. In fact, the Bideyat – Déby’s clan – is basically Chadian and is not found over the border. The Sudanese Zaghawa, while they might have contacts with their Chadian relatives, do not belong to the same clans. Thus, on the Chadian side, besides the Bideyat, by far the most important are the Kobé, situated along the frontier, the Kapka (a sub-clan that has become autonomous from the Kobé) and the Borogate, who are often associated with the Goranes, the ethnic group of Hissène Habré. On the Sudanese side, there are many Zaghawa clans, but the most important in numbers and military terms from this period onwards are the Gala and the Twer, as well as the Suweini, Artaj, Awlad Digein, etc. The relationships between the Chadian Zaghawa groups are anything but simple, mainly because French colonialism reorganised the chefferies and only one branch of the Kobé – that of Hiriba – really benefited by increasing the pre-eminence of its sultanate. Memories of this historic period are often invoked in the present political crisis.

This alignment with Déby was also encouraged by the Sudanese and Libyan authorities who supported the former military chief Hissène Habré in 1989. Ethnic solidarity – too often said to be almost instinctive – was thus based more on a rational calculation, while the possibilities of ‘booty’ are not without importance. It was a question of getting positions in the conquered state apparatus and to benefit in one way or another from the facilities that come with its control, but also to use it to defend any claims that could be entertained by the Zaghawa on the Sudanese side of the frontier.

As for the Chadian Arab groups, in the early 1980s, before the break between Déby and Habré, they went through a very difficult period. It was then that Idriss Déby and those close to him carried out repressive measures on behalf of Hissène Habré. The divisions between the Arab leaders and all the conflicts that were intensified by their withdrawal to Sudan did not prevent them from installing themselves in western Sudan. In the current war in Darfur, the Arab groups are deliberately mobilised by Sudanese military intelligence who stress their Chadian status and the precariousness of their presence to make them foot soldiers in a war that is not really theirs. Perhaps because their military importance is not great, little is known about the attitude of the Masalit (a people who live in two sultanates, one in Chad and one in Darfur) in the first phase of the conflict, while they were being confronted by ‘invasions’ from both sides.

**Different Levels of Mobilisation in the Current Darfur War**

While the situation was deteriorating at the end of the 1990s, a number of processes were at work. First was the disillusionment with President Déby. Then as the situation worsened, the solidarity pact between the Chadian and Sudanese Zaghawa concluded in 1989 was recalled. Intellectuals were formulating ethno-nationalist discourses and finally political and military cadres emerged that were bent on organising self-defence militia because of the local conflicts stirred up by regional political and military movements. These developments converged to explain the creation of the armed groups in Darfur – the Movement/Army for the Liberation of Sudan (SLM/A), whose chief leaders are Abdel Wahid Mohamed Ahmed Nur, Khamis Abdallah Abakar and Mini Arko Minawi, and the Justice
and Equality Movement (JEM) led by Khalil Ibrahim Mohamed. This also explains their social roots and their difficulties in organising and promoting concrete political programmes that go beyond petitions stating principles.

Discontent with Déby grew and became more radical during the 1990s, evidently reaching a peak during the congress of his party, the Patriotic Salvation Movement (MPS), in November 2003. Even before Déby expressed his wish to present himself for a third mandate and to change the constitution – thus breaking a promise he had often made – many Zaghawa strongly criticised his incapacity to ‘share’, his amateur management of the state apparatus and his political shortsightedness. Unable to make political compromises Déby was endangering the permanence of the Zaghawa gains. These criticisms did not come only from the same circles nor did they have the same objectives but it was evident that the Zaghawa, like the population as a whole, were divided as to how to evaluate the regime. This was expressed in an attempted coup d’etat in May 2004 and, as from autumn 2005, recurrent defections both from among governing circles and the praetorian guard of the Chadian regime.

The situation in Darfur degenerated in various phases during the 1990s and there were clashes that, well before the ‘official’ date of February 2003, mobilised the Zaghawa in North Darfur. These vendettas have all the more impact on Zaghawa opinion in that they demonstrate a significant imbalance of power. On the Chadian side, the Zaghawa have greater impunity which enables them to act as they wish vis-à-vis a population that cannot take it any longer. On the Sudanese side, it is the Zaghawa who are the victims of the impunity of hostile groups. This discrepancy and this refusal to question the impunity are the reasons for the mobilisation and escalation in what then became the war of Darfur.

Following the publication of historical studies, Zaghawa intellectuals in the diaspora have been posing the problem of their people, who were ‘a people (today) without a State’ in spite of former grandeur; the Zaghawa were at the origin of the great sultanate of the IXth century and constituted the military basis of the sultanate of Darfur in at least parts of the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries. This debate, which mixes epic poetry, moral ethnicity, social memory and nationalist frustrations, has certainly played a role in the identification of the Zaghawa population with the cause of Darfur – without it being a question of forming a ‘Zaghawaland’ as the Sudanese regime claims. However there is certainly the idea held by some – not necessarily the leaders – of the possibility of reviving a glorious phase of their past.

The Zaghawa soon played a central role in the military groups of the insurgents, even if the Fur constitute the majority. The reason is, no doubt, because of their way of life, which is very close to that of the janjaweed, the Arab militia. But we should also take into account what is known as the Chadian transplant: some of the Zaghawa have spent years in the Chadian armed forces (the nomad guard, the republic guard, or just the army) and they can be sure of a supply from their former colleagues on the other side of the border and, soon, of refugee camps that will serve them as a pool for recruitment.

State Policies Transnationalise the Conflict

In Darfur, as in West Africa, the transnationalisation of war too often seems to conjure up informal arrangements, while hiding the practical role of the states in
implementing them. Various states played an essential role in the meshing of the conflicts in Chad and Darfur. Some did so deliberately; for others it was more often the unintentional effects of their policies. For France, especially, it was certainly one more case of political shortsightedness.

At the beginning, Idriss Déby and Omar el-Bechir took on the challenge of cooperating closely on security to reduce what seemed to be, in early 2003, just an agglomeration of militia groups which were all equally hostile to the local administration set up by Khartoum and to certain Arab tribal chiefs. This collaboration had consequences that went well beyond what was originally anticipated. In fact, the displacing of population, the destruction of villages in Darfur and some clashes between insurgent groups were soon attributed to the two heads of state. In Chad, Idriss Déby was obviously held responsible for this policy which lost him still further support: the Kobé, in particular, regarded his continued presence as a humiliation after their leader, Abbas Koty was eliminated in 1993.16

An illustration of this cooperation and its rather surprising consequences has been the creation of the National Movement for Reform and Democracy (NMRD). This group brings together fighters who are essentially Zaghawa/Kapka who first belonged to the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) of Khalil Ibrahim Mohamed (himself a Zaghawa Kobé). Déby, when he intervened to mediate, unsuccessfully tried to impose future leaders of the NMRD who were more conciliatory than Khalil and his partisans17 as the legitimate representatives of the JEM. In December 2004, while the negotiations at Abuja were dragging on, showing up the bad faith of Khartoum, the NMRD signed a peace agreement with the regime of el-Bechir, while attacking the JEM. The real founders of the NMRD, if they exist, are probably Hassan Borgo, a Sudanese Kapka, whose brother is director of radio al-Nasr at N’Djamena and a member of the Patriotic Movement for Salvation (MPS) and who is responsible for West Africa for the leading party in the Sudan, the National Congress, and, on the Chadian side, Mahamat Ismaël Chaïbo, another Kapka and, above all, director-general of the Chadian National Security Agency (ANS).

Of greater interest, perhaps because more difficult to understand, are Libyan and Eritrean policies. In the Darfur conflict Libya has two priorities. The first is to prevent foreign troops from crossing its frontiers. In spite of the diplomatic normalisation with the United Kingdom and the United States, which has been evident since 2004, the Libyan leader remains obsessed by the possibility of being assassinated, following the bombardment of Tripoli in 1986. He then came out of it unharmed but he lost his daughter and others close to him. The second priority is to appear as the only regional power that must be involved in the search for a solution to the conflict. To do this the Libyan leader has been mobilising networks that had become obsolete since the 1990s. These are the greater or lesser attachments to Abbas Koty, whose pro-Libyan sympathies were obvious, and those resulting from contacts with the Sudanese regime during the 1990s. Once again, the Zaghawa (ex?) Islamists of the JEM play a political role which goes well beyond the extent to which they are represented in the military or social field.

The case of Eritrea – and perhaps of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement – is less sophisticated, but as effective. The delivery of arms and munitions does not need much quibbling over. When certain Darfurian factions18 signed an alliance under the auspices of President Déby at N’Djamena in January 2006, Abdallah Mohamud Jaber, adviser to President Issayes Afeworki on security matters, played an
important role in the negotiations and rewarded the agreement by deliveries of arms
and munitions to the armed movements that had signed it. For Eritrean rulers, a
normalisation in Sudan means a weakening of their influence in the region at a time
Addis Ababa and Khartoum are still allied. The signature of a peace agreement at
Abuja on 5 May 2006 has not so far undermined the reciprocal linkages between the
two Chad and Darfur conflicts. First, while much has been made of the disarmament
of the janjaweed, no definition has been given to these militia. Since June 2004, the
Sudanese government has signed at least three agreements to demobilise these
groups but there has been massive recruitment in the new units of the border guards
and of the people’s defence forces. Some of the traditional leaders of Arab tribes have
already announced that the disarmament agreement had nothing to do with them:
they were obliged, by tradition, to carry arms. The fact that only one faction chief,
Mini Arkoi Minawi, had signed, while the fact that Abdel Wahid, on whom the
international community had been counting, abstained, as did the JEM leader,
created considerable tensions.

A possible scenario – fortunately not the only one – is that this divergence risks
degenerating into a battle line-up, with the Furs accusing the Zaghawa to have
abandoned all serious claims in order to obtain leading positions in Darfur.
Khartoum, unsurprisingly, tends to play this card. But the Chadian president has
not been inactive either: he is allowing the forced recruitment in the refugee camps in
Chad of fighters for the Darfuran movements and it seems that, at the end of May
2006 he helped to set up a new armed group whose mentor is none other than Sharif
Harir, a Zaghawa university lecturer and a Sudanese dissident who is constantly
acting against Mini within his ethnic group.

The Chadian Crisis

When a column of Chadian rebels reached the gates of the capital on 12 April 2006,
President Déby denounced the expedition as being led by Sudanese mercenaries –
the explanation he has since been trying to get accepted at the international level.
What population would wish to keep a leader in power who is ill and worn down by
15 years of rule without sharing, who has succeeded in guaranteeing impunity for
his own and who has allowed Chad to become the most corrupt and poorest country
in the world? With such a record, but not daring to face the internal opposition, Déby
must necessarily blame foreign mercenaries: this is a well-tried stratagem that has
often functioned in Africa, in Togo for example.

As we have just seen, many unofficial and then official links have been woven by
Chad with the Darfuran opposition insurgents. While Déby seemed at one time to
have played the game of Khartoum, he did so because he was paid handsomely in
cash and then he changed his position. For many months, the Sudanese authorities
have been accusing him of having played a double game right from the beginning of
the conflict and to have followed Khartoum’s directions only for profit while
limiting the destructive effects on the Darfuran insurrection. The camps of the
Chadian opponents were open in Darfur and near to Khartoum as from the summer
of 2004 and the supplies they received were quickly stepped up the following year. It
is difficult to pin down the exact date because the information given by Sudanese
officials varies and, above all, cannot be verified.

At all events, the vote on resolutions 1591 and 1593 by the Security Council in March
2005 probably constituted a first stage in the rupture, after the publication of the
Antonio Cassesse report at the end of January 2005. The changeover was complete when, in the autumn of 2005, the Zaghawa defections from the Republican Guard showed clearly the depth of the Chadian regime’s crisis. After this date, even more than previously, it was a question of destroying the only military card left to the insurgents in Darfur: the possibility of sanctuary in Chad and the effective transnational guerrilla mobilisation of the Zaghawa.

Before going any further, it is perhaps appropriate, from a Chadian viewpoint, to recall a series of developments during the 1990s that had some political effects when the Darfur crisis broke out into armed conflict. Three can be mentioned here: the extent of armed factionalism in Chadian politics; the crisis within the Zaghawa, which was a hegemonic crisis; the game of Khartoum confronted with the twofold social marginalisation of the leading elites and fighting groups.

The Importance of Armed Factionalism in Chadian Political Life

With the decline of Frolinat through the attacks of the French army at the beginning of the 1970s, the drought that affected the whole Sahel at that time, and all the internal divisions, a system of armed factions developed that proliferated thanks to international interventions, in the absence of stable power relationships and the permanent deconstruction of the state which was taken over by the winner of the moment and its partisans.

When Déby took power in December 1990 there was a much more favourable framework for stabilising the situation but he did not go through with it. This would have involved undertaking a genuine reconciliation with Chadian society, poorly reflected by the different military organisations which were the object of Déby’s attentions, through both co-optation and repression. While such an approach might have brought about a stable government, it would not have authorised impunity for the head of state and those closest to him. It would also have meant putting the state structures to work, a government – and not a president – that governed, an army and police force that were strong but that respected the laws, etc.

The main argument for justifying the continuation of the old practices of government was the continuing attempts at coups d’état and the constitution of armed groups with claims that were often unrealistic. While this argument is indisputable, it is politically biased because the Chadian president acted from the start so as to reinforce the idea that the only claims that obtained something were those brought about by arms: the leaders of these revolts were then designated to some high public function and even became ministers, while their partisans were absorbed into an oversized army that fed off the population.20

The systematic pillage in Chad was thus the result of the singular pattern of the social and political system that Idriss Déby did all he could to preserve and which can be summed up, as Marielle Debos has suggested, as the permanence of the social status of the armed man, whatever function he has – customs officer, soldier, gendarme, policeman, customs fighter, highwayman, freedom fighter at large, as well as small-scale bandit.21

If friends of Chad, France especially, had a genuine aid policy, they should have tried to break this vicious circle by which political change only came about through violence and they should have done everything to facilitate the departure of Idriss Déby from power, according to the regulations of a legitimate constitution at the end.
of a popular vote respecting international standards. Since 2003, at least on the French side, this has not been the aim, nor the practice, as can be seen from the declarations of Xavier Darcos congratulating the Chadian president for reforming the constitution which enabled him to win a third mandate as head of state,22 and from the continuing support so clearly given to him during the recent presidential elections which were a perfect example of vote-rigging.

Hubris & Stasis Among the Zaghawa

While the political system remained generally static during the reign of Idriss Déby, there were nevertheless some changes in Chad, for example the opening to a multi-party system and the emergence of civil society. Much could be said about the weakness and shortsightedness of these various organisations and even more about their difficulties simply to exist in a system that only tolerates individual strategies and a clientelism that sometimes employs the coercitive methods of the past.

The 1990s saw a much greater increase in social differentiation among the Zaghawa than in the previous decades, for various reasons. On the Chadian side, the access of one of them to state power automatically authorised preferential treatment and the ‘capture’ of positions enabling accumulation by many Zaghawa, both in the economic field and in direct spoliation (customs and extortion) within the state apparatus. The exploitation of oil fields that started in 200323 only extended the possibilities of monopolisation, even if it meant the World Bank losing face. These facilities are not equally shared in the Zaghawa world which possesses its wealthy, its corrupted and its predators, but also its poor, its rebels and its honest ones.24

On the Sudanese side, there are several dynamics at work. Under the influence of one of the first Zaghawa state officials, a teacher, many young people during the sixties and seventies joined the Muslim Brothers and their sympathies for Tourabi gradually enabled them to acquire influential posts. In Sudanese society, more than in Chad, there is a lot of migration for work outside national frontiers. A number of Zaghawa are to be found in the commercial networks in the Gulf and in Asia, carrying out import-export activities as from the 1980s. The fact that the Islamist regime was subjected, after 1989, to international pressures facilitated and indeed accelerated this trend, so much so that the sanctions are, for some, a godsend. This can be measured by the importance that the ‘Libyan market’ took on in the Sudanese capital, although we must not forget the Zaghawa trading communities established in the Kordofan and the east of the country.

This primitive accumulation, which to some extent follows the regulations of ethnic business, is carried out transnationally. Not only are Zaghawa obtaining important positions in the commercial networks which, from the Gulf or from Malta, keep the Sudanese market supplied, but they become share-holders in companies that are based in these countries. For example, in 2000 an important Sudanese Zaghawa businessman ‘bought out’ the only soap and oil factory in Chad. Likewise, the murder of a Sudanese businessman in N’djamena in October 2003 and the execution, in very questionable circumstances of a presumed assassin, reveal the economic ties between the Zaghawa in the two countries.

Thus, over the last fifteen years the Zaghawa world has become more differentiated thanks to its proximity to the state and to politics. On the Sudanese side, the Zaghawa have benefited from the social reclassifying authorised by the Islamic
National Front when it came to power: reclassifications that are now oversimplified, reduced to the supposed support for Arabism of the present leaders of the National Congress, as described in the famous ‘Black Book’ that can be read on the JEM’s website. In Chad, integration is weaker, as it directly depends on the control of the state and not enough on the ‘soft power’ that could bring about the education and emergence of a class of non-parasitic economic operators. Also, the emergence of new social strata that are better integrated socially makes the ordinary Zaghawa more fragile.

The opposition to Idriss Déby is long-standing and is based on contradictory criticisms of his behaviour, both public and private. Without going into too much detail on this subject, three aspects should be cited – on top of what has already been mentioned. The first is his reneging on the promise he made in 2001, at the end of disastrous elections, that he would not stand for another mandate. The barons of the regime then hoped to see an end to the degradation of state management and also – especially – the possibility of one of them acceding one day to the position of president. Déby’s health having become very fragile – he fell into a coma during the summit of the African Union in Maputo in July 2003 and, since then, goes regularly to France for health care – no one can understand why he hangs on so tenaciously and does not organise the transfer of power. One can only laugh at the claim, repeated by French diplomacy during the crisis of April 2006, that there is no credible alternative, which merely reflects a pathetic colonial attitude. Can one imagine an autocrat allowing an alternative to emerge? Hardly.

A second aspect was Déby’s desire to set up a Bideyat chefferie, the leadership of which he would give to one of his brother Timan. This was equally unacceptable to the Zaghawa and their overweening pride. The last point is his very muddled, but concerned attitude to the Darfur conflict as it has developed: several times he tried to arrest Zaghawa members of the JEM and send them to Khartoum, which has created enmity, not only among the partisans of these Darfurians.

On 16 May 2004 an attempted coup d’état was only just averted. It developed within the Republican Guard, but concerned only the Bideyat as the Kobé, who were well represented in this praetorian guard of the regime, preferred to maintain their neutrality at the time. In fact, because of the very bad relations between the JEM and the Chadian presidency, they feared manipulation aimed at eliminating them, as had already happened to Abbas Koty. While no disciplinary measures were taken, there were many changes in the following months and throughout the state apparatus officers suspected of treachery were penalised, as well as their relatives.

The Zaghawa continued to defect as from October 2005 which led to several armed groups taking refuge in Darfur, particularly the Platform for Change, Unity and Democracy (SCUD), led by Yaya Dillo, and the Rally for Peace and Justice (RPJ) of Abakar Tollimi. This desertion from the ranks of Déby’s first circle of supporters continued, in spite of denials by his partisans and the buying back of some dissenters. Almost every month since October, some Zaghawa who were well known, or not so well known, joined the Zaghawa opponents now federated in the Rally of Democratic Forces (RaFD) led by a former director of the president’s civil cabinet, Timan Erdimi.

After having convinced the French that he stood above his ethnic group, that he was, so to speak, the only real Chadian, the only person who could prove his genuine nationalism and embrace the whole nation, Idriss Déby, who had not used the name
of his grandfather for more than two decades, made it known, by a presidential decree in March 2006, that his name was Idriss Déby Itno. This was to recall to the members of the Itno that they owed him support – all the more so that in February 2006 one of his first cousins had defected with the former chief of the armed forces, General Seby Aguid.

Earlier, in January, he had sponsored an agreement between the Darfur personalities who best represented this transnational dimension of the Sudanese conflict: Khalil Ibrahim, Mini Arkoi Minawi and Khamis Abdallah Abakar. Khalil and Mini signed the agreement to facilitate their political survival: if Idriss Déby fell all their logistical help would disappear and Khartoum would be that much stronger. But it was also another demonstration – albeit a measured one – of Zaghawa solidarity. For the Kobé, to help the Chadian regime, weakened by the divisions among the Bideyat, it also meant making a date for the future in the president’s circle. As for Mini, whose group does not have the same ties to Chad, it meant exchanging one guarantee for another: camps and arms against support in case of destabilisation coming from Darfur.

The case of Khamis, even if he is a Masalit and his group had no privileged access to power in Chad, was resorting to the same logic: if he suffered military defeat in western Darfur, he could guarantee a warm welcome in Chad for his followers, as well as obtain access to arms, munitions and preferential treatment that would enable him to return to the offensive in Darfur and exist politically, while the Abuja negotiations took their course. After the signing of the Abuja negotiations by Mini Arkoi Minanwi at the end of May, Khamis was in N’Djamena and subjected to pressure from the Chadian president; few of his colleagues doubted that his declarations against the Abuja agreement were inspired by his host, as everyone recalled the divisive role the latter had reserved for Sharif Harir.26

Khartoum Faced with the Double Social Marginality of the Elites & Fighter Groups

The situation of the armed groups of the Chadian opposition is somewhat paradoxical. Inside Chad it is evident that the regime of Idriss Déby is politically (but not militarily) moribund, in the absence of political initiatives or the ability to conceive of political alliances other than the buying of individual allegiances. Outside, in Darfur and more marginally in the extreme north of the country and in the Central African Republic, the armed groups are supported only by relatively small ethnic groups. Besides the Toubous, who are fighting in the extreme north under the leadership of the Movement for Democracy and Justice in Chad, it is necessary to count on the Borogate and the Zaghawa.

The largest opposition group, or the one that benefits most openly from the support of Sudanese military intelligence, the United Front for Democratic Change (FUCD, symptomatically often reduced to FUC), led by Mahamat Nour, recruits mainly from among the Tama,27 other Ouaddaiens and Arabs. It suffered two stinging military defeats at Adré on 18 December 2005 and at N’Djamena on 13 April 2006, even if politically it was a different story. Déby clearly stays in power only thanks to a French military intervention, the legality of which is very questionable, although it has not been challenged by French parliamentarians. After this battle journalists were surprised to see men from the Central African Republic among the FUC fighters. This was not altogether surprising: they were Chadians in April 2003 when
General Bozizé had to be installed in power at Bangui, with the blessing of the Chadian and French presidents. Journalists could also observe that many of the companions of this expedition’s chief, Colonel Mahamat Issa, were fighters that came mainly from the Ouaddai, who had once followed Adoum Yakoub and lived in the area bordering the three frontiers (Sudan, Chad, Central African Republic) and then found themselves under the protection of John Garang’s movement before disappearing to take up the struggle again in Darfur in 2005.

As this brief summary shows, there is a sociological reality that cannot be ignored: all Chadian armed groups today rely on ethnic groups who all together represent less than 15 per cent of the Chadian population, except for the Arab groups who themselves could represent between 15 and 20 per cent of the Chadian population. This sociological marginality is one of the causes of Khartoum’s influence. It reflects the tenuous legitimacy of the leading Chadian elites and also explains the gap between political life and a large part of the population. Optimists consider this a sign of the victory of the political parties of the civil opposition which finally, in spite of their divisions, have exposed the hollowness of a regime as well as that of an armed opposition that does not offer a real alternative.

The involvement in these two crises of the Chadian Arabs, who represent between 15 and 20 per cent of the Chadian population, should be analysed in depth. A first observation would be that there is not just one position, either in the present tensions or in the previous episodes of the Chadian civil war. Part of the Arab community was with Déby until the attack of the FUC on the capital. But his behaviour was then dictated by clan allegiances: while Zaghawa civilians were armed to defend ‘their’ regime, some of the Arab and Gorane officers were disarmed and even arrested during the fighting. Already contested, the popularity of the Chadian president was not increased among the last of the faithful.

The fact that important political figures are now taking up armed opposition has been made more complex by the conflict in Sudan. The case of Ahmat Soubiane Hassaballa, Chadian Ambassador to Washington who defected in December 2003, illustrates this difficulty. He was an important personality among the Mahamid but it was impossible for him to establish himself in Sudan without having relations with those responsible for the janjaweed, which would have destroyed the political credibility that he had built up for himself during the 1990s in Chad and abroad. Not only that, Idriss Déby was able to convince some French officials and perhaps himself that this whole crisis was an attack by the Arabs who, after getting control of Chad and mistreating Africans, would be pushing towards Niger and Nigeria to upset societies in those countries. It is surprising that this supermarket approach to geopolitics received the attention of some French civil and military decision-makers.

It has, however, to be acknowledged that in only one sense it is valid, even though the form in which it is expressed is unacceptable. This view, indistinct as it is, gives a glimpse of a transformation in the Chadian elites. While they were francophones and francophiles in the 1960s, since Habré and even more since Déby, they have become much more arabophone and, marginally, anglophone. The French-speaking world and francophilia suffer from well-known illnesses in Chad, as elsewhere on the African continent. They have little to do with the geopolitics of Arab nomads rushing towards the beaches of West Africa and much to do with the new economic polarisations, the giving of visas and scholarships and, last but not least, the regional origin of the present elites of Chad, in the absence of political rivalry and a functional meritocracy. It is interesting to note the ‘admirable’ similarity with
another case just after the Rwandan genocide: the discourse about the colonial ambitions of the Hamites coming down from their Ethiopian hills to destroy the Bantu in the Great Lakes and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

This ‘strategic’ vision poses a number of questions which need answering. What can the status of Chadian Arabs be in their country if, as soon as they oppose the current regime, they are nothing more than the auxiliaries of Libya (yesterday), or Sudan (today)? How to explain why the French government and its president, so enamoured of justice and stability, maintained – until the summer of 2004 – extremely cordial relations with a Sudanese regime which, after 15 years of existence, decided to destabilise Niger, Nigeria, Mali and – why not? – some countries of central Africa? How can one believe in such pitiful arguments, lacking any basis in facts, when one of the recurrent weaknesses of the FUCD is its incapacity to organise Arab groups who are all hostile to Déby but jealous of their independence? This instrumentalisation of the ‘Arab threat’ goes along with another, more internal approach stressed by Déby: ‘Me or chaos’, a saying that many Chadians, not all involved in politics, render as ‘Me and chaos’.

Has the role of Khartoum been exaggerated in the military incidents taking place to the east of Chad and in the border zone with the Central African Republic? Certainly not, but it should be gauged with precision. According to Hassan Borgo,\(^2\) at the beginning of the Darfur conflict, the Sudanese intelligence services invited in their foreign counterparts – at least those with which they had the closest relations. One of them would then have explained that the real threat was created by the Zaghawa, who have the support of a state – for Sudan the regime of Déby was nothing more than a Zaghawa state. The Zaghawa are to be found on both sides of the frontier and are excellent fighters. The aim today is thus to get rid of Déby because, either by choice or through powerlessness, he cannot control his followers and their excesses. For Sudan, or at least for its military intelligence services, the solution to the war in Darfur is to be found in N’djamena, rather like in 1989 and 1990 when the victory against the SPLM would be won through the toppling of Mengistu Haile Mariam in Addis Ababa.

**Conclusion**

Various scenarios can now develop. If the same international passivity and French shortsightedness towards Idriss Déby and his adventures continue, it is very probable that a war of attrition will develop along the eastern borders of Chad. Khartoum thinks that its national security is at stake and will not allow Déby to act as he is doing at present. From this viewpoint, the Abuja agreement can encourage new confrontations rather than solve the overall problem. This fighting may take place between the Zaghawa themselves or between the Zaghawa and the Fur. It will render the Abuja agreement unworkable, which would not make Khartoum unhappy. This is, today, the most likely scenario.

Another possibility is that Déby, under international pressure, will offer positions to leaders of the civil opposition and at the same time do all he can to ensure that the UN force destined for Darfur install its rearguard base in Chad. If this were to happen there could be consequences that would do no credit to the reputation of the international community. The civil opposition is very reluctant to accept an agreement of this kind as long as it is convinced (with good reason) that it would lose its soul, gain little money and much dishonour, and that it would only strengthen the armed groups of the opposition. As for the international presence, it would
rapidly become hostage to the settling of scores which would take place in the border zone. It would not have the mandate to intervene but would be exposed to stray bullets and held responsible for all the massacres that would take place.

It is also possible, although unlikely, that the international actors will develop a more critical view of their own position: that they (including the French government) will abandon certain current axioms in their policies towards Chad and Darfur and accept approaching the two crises simultaneously (and perhaps a third one, if the Central African Republic also goes the same way). Before launching a whole new operation, they should at the same time promote what the Abuja agreement calls for, a conference between Darfuran actors and a national dialogue in Chad, in order to increase the advantages of a simultaneous review, starting from scratch, of the problems of the two countries, so that the two regimes cannot count on the indifference of the international community to undo progress on the other side. This would be politically consistent and encourage, more than has happened to date, the protagonists in these crises to decide how their futures must be rooted, in Chad and in Darfur, but always peacefully.


**Endnotes**

1. To illustrate the democratic functioning of institutions, as is the tradition in Chad, on 29 May 2006 the score was reduced to 64.67 per cent by the Supreme Court.

2. For another example of how this concept is used, see Roland Marchal, ‘Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea: a war without frontiers’, *Politique africaine*, No. 88, December 2002.


5. He died in a helicopter crash on 30 July 2005 and was succeeded by Salva Kiir Mayardit.


8. As the joke goes, ‘Gorane under Habré, Zaghawa under Déby’.
9. See Andrea Behrends’ ongoing research.

10. Abdelwahid, President of the MLS, is a Fur; Khamis, Vice-President, is a Masalit and Mini, Secretary-General, is a Zaghawa/Gala. Thus the three most important ethnic groups in the insurrection are represented at the top. But this representation can rapidly be challenged by events and in no way reflect military realities.

11. Khalil is a Zaghawa/Kobé, close to Hassan Tourabi, Minister of State for North Darfur, who was at one time responsible for the Popular Defence Forces.

12. Chadians often complain about their sub-prefects who are usually Zaghawa and designated by the President. They can neither read nor write, being ‘bilingual illiterates’, with ‘diplomas from the school of the goats’.

13. In spite of some discrepancies, the book by Alex de Waal and Julia Flint is a good source of information in this respect. See also a very good synthesis of the history of the conflict, published by the UN: Domenico Polloni, Darfur in pieces. Conflict analysis tools, No.6, Khartoum, United Nations, 24 March 2006.

14. While certain Arab tribal militia have very good relations with the Sudanese army and the Popular Defence Forces, it should be recalled that the Governor of North Darfur, General Ibrahim Suleiman, imprisoned Musa Hilal (one of their chiefs) and some of his followers whom he considered as bandits, in the autumn of 2002. They were released in the spring of 2003 by the Vice-President, Ali Osman Mohamed Taha, and ever since have been leading the notoriously dirty war.


16. Abbas Koty was an important personality in the MPS (a Kobé linked to the family of the Sultan of Hiriba) who founded the Comité national de redressement (National Recovery Committee), following a failed attempt at a coup d’état in 1992. He returned to N’Djamena after a reconciliation guaranteed by Sudan and Libya and was killed on 22 October 1993.

17. Nourene Manawi Bartcham, Secretary of the MNRD, is a Chadian, a former member of the Patriotic Salvation Movement and author of a hagiographic biography of Idriss Déby, published in Arabic. Among the Zaghawa he is known as one of Débre’s right-hand men. ‘Colonel’ Djibrine Abdelkarim ‘Tek’ had a more eventful history: as a military man he rebelled, with other Zaghawa in 1992, under the leadership of Abbas Koty. He was then in Darfur as the military leader of his organization, the National Revolutionary Council. Thanks to the mediation of Sudan and the arrests of several leaders in Libya, this rebellion soon ceased and he returned to Chad in 1993 where he was incidentally assigned to the presidential guard for a while. The MNRD split some months after it was created, after clashes with the Chadian army.

18. On 18 January 2006, the MJE of Khalil Ibrahim, the faction of the Sudanese Liberation Army of Mini Arkoi Minawi and the faction of Khamis Abdullah signed a first text. A second agreement was signed with the MNRD on the 23rd, but without the participation of the MJE.


20. The very structure of the army is absurd: there are as many officers and non-commissioned officers as there are soldiers. Déby goes to great lengths to avoid making the radical reform that is regularly demanded by donors.


22. France supports the position of President Déby who has been twice democratically elected. It welcomes the fact that the National Assembly by a larger majority than usual, supported the
government and approved the revision of the Constitution’ (28 May 2004, on a visit to Chad).

23. For details of the economic aspects that have been little treated in this text, read: OECD Development Centre and African Development Bank, *African Economic Outlook 2005/2006 – Country Studies: Chad*, 16 May 2006, accessible on: http://www.oecd.org/searchResult/0,2665,en_2649_201185_1_1_1_1_1,00.html. The irony of this Chadian political crisis is that it is partly linked to the aspirations of the population and the elites that have been created by oil revenues, but the debate on oil exploration, the policies of the large corporations and the World Bank do not give rise to the political debate that might logically be expected.

24. By adopting a certain discourse of the opposition one risks forgetting that a large part of this population lives in condition as miserable as the others.


26. Déby, who uses the Darfuri groups who signed the January agreements as auxiliary forces is not in favour of the Abuja agreement which deprives him of fighters, while his opposition remains in Darfur. For this reason he attempted, with some success, to divide the group of Mini by promoting another Zaghawa leader, Sharif Harir, providing him with arms and munitions. See, especially, ‘Sudan: clashes reported between Darfur rebel factions’, excerpt from report by Sudanese independent Al-Mashahir website on 30 May, *BBC monitoring*, 31 May 2006.

27. The Tama are agriculturalists who, in the 1990s, came up against the Zaghawa pastoralists whose pastures had been destroyed by the drought. After many incidents they found refuge in Darfur. Mahamat Nour, the grandson of the Sultan, based his popular support on this forced exile.


29. Interview in Khartoum, February 2006.
A Political Ecology of Wildlife Conservation in Africa

Samantha Jones

This short review summarises research and key debates in the conservation and management of wildlife, biodiversity and valued environments in Africa. It is broadly grounded in a political ecology approach, and indicates the importance of considering ways in which power and meanings conferred on the landscape play out in the realm of conservation. The review highlights the paradigm shift that has occurred in thinking about African environments and shows how this has shaped approaches to conservation. It considers factors that influenced the origin of conservation initiatives in Africa, including the preservation of game for hunting and the establishment of national parks in the United States. The shift from an early fortress conservation model to later community conservation approaches is traced and a summary of the critique of community conservation with a analysis of the CAMPFIRE programme in Zimbabwe, is presented. More recently the conservation agenda seems to have turned towards transfrontier conservation. The conclusion cautions that despite the weight of critical analyses of community conservation, its abandonment would be somewhat premature and potentially detrimental to desirable conservation and development outcomes.

Current approaches to the management of wildlife, biodiversity and valuable habitats in Africa are perhaps best contextualised through the lens of history. These approaches have been shaped historically by views of nature, or ways of ‘seeing’ the environment, by powerful groups in society. Political ecology provides a valuable approach for reviewing changes in wildlife conservation in Africa; it is attentive to the role of historical factors, social constructions of the environment and power relations in shaping environmental change. It represents a confluence between ecologically rooted social science and the principles of political economy (Peet and Watts, 1996). Like political economy approaches, it demonstrates a marxist orientation alongside an emphasis on the role of a wider political and economic context in exploring processes of environmental change (see, for example, Simmons, 2004); with ecology, it shares a consideration for local specificity and heterogeneity in analysing ecological conditions (see Bryant, 1992 and 1998). In general, political ecology examines the politics of struggles over the control of, and access to natural resources (e.g. Duffy, 2006). However, as some early political ecology analyses were criticised for their ‘overly deterministic vision of social structure’ and an overemphasis of material struggles (Moore, 1993), more recent attempts have tended to both afford greater agency to the land user (examining, for example, the ‘politics of resistance’) and consider the role of competing meanings or constructions of the environment (combining, for example, analyses of ‘symbolic struggles’ with those of material contests over resource use). The latter have been loosely termed post-
structural political ecology approaches. Yet while political ecology has been widely adopted as a framework for analysing agricultural environments in Africa (e.g. Awanyo, 2001; Bassett, 1998; Batterbury, 2001; Bell and Roberts, 1991; Gezon, 1997, 1999; Moore, 1993; Park, 1993, Schroeder, 1993), it has been less frequently applied to the exploration of ‘conservation environments’.

Beinart and McGregor (2003) summarise the paradigm shift evident in views of African environmental history. The older paradigm conveys images of eroding soils, shifting sands, retreating forests and desiccating water resources – a decline from a prior state of pristine wilderness. Implicit in such a perspective is the justification of an interventionist and control-oriented management of the environment. The new paradigm suggests a greater resilience of the African environment and hails the ability of rural societies to interact with nature constructively. The validity of indigenous knowledge is emphasised and indigenous rights to resources advocated. Within the context of this paradigm shift, much of the literature on the social history and political economy of wildlife conservation is concerned with mapping two things: first, how a top-down centralised approach has given way to a more participatory and community-oriented approach and, second, the respective problems of these approaches. Furthermore, lively debates exist around the role of factors such as population change, which may have impacted upon deforestation and degradation dynamics, thus affecting wildlife distributions and levels of biodiversity (e.g. Cline Cole et al. 1990; Tiffen et al. 1994, Fairhead and Leach, 1996; Jones and Carswell, 2004). However, these are beyond the scope of this short review, which focuses on the management of valued species and habitats; and considers people-park relationships (including the distribution of rights and benefits arising from conflicts over resources between different stakeholder groups), and the extent of conflict or complementarity between conservation and development activities. Exactly how people-park relationships are mediated by actual resource use emerges as a key theme in the literature.

The Historical Expansion of Protected Areas: Land from People?

Many of the protected areas in Africa owe their origin to the practice of hunting. Historically widespread throughout Africa, hunting has played an essential role in livelihood provision (game meat, hides etc.) and social functions (rites of passage, social cohesion). Hunting for ‘the thrill of the chase’ (sport) also existed among colonial elites, starting in the nineteenth century. As colonial hunters tried increasingly to establish a monopoly over game resources in Africa, tensions with subsistence hunters mounted. Hunting controls were designated and ‘protecting game became part of the larger concern of the empire’ (Beinart and Coates, 1995:28). Controls were not particularly effective; game reserves (hunting parks) were thus established in the latter part of the 1800s. These were a far cry from the meaningful protection of wildlife, for their purpose was to preserve game for sport.

Early support for conservation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century took the form of concern over the threat of species extinction. For example, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) was established in 1891, and was a largely female initiative against the plumage trade which was causing the extinction of certain birds. In 1900, the ‘Convention for the Preservation of Wild Animals, Birds and Fish in Africa’ was signed by European countries with colonies in sub-Saharan Africa, with the aim of protecting fully a few species considered to be under threat of extinction. Such concerns reflected scientific interest in zoology, botany, natural
history and evolution at the time. As ecology began to emerge as a discipline in the 1920s, however, conservation of the whole habitat or ecosystem became a higher priority (Beinart and Coates, 1995), representing a shift away from the privileging of selected animals (slaughtering certain predators and deliberately breeding others). Nonetheless, less attention was devoted to forest, wetland and marine habitats, when compared to semi-arid savannah areas (Barrow et al. 2001), not least because of the latter’s endowment of large and charismatic species.

It was the US National Parks model, though, to which Africa owes much of its approach to the management of protected areas, notably as many hunting reserves and game parks were reclassified as National Parks in the 1940s. This model prioritises ‘recreation’ and ‘preservation’. The implication of the former, particularly in South Africa, was that protected areas became a source of white nationalism – wildlife tourism was of no interest to indigenous populations. Later, with the rise of international tourism and powerful conservation organisations, it came to represent the subjugation of local interests to national and international interests, notably when the distribution of costs and benefits is taken into consideration (Wood, 1993). The implication of preservation was that protected areas had to be ‘depeopled’ to allow ‘Europeans to impose their image of Africa upon the reality of the African landscape’ as there existed ‘a wish to protect the natural environment as a special kind of “Eden”’ (Anderson and Grove, 1987:4) – a natural wilderness. This model did not pose a uniform challenge across Africa. In East Africa, land gazetted for conservation tended to be of poor agricultural potential, historically of low population densities, and commonly under customary tenure and extensive land management. In Southern Africa, on the other hand, many of the wildlife-rich areas had been alienated and converted to private tenure (Barrow et al. 2001). The provision or availability of water resources in parks helped to minimise conflict with neighbouring landholders by retaining wildlife in protected areas. Conflict was magnified, conversely, by the forced removal of African villagers from parks, often to waterless sites (Beinart and Coates, 1995), and thereby concentrating pressures around parks.

This model for the management of protected areas has come to be known as protectionism, ‘fortress conservation’ or the ‘fences and fines’ approach, the key rationale being that local people constituted the principal threat to forests and wildlife (Dwivedi, 1996). It involves delimiting the valued environment and placing it under state control; minimising human impact on such environments through monitoring and policing (often using armed patrols); excluding or removing resident peoples from such areas and, in preventing consumptive use of the environment (Ghimire, 1994), ignoring customary rights (Nepal and Weber, 1995, Fairhead and Leach, 1994) while at the same time amplifying individual and societal vulnerability (Naughton-Treves, 1997). The costs to local people in terms of crop damage and, sometimes, loss of life have been substantial, generating hostility among local populations or, at the very least, antipathy towards protection measures (Ghimire, 1994). But while wildlife patrols which were well financed by powerful states facilitated the protection of species such as elephants in southern African countries, this was not the case in East Africa where mega-fauna populations declined dramatically. In countries such as Angola and Mozambique, where ivory could be traded for arms, poaching by non-local and well resourced gangs escalated. Thus the fortress model secured neither conservation nor development.
The New Paradigm in Conservation

A new generation of ideas to secure wildlife conservation based on community involvement emerged in the 1980s and spread rapidly. The new approach has been variously called ‘community conservation’, ‘community wildlife management’ and ‘community based natural resource management’, although it has been suggested that the first two of these descriptions should apply to protected areas, and the remaining one reserved for forest management, watershed protection, etc. (Campbell and Vainio-Mattila, 2003). The approach is underpinned and informed by the notion of participation and participatory development, and parallels a fundamental shift in development thinking (Barrow and Murphree, 2001). In some cases this amounts to a decentralisation of natural resource management (‘the systematic and rational dispersal of power, authority and responsibility from central government to lower level institutions’, according to Plummer and FitzGibbon, 2004), something which has also occurred widely in the area of forestry in the developing world (Agrawal and Ostrom, 2001). Much scholarship on the decentralisation of natural resource management asserts the superiority of decentralised solutions over centralised approaches on grounds of efficiency, equity or sustainability (Agrawal and Ostrom 2001). However, it may in practice sometimes amount only to information provision and passive participation to legitimise types of conservation interventions.

Community conservation has been defined as ‘those principles and practices that argue that conservation goals should be pursued by strategies that emphasise the role of local residents in decision-making about natural resources’ (Adams and Hulme, 1998). Key elements of the community conservation narrative involve the imperative for 1) allowing people in and around protected areas or with property rights in such areas to participate in the management of conservation resources; and 2) linking conservation to local development needs. These objectives create ‘a space within which a great variety of different kinds of conservation interventions lie’ (Adams and Hulme, 1998). Here, an examination of Jones’s (1999) distinction between ‘Park and Neighbour’ and ‘Community Based Natural Resource Management’ will suffice, although it is worth noting that Wolmer and Ashley (2003), for example, highlight four types of conservation interventions.

The Park and Neighbour approach is designed to minimise conflict between parks and neighbouring populations rather than to develop sustainable livelihood alternatives (Ghimire, 1994). It operates primarily through offering compensation to affected populations (Infield and Adams, 1999). Thus while the conservation of species, habitats and ecosystems is the primary objective, public relations, consultation, revenue sharing and the promotion of community development are ‘added on’ to compensate for the negative effects of living near a protected area. This is a biocentric approach which recognises the intrinsic value of nature while meeting few utilitarian goals (Adams and Hulme, 1998). Buffer zones around national parks provide a good example. According to Neumann (1997), buffer zones extend state authority over settlement and land use well beyond protected area boundaries. Indeed, Adams and Infield’s (2003) study from Uganda suggests that while revenue sharing can lessen community grievance, it does not compensate for the cost of park creation, although others cast revenue sharing in a more positive light (Archabald and Naughton-Treves, 2001).

The Community Based Natural Resource Management approach (CBNRM) tends to be more empowering, as it is based on the premise that local populations have a
more intricate knowledge of local ecological processes, and are more able to effectively manage local resources through ‘traditional’ forms of access (Brosius et al. 1998). It is an anthropocentric approach and may do little to preserve species with little economic value. Typical activities include revenue generation within protected areas (based on photo tourism, live animal sales, safari hunting, timber production etc.); sustainable use of protected area resources (e.g. thatching grass, poles, firewood, medicinal products, bee products, small animals, fish, marine resources, gums, leaves, vegetables, fruit, roots, berries, rodents, insects, wild plants, etc.); promotion of more sustainable on- and off-farm activities and diversification (e.g. agroforestry, local handicrafts); and training and capacity-building. CBNRM is suited to the many environments in which human use has shaped local ecology and biodiversity value, although this anthropogenic influence has tended to be overlooked by international conservation organisations aiming to protect biodiversity (Fairhead and Leach, 1994; Homewood and Rodgers, 1987; and Agrawal and Gibson, 1999). As stronger local proprietorship over land and resources is a feature of the approach, it is also more appropriate where pre-existing customary rights were expunged as part of the establishment of a protected area.


Critical Reflections on ‘Community Conservation’

Although communities have been regularly treated as homogenous with members having complementary interests in ‘community conservation’ efforts, they are dynamic, factional and internally differentiated by gender, caste, wealth, ethnicity, age and origin, etc. (see Li, 1996; Belsky, 1999; Brosius et al. 1998; Moore, 1998; Twyman, 1998; Sharpe, 1998; Leach, Mearns and Scoones, 1997; Nabane and Matzke, 1997 and Agrawal and Gibson, 1999). Interventions at the aggregate community level do not capture the differential resource access and benefits for women, children and the poor (Nabane and Matzke, 1997). New institutional arrangements may reproduce the social relationships that marginalise groups like women and the poor (Martin and Lemon, 2001; Wolmer and Ashley, 2003), as the representiveness, transparency, democracy and accountability of such arrangements cannot be guaranteed. Social and ecological resilience may be undermined by the imposition of formal rules (Turner, 1999; Twyman, 1998). This has led some to call for greater attention to power relations, institutions and differentiated interests in CBNRM initiatives (Kepe et al. 2001; Kull, 2002; Agrawal and Gibson, 1999).

Critics also note that the success of schemes has been limited (Kellert et al. 2000; Gibson and Marks, 1995). Aside from issues of poor planning, policy formulation and participation in practice (Mayaka, 2002), more fundamental concerns arise over
the prevalence and effect of corruption (Archabald and Naughton-Treves 2001; Naughton-Treves, 1997) and the limited extent to which decentralisation has actually taken place. Different levels of rights can be devolved. Under CBNRM, communities have been allowed management responsibility for conservation but governments are still reluctant to grant communities tenure over resources, including wildlife (Goldman, 2003; Murphree 1997). There are concerns that decentralisation (particularly the establishment of buffer zones) has been primarily a rhetorical devise, as higher level rights are retained by the state with only lower level rights being transferred to local populations (Goldman, 2003; Neumann, 1997). Furthermore, conservation efforts may be jeopardised by excluding perceived ‘outsiders’ (Dzingirai, 2003).

Unlike its forebear, ‘fortress conservation’, which assumed that a trade-off existed between conservation and development, community conservation assumes that conservation and rural development are compatible. Some of the critiques of community conservation, from both conservation and development angles, emphasise trade-offs. For example, despite the growth in protected areas in the recent past, even in countries less well known for their protected areas such as Malawi, Rwanda, Senegal and Togo, where these areas cover 11-14 per cent of national territory (Schroeder, 1999), conservationists argue that ‘pockets’ of protected areas are insufficient and that more environmentally benign practices are needed over larger areas (Homewood, 2004). At the same time, the more extreme end of the pro-conservation critiques of ‘people-oriented approaches to conservation’ advocates a renewed emphasis on authoritarian protection to safeguard critically threatened species (for a convincing critical review of the resurgent protectionist argument see Wilshusen et al. 2002). Pro-development writers, in contrast, question the wisdom of sequestering more land in protected zones, particularly in the context of increasing demand for food, shelter and other basic needs (Ghimire, 1994; Wood, 1993). Furthermore, numerous studies have documented how systems of range, forest and soil management practised by Africans have not only been responsible for producing the ‘wild’ areas which are subsequently targeted for protection, but also for maintaining these areas in existence (Schroeder, 1999).

Wolmer (2003:267) notes, first, that ‘the ubiquitous community based natural resource management seems to have lost some of its cutting edge ‘of the moment’ flavour, as institutional fatigue has set in’; and, second, that as CBNRM debates became more complicated, and increasingly focused on weaknesses rather then strengths, donors and practioners started to look for a new paradigm. Transboundary natural resource management (also known as transfrontier conservation areas or ‘peace parks’) has thus become the new ‘cutting edge development’ with a potential for replication (Duffy, 2006). Wolmer notes that recent years have witnessed ‘the emergence of an ostensibly surprising coalition of interests around the notion of transboundary natural resource management in Southern Africa’ (Wolmer, 2003). For example, the notion of ‘bioregions’ has been invoked as a route to re-establishing natural systems that have been interrupted by political boundaries (Ramutsindela, 2004). Indeed, transboundary conservation presents an opportunity for restoring connectivity to isolated habitats in national protected areas (Duffy, 2006).

Ramutsindela (2004) argues that transfrontier parks have included notions of community participation, economic development and empowerment to win the support of communities and donors. However, both Wolmer (2003) and Duffy (2006) describe transfrontier conservation areas as the latest in a line of top-down, centralising and undemocratic market-oriented interventions. The Great Limpopo
Transfrontier Park (straddling Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique), for example, has been implemented with next to no consultation with local communities (Wolmer, 2003). Communities that will be directly or indirectly affected by the proposals have been largely sidelined, generating fears that substantial numbers of people will be displaced. At the same time, Virtanen (2003) notes, attempts at creating institutions of control with supranational powers are easily perceived as an infringement by ‘the North’ on the sovereign rights of ‘the South’. These sentiments are echoed by Duffy (2006), for whom ‘this global form of control through environmental governance has invoked memories of imperial expansion and a creation of European style states in Africa’. Furthermore, van Ameron and Buscher (2005) are concerned that the effectiveness of transfrontier conservation has been hindered by the domination of national interests and that peace parks can and often do exacerbate inequalities between states. This might heighten tension, thereby confounding hopes that these transfrontier parks would both facilitate and promote regional peace (Wolmer, 2003).

Case Study: CAMPFIRE

Although early explorers and pioneers in Zimbabwe used wildlife to subsidise their activities, wildlife became an impediment to agriculture and ranching as Europeans began to settle (Gibson, 1999). During the colonial period, white settlers appropriated much of the best agricultural land and removed resident people to ‘Native Reserves’ (now known as communal land) (Jones and Murphree, 2001). Game reserves were established and African hunting was criminalised. Despite strong notions of ‘wilderness’ prevailing in the discourse justifying the establishment of protected areas, Wolmer (2005:264) argues that wilderness was manufactured, with the Gonarezhou National Park, for example, being ‘stitched together from a wide variety of designations on the basis of ad hoc negotiations between various actors’. In reality, not only had the area been subject to frequent boundary changes; but large areas had previously been inhabited and cultivated; and large-scale tsetse control and military activity had altered the ecology, vegetation patterns and wildlife numbers, sometimes significantly.

Although some resentment towards wildlife and the establishment of game reserves existed among the white population, it was even greater among black Africans whose ‘native reserves’ were less suitable for cultivation, and more likely to host populations of wildlife, although the methods that might have been used to protect crops from wildlife (snares, traps and nets) were outlawed (Gibson, 1999). Yet, the tenure system that facilitated indirect colonial state control of land and natural resources through chiefs was retained following independence to ensure continued post-colonial state control over land (Murombedzi, 1999), despite prior promises by nationalist leaders to reverse such exclusionary measures (Gibson, 1999). Indeed, control over wildlife presented the independent state with a valuable natural asset (Gibson, 1999).

In 1975, the Rhodesian Parks and Wildlife Act had allowed private landowners (almost all at that time former European settlers) to own wildlife on their land for the first time (Adams, 2004). With farmers thus having an incentive to encourage wildlife, Duffy (2000) notes that sport hunting became the major revenue earner within the private game ranch industry (growing from a value of $195,000 in 1984 to $13 million in 1993). In the 1980s a newly-independent Zimbabwe took steps to enable smallholders on communal land to similarly profit from safari hunting through a 1982 amendment to the Wildlife Act (Adams, 2004; Gibson, 1999).
CAMPFIRE (Communal Area Management Programme for Indigenous Resources) was established to facilitate the capture of some of the benefits of wildlife and the sustainable utilisation of natural resources by residents of communal areas. It has become renowned for enabling local people to play an active role in the management of resources, and in the generation and distribution of benefits. It has devolved authority for the management of mega-fauna from the state to rural district councils. More specifically, CAMPFIRE usually involves local authorities advertising hunting rights, selecting and contracting safari companies, setting quotas, organising anti-poaching activities and collecting and disbursing the revenue generated from the wildlife operations (Campbell et al. 1999).

As Gibson (1999) notes, nearly all analyses of CAMPFIRE praise its innovativeness, particularly its decentralisation of authority over wildlife. There are definitely success stories. For example, Matzke and Nabane (1996) report that under the centralised (conventional) model of conservation, the village of Masoka was the source of poachers, but that through empowerment conferred by the CAMPFIRE programme, local people have been transformed into ‘a bastion of support for wildlife protection and enhancement’. Murphree (1997) also cites a positive example from Chapoto District near the Mozambique border. Here, communities fix/change quotas for elephant and buffalo depending on the quality of trophy (tusk weight or horn size) as highest revenues come from trophy quality. He describes this as local environmental science, elegant in its simplicity. The approach is effectively regulating wildlife populations.

There have been some criticisms of CAMPFIRE, however. Campbell et al. (1999) note that schemes are strongly differentiated by the quality and diversity of wildlife and the density of human and livestock populations; and Murombedzi (2001) concludes that CAMPFIRE has only been successful in small, discrete and relatively homogenous communities with access to extensive wilderness (cited by Adams 2004). In fact, wildlife, ‘so beloved of donor and NGO programmes’ (Wolmer, 2003), may not be uniformly attractive or valuable to local people outside areas like Chapoto, where a marginal agricultural environment encourages a heavy dependence on wildlife revenues (Murphree, 1977). Wolmer (2003) explains that labour migration, remittances and transborder trade are the mainstays of local livelihood systems, and are often more important than wildlife. Similarly, Murombedzi (1999) argues that people prioritise agriculture over wildlife, even with the high revenues from the latter, because wildlife do not represent the primary source of household income.

CAMPFIRE has also been criticised on the grounds that there needs to be further devolution from rural district councils to producer communities:

Attempts to foster people’s participation in conservation through the distribution of revenues from resource utilisation without devolving rights to resources to local people will not necessarily improve local stewardship of resources, regardless of the extent of the revenues generated (Murombedzi, 1999:289).

Moore (1998) offers a more radical critique, suggesting that CAMPFIRE represents an unprecedented and unregulated penetration of private lands by the state and private business (cited by Dzingirai, 2003). Clearly also, the reconciliation of values at different levels poses an ongoing challenge. In this connection, Murphree (1997) argues quite simply that local values are the sustainable utilisation of resources while global values are those of species preservation and biodiversity; the global
and local are clearly intertwined. Unless local values are accommodated, Murphree suggests, international values and goals will be subverted by local responses. Nonetheless, he argues tensions (will) continue to exist, given that local incentives indicate devolution of proprietorship, while the international-level bureaucratic and technocratic mind upholds the centralisation of authority and regards devolution as the surrendering of professional management to unsophisticated peasants (Murphree, 1997).

The land occupations in Zimbabwe in 2000 and 2001 have impacted upon the success of wildlife conservation efforts. Wolmer (2005) provides an example of the Chitsa people who have re-occupied a northern portion of the Gonarezhou National Park. While ZANU(PF) had been keen to present the land occupations as renationalising farms in white hands, the Chitsa people’s grudge was actually about the initial loss of their ancestral lands to the park. The Ministry of the Environment and Tourism severely censored this park occupation, which it saw as jeopardising plans for the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park. Balint (2006) cites another example of the impact of the post-2000 social and economic crisis in Zimbabwe. He notes that there have been revenue losses from a previously highly acclaimed project in the Mahenye area near Gonarezhou National Park following the decline in game viewing tourism. This did not jeopardise the success of the project however, because trophy hunting appeared to be less affected by political unrest. Yet, the combination of a loss of donor funding, NGO withdrawal and the collapse of local governance did precipitate a sharp deterioration in the performance of the 10-year old project. Balint (2006) notes that as the ruling party turned its attention to consolidating its power at the national level, the traditional chief and his family took advantage of this to assert control over the local CAMPFIRE committee and co-opt project benefits. In this respect, despite the criticisms levelled at transfrontier conservation noted in the previous section, success in attracting donor funding to continue to support conservation may be beneficial, particularly if it helps to maintain mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability.

Conclusion

This brief review has considered wildlife conservation in Africa giving some attention to historical forces, ways of seeing the environment, and power relations. Wildlife, biodiversity and valued environments are clearly not static resources, and their distribution and prevalence are fluid and intimately linked with policy and politics. Neo-liberal policies favouring consumptive use of the environment shape local ecologies as some species become more valuable than others. Wildlife policies and their outcomes reflect attempts by individuals and groups to gain private advantage or manipulate existing conditions or create new ones in order to achieve their ambitions (Gibson, 1999; Ramutsindela, 2004). Competing agendas and ways of seeing the environment among different interest groups at local, national and global levels with differing levels of power and capacities to negotiate and resist, add to the complexity of the story of conservation and present significant challenges to environmental governance.

Given the diversity and dynamism of people-nature interactions in Africa, a prescriptive approach to community conservation could be as fallacious as fortress conservation approaches. Yet there is considerable potential for community conservation to maximise positive conservation and development outcomes. Despite the weight of criticism surrounding aspects of community conservation,
abandoning efforts now could undermine previous successes (Balint, 2006). Transfrontier conservation, superceding community conservation as the ‘cutting edge’ of conservation in parts of southern Africa at least, has been shown to be replete with potential pitfalls, in addition to raising questions concerning policies towards, and the role of, powerful international organisations in conservation. Left unaddressed, these could potentially ‘undo the meagre gains of CBNRM and recentralise natural resource management’ (Wolmer, 2003). At the very least, they possess the potential for magnifying tension among competing interest groups. For this reason, as for many others, local livelihoods need to remain at the core of conservation efforts.

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A Political Ecology of Wildlife Conservation in Africa


Can the Poor Help GM Crops? 
Technology, Representation & Cotton 
in the Makhathini Flats, South Africa

Harald Witt, Rajeev Patel & Matthew Schnurr

The adoption of Genetically Modified (GM) cotton in South Africa’s Makhathini Flats in 1998 was heralded as a case in which agricultural biotechnology could benefit smallholder farmers, and a model for the rest of the continent to follow. Using historical, political economic and ethnographic data, we find the initial enthusiasm around GM technology to be misguided. We argue that Makhathini’s structured institutional framework privileges adopters of GM technologies through access to credit and markets. The adoption of GM cotton is symptomatic not of farmers’ endorsement of GM technology, but a sign of the profound lack of choice facing them in the region.

Recent literature in development journals has taken a robust and optimistic view regarding the potential of Genetically Modified (GM) crops to regenerate the agricultural sector in the global South. The claims for improved yield and pest-resistance seem to have been vindicated by a further claim, circulated across a range of scholarly articles and reports, that farmers have chosen GM crops of their own volition due to the advantages they confer.1 One of the most widely cited success stories has drawn on the experiences of small-scale farmers cultivating GM cotton in the Makhathini Flats in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

The stakes in the assessment are of concern elsewhere on the continent. Cotton farmers in West Africa have, for example, found it difficult to compete with cotton produced in the United States, because of the high levels of government subsidy enjoyed by cotton producers there. In response, the US has chosen not to reduce its subsidies, but offered GM cotton technology to farmers in West Africa, despite the fact that producers there are second in productivity only to Australia (Greenberg, 2004). In the promotion of GM cotton as suitable for African farmers in toto, the success story of Makhathini plays a key role. Yet precisely because the local circumstances are stripped away from any assessment of GM cotton’s suitability, farmers’ choice of GM seed can be represented and misrepresented as an endorsement of the technology, and by extension, an invitation to apply it elsewhere.

This study examines the adoption of GM cotton in the Makhathini Flats area, contextualising the laudatory findings of some researchers (see, e.g. Thirtle et al. 2003), and placing Makhathini’s cotton monoculture in a longer history of imperial export agriculture, technology and policy. We draw on thirty in-depth interviews with the leaders of cotton-growing associations, interviews with local government officials, growers and processors, suppliers of inputs, together with debt data from regional and national creditors, data from the cotton industry, the findings from

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three workshops involving a total of 80 farmers from the area, as well as survey data covering 50 residents. We begin with a brief history of cotton farming in KwaZulu-Natal, observing the development of a cotton monoculture destined for export, which GM technology extends. We then outline the limited choices facing cotton farmers, from a macro-economic, institutional and micro-local perspective.

We suggest that, in the light of current evidence, the considerable favourable attention accorded the Makhathini cotton farmers is indicative not of the appropriateness of the technology, but a symptom of a development policy and life-science industry which is keen for the technology to succeed. We argue that the adoption of GM cotton in the Makhathini area is symptomatic not of an endorsement of GM technology, nor a step on the road to regenerating the agricultural sector, but rather a sign of the profound lack of choice facing farmers in the region. Following Ferguson (1990), we conclude that the technology represents an anti-politics machine – offering a technological solution to a series of political problems around differentiated access to markets, and access to state resources including credit, agricultural extension services.

Context & Background

The Makhathini Flats cover the floodplains on either side of the Pongola River, stretching from just below the Jozini Dam to the confluence of the Pongola and Usuthu Rivers on the Mozambique border. More generally, the Flats comprise the low-lying areas east of the Ubombo mountains, covering some 13,000 hectares. The region falls within the Umkhanyakude district, and is characterised by chronic poverty, with 85.2 per cent of households within the municipality earning less than R1,500 per month (Iyer Rothaug Collaborative, et al. 2002) and by falling levels of employment from 13.4 per cent in 1996 to 9.8 per cent in 2001 – the period for which latest reliable figures are available. Socioeconomic data place the district as one of the poorest in the province (Jozini Municipality, 2004).

South Africa’s Genetically Modified Organisms Act, No.15 of 1997 was passed into law in 1999. A great deal of academic, corporate and governmental attention, both within South Africa and beyond, has been paid to the introduction of this agricultural technology, and its impact for local producers. The majority of farmers in the Makhathini area are smallholders, with average landholdings around 2.5 to 5 ha with some holdings smaller than one hectare (Hofs and Kirsten, 2001). In a series of publications, based on a single survey and including but not limited to these (Ismael, Bennett and Morse, 2002; Ismael, Bennett and Morse, 2001, 2001; Thirtle et al. 2003), this team of researchers has sounded a note of ‘cautious optimism’ regarding the success of the introduction of genetically modified cotton, concluding that the majority of adopters benefited from reduced pesticide exposure and increased yields; others have been less reserved. In testimony to the United States Congress House Science Committee, Subcommittee on Research on 12 June 2003, Robert Horsch, Vice President for Product and Technology Cooperation at Monsanto Inc, suggested the following:

*Monsanto’s insect-protected cotton has been a particular advantage to growers in the Makhathini Flats region of South Africa, one of the poorer regions of the world, where bollworms traditionally have destroyed up to 60 per cent of growers’ harvest. Average yields for biotech cotton in South Africa from 1998 and 2001 were 25 per cent higher than for conventional varieties, according to one study. Another study of the 1999-2000 growing season said average yields were 93 per cent higher than for conventional varieties – with an
average earnings increase of 77 per cent. T.J. Buthelezi one of the first farmers to plant biotech cotton in South Africa, says higher yields from biotech cotton have helped him invest for the future in more land and better equipment. T.J. recently told me, ‘For the first time I’m making money. I can pay my debts.’ The successful adoption of biotech cotton clearly shows the power and relevance of biotechnology for Africa (Horsch 2003).

That Horsch was able to call on Makhathini in this way, through the testimony of one of its farmers, but without substantive evidence for the durability or political economy of the intervention is of key significance. Such interventions shape the ideological climate in which donors and development agencies operate. Yet the testimony of how cotton has improved the lives of some Makhathini residents has been shorn of the area’s history, and has left un-told the story of how Makhathini is one of cotton’s last refuges in South Africa. This paper contextualises cotton growing in Makhathini by examining its historical political economy, its contemporary economic environment, its institutional framework, and the surging prevalence of debt. The findings from these investigations suggest an altogether different set of reasons behind the portrayal of success in Makhathini.

**Historicising Makhathini**

The history of cotton growing in KwaZulu-Natal is best characterised as a crop in search of a climate. Following annexation of Natal in 1843 plans were advanced to turn Natal into a ‘cotton colony’ which would satisfy the increasing demand of the Lancashire-based textile industry (Leverton, 1963). Cultivation was attempted throughout the colony but nowhere was cotton successful. Following the annexation of Zululand in 1897, agronomists and officials were optimistic that higher temperatures and lower incidence of frost during the growing season in Zululand would make for ideal growing conditions. While scattered cultivation did succeed at a very small scale near Eshowe and Mtubatuba, and more recently inland near Vryheid, by the 1970s most officials were convinced that for Natal to finally realise its potential as a cotton growing region, production would have to be anchored within the northern-most reaches of the province, including Makhathini.

It is uncertain as to when cotton was first introduced into the Makhathini area, although records show that white farmers near Ndumo were farming dryland cotton as early as 1919 (Henderson, 1992). Throughout the early 1960s and 1970s sporadic attempts at cotton cultivation were attempted in Ohlalwini, Mboza and KwaJobe, but large-scale production only emerged as a viable aspiration following the damming of the Pongola River to provide a predictable and controllable supply of water to the Flats. Influenced by the nearby Pongola Irrigation Settlement Scheme, the construction of the Jozini Dam in the 1960s was also intended to provide opportunities for poor unemployed whites who were to be settled on 20 ha plots on the Flats. It was estimated that some 652 million m$^3$ of water would be available for irrigation purposes (Eksteen et al. 1994).

When the Dam opened in 1974, however, the influx of white farmers never materialised. Rapid economic growth of the South African economy in the 1960s had mopped up surplus ‘poor white’ labour, thus eliminating the need for additional settlement of the land. The fall in the international price of sugar during the 1970s, the inability to fill the Jozini Dam due to protracted negotiations with Swaziland, and high employment rates in urban areas further hindered the expected mass white migration. As a result, and given the prevailing resistance to apartheid and the concomitant need to build support for the regime in rural areas,
the state directed its efforts towards making the dam meet the perceived needs of local black populations. The reluctance of whites to settle thus ultimately assisted the broader aims of the apartheid state in seeking to legitimise the fragmented nature of its ‘homeland’ states through a process of both consolidation of state power and the devolution of responsibility to ‘Bantustan’ authorities.

The Jozini Dam and the subsequent establishment of the Makhathini Irrigation Scheme were expected to fulfil the role of ‘growth engine’ for the sub-region. But an incoherent and continually mutating institutional framework imposed upon a matrix of changing developmental and political philosophies led to a lack of continuity and poor co-operation. This was exacerbated by inappropriate farmer selection and the initial removal and resettlement of some 5,000 individuals to establish the Irrigation Scheme. These factors generated high levels of institutional mistrust, disillusionment with development as a process, and crippling levels of indebtedness. The inability of the Scheme to lead and shape agricultural and rural development in the sub-region also ultimately undermined the broader potential of small-scale dryland farmers located beyond the Scheme. The apartheid state’s goal within these development initiatives was subtle; the state

... played the role of entrepreneur to generate ideological revenue – from those who were too poor to pay taxes – either through direct dispossession of land, or through the production process whereby smallholder farmers cultivate labour intensive crops that are considered to be in the national economic interests and in line with political interests of creating a black middle class (CORD, 1990).

State engagement not only provided the initial resources and vision for the construction of the dam, but continued to intervene in the institutional arrangements within the Flats as its own priorities and structures were constantly shifting. Once the Makhathini Irrigation Scheme was established it continued to rely on state support although there were consistent changes in the management of the scheme. In 1984 the previous government manager, the Corporation for Economic Development (CED), was disbanded and the South African Development Trust Corporation (STK/SADT), and more specifically its subsidiary – Mjindi Farming – was appointed as the new managing agent. Overall control remained with the Department of Cooperation and Development (DCD) and later the Department of Development Aid (DDA) which in turn was replaced in March 1992 by a consortium comprising the Department of Regional and Land Affairs, the Department of Agriculture, and the Natal Provincial Administration (Eksteen et al. 1994). In 1996 responsibility was transferred, once again, to the Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs.

Under STK, the Irrigation Scheme was geared primarily towards the production of cotton, which significantly accelerated the development of the infrastructure required for cotton production in the region (Eksteen et al. 1994). This also led to the expansion of extension services ‘to include the burgeoning dryland cotton farming’ (Mjindi, Farming (Pty) Ltd. n.d.). By the late 1980s, nearly 2,000 ha were under sprinkler irrigation, with a further 1,000 ha under dryland conditions. Yields of up to 3 tons/ha were recorded (Snyman, 1988). The surging interest in cotton as the key institutionally supported cash crop triggered a corresponding decrease in a number of food crops which had previously been planted regularly in the area. This shift coincided with the return of many retrenched migrant workers who, upon their return to the Makhathini Flats, began to explore alternative income generating opportunities.
The complicated and often confused development history of Makhathini reveals that the context in which a new technology is introduced is far from innocent. Exponents of the benefits that Bt cotton has conferred on Makhathini’s farmers often portray GM technology as a separation from the past, a revolutionary new technology that will irrevocably alter the livelihoods of smallholder farmers. Serious engagement with the region’s history overturns this notion. GM is best understood as the latest in a long series of technocratic interventions that have consistently failed to transform Makhathini into a hotbed of commodity production, but have instead been guided by a technocratic will to make cotton a lucrative cash crop, regardless of local conditions, needs or ecology.

Having outlined how regional history and geography have shaped the context of this technological intervention, we now turn to the political economy of cotton production in South Africa. We document the wide range of factors, both economic and institutional, that affect the choices available to the Makhathini cotton farmer. Policy decisions taken at all levels – international, national, and local – have important repercussions for small-scale farmers and fundamentally affect the benefit the farmer will receive from this new technology. Understanding how appropriate this GM technology is for the farmers of Makhathini can only be achieved once the range of political and economic factors that influence the adoption of cotton in the region have been unpacked.

### The Contemporary Economic Context of Cotton

South Africa is a net importer of cotton, and South African cotton growers have always been vulnerable to the variability and vagaries of the international cotton market. With the recent entry into the global market of a growing number of low-cost cotton-producing countries in Asia, together with persistently high cotton subsidies in the United States, South Africa’s cotton sector has become even more vulnerable. Cotton is a crop in decline in South Africa, although the impact of lower international cotton prices on South Africa’s cotton growing regime has been uneven. Dryland areas, for example, have proved to be far more susceptible to the price slump within the industry than irrigated farmland, as Table 1 shows.

This year’s estimates for cotton growth in the Makhathini Flats reflect the systematic decline in cotton cultivation in South Africa. Cotton SA estimates that 550 farmers in the Makhathini area are planting cotton in the 2004-2005 season – a significantly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Growing season</th>
<th>Area planted under Irrigation (ha)</th>
<th>Dryland area planted (ha)</th>
<th>Total area planted (ha)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993-94</td>
<td>11,258</td>
<td>55,941</td>
<td>67,199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994-95</td>
<td>19,038</td>
<td>35,096</td>
<td>54,134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-96</td>
<td>17,609</td>
<td>72,809</td>
<td>90,418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996-97</td>
<td>15,954</td>
<td>67,017</td>
<td>82,971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-98</td>
<td>20,361</td>
<td>69,578</td>
<td>89,939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-00</td>
<td>10,486</td>
<td>40,282</td>
<td>50,768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-01</td>
<td>18,539</td>
<td>38,153</td>
<td>56,692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>18,971</td>
<td>28,897</td>
<td>38,868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>10,322</td>
<td>12,252</td>
<td>22,574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>18,269</td>
<td>17,450</td>
<td>35,719</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Cotton SA, 2005
lower figure than Thittle et al.’s estimate of ‘3,000 Zulu smallholders growing cotton in Makhathini Flats’ (2003:718). Table 2 shows crop production information for KwaZulu-Natal. Since areas of dryland production outside of Makhathini are marginal, the provincial dryland statistics are a reasonable proxy for cotton grown by smallholders in the Makhathini Flats, the only significant smallholder cotton producers in the province. Irrigated farming is a little more diffuse, however, with cotton farms spread across Northern KwaZulu-Natal.

As Table 2 demonstrates, there is variability at the level of orders of magnitude in the adoption of cotton by dryland farmers as reflected in area under cultivation. The reason for this is fairly straightforward; without rain, cotton seed cannot be planted, and the fortunes of farmers without irrigation are therefore hostage to the region’s variable climate.

Of particular significance within this data are the statistics on yield. Despite the claims of the Monsanto Corporation, the South African cotton trade industry body data suggests that yield cannot alone explain the adoption of GM cotton within Makhathini. Table 2 shows more or less constant yield levels before and after the adoption of Bt cotton, contradicting a correlation between the introduction of GM cotton and increased yields in the region. This is consistent with ecological modelling associated with yield spikes with Bt cotton (Gutierrez, Dos Santos, Pizzamiglio et al. 1991; Gutierrez, Dos Santos, Villacorta et al. 1991). At the beginning of the period for which data could be found in the production year 1997-98, dryland yield stands at 600kg seed cotton per hectare, with 0 per cent GM cotton adoption. In 2004-05, with close to 100 per cent GM cotton adoption, yields are once again 600 kg/hectare.

Increased yields are then unable to account for the almost unanimous decision of Makhathini cotton farmers to adopt Bt cotton. Thittle et al. (2003) also suggest reduced pesticide exposure as a motivating factor in adoption. We were unable to collect data on pesticide use that would confirm this, though discussion with those familiar with pesticide application in the area suggests that while pesticide application to control boll-worm has fallen in the period since the introduction of Bt cotton, these reductions have been countervailed by increased pesticide application to ward off secondary insects such as jassid, whose appearances have substantially increased since the introduction of Bt cotton. While we cannot categorically dismiss reduced spraying costs as a possible explanation in the adoption of Bt cotton, and while our scepticism has been confirmed by recent research (Pschorr-Strauss, 2005),

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Production Year</th>
<th>Area planted under irrigation ha</th>
<th>Area planted under dryland ha</th>
<th>Yield of cotton planted on irrigated land (kg seed cotton per ha)</th>
<th>Yield of cotton planted on dryland (kg seed cotton per ha)</th>
<th>Production (200kg bales cotton lint)</th>
<th>Crop % handpicked</th>
<th>% crop ginned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997-98</td>
<td>1,144</td>
<td>6,459</td>
<td>2,100</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>1,130</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-99</td>
<td>1,502</td>
<td>6,785</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>12,683</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-00</td>
<td>1,155</td>
<td>5,926</td>
<td>1,400</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>7,493</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-01</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>3,587</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>1,150</td>
<td>10,419</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>2,620</td>
<td>10,593</td>
<td>4,400</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>10,486</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03*</td>
<td>1,403</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>2,135</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>8,500</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>2,276</td>
<td>2,537</td>
<td>3,310</td>
<td>659</td>
<td>14,715</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05*</td>
<td>1,173</td>
<td>2,242</td>
<td>2,860</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>8,695</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Cotton SA; *estimates
we suggest that adoption is primarily a function of a structured institutional framework that privileges adopters, while marginalising and excluding those with aspirations of escaping the cycle of cotton. In a context in which many farmers feel abandoned by the provincial department of agriculture and by government extension services and credit services, it is only through cotton that farmers gain access to seed, credit and support.

Changing Institutional Arrangements

Much has changed in Makhathini since Thirtle et al. conducted their research. At the time, in 1999-2000, the Vunisa Cotton Company was the sole vendor of cotton seed and supplies and, together with Noordelike Sentrale Katoen (NSK), one of two buyers of cotton in the area. Since then, NSK has given way to the Makhathini Cotton Company (MCC). Vunisa, following a legal dispute with the Makhathini Cotton Company in 2002 (Makhathini Cotton (Edms) Beperk vs. Vunisa Cotton (Edms) Bpk 2002), has completely shut down its operations in the area. Despite its departure, Vunisa’s legacy, especially as a facilitator of the extension of credit, remains. Officials report that the company was profligate in its extension of credit to farmers – this was cited in interviews as one of the contributing causes for Vunisa’s departure. Some farmers report that Vunisa would extend credit without ascertaining whether the prospective debtors in fact owned any land. Vunisa’s widespread dissemination of credit explains the discrepancy between Thirtle et al.’s reported ‘3,000 Zulu farmers’ and the suggestion by the local Monsanto representative that, were full production capacity to be resumed, the total number of farmers in the area adopting cotton would be between 1,500 and 2,000. The difference between this assessment and the larger previous one can be ascribed to large numbers of people declaring themselves as cotton farmers in order to access credit from the Land and Agricultural Development Bank of South Africa (Land Bank) through Vunisa, but with neither the intention nor the means to grow cotton.

Also omitted from Thirtle et al.’s account is Mjindi Farming (Pty) Ltd. Mjindi is a parastatal that administers the water and state land connected with irrigation from the Jozini Dam. Ten years ago, they were in receipt of grants in the region of R13 million, with a staff of 180. Today, the same operation runs with a staff of 12, and with a slimmed-down grant of only R2 million. This dramatic decline in funding has focused Mjindi’s efforts towards full cost recovery. Owed R7,538,233 by 325 farmers and collectives, Mjindi has been scrambling to establish stricter means of enforcing repayment, the latest of which is the introduction of pre-paid water meters. So far, ten farmers have had their water cut off for inadequate repayment. The operation, however, remains unable to mitigate its financial collapse. A report by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) suggested that the simple maintenance of existing capital equipment required a subsidy in excess of R100,000 per month. This untenable financial situation has led many to speculate that it is merely a matter of time before DWAF sells the organisation, the most likely buyer being the local industrial giant, the Makhathini Cotton Company.

Before we consider the formidable position of the MCC within Makhathini’s political economy, it is important to consider the role of debt as an accelerating engine of cotton adoption rates. Mjindi Farming’s cost recovery exercises, and its liabilities, reflect the parlous situation of irrigated farmers. Many of these farmers choose to grow sugar cane instead of cotton in order to service their debt. For dryland
farmers, such options have never been available. Yet while the options for dryland farmers are more constrained than their irrigated-land counterparts, they share a common history in their exposure to debt. In September 1988, the KwaZulu Finance Corporation (KFC) became the primary agent responsible for advancing and managing production loans on the Mjindi Scheme. KFC lending soon expanded to funding dryland farmers, in response to a request from the KwaZulu cabinet. From 1988 to 1994, the KwaZulu Finance Corporation advanced R11,998,317, mainly as cotton production loans. Due to poor repayment rates, KFC eventually decided to cease lending in the area on 31 August 1994.

The supply of credit during this period was sporadic, uneven, and confused. Yet demand remained high. Farmers repeatedly articulate that the reason so many of them turned to cotton was that it was the sole source of credit in the region. After KFC’s withdrawal, the only access to credit available to farmers in the region was through the cotton companies themselves (namely, Vunisa). Lending undertaken on behalf of the cotton industry was excessive and irresponsible. According to one respondent in the banking sector, during the 1980s:

_Mjindi Farming … provided interest free credit with very little attempt to recover monies lent, neither were farmers charged rent for the land nor for the irrigation water supplied to them. A culture of non-payment soon came to dominate._

This reckless lending was exacerbated by the inability of cotton farmers to extract high yields from their crops. In the 1988-89 season, irrigation farmers averaged 1,383 kg per hectare which was considerably lower than the ‘break-even high technology yield of approximately 2,000 kg per hectare’ (Bembridge, 1993). By 1991, average irrigation farmer debt was R17,155, up to R31,158 when water and other costs were included. These spiralling levels of debt meant that only 25 per cent of farmers qualified for seasonal crop loans in that season (Bembridge, 1993). As a result, the number of cotton farmers on the Irrigation Scheme declined from 259 in 1988 to just 131 in 1991 (Woodburne, 1993).

Levels of indebtedness were then exacerbated further by the Vunisa Cotton Company’s decision in 1993 to distribute free cotton seed to farmers. The climate that year was unfavourable, and the subsequent poor yields meant that farmers were unable to recoup input costs (Woodburne, 1994). The situation of farmers on the irrigation scheme was equally depressing. By 1994 the outstanding cotton debt of both dryland and irrigation farmers owed to the KFC already stood at an estimated R2 million, swelling to over R5 million when land rental arrears, accumulated water charges and SADT loans are included. Although an agreement on debt consolidation was reached, a 1994 report on the Makhathini area stated that ‘irrigation and dry land farmers are in a desperate situation … continued attempts to cultivate cotton will serve only to drive them further into debt’ (Woodburne, 1994).

The debt burden is exacerbated by difficult climatic conditions only marginally suitable for cotton, compounded by fluctuating and recently declining international commodity prices. The seasonal reliance on financial assistance, often channeled through cotton interests, has created a dependent cyclical relationship between small-scale cotton farmers and an ever-changing set of developmental institutions, that has served to entrench farmers in a high risk, low-return system of agriculture that is neither financially nor ecologically tenable. This dependent relationship is constituted by the institutional arrangements that prevail in the area. The story of
debt informs part of this. The monopsony of the Makhathini Cotton Company is a further, central component, and it is to this that we now turn.

**Makhathini Cotton (Pty) Ltd**
The most recent member of the institutional matrix defining the developmental context of the Makhathini Flats is Makhathini Cotton (Pty) Ltd or the Makhathini Cotton Company (MCC) as it is more commonly known. The physical presence of the Company in the region is characterised by its recently relocated and re-assembled cotton gin and the necessary infrastructure required to ensure an adequate level of direct access to cotton markets. In some respects Makhathini Cotton (Pty) Ltd embodies the post-apartheid development discourse which has emphasised privatisation and the role of private capital in economic development, as well as the redistribution of economic opportunities to previously disadvantaged individuals. The MCC also represents the vanguard to the much vaunted public-private initiatives in the province designed to facilitate a ‘green revolution’ in the area.

The MCC was founded in 2002 at the behest of prominent provincial politicians and as an initiative of the late J.S. Eriksen. The founding partner was the cotton company Noordelike Sentrale Katoen (NSK), which had established a small presence on the Makhathini Flats in the 2001/2002 season. The vision of the company was, as with every other initiative before it, to bring enduring development to Makhathini. Furthermore, with 70 per cent of the shares owned by a black South African, the MCC also fulfilled the role of an Agricultural Black Economic Empowerment (Agri-BEE) company. This policy justifiably seeks to redistribute control of the economy to previously disadvantaged groups. Yet in the context of Makhathini it has still not addressed the fundamental flaws in the overarching development paradigm.

Although the MCC does not sell cotton seed directly, the Company does have ‘friendly relations’ with Monsanto and other key input suppliers such as Wenkem, a local agrochemical and seed distributor. Wenkem operates from a container adjacent to the MCC property and it is from here that the Bollgard™ cotton seed primarily used by Makhathini farmers is sold. To ensure that some of the concerns surrounding outstanding production loans, licensing ‘violations’ and the illegal distribution of patented seed is monitored and controlled a list of licensees is provided by the seed distributor to the MCC. In addition, the MCC now only provides sacks for baling cotton free of charge to registered licence holders. Previously the Company had distributed sacks to all cotton farmers, but the sacks were sometimes returned filled with cotton that ‘wasn’t theirs’, which was perceived by MCC as being a source of conflict.

The MCC also has institutional links with the Land Bank although, unlike Vunisa, it does not provide farmers with credit for seed, inputs or irrigation. Rather, the MCC has offered to collect ‘voluntary’ repayments of Land Bank loans. More important however, is the role of the Land Bank as the primary provider of finance for the ongoing operations of the MCC.

As was alluded to earlier, the MCC is not merely a ginning facility, but also actively engages in the production of cotton in both a direct and indirect capacity. The company has three distinct cotton production arrangements. First, it grows cotton itself on 350 ha on the existing Mjindi irrigation scheme, and on a further 732.91 ha on land leased from Mjindi Farming (Pty) Ltd. Second, cotton is grown in a
subleasing arrangement with farmers on the Mjindi irrigation scheme where the average farm size is 10 ha. The payment arrangements for this scheme are a flat rental of R12,500/ha per crop per year over a five year period, with 50 per cent of the profits returning to the Land Bank, 25 per cent of profits returning to the MCC and 25 per cent to the farmer. Within this scheme there are two sub-arrangements which include a self-help scheme (chosen by only five farmers) where the farmer supplies labour in the growing of cotton. Alternatively, farmers may choose an arrangement whereby the entire farming operation is taken over by the company (chosen by the majority of around 35 farmers). The overall production scheme is currently in its third year, but is already proving to be financially problematic for the MCC.25

Third, the MCC is also engaged in joint venture partnerships with farmers south of the core Mjindi area. It has succeeded in setting up small joint-venture companies with farmers in which the MCC holds 51 per cent stake of shares and farmers own 49 per cent. In these schemes, while there is no guaranteed payment, the companies will, over a ten year period, share profits along the same lines as the Mjindi scheme, with Land Bank receiving 50 per cent of profits, 25 per cent going to the farmer, and 25 per cent going to the MCC.26 Irrigation equipment will be fitted by the MCC, and charged to the joint venture company. With the profits generated through this business, farmers will be able to repurchase shares from the MCC, with the aim finally of owning the joint venture as a community. Three key features of this scheme are that the area under cultivation will be relatively large (180 ha in Makhathini’s Section 6 area), that irrigation will be installed, and that it makes credit available to farmers through their joint venture.27 Despite this, the chances of farmers buying back any shares from the MCC based on cotton revenue seem unlikely. This year, the most profitable plot of land on which the MCC grew cotton turned in a profit of only R141.63/ha.28

The issue of scale is equally critical here as the areas in the joint venture are to be irrigated with a centre-pivot system. Once the pivot is installed, the marginal cost of adding an extra section of irrigation boom decreases (because the surface area covered by each extension to the radius of the pivot increases with scale). The irrigation technology therefore favours large-scale operations. All land under the sweep of the pivot must be part of the same scheme as it is not viable to turn off the pivot for plots of land that are not congruent with the overall scheme.29

Clearing obstructions for the centre pivot system has also meant relocating families. The need for contiguous plots of land under the pivot demands the full and complete participation of every land-holder in the area. This has led to allegations of intimidation tactics being used by local committee members against individuals hesitant to relocate in order for these companies to be formed.30 Furthermore, while R6,000 has been allocated per farming family for temporary accommodation, the farmers are still waiting for permanent housing. At present neither the Jozini Municipality nor the MCC seem to want to take responsibility for this, despite farmers’ understanding that both institutions had committed to providing housing in exchange for relocation.31

The motive behind MCC’s massive expansion plans is most likely financial. In order for the gin to turn a profit it will have to process over 10 million kg a year, a figure that has not yet been approached in the first years of operation. In the 2003/2004 season, for instance, the gin processed only 8 million kg.32 With the MCC incurring heavy losses on cotton farming, these must be compensated by profit generated by the ginning process, which can only be realised with accelerated production volumes.33
Choices, Farmers & the Adoption of Genetically Modified Cotton

Having articulated the historical, economic, political and institutional contexts that frame the decision-making ability of Makhathini cotton farmers, we now turn towards evaluating which factors are most pivotal in shaping the lack of choices available. Informing this are data from a series of workshops, and in-depth interviews with leaders of local cotton associations. This struck us as an appropriate methodological intervention, not least because in the reporting of the Makhathini GM phenomenon, the voices of all but a few farmers – invariably those willing to promote GM cotton – have been silenced. Through these conversations, the following were suggested as key factors in Bt cotton adoption.

Few Alternatives for Dryland Farmers

Above all else, and repeatedly throughout our discussions, dryland farmers in the Makhathini area made it clear that they had few alternatives to cotton. A constant refrain in our workshops was the call for additional markets and expanding irrigation. With irrigation would come the possibility of growing sugar-cane and other crops, especially maize. Some floodplain farmers, reliant on the floods from the Jozini dam but not connected to its irrigation system, grow cane, but the crop exhibits increasing returns to scale, and transport fees and distance to the mill in Pongola some 70 km away from Jozini make it a barely economic proposition. Other disincentives to sugar-cane cultivation are the fact that Makhathini farmers are restricted to only marketing the cane from 1,420 hectares in terms of national sugar milling policy, and that cane require more than twice as much water than does cotton (INR, 2002). Despite this, farmers were nearly unanimous in favouring sugar cane over cotton. Farmers explained that in the absence of markets for alternative crops, cotton remains the only possible source of income in the area.

Effective Prevention of Access to Conventional Cotton Seed

The absence of alternatives at a crop level is replicated at the level of seed purchasing or seed supply. Choices are already limited by the fact that Cotton South Africa puts forward an annual short list of three recommended seed varieties to ensure consistency in the processed fibre. Yet farmers report and employees at the MCC confirm that conventionally improved cotton seed is not being grown anywhere on the Makhathini Flats. While Delta Opel, an improved non-GM variety, is available for sale at the official Wenkem outlet situated adjacent to the MCC gin, it is only sold in quantities of 25kg, as opposed to the Bollgard™ NuCOTN 37-B seed which is marketed in an ‘Ecombi’ 5kg package, an ideal size for the small acreage farmers that prevail within the Flats. Even more prohibitively, the MCC gin only purchases cotton packed in woolsacks that the MCC provides. These woolsacks are allocated to farmers at the beginning of the season based on information derived from lists provided to MCC by Wenkem of those licensed to grow Bt seed. Thus, MCC excludes the potential of non-GM growers by only allowing Bt cotton to pass through its gin.

Water

This is the third year in which rain has been unseasonably low during the cotton planting season. The drought has meant that dryland farmers have been unable to plant cotton seed. T.J. Buthelezi, the farmer that Monsanto has flown to over 13 different countries to speak on his positive experience growing Bt cotton, had invested R6,000 into plowing and disking his soil, and but had yet to plant a single
seed in the 2004/2005 growing season. In an early February 2005 interview, he indicated that were he to plant at that time, he would barely recoup his costs. He reported that: ‘my head is full. I do not know what I’m going to do. I will have to speak to my wife so that we can make a plan’. His situation epitomizes that of many farmers in the region. At the Ndumo A irrigation project near the Mozambican border, only 60 ha of the 488 ha set aside for cotton were being utilised in the 2004/2005 growing season due to water constraints. Farmers at nearby Ndumo B reported similar shortages and as a result 300 ha of land designated for cotton lay untouched due to a lack of water.

Debt
The final variable that constrains the choices available to the cotton farmers of Makhathini is that of escalating debt. We have outlined how profligate lending practices on the part of KFC and Vunisa Cotton Company led to spiralling levels of farmer debt and eventually forced both institutions to abandon credit provision in the region. Lending in the post-GM era has now become the sole responsibility of Land Bank. Easy access to credit needed to be widely available during these introductory years since small-scale farmers required ready cash to cover the increased seed and input costs associated with GM cotton seed. Buoyed by the initial surge in enthusiasm that accompanied the introduction of GM in 1998, Land Bank was extravagant in its loans, giving out more than R8 million to small-scale cotton farmers in the first growing season (see Table 3). Due to the institutional and climate constraints detailed above farmers were unable to meet their repayment schedules, forcing Land Bank to close 1447 out of the 1648 loans after only one year.

In subsequent years Land Bank was more restrained in its lending, attempting first a reduced loan amount per farmer, then consolidating loans among groups of farmers in the hopes of improving loan repayment. Revenues from Bt cotton were still insufficient to allow farmers to meet their repayment schedules. Land Bank eventually ceased lending in Makhathini in 2004, with R22.7 million outstanding in defaulted loans.

The volatile and unpredictable pattern of lending undertaken by Land Bank mirrors the roller coaster experience of small-scale farmers with Bt cotton. Initial enthusiasm during the first few growing seasons obfuscated the institutional and political economic realities that make cotton-growing in Makhathini an unpredictable and precarious undertaking. Land Bank’s disastrous lending figures confirm farmers’

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**Table 3: Loan Accounts to Dryland Farmers in KwaZulu-Natal Issued & Closed by Land Bank, 1998-2004**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year in which loan granted</th>
<th>No. of loans granted</th>
<th>Original loan amount (ZAR)</th>
<th>No. of accts. closed</th>
<th>Final arrears owed to Land Bank in this year (ZAR)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>1,648</td>
<td>R 8,110,985.40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>R 214,450.00</td>
<td>1,447</td>
<td>16,185,855.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>795</td>
<td>R 1,389,375.00</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>1,103,838.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>R 25,000.00</td>
<td>793</td>
<td>3,387,492.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>R 1,173,485.00</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>81,132.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>R 53,960.00</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>1,176,875.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>R -</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>812,952.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,537</td>
<td>R10,967,255.40</td>
<td>2,621</td>
<td>22,748,147.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Land Bank 2005.
reports which were adamant that their debt situation had deteriorated following the introduction of Bt cotton.40

Conclusion

The development of cotton in Makhathini suggests that the success story of GM cotton has been ascribed a prematurely happy ending. Technical interventions, even relatively easily adaptable ones such as Bt cotton, are not inserted into a vacuum. The ecological and political economic contexts have been shorn away from the accounts that, on balance, find grounds for ‘cautious optimism’ in the Makhathini area. Yet the political economy of Makhathini has been consistently transformed to accommodate the needs of cotton, despite the ongoing uncertainty around the compatibility of small farms and the scale-based returns necessary to sustain modern cotton economics. The political economy of cotton production puts the MCC in a position in which it seeks to increase its land holdings, resulting in sleight profit-sharing arrangements for some, coerced eviction for others, and widespread indebtedness for many. This results in the exclusion and disempowerment of the very farmers Bt cotton is intended to empower.

Yet, the MCC remains committed to its planned expansion. We can make sense of this, despite the potential losses currently sustained by the company, not because of the intrinsic benefits conferred on it by genetically modified seed, but because the company is merely the latest in a succession of large-scale development efforts in the Makhathini region. As with previous efforts, it is important for the development intervention to appear as if it is ‘benefiting the poor’. It is perhaps for this reason that the MCC has recently relaunched its website, hosting a 2005 news article from the ‘life-sciences’ industry-funded Council for Biotechnology Information (Company, 2005; Council for Biotechnology Information, n.d.) in which T.J. Buthelezi claims: ‘Normally, at the end of the year, I would ask my wife how we are going to pay our bills,’ he says. ‘Now I ask her, how are we gonna spend this money?’ Our interviews with Buthelezi, as well as with other leading cotton farmers, contradict this rather favourable scenario.

We have shown that farmers on the Makhathini Flats adopt Bt cotton not because they consider themselves to be innovative adopters of biotechnology, but because agrarian choices are severely limited. The principal intervention in the bringing of GM cotton to the region has been the facilitation of access to cotton markets for local farmers. Absent from the area has been any serious and consistent engagement by government to offer genuine sustainable alternatives or to promote a viable model suitable to small-scale agricultural development. In this context the rhetoric of ‘GM technology helping the poor’ seems to serve the needs of the promoters of the technology, rather than the residents of Makhathini. With the spectre of similar interventions haunting other parts of Africa, sanctioned through the ‘success’ of Makhathini, we sincerely hope that this prioritisation can be reversed.

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Endnotes

1. See, for example, the rationale behind the Global Environment Fund’s ‘West Africa Regional Biosafety Project’, GEF Project 2911, which explicitly mentions insecticide resistance as a rationale for the development of GM crops, available at http://www.thegef.org/Documents/Council_Documents/GEF_C28/WP.html

2. The first trials in South Africa of genetically modified cotton had, however, taken place almost a decade earlier. In 1989 the Department of Agriculture received its first application for GM cotton. In 1990 Calgene had conducted field trials with GM cotton to test for Bromoxynil tolerance. The first trials with Bt cotton were initiated in 1993.

3. Interview, Pete Derman, Director, Community Outreach Research and Development (CORD), 1 December 2003.

4. Settlement on the irrigation scheme began in 1982 and by 1988/89 there were 284 farmers on 3,500 ha. Average area per farmer was about 10 ha (Bembridge 1991).

5. The SADT was gradually phased out and replaced by Natal Trust Farms but continued to be represented locally by Mjindi Farming. In November 1993 Mjindi Farming (Pty) Ltd was established and the shareholdings were transferred from the SADT to the national Department of Agriculture. The new structure reported to a board of directors which comprised of shareholders and local representatives.


8. Interview, Barry Janse van Rinsberg, Operations Manager, Makathini Cotton, 3 February 2005.

9. These observations were corroborated by Monsanto employees; Interview, Andrew Bennett, Biotechnology Lead, Monsanto, 28 February 2003 and Charles Motlu, Monsanto Field Representative, Makathini, 4 February 2005.

10. Originally created by Clark Cotton and the Tongaat Cotton Company. Clark Cotton had come to dominate the local market since its arrival in 1978.


13. Interview, Charles Motlu, Monsanto Field Representative, Makathini, 4 February 2005.


15. Interview, Pieter Pretorious, Irrigation Manager, Mjindi Farming, (Pty) Ltd, 2 February 2005.

16. The KwaZulu Finance Corporation had begun lending in the area in 1985-86 for small-scale capital goods such as tractors.

17. Additional development funding for the expansion of the Irrigation Scheme was also made available by the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA).


22. According to Harry Strauss, the principal actors were Mr. J.S. Eriksen, Mr. P. Sokhela, Mjindi (Pty) Ltd and the provincial government (Personal Communication, 1 April 2005). It should be noted that Mr. P. Sokhela also has extensive interests in sugar where recent acquisitions such as Illovo Sugar’s Gledhow and Umfolozi sugar mills have also been heralded as major BEE advances.

23. Interview, Barry Janse van Rinsberg, Operations Manager, Makhathini Cotton Company, 3 February 2005

24. Interview Barry Janse van Rinsberg, Operations Manager, Makhathini Cotton Company 3 February 2005. According to its website, Makhathini Cotton Farming (Pty) Ltd successfully negotiated with the government to lease 15 000ha of state land and has obtained water rights for 4 000ha. As at the end of 2004, 1 500ha of land has been developed under irrigation (Makhathini Cotton Company 2005).


27. Thirtle et al. did not consider access to water as a variable in their adoption model. Although there were floods in the year they conducted their survey, the infrastructure for water is a more permanent feature of the area, and their omission of it as a variable is surprising. Their findings on economies of scale are inconclusive – their sample found that there were returns to scale for adoption of Bt cotton, but could not rule out that adoption was scale-neutral. Qualitative data suggests that there are indeed returns to scale, and the business strategy of MCC is based partly on this assumption.


29. Interview, David McAllister, Agricultural Development Manager, Makhathini Cotton Company, 3 February 2005. Economies of scale in cotton farming are also suggested by qualitative data from a forthcoming study by Van der Hueve, who found that farmers who reported increasing their cotton hectarage did so because they thought that in so doing, they might be able better to recoup their costs, having failed to do so with smaller areas under cultivation.

30. One woman, who would give her name only as Mrs. X for fear of reprisals, reported that her local committee had intimidated her into signing over the rights to her land as without her consent the entire project would have had to be halted.

31. Interview with Mr. B. C. Nkabinda, Manager Jozini District Office, Department of Agriculture, 25 Jan 2005

32. Interview, Barry Janse van Rinsberg, 23 November 2004.

33. Interview, David Macallister, 3 February 2005.


36. Interview, David Macallister, 3 February 2005.


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Edward Ramsamy

The World Bank did not address urban issues for the first twenty-five years of its existence. However, a variety of political factors propelled the reluctant institution to address urban poverty in the early 1970s (Ayres, 1983; Ramsamy, 2006). The majority of the Bank’s urban interventions during the 1970s concentrated on squatter upgrading and sites-and-services projects. While these programmes did have their problems, they represent the Bank’s first attempt to address directly the needs of the urban poor, and offer them a framework to legitimise their rights to shelter and secure land tenure. By the mid-1980s, however, the Bank moved away from this approach and embraced a perspective that examined cities in their national macro-economic contexts. The Bank argued that the role of governments ought to be transformed from that of ‘providers’ of urban services, to that of ‘supporters’ or ‘enablers’ that serve as a liaison between the private sector and self-help groups (World Bank, 1991, 1993).

It was during this shift in urban policy that the country of Zimbabwe approached the World Bank about the possibility of an urban development loan. According to Fred King of the Southern Africa Department of the World Bank, Zimbabwe requested the Bank’s consideration of funding a rapid railway system between the capital city of Harare and the satellite township of Chitungwiza. In response, the Bank sent an urban sector mission to Zimbabwe in 1981 in order to ‘get a sense of the priority of issues that the government should be grappling with in the urban sector, rather than just helping it build a railway line.’ The mission to Zimbabwe produced a detailed report on the urban condition in the country, and recommended a series of policy changes, repeatedly commenting on the need to address ‘the extreme duality of Zimbabwe’s economy’ (World Bank, 1985). For the Bank, the solution to the duality was to provide low-income areas with the same kind of institutions and services that were available in the middle and high-income areas. In essence, this strategy entailed increasing home ownership and utilizing the private sector to expand market-oriented housing delivery.

The aim of this paper is to offer a critical overview of the World Bank’s urban programmes in Zimbabwe. The first part identifies the core features of the Bank’s urban programmes in Zimbabwe. The World Bank’s own assessments of its efforts in Zimbabwe adopt a self-congratulatory tone, claiming that the ‘highly satisfactory’ projects were ‘an excellent example of privatised housing finance’ (World Bank, 1995:12). The second part of this paper, in contrast, will argue that the Bank did not, in fact, influence the broader policy climate in a manner that improved the lives of the urban poor.
The World Bank’s Urban Programmes in Zimbabwe

Effective in 1985, the Bank’s first urban development project in Zimbabwe, called Urban I, set out to implement the recommendations of the urban mission’s report. The main objective of the project was to ‘increase the supply of affordable housing and related services to large segments of the poorer population, and to improve the system of housing finance’ in four major cities: Harare, Bulawayo, Mutare, and Masvingo (World Bank, 1984:8). The Bank tried to incorporate its evolving policy of privatisation and reduction of urban subsidies into its urban programmes in Zimbabwe by involving local building societies. Although these societies were the traditional source of financing for middle and upper-income mortgages, the Bank sought their participation to cover the capital costs of plot and housing construction for low-income groups also. By involving the building societies, the Bank aimed to bring together two separate systems of housing finance delivery that had existed in Zimbabwe prior to independence. In other words, the Bank sought to integrate private-sector-based financing options that served middle and upper-income households with the public-sector-based financing delivery options intended for low-income households. Building societies were identified as the means to that end. Initially, the Bank found it difficult to persuade the building societies to fund low-income housing on a non-subsidised basis. As Jeff Racki, Urban I’s task manager, recalls,

They weren’t exactly jumping up and down to fund low-income housing. The old codgers who ran the building societies were part of an old regime and their mindsets were not going to shift very easily.4

After independence, despite the end of official segregation, building societies did not enter the low-income housing market immediately. They also faced the criticism that they borrowed from the poor to fund the houses of the rich. Middleton Nyoni, City Treasurer of the city of Bulawayo, observed that the new government and the general black population resented building societies because they were ‘typically the place where most of the Black labor force put their savings but were never given access to loans because the money went toward low-density White housing.’5 The societies, thus, were accused of racism, conservatism, and a refusal to accommodate the poor (Kamete, 1999:77-96; Mafico, 1991).

However, the collapse of the middle and high-income housing market ‘helped to convince building societies to finance low-income housing because they weren’t lending to anyone.6 The World Bank sector report on urban development in Zimbabwe echoed this observation:

A case could also be made for involving the building societies in low-income housing simply to preserve their dynamism during the period of a depressed upper-income housing market. At present, there is no sign that the slump is abating and it may well last for years. It is not clear that the building societies could survive, as mortgage lending institutions, without entering the low-income housing field in one way or another (World Bank, 1985:81).

The Bank presented this situation to the government and the building societies as an opportunity to enter into a mutually beneficial partnership. The government gains if the potential dynamism of the societies can be exploited for low-income housing; and the building societies gain if they can enter this fast growing field while their main historical business is severely depressed (World Bank, 1985:81). After much negotiation, the building societies finally agreed to provide project beneficiaries sufficient mortgage loans to cover the purchase cost of a plot, plus the cost of
constructing a minimal shelter on that plot. Based on the success of Urban I, the Bank presented Urban II in 1989 to its Board of Directors for approval, to run concurrently with Urban I. Urban II was the second major urban and regional initiative in Zimbabwe, and a relatively large project totaling US$580 million to which the World Bank contributed US$80 million. Approximately 70 per cent of the project’s resources were dedicated to housing and housing-related infrastructure. As Urban II’s task manager James Hicks recalls, Urban I ‘laid a foundation for a housing programme with a broader base outside the public sector.’ The purpose of Urban II was to continue this trend and to ‘expand the role of private sector financial intermediation for housing from a pilot operation in four cities, to a nation-wide sector programme.’ In contrast to Urban I, which was based in four cities, Urban II conformed to the Bank’s own concurrently evolving urban agenda by emphasising the need for nationally-based urban initiatives.

As in Urban I, the building societies provided the necessary finance for the purchase of plots as well as the construction of dwelling units in Urban II. The Bank regarded the involvement of the building societies in both Urban I and Urban II as a key strategy in reducing the financial burden on the public sector and envisioned that their participation would eventually ‘restructure the financing of low-cost housing so that government funds are replaced by private sector resources.’

The World Bank hailed the entry of building societies as a success because the initial fear of potentially high default rates proved to be unfounded. Defaults were rare up to the mid-1990s; in fact, a Bank review found that default rates were actually higher for upper-income groups (World Bank, 1994). When allottees did have difficulty meeting their monthly payments, high demand enabled them to sell their properties at a profit. Furthermore, building societies were able to do the same with repossessions.

By the closure of Urban I in 1994, some 18,000 residential plots and community facilities had been made available for low-income residents in four cities. Urban II, on the other hand, was implemented country-wide and involved over 21 cities and towns in Zimbabwe. The Bank’s report of Urban II stated that some 30,000 stands for low and middle-income housing were built before the project’s completion in 1999. During the course of the project, 29,328 mortgage applications were received by the building societies, of which 22,432 were approved (out of a target of 24,000) for the value of approximately Z$570 million (US$16 million). Approximately 11,200 stands were completed in Harare alone for the duration of Urban II (World Bank, 2000). The World Bank’s projects in Zimbabwe led to some gradual, limited improvements in housing conditions and access to facilities for some of the urban poor. The projects were also able to extend private sector finance to low-income families on a limited basis.

The Bank concluded that its urban projects forged an effective link between the public and private sectors and reduced the fiscal burden on the public sector. In its evaluations of Urban I and II, the Bank proclaimed that the successes and benefits of these new sector-wide projects surpassed the project-by-project approach of the 1970s:

The project provides an excellent example of a case where the traditional public sector role in housing is reduced from that of total provision to the more limited one of servicing residential land, leaving the financial and actual contraction of the dwelling units to the private sector.
The projects demonstrate how low-income households can have access to finance by providing an enabling environment for the housing sector (World Bank, 2000:8).

Thus, Urban I and II were celebrated by the Bank as solutions to the problem of low-income housing finance in Zimbabwe.

Critique of the World Bank’s Urban Programmes in Zimbabwe

The Bank claimed that Urban I and II created alternative, enabling, and sustainable structures for low-income housing finance in Zimbabwe. This evaluation, however, does not stand up to empirical scrutiny. In addition to logistical problems encountered during the projects’ implementation, there is some incongruity between the Bank’s own evaluations and the projects’ actual impact.

Urban I and Urban II did not reach the poorest segments of the urban population, despite their aims to do so. Most of the urban poor could not meet the eligibility criteria for building society loans. From the Bank’s perspective, the primary objective of Urban II programme was to encourage private sector financing for low-income housing in the long term:

*The private sector will provide all financing for low-income housing. Broader-based investment in building societies will occur through the creation of several new mechanisms to raise long-term housing finance. The result is that the societies’ low-cost mortgage portfolio will expand and the government’s long-term portfolio will correspondingly diminish.*

However, private sector financing meant that a substantial number of the urban poor could not gain access to funds to meet their housing needs. While the Bank intended its programmes, especially Urban II, to provide an alternative system of financing for low-income housing, the impact of these programmes did not match the extent of the problem. In the first three years of lending for low-cost housing, just under 14,000 mortgages were issued, compared to the nearly 16,000 mortgages issued for high-cost housing, although the need for the former was much greater (Zimbabwe, 1991). In addition to the building societies’ fiscal conservatism in issuing loans, local authorities’ delays in servicing the plots also contributed to the problem and prevented many poor people from participating.

In sum, the World Bank’s programmes may have increased access for a few low-income residents, but they have only marginally affected the overall critical housing shortage in Zimbabwe, which is primarily due to insufficient availability of finance for housing development. The National Housing Fund’s resources have been exhausted and have not been replenished. To complicate matters further, the World Bank suspended aid to Zimbabwe as of November 2000 because of political instability. However, even with international assistance, the majority of households on the waiting lists did not qualify for finance under existing eligibility criteria. At present, the housing crisis is compounded by the international development agencies’ policies of fiscal management and austerity, as well as the imprudent choices of the domestic elite in Zimbabwe.

The Zimbabwe government opted for a pragmatic approach to development following independence. The World Bank programmes did not attempt to transform the colonial basis of economic and spatial inequality in Zimbabwe. While the Bank, as pointed out earlier, viewed the problem as one of ‘extreme duality’, it recommended an extension of the market-based system into the black townships as
a solution (World Bank, 1985). However, the differences and unequal relationships between black high-density townships and former white residential areas in Zimbabwe are better captured by the idea of uneven capitalist development (Bond, 1998; Smith, 1984). Consequently, a number of the urban poor’s hardships were unaddressed by both government and World Bank initiatives, such as the high transportation costs and related problems resulting from the white regime’s deliberate location of the high-density black townships on the urban periphery in order to separate the racial groups.

The potential gains of Urban I and Urban II were further limited due to the impact of structural adjustment programmes on the political economy in Zimbabwe, as well as the choices of the domestic ruling elites. In March 1991, the Zimbabwean government developed and implemented what came to be known as a ‘home grown’ Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) (Stoneman, 1993:89). ESAP mirrored the programmes of the World Bank and the IMF in that it included devaluation of currency, export promotion, trade liberalisation, privatisation of government enterprises and parastatals, and reduction of expenditure in the social service sectors such as education, health, and housing. Assessing whether ‘external capitulation or domestic reform’ caused the Zimbabwe government to embrace market-based reforms and privatisation, Dashwood argues that while Zimbabwe had been under considerable pressure from the World Bank and IMF to liberalise its economy since 1982, the ‘initiative for reforms came from within Zimbabwe’ (Dashwood, 1996:29). However, once the reforms were implemented, the influence of the World Bank and IMF grew considerably.

ESAP was far from successful. Its targets for growth and development were missed by huge margins and real wages fell by about 30 per cent since its implementation in the early 1990s (Stoneman, 1999). The exclusive focus on exporting primary products to an increasingly hostile international economy, which was bogged down in recession, did not generate internal economic growth in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, Zimbabwe had very little control over the international prices of the primary commodities, which plunged to historic lows during the 1990s. Consequently, formal sector employment declined and public services in health, education, and housing were cut deeply, thereby worsening the plight of the urban poor, and making it extremely difficult for them to meet their basic needs (Gibbon, 1995; Tevera, 1995). The deteriorating macroeconomic climate, induced in part by the structural adjustment programmes, eroded the limited gains of Urban I and II. The Bank’s technocratic emphasis on reducing and/or eliminating public sector spending on social expenditures failed to generate alternatives for addressing the needs of those on the economic margins of Zimbabwean society. In examining the impact of the Bank’s structural adjustment programmes and private sector initiatives, ul Haq (1998) notes that while the need for developing countries to trim their budgets is not disputed, the downsizing was always done in a manner that adversely affected the poor.

Furthermore, in March 1997, a major national scandal erupted when it was discovered that Z$450 billion were ‘missing’ from the War Victims’ Compensation Fund, which was set aside to compensate ex-combatants for injuries suffered during the Liberation War. President Mugabe appointed a judicial commission of inquiry chaired by Justice Godfrey Chidyausika, which then revealed that senior officials in the political and military wings of government, including the late First Lady’s brother, had appropriated the fund.13 The powerful Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association, under the leadership of Chenjerai Hunzvi, staged mass
demonstrations from June through July 1997, meeting with and finally compelling Mugabe to agree to a lump sum payment of Z$50,000 to all ex-combatants who fought in the national liberation struggle, plus a Z$2,000 monthly allowance. Since many of the ex-combatants populate the military and police forces, Mugabe agreed to these demands without consulting his cabinet or parliament, putting additional stress on the country’s already weak economy. Furthermore, Mugabe announced that 1,480 of mostly white-owned farms would be seized and 20 per cent of the land would be distributed to the War Veterans. On 14 November 1997, also known as ‘Black Friday’, Mugabe’s unbudgeted Z$4 billion settlement with the War Veterans resulted in the collapse of the Zimbabwean dollar, which fell by 75 per cent in just a few hours. Interest rates were increased by 6 per cent in the course of the next month, as were sales and petrol taxes, in order to help cover the costs of this scheme (Brickhill, 1999).

Private sector financing for low-income housing, an integral part of the Bank’s housing programme, evaporated in this deteriorating political and economic climate. According to Colleen Butcher, a resident representative of the World Bank in Harare, building societies were still willing to finance low-income housing, but it was not viable for them to do so in such an environment. With interest rates skyrocketing, building societies were investing their deposits in money markets, not issuing mortgages. Given the absence of a public sector housing programme in Zimbabwe due to the factors discussed above, the urban poor were forced to rely on their own meager resources once again to house themselves.

The poor experienced additional hardships because of the structural adjustment programmes and price hikes in the aftermath of Black Friday. Their massive and violent demonstration over rising food prices in Harare in January 1998 left nine dead, hundreds injured and caused over Z$70 million in damage. The contempt of the ruling elites to the plight of the poor was demonstrated further by the fact that during the same week, the government announced that it had spent some Z$60 million on fifty new Mercedes-Benz automobiles for twenty-six cabinet ministers and two vice-presidents. Additionally, instead of committing resources to provide for the basic needs of Zimbabwe’s own lower classes, the Mugabe government committed troops to a foreign war in the Democratic Republic of Congo at a cost of nearly US$1 million a day.

With respect to low-income housing in particular, about US$3 million from the National Housing Fund and the National Housing Guarantee Fund were ‘borrowed’ by Mugabe’s wife, Grace, in order to build herself a 32 room house with three servant cottages in a rich suburb of Harare in 1998. Nicknamed ‘Graceland’, the house is hardly used because the First Lady ‘changed her mind about living so far away from the city centre.’

The crisis facing the urban poor was exacerbated in May 2005, during the Zimbabwean winter, when government security forces launched Operation Murambatsvina (which means ‘clean out the trash’ in the Shona language), a massive slum and squatter removal campaign in Zimbabwe’s major cities. In the once flourishing city of Victoria Falls, some 30,000 people were evicted from their informal settlements and in the capital city Harare, entire squatter settlements were burnt down (The Independent, 12 June 2005). President Mugabe declared that the mass eviction ‘Operation Murambatsvina was needed to restore sanity to Zimbabwe’s cities’ (reported on the BBC, 17 June 2005). In an address to the central committee of the ruling ZANU-PF party, Mugabe characterised the demolitions as an important part of the ‘urban renewal’ of Zimbabwe:
Our cities and towns had become havens for illicit and criminal practices and activities which just could not be allowed to go on. From the mess should emerge new businesses, new traders, new practices and a whole new and salubrious urban environment. That is our vision.

The minister for local government, Ignatius Chombo, characterised the squatter eradication campaign pejoratively in utopian language, claiming, ‘This is the dawn of a new era. To set up something nice, you first have to remove the litter, and this is why the police are acting this way’ (Mail and Guardian, 9 June 2005). In this manner, the homes of 200,000 urban poor were destroyed. The United Nations estimates that some 700,000 people have been displaced as a consequence of this policy and 2.4 million more are adversely effected by the government’s actions (United Nations, 2005).

The Mugabe government’s rationale for this policy is that it restores law and order, curbs the chaotic growth of informal settlements, and strengthens the formal economy. However, the worsening conditions in Zimbabwe’s cities during the last ten years were caused by the neo-liberal policies implemented by Mugabe under the guidance and instruction of the World Bank. The ESAP programme, mentioned above, contributed to severe job losses in the urban areas. As a result, the workers had to generate their own incomes in the informal sector, interestingly, at the government’s own urging. In fact, the government pressured local authorities to relax standards to accommodate informal economic activities. However, in a puzzling change in policy, the Mugabe regime became obsessed with ‘the illegality’ of the informal economy in May 2005.

A major factor prompting Mugabe’s assault on the urban poor is his desire to crush the oppositional party’s Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), because the primarily urban based MDC threatened the ZANU-PF stranglehold on power. Welshman Ncube, secretary general of the MDC, characterised operation Murambatsvina as an ‘harassment campaign against urban voters’. In the March 2005 elections, Mugabe’s ruling ZANU-PF party lost the cities to the MDC. Many ZANU members’ homes and informal businesses were destroyed in the government’s retributive campaign, which not only aimed to curb dissent, but also attempted to gain control of the informal economy that had operated outside of the government’s grip during the last few years. Elliot Manyika, ZANU-PF’s national commissar, said that ‘the economy needed to account for informal business and order needed to be restored in urban areas.’ During its raids, the government discovered large caches of foreign currency in the urban homes of informal traders. The campaign against informal markets was an attempt by the Mugabe government, which faces a dire shortage of foreign currency, to get a better grip of foreign currency transactions.

However, instead of restoring law and order, this campaign has only deepened the country’s political and economic crisis. Inflation is around 144 per cent, the unemployment rate is estimated at 70 per cent, and some 3 million people are facing the prospect of starvation (Business Day, 12 September 2005). Current World Bank president Paul Wolfowitz has characterised the situation as ‘a tragedy’. However, such an understatement is somewhat disingenuous from the head of an institution that bears at least partial responsibility for the misguided policy choices of the Mugabe regime. Structural adjustment contributed to structural collapse in Zimbabwe.
Zimbabwe’s critical shortage of housing for the low-income urban poor ranks next to unemployment as the most serious problem confronting the country in the post-independence period. Seen in the above context, while the World Bank’s projects did enable some low-income urban families to gain access to credit, they certainly did not provide an ‘alternative and sustainable structure’ for low-income housing finance or an ‘enabling’ environment for low-income housing delivery, contrary to the World Bank’s initial expectations and final evaluations. First, the programme did not reach the poorest segments of the urban population, who were excluded because of eligibility criteria and lack of finance. Second, absentee landlordism and raiding by high-income groups prevented the poor from reaping the benefits intended for them. Third, while there were some successes, the programmes failed to address the extent of the low-income housing problem in urban Zimbabwe. Fourth, the programme failed to improve the lives of the urban poor in light of the degenerating political and economic climate of the mid to late 1990s. Thus, the multilateral development agencies’ fundamentalist faith in the ‘magic of the market’ and fiscal austerity have not only failed to offer any viable strategy for dealing with growing inequality, but have actually exacerbated it.

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Endnotes

1. Interview with Fred C. King, Senior Country Officer, Southern Africa Department, World Bank, 1991.

2. Interview with Jeff Racki, 2001; Racki was a member of the first urban sector mission to Zimbabwe and later the task manager for the World Bank’s first urban project in Zimbabwe.

3. The Urban Sector Report (World Bank, 1985) was based on the findings of an Urban Sector Mission which visited Zimbabwe from 19 August 1981 to 5 September 1981; the mission included P. Patel, J. Racki, G. Beier, J. Kozloswski, E. McKay and E. Bachrach.


5. Interview with Middleton Nyoni, City Treasurer, Bulawayo City Council Zimbabwe, 2000.


7. Interview with James Hicks, 2001; Hicks was Task Manager for the World Bank’s second urban project, Urban II, and the Regional Development Project in Zimbabwe.

8. Interview with James Hicks, 2001.


10. Interview with James Hicks, 2001.

11. Interview with James Hicks, 2001.


15. Interview with Colleen Butcher, 1993. Butcher was Resident Representative at the World Bank Mission in Harare, Zimbabwe.
16. Reported in Leadership Online, 8 December 2000, Vol. 18(1); available at www.millennium.co.za
18. See www.architectafrica.com/bin1/zimbabwe080613.html
22. Reported by the BBC, 17 June 2005.
24. For an account of the World Bank’s role in the policy choices of Zimbabwe, see Bond (1998).

Bibliographic Note


Angola: Can the Politics of Disorder Become the Politics of Democratisation & Development?

Steve Kibble

Postwar Angola seems at first look to be in a triple transition from war to peace, devastation to reconstruction and from a state/elite patronage system to democratisation and transparency. In fact it is argued here that the ‘politics of disorder’ stemming from war suit the purposes of the Angolan elite whilst it simultaneously proclaims transition for outside cosmetic purposes. The Angolan elite comprising in David Sogge’s words ‘a constellation of politician-rentiers, petroleum sector technocrats and military officials’ can run the state in their own interest, largely ignoring any demands from the citizenry given that the accumulation basis and the orientation of the elite is to the outside. Chinese loans, high oil prices, further oilfield expansion and the warm alliance with the USA ensure that Angolan civil society – despite its efforts – is unable to adequately counter the elite’s ability to control events. Promised elections – without a date having been announced – are unlikely to change this structural framework.

Angola became independent from the Portuguese in 1975 after a costly and long running liberation war with three independence movements based on different ethno-linguistic, ideological constituencies that were as antagonistic towards each other as to the colonial power. Angola is now in its fourth year of peace with no immediate reason why war should resume. This comes after 27 years of civil war between União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) rebels under their charismatic, dictatorial and ruthless leader Jonas Savimbi and the governing Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA). The former were US and apartheid South Africa-backed, although with a rhetoric of representing the poor ‘real’ rural Africans of the interior and based on the Ovimbundu – the largest ethnic group. The latter was based on the coastal elite which is urban and mestizo, with a rhetoric of broader nationalism, socialism, and anti-imperialism in a conflict overlaid by the Cold War and its malign agencies.

In 1991 there were changes from a Marxist-Leninist state with an inefficient command economy towards a supposed multiparty democratic state and market economy. Few freedoms were realised although there were free and fair elections won by the government in 1992 – the ‘excuse’ for UNITA to renew the war. The state remained heavily centralised with the president and elite able to control extra-budgetary revenues for their own accumulation and clientilist purposes. It has massive oil production revenues and potential. Much of the infrastructure, agriculture and rudimentary health services were destroyed by war with millions of landmines being laid – with knock-on effects on agriculture, transport as well as
people’s lives. War also meant excess mortality of one million deaths – roughly a tenth of Angola’s population, displacement/urbanisation with about half of all Angolans, perhaps seven million people, living in cities and towns, one-third in Luanda. The agrarian system collapsed as did the health and education services – only 37 per cent of primary-aged children were enrolled in school whilst most of the health budget goes to hospital-based curative services, including elite spending in South Africa and Portugal.3

Peace broke out in April 2002 when rebel leader Jonas Savimbi was killed, leaving the MPLA-controlled government as the undisputed victor, but espousing reconciliation4 – for which civil society can claim some credit. The country in theory faces a triple transition from war to peace, from devastation to reconstruction, and from a state/elite patronage system to a transparent market economy. The first two are better advanced including a greater commitment to infrastructural (re)construction. Many in civil society express concerns over delays in and government commitment to reform. Inflation has been brought down although no major structural reform has occurred. In particular there is unlikely to be a challenge to the key nature of the bazaar economy (Cadongo) in trade and services which is controlled upstream by commercial tycoons and army officers able to accumulate resources by using special powers, granted them by senior politicians, to import goods. There has been increasing political and economic inequality including in land, and especially in relation to the massive inequality suffered by women.5

Angola can use high oil prices and (expensive) oil-backed loans to play the Chinese card against the US one, avoiding any international pressure for reform. It also has hegemonic regional aspirations rivalling those of South Africa to the south.

**Transition or Steady State?**

There is an assumption that Angola is in transition and that its current dysfunctionality will change – but is it true? Conversely we can see the current situation of the ‘politics of disorder’ as a functional ‘steady state’ for the Angolan elite. It holds a number of cards, although is dependent on a number of conditionalities such as high oil prices and the state’s ability to attract concessional oil-backed loans such as those from Standard Bank and the $2bn from the Chinese Eximbank in 2005.5 Is this a reversion to the ‘normality’ of a protected Cold War state although intriguingly with the sides having changed (the US having previously used UNITA to counter ‘Soviet expansionism’)?

What is the current situation and problems and are we talking transition or ‘steady state’? Currently Africa’s second largest producer is one of the continent’s fastest growing economies with some of its poorest people.6 In 2005 oil production was 1.3 million barrels a day and several large deep-water finds were set to further boost output to two million barrels of crude per day by 2008. A new law aimed at the creation of private local companies to exploit this new field has been implemented and while much of this revenue is already mortgaged, much will also go to a small number of wealthy Angolans with little reaching its citizens.7

Angola earned an estimated $6.88 billion total oil revenues for 2005, pumping over 1 million barrels of oil per day with new major projects8 coming onstream to increase future production.9 Diamonds were expected to increase to 150,000 carats. Increases in coffee production were expected in the year, although low world prices and
possible overproduction might affect progress. Little diversification occurred elsewhere. There has been very little trickle down given the problems of a three-tier society – the capital and coastal regions benefited to some extent from oil, but the hinterland continues to struggle. The government budgeted for 16 per cent growth although the IMF Staff Report projected annual growth at 18 per cent a year over 2005-2007. In fact, it looks more like 20 per cent with double digit growth widely predicted to continue over the next few years.

The country had a UNDP Human Development Index of 0.445, giving it a ranking of 160 of 177. There was neither a formal agreement with the IMF in 2005 or a donors’ conference despite it being heralded on many occasions. Donors appeared reluctant to commit fully to a donors’ conference for a rich booming country (or rather a poor country with a rich elite) in relation to humanitarian appeals. Angola is also the fourth or fifth largest diamond producer – historically like oil, another enclave sector with little regulation or accountability. There were accusations that as well as continued smuggling (despite expulsions of 127,000 foreign nationals involved in the illegal diamond trade between April 2004 and February 2005), human rights violations – including forced labour, ill-treatment and disappearances were common occurrences in the informal diamond sector. Such allegations led to Angola withdrawing its candidacy for the vice-chair of the Kimberley Process (KP) during the Moscow meeting in November 2005. A peer review visit with experts from Russia, Canada, the Central African Republic, Global Witness and the World Diamond Council took place in October 2005 to verify Angola’s implementation of KP; results have not yet been disclosed.

Diamond production was expected to be around $900m which, along with decreased smuggling, would assure the government of much greater revenue. However, a report from Partnership Africa Canada stated that despite some positive changes, the diamond industry needed to do more to develop the country – particularly in the artisanal sector so that more people could access the industry and benefit from it (a diamond polishing centre opened although without creating much employment).

Infrastructure continued to be repaired with the concessional oil-backed loan of $2bn in 2004 from the Chinese Eximbank. The agreement between them revolved around China providing infrastructural development, cars, and transmission line equipment, helping rebuild Luanda’s government buildings, local rail network, improving the electricity supply and providing agricultural equipment. Local civil society and economists continued to express concerns that the deal only looked to contract 30 per cent to local firms, which meant that the Chinese were largely without competition. There were also questions about whether it would be the elite-linked firms that got the 30 per cent non-Chinese component. The opaque nature of the deal runs counter to the rhetoric of the Angolan government opening up its books to scrutiny.

But despite large GDP growth, a current account surplus, and the lowest inflation rate ever, the challenges remain: a fragmented national economy, a history of financial embezzlement and misappropriation of funds, a lack of international confidence and donor coordination, poor administrative capacity, a large child population at risk from disease, and a largely weak (or at least fragmented) opposition and civil society unable to affect social and political developments.
Angola was ranked 133 out of 145 on Transparency International’s Country Corruption index. In recent years, over one million Angolan people remained dependent on UN-funded food aid, and one child died every three minutes of preventable causes – 480 per day. The underlying problem is the ‘resource curse’ of oil-based economic enclaves with greater external than internal linkages, meaning a lack of reciprocity between domestic rulers and the ruled in all spheres.

Angola like many oil-producing countries has the paradoxical link between exploitation of oil, gas and minerals and high rates of poverty indicators of child malnutrition, low health care spending, low school enrolment rates and poor adult literacy (and war) – although these are projected to increase in actual terms and as a percentage. The effect of oil wealth (‘Dutch disease’) is to cause economic contraction and inflation through high local prices, expensive exchange rates and depressed levels of manufacturing in other sectors plus a lack of national accountability, especially with increased world demand, tightening supply and in 2005-06, continued high prices. As an oil enclave economy which has few forward and backward linkages, the industry (overwhelmingly offshore) employs only 10,000. Oil accounted for 90 per cent of exports and 80 per cent of tax revenues and economic diversification to combat such indicators is still awaited. Does the elite want diversification (even if they can see the necessity) given their control over import and export? The elite would certainly want to control any diversification programme rather than allow an unfettered free market.

The World Bank described the government’s oil-backed borrowing as the ‘core obstacle to the country’s development’. However, there was a conference on transparency in May 2006 on the use of oil revenues, although typically the government only allowed civil society into selected sessions.16

Yet undoubtedly there have been changes. Transparency has improved in areas of revenue (if not expenditure) through publication of an oil diagnostic undertaken by outside consultants KPMG with some moves towards a declaration of signature bonus payments. Although these have not been incorporated into law, the latest signature bonuses were made public. Although allegations of corruption persist with high-ranking government officials implicated in private business deals related to their public office, the Accounting Court successfully prosecuted a number of senior officials in 2003-04. In July 2004, Angola signed up to the African Union’s Peer Review Mechanism – although NEPAD staff confirmed that it is still far from meeting the Mechanism’s conditions.

Angola faces the task of moving from a state of non-war to a ‘Civil/Social Peace’. There remains a need to end corruption and tackle poverty, allow the development of a genuinely independent private sector, create an open and transparent tendering process and transform the political system into a pluralist democracy. Equally, to maintain stability and create justice, civil society called for action on disarming the estimated one-third armed Angolans (although this appears not to be a government priority), clearing an unknown number of landmines, and addressing the exclusion of the poor and marginalised, especially women. This, civil society hopes, would then lead to a widely-agreed and owned electoral process and thereby legitimise the institutions of government, without legitimacy since 1996. There is need for institutionalising constitutional reform in guaranteeing citizens’ fundamental rights such as the Constitutional Law Review Court and the work of the Ombudsman Paulo Tjipilica, former Minister of Justice, who was elected in April
2005. There is also a human rights commission at the national assembly, but it appears not to be functional.

But can the government just more or less ignore these problems and maintain the present situation for its own stability and security? There are a number of reasons to think so. Resumption of war is highly unlikely while high oil prices and fields for development look set to continue. There is also likely to be availability of oil-backed loans from, for instance, the Chinese and Standard Bank (and a French one forthcoming); these are not as cheap as multilateral funding, but are more under government control (private bank loans have higher interest rates but do not have the extra conditionalities deriving from IFI/IMF loans). Internationally, continued instability in the Middle East combined with US hegemony over the Gulf of Guinea/the ‘American Lake’, means that the US is relying more to African rather than Arabian oil and expects around 25 per cent of its supplies to come from the continent. This means that the increasing market share for Angolan oil going to the US and other states means unsurprisingly that security considerations weigh far more heavily than transparency or human rights ones.

Angola is a strong state with no obvious internal or regional threats. Co-option, division and occasional repression work well to negate any possible internal threats. The Angolan elite remained largely immune to what international pressure there was for good governance and transparency, and avoided a deal with international financial institutions through its loan from and cooperation with the Chinese. There appeared lessening outside capacity or the will to induce an equitable distribution of the large oil profits or push issues of transparency. The West is aware of the need to engage with a booming economy and is keen to compete with China which is getting the lion’s share of contracts for infrastructural (re)construction.

What pressure there is for change (mostly from Western financial institutions and INGOs) is directed more towards questions of transparency and a secure and inviting climate for foreign investment (FDI) rather than democracy and poverty alleviation. The Chinese loan was earmarked for a small number of large projects in a seemingly transparent process, but comes under a new ‘reconstruction cabinet’ under presidential control.

This is against the background of declining world oil production which is believed to be over the ‘Bell curve’. Regionally, excluding Zimbabwe and (parts of) the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the region has been stabilised – in part by Angolan interventions in neighbouring states to ensure there were no UNITA rear bases but also by such governments’ compliance with Luanda. Angola is able to use the rhetoric of sovereignty and anti-imperialism which resonates well in the southern African region – as shown in the case of Zimbabwe. This is despite the more partial view of sovereignty enunciated by the AU as opposed to the absolutist OAU version.

Luanda has proclaimed that there is now a ceasefire and a Memorandum of Understanding (Namibe agreement of 1 August 2006) to end the Cabindan conflict – a separatist issue that is distinct from but interwoven with the nearly 30 year civil war; Cabinda holds 60 per cent of Angola’s oil wealth. According to the government, a series of meetings with the Cabindan Forum for Dialogue (CFD – a grouping of the resistance, human rights groups and the catholic church) led to a decrease in military activity, and then acceptance that Angola was a unitary and indivisible
state, but that the ‘specific characteristics of Cabinda Province made a special status necessary for the province, in terms of a provencial government and local administration’

However, the kind of special status is very unclear with a rejection of the deal by parts of the liberation movement, Frente Libertação de Enclave de Cabinda (FLEC). Additionally, the Cabindan human rights organisation, Mpalabanda Cabinda Civic Association (MACC) which is part of the CFD, was banned on 20 July 2006, which seems to suggest that Luanda is prepared to grant some form of limited autonomy for selected people, as long as it is in control of the process. Those who doubt there will be real autonomy point out that the military commander in charge of the process of integrating FLEC forces into the army and of the ceasefire is General Uala who killed Savimbi.

The government has little shame in making promises (‘doing it for the English’ in the Portuguese phrase) that they seem to have little inclination to keep; only when economic trends go against them do they seem to move – moving slowly and only making cosmetic changes. Additionally, rather than seeing forthcoming elections whenever they are as an opportunity, the population being only too aware of what happened in 1992, seems as much fearful or apathetic. Local churches and NGOs seem to be in a three-way relationship with outsiders and the local state – each can attempt to play off the other with advantage normally favouring the state.

The governing MPLA can pay off and play off other parties. Whilst it has its own factions, the president runs a parallel state and seems to be in control of the party as with his reversal of not standing as its presidential candidate. Through frequent government reshuffles he also ensures existing and potential opponents such as the chief of external intelligence agency General Fernando Miala (who paid the price for becoming too popular) are nullified. UNITA, the major opposition party formally reconciled its three factions after 2002, but there are divisions and complaints about their leader Isaias Samakuva rearing their head. Other parties seem more concerned with getting their snouts in the trough rather than representing distinct interests and policies.

Political Disorder & Its Uses

Angola can be seen then as an example of the use of ‘disorder as a political instrument’ whereby non-transparency, non-accountable authority, and a weak legal framework provide dynamics for elite accumulation. Historically there has been a ‘Bermuda triangle’ of resource flows between the Presidency, Sonangol and the national bank – bypassing formal organs such as the Ministry of Finance (although the latter is gaining greater control). As well as vast corruption in the past detailed by many reports including from the IMF, Global Witness and Human Rights Watch, practices continue as shown in the reports from Brazil of illegal financial dealings linking the Angola Minister of Finance, and the Governor of the Central Bank.

The nation’s rulers – described by Angola-watcher David Sogge as ‘a constellation of politician-rentiers, petroleum sector technocrats and military officials’ – run the state in their interests. He sees most citizens as having become irrelevant due to citizen-state reciprocity being virtually non-existent given the lack of any politico-social contract by which citizens consent to meet legitimate demands (such as payment of taxes, compliance with rule of law, etc.) in return for state responsiveness, within its capacities, to respect citizen rights broadly and fairly. Few citizens have access to basic services of reasonable quality in water, health, education, public
order, justice, energy, and infrastructure and where there is access, it is allocated not by right or need but according to spending power and political connections. Despite some cosmetic improvements, change has been slow on closing the gap between the political class and citizens. A personal presidentialist style of rule parallel to the formal governmental/cabinet structure characterises the country, working through patronage networks and political co-optation of opposition parties and journalists with the former receiving state funding. Government accountability to the Angolan population remains weak, with citizens given few opportunities for legal redress against perceived injustice or abuse and localised corruption still endemic. A number of provisions made in the Constitution remain unfulfilled, including structural features such as the existence of a Constitutional Court which would enable citizens to claim their rights more easily. Angola’s legal system is a contradictory coexistence of colonial laws (e.g. The Penal Code of 1886), Marxist-Leninist laws (e.g. the Law of the Attorney-General), and democratic laws (e.g. the Constitution). This situation is aggravated by the lack of political will to set up a constitutional court, as required by the Constitution, to intervene on these matters. Angola still ranks considerably below other sub-Saharan and low-income countries in comparative governance and ethics indicators. Sogge further notes that the domestic Angolan political economy cannot be separated from the external constituencies, chiefly the global oil and banking industries, and strongly favourable diplomatic and military currents driven by Western (especially US) strategic interests.

In this sense Angola’s problems of domestic governance ‘are at the same time problems of global governance’ in which the constrained forms of global citizenship ‘practised by institutions offshore set limits to citizenship for ordinary Angolans onshore’.

**Elections: Paths to Democracy or Ensuring the Right Result?**

A promised electoral process has been delayed despite promises since the end of the war in April 2002. The parliamentary and presidential elections which were announced unconvincingly in 2005 for September 2006 and 2007 respectively seem now to be put back until there are infrastructural improvements – for which the government would gain electoral advantage and increased control over the process.

There was a review by government, with the opposition alternatively taking part and boycotting the process, of Electoral Law and the creation of the National Electoral Council (CNE) on 19 August 2005, but work remained outstanding on the population census and electoral rolls although an electoral budget of $125m was approved. Delays and lack of information on the election timetable despite government denials appeared to confirm doubts over the timetable’s realism. In September 2005, Minister for Territorial Administration (and coordinator of the Inter-Ministerial Commission for the Electoral Process [CIPE]), Dr Virgilio de Fontes Pereira estimated voter numbers as seven million of a fourteen million population with six million lacking identity documents. Even by that month, the government had not decided whether the presidential and legislative elections should be held simultaneously. All those over 18 would be eligible to vote, although the diaspora will only be entitled to vote in the legislative elections. International observers would be invited and there would be a civic education initiative. Unanswered questions included the effectiveness of CNE, how to overcome two-speed democracy – with
little happening yet outside Luanda. Issues of reconstruction of transport, infrastructure and de-mining were vital for the elections as well as restoration of normal life.

The European Union stated (during 2005) that it would contribute to parliamentary elections if there was ‘a proper and conducive environment’ which seemed to mean a commitment to transparency, dialogue and pluralism. The government held an international seminar on organising elections in August 2005, but nothing concrete transpired. Western diplomats in Luanda noted government’s failure to establish a regular forum for consultation except on emergency and humanitarian aid between it and the international community.

For unexplained reasons the electoral law on presidential elections was referred to the Supreme Court by the President, although officially it was to ensure consistency with the constitution and give a legal basis to the elections. Nor were the political implications and possible effect on the registration process, provision of identity cards, and thereby the election date fully explored. The general population seemed either fearful or apathetic in terms of the elections and expected little change in their lives; many were reluctant to return to home areas until after peaceful elections. Abstentionism, which appears likely to be high given the experience of 1992, worried the government into stressing the need for civic education. With elections promised there was an initial expectation of greater commitment to development and poverty alleviation, although in fact the elite appears to be using incumbency to maximum advantage.

In preparation for the elections, all parties tried to get rid of their ‘deadwood’. UNITA saw allegations that leader and presidential candidate Isaias Samakuva was operating a patronage system under pressure of a possible leadership challenge from Abel Chivukuvuku (leader of one of the previous factions). Samakuva expelled Jorge Valentim, a former minister of tourism and suspended Eugenio Manuvakola, former president of UNITA-Renovada.

Within the ruling party MPLA, President Dos Santos maintained and strengthened control as the party’s seemingly now undisputed presidential candidate despite denials in previous years that he would again stand. An internal struggle between old hardliners and technocrats allied to those interested in democratic appearances saw the latter gaining the upper hand. Whilst the MPLA does not yet see itself as no longer synonymous with the state, there has been some small movement away from the classic national liberation stance of it being the only legitimate expression of all Angolans. The MPLA continued its recruiting drive among ex-UNITA fighters, with the state media giving large publicity to those joining.

Over 150 political parties continue to exist, many with identical platforms, undemocratic internal practices and with little parliamentary initiative from those parties represented in the National Assembly. Little happened in the establishment of coalitions between opposition forces or promulgation of alternative policies or monitoring of government policies. The dependence of opposition political parties on state funding did nothing to help them work out their positions, policies and monitoring capacity. The MPLA held 129 seats in parliament where it controlled the Government of National Unity and Reconciliation. The main opposition party UNITA, had 70. Police claimed in 2005 they were still investigating the assassination in the previous year of Mfulumpinga Lando Victor, leader of the Democratic Party for Progress and National Alliance (PDP-ANA) – a longstanding vocal critic of the MPLA government.
Civil Society: Small, Autonomous but with some Resistance

At least a third of Angola’s population resides in **musseques** (shantytowns) where most live atomised lives. Collective action to solve common problems does not take place spontaneously. Semi-formal groupings do however spring up, occasionally coalescing around demands. Much depends on who is trying to animate whom for what ends. Most non-profit social enterprises, that is, NGOs, commonly try to ‘act upon’ or on behalf of ‘the community’. Such approaches can occasionally get results, but donor agendas as elsewhere often interfere.

Open, horizontal community-based organisations and neighbourhood committees to resolve disputes and manage local public improvements have had some successes e.g. in Luanda and Lubango. Elsewhere in Angola dormant institutions, such as the *onjongo* (communal meeting place for adult leaders), hold significance for people, and have been revived with encouragement from sensitive development practitioners, such as the major Angolan NGO, ADRA (Association of Justice, Peace & Democracy).

Many forms of mutual aid have been transformed or dissolved under pressures of war, forced urbanisation and competitive scrambles for existence. Given the widespread damage to the social fabric, the strength of vernacular institutions should not be over-estimated.

No significant dialogue over elections seems to occur between government and civil society although the ruling party did attend international NGO events on electoral education. Discussions took place on the need for increased media freedom, access to information and lessening of the state monopoly of the only daily newspaper and the only TV station/news agency which resulted in some rethinking inside the ruling party on the need to loosen its control over state institutions and functions.

Angola finalised its Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper in November 2005. NGOs, amid civil society worries that the administration lacks the capacity to design, implement and manage the grassroots programmes needed to effectively tackle poverty and that large scale infrastructural projects were easier for the government to undertake, especially given the Chinese input into them. After increases in social spending in the previous budget, the proportions looked to decline in 2006.

A new press law was passed in which the government expressed willingness to provide training for the state and private press in Angola, although it still did not allow the Catholic radio station, Radio Ecclésia, to switch on its provincial transmitters. The government in 2005 announced efforts to increase the broadcasting range for television and radio, and engaged in discussions on a new press law to allow for greater private participation, restating its commitment to the principles of inclusion, pluralism, transparency and permanent dialogue. New broadcasting laws, according to the government, would see Radio Ecclésia and other broadcasters playing a role in giving all citizens access to information. The government and the media looked to outside donors as well as returning diaspora to help train Angolan journalists in awareness of electoral issues, and political parties’ awareness of the media.

Challenges facing the media included high rates of illiteracy, limited circulation and the government monopoly on television and controls over radio. According to Radio Ecclésia, it had greater freedom than before but problems still remained – largely political rather than legal. The authorities seem to have abandoned repressive
tactics in favour of co-option of critics into the state-run media. Progress towards a new constitution faltered and appears unlikely – certainly before any elections. The alienation from and profound distrust of the government seems to suggest few overt signs of opposition or resistance. There are very few demonstrations against the government despite the poverty and little alternative leadership and vision, although recently there have been protests over the violence used by police in forced removals in some neighbourhoods in Luanda. State coercion is always possible both with these removals and the risk of arrest of human rights activists such as the SOS-Habitat coordinator, Luis Araujo. The army is well-trained and large.

Street protests are put down promptly and with force, but small opposition parties, human rights NGOs and independent media continue to push out the boundaries of a small political space (at least in Luanda) by framing their efforts in terms of legal norms. Some of the key questions about which civil society organisations have raised concerns include the continuation of José Eduardo dos Santos as President, transparency and corruption in government, debates around land law and the new constitution, the DDR process (demobilisation, disarmament and resettlement), police and military impunity, freedom of expression and political action, and Cabinda. At the same time, many others, in particular rural churches and NGOs, continue to focus their work around humanitarian assistance and basic service provision, working closely with government agencies. In Angola, NGOs are not ‘neatly-bounded, structured things but fluid processes’.

Domestic human rights and media activism have yielded modest achievements. However, the pace and quality of change stemming from citizen pressure have been limited by the fragility or absence of public systems and institutions – part of the general disorder that has served elites well for many years. On occasion this critical mass of activists and intellectuals has connected with poor people under threat, but such linkages are few and full of risks. It is a kind of low-level equilibrium trap.

The Inter-Ecclesiastic Committee for Peace in Angola (COEIPA) and other NGOs took part in a number of electoral education initiatives throughout 2005 and 2006 (although local NGOs suggested on my recent visit that COIEPA is in crisis). The main theme was to go beyond the election process for a wider process of national reconciliation and monitoring campaign pledges such as promises on providing clinics and schools. These were attended by high-level delegates from the government and parties. Civil society continued a broad range of initiatives aimed at strengthening local analysis and capacity in resolving potential and local actual conflicts. Eunice Inacio of Development Workshop’s Peacebuilding Programme became one of the Nobel ‘1000 women for peace’ receiving an additional award from the government.

Findings from a joint assessment carried out in 2005 by the UN and the government revealed that although some four million internally displaced persons (IDPs) had returned since April 2002, more than 91,000 remained. The humanitarian situation facing IDPs living in camps saw a high proportion of poor, food-insecure families, limited local administrative capacity, lack of infrastructure and basic services remained bleak, especially as donor support for humanitarian assistance progressively reduced. In Cabinda where the ‘massive presence’ of Angolan armed forces was the chief deterrent for would-be returnees, most of the displaced were receiving no assistance. The World Food Programme (WFP) Vulnerability Assessment for 2004-5, said that 1.5m people were still exposed to food insecurity, with most of the 13.5m population living in dire poverty. It fed 750,000 people through the year
despite the donor shortfall which saw it compelled to reduce the cereal rations it provided to vulnerable groups, mainly refugees and those internally displaced. UNICEF also had a shortfall in its appeal. Levels of political intolerance and violence between non-displaced communities and formerly displaced persons rose as in March 2005 in Kuando Kubango. The process of demobilising former opposing sides into a single army ran into problems as in Bié where former UNITA, unlike former MPLA combatants, were not returned to the home area.

In terms of the ‘Education for All’ programme promising free compulsory and quality education by 2015 and full gender equality, building began on a number of schools. There was a rise in the 2005 budget for social, health and education spending to overcome the collapse of education, but this was set to proportionately decline in the budget for 2006.

Angola has only 1,600 registered doctors of whom 85 per cent are in Luanda which translates into one doctor per 20,000, one nurse per 1,000 and one midwife per 20,000 inhabitants. In April 2006, Angola signed the last two protocols on the rights of the child.

The Government has made some attempts at addressing HIV/AIDS and associated vulnerabilities. Previous statistics had indicated a prevalence rate of 5.5 per cent, highest in border areas and rising in urban areas to 10 per cent, but there were regional variations and the figures were probably considerably underestimated with increased movement of population likely to speed the pandemic’s effect. In rural areas access was difficult. The President inaugurated a new institute to fight AIDS on 23 September 2005.

It has been a mixed picture on improvements in human rights observance with the report from the UN Special Representative on Human Rights being denounced by the Angolan Foreign Minister. Independence of the judiciary saw little improvement as judges for the constitutional court were still being appointed by the president and subject to executive dictat. In November 2005, local NGO APJD published a report on problems in the judicial system, and the army was criticised for its handling of the mass repatriation of Congolese involved in the diamond trade in Angola.

The uncertain economic situation was compounded by continued crackdown by the fiscais police on the informal sector, allegedly as a ‘danger to public health, street crime or impeding traffic’. This is where most small-scale traders make their living and Luandans saw this initiative as serving the interests of politically-connected larger traders, objecting to being undercut by smaller ones.

**Land & Land Reform: Who Gains?**

Despite Angola’s size and relatively low population density there is a lack of abundance of land for all – for geographical/climatic reasons as well as political/economic ones. The result of this is that land (tenure and use) is one of the main potential flashpoints for future disputes and tensions especially if there were to be large-scale population return to rural areas. In the early 1990s, following an ideological shift within the MPLA, the government embarked upon a huge land privatisation programme. A new land law was drafted resulting in the large state-owned companies being divided up and their constituent farms privatised and sold off to would-be commercial farmers. However, the new private ownership laws did
not consider customary or communal rights to land and a few wealthy individuals gained control over vast natural resources; it was, in effect, a 'land grab' which benefited well-connected families of the ruling elite at the expense of small peasants. This proliferation of ranches and commercial farms is concentrated in the areas of the country with the highest quality land.

As the majority of the Angolan population relies on subsistence agriculture for survival, land is many families’ chief asset and the only source of family income; hence, tenure and use of land is heavily contested. Because of low soil fertility in many areas, the size of the smallholding needed to sustain a family is larger than might be expected – an issue in the context of the return movements of displaced and refugee families. Customary land law implemented by traditional chiefs states that a man may leave his land for over a generation and return to claim it. In the meantime land may be temporarily reallocated. As rates of return increase this may no longer be possible. In addition, there may be conflicts between implementation of customary law and state land law, which remains unclear. Customary law discriminates against women as the right to return and inheritance applies only to men. Furthermore, in practice, women and female-headed households have been allocated smaller plots than men.

The passing in November 2005 of the land reform law allowed communities to access and legally register their land as property leading to hopes of greater security for an estimated four million people and improvement in Angola’s agricultural production, even with lessened donor support; However, observers doubted it would eliminate the possibility of conflict over land. The new laws contain no implementation clauses, meaning that although some foreign-funded local NGOs and the longtime international NGO Development Workshop have been attempting to register land for local communities, the process is difficult and NGOs working in rural areas say that many in local government know little about the law. The UN/FAO began training communities to prepare land delimitations, for example, in Huila province. There was hope for improvement in the treatment of workers and small farmers on fazendas (estates) after a court case near Lubango on illegal detention and torture of farmworkers.

In August 2005 as part of the land reform programme, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development announced a 25 per cent increase in agricultural production due to the return and resettlement of displaced people and refugees. This resulted in an increase in the area of land cultivation and maize production from 700,000 tonnes to 880,000, leaving 800,000 needing to be imported. According to official figures, agriculture accounted for 12 per cent of GDP in 2005, a 4 per cent increase from the previous year. With three consecutive years of improved harvests Angola still has pockets of food insecurity due to regional disparities in crop production as well as transport system difficulties in moving food from surplus to deficit areas.

**Women: Peace Burdens Follow War Burdens**

Those with least access to resources and decision-making power in Angola are women. Women suffered enormously during the war, not only because of the direct effects of violent conflict, but also because of the indirect effect of poverty on families and communities. Eighty per cent of internally displaced persons were women and children, suffering high levels of mortality, malnutrition, illiteracy, poverty and HIV/AIDS. Women and girls are particularly affected by lack of access to health,
information, education and water. Angola has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, low literacy amongst women and lower school matriculation, attendance and completion amongst girls than boys.34 In rural and urban areas, women and girls take responsibility for water collection and this alone impacts negatively on health. Women as primary carers are responsible for sick family members. In urban areas, the lack of (male-dominated) formal employment possibilities has resulted in women becoming primary family breadwinners through informal commercial activity, in addition to remaining primary carers.

Current government attempts to crack down on informal commercial activity will have the effect of further increasing poverty levels amongst poor urban women and their families. Women are again particularly affected by these issues, especially lack of access to services and resources, and tensions that have led to abuses. Women are under-represented at all levels of state administration, political life and at decision-making levels in churches and NGOs. Tensions and conflicts at a local level have manifested themselves in abuses of power relations in the home – including violence against women.

There was for the first time a report to CEDAW in 2004 which acknowledged the unequal burdens borne by women, but the need for resources to promote gender equality in structural, legal and traditional discrimination against women in areas of property, inheritance and sexual violence still remains.

What International Pressure?
Activism on rights and governance on the international plane, driven by knowledge-based activist organisations abroad, has been much less inhibited and has achieved a great deal in raising issues and setting agendas in corporate behaviour. The ‘Publish What You Pay’ campaign on transparency of payments continue to target oil companies in relation to Angola and other countries. The Angolan government’s negotiations with George Soros’ Open Society Initiative, in which transparency would be rewarded by Soros leveraging increased investment in Angola, appeared to have foundered after April 2004 as oil prices rose. Angola also appeared a long way away from signing up to the EITI (Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative) despite earlier promises.35

Angola is ranked 133 out of 145 on Transparency International’s Country Corruption index. The IMF found that between 1997 and 2001, $8.45 billion of public money was unaccounted for (an average of 23 per cent of GDP). The Angolan government still has no transparent system for managing its oil money with uncertainty on how much oil revenue is in the central bank. The Cabinet/Council of Ministers having announced agreement with the provisions of KPMG’s Oil Diagnostic Report on revenues deposited in the central bank, did not specify which it agreed with. International oil companies were, as usual, contractually not allowed (even if they so wished) to publish what they pay to the state, meaning that ordinary Angolan citizens had no information so as to, inter alia, call their government to account over use or misuse of state funds.

During 2005, Angola said it was ready to enter into an IMF programme to restructure its debt, but did not want new loans as the amount it could access would be tiny compared to Chinese and other loans. Finance Minister José Pedro de Morais suggested that the IMF did not have an accumulated knowledge of Angolan economics as the reason for years of failed talks – interpreted locally as being
unwilling to understand the needs of the elite. To help fund its post-conflict reconstruction, Angola continues to rely on expensive oil-guaranteed loans despite its promises to the IMF earlier in the year. According to De Morais, with estimated external debts of $10 billion, Angola wants IMF approval of its would-be home-grown programme through a Policy Support Instrument (PSI) that would help it tackle its $1.5bn to $1.8bn Paris Club debt arrears. This would give a seal of approval for creditors wanting assurances before discussing debt rescheduling. The IMF response was that a staff monitoring programme only was possible.

IMF visits in 2005 and 2006 produced some praise for progress in transparency over oil revenues, external debt, Sonangol’s (the state oil company) transactions, and macro-economic management – including publishing of the Oil Diagnostic, but noted deficiencies in fiscal information, monitoring and control of public expenditure. A promised first-ever audit of Sonangol appears not to have happened. The loan agreements, high oil prices with increased oil production and bilateral lending appeared to give Angola greater leverage in its dealings with the IMF – a double-edged sword for the poor.

According to Global Witness, a syndicate of European banks led by French bank Calyon are organising a $2.25bn oil-backed loan to Sonangol to both refinance existing debt and for $800 million in new money for undisclosed use. A Chinese company would be the buyer of the oil. The budget for 2005 was of a proposed $1.89bn deficit – 8.9 per cent of GDP, forecast to grow by 11.6 per cent through rising oil taxes and greater lending; inflation came down (see introduction). The budget for 2006 announced in October 2005 included reducing defence and social spending expenditure, although doubling spending on agriculture. The kwanza remained stable throughout the year against the dollar and euro due to the ‘hard kwanza’ policy of intervention in money markets to defend the currency (oil prices are pegged in US dollars).

Stabilising the Neighbours without Invasions

Angola appears concerned to counter images of its corruption, although without necessarily giving up hegemonic notions in Central Africa to rival/complement South Africa’s further south such as an increasingly warm relationship with fellow oil producer, Equatorial Guinea. With Portuguese assistance, Luanda indicated a wish for a larger peace and security role in Africa for its large and relatively well-equipped armed forces. Although lacking a peacekeeping background, Angola offered its assistance given its ability to deploy without pre-funding from the African Union or United Nations.

Angola, as the third largest provider of crude oil, remains aware that its fortunes are linked to international oil consumers– its military and economic assets giving it bargaining power. It continues to forge agreements with the Chinese, busy extending their influence in Africa. However, the long-projected donors’ conference did not occur due to insufficient confidence in the government’s capacity and commitment to the development process as one of the preconditions set by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (this was for more transparency in the management of oil resources). Angola appeared a long way away from signing up to the EITI despite some promises and its observer status. Indications were that the West was keen to invest in infrastructure but less interested in investment in the social sectors.
As a contestant to African regional leadership, Angola positions itself as a key player in efforts to maintain and restore peace and security, spending around 10 per cent of its GDP on its military. Reflecting moves towards a more united SADC, Angola continues to draw closer to South Africa with whom it previously had difficult relations, signing a number of cooperation agreements on agriculture and trade. Warm relations with Brazil, Israel and Russia are likely to continue.

The interest of the US in the Gulf of Guinea – ‘the American Lake’ – and Angola in particular as alternative sources of supply to the Middle East also continues gaining a growing share of the US market (although oil exports to China overtook those to the US); the latter continues as Angola’s chief trading partner, political patron and major aid donor and gives it preferential African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) treatment. The US ‘spoke positively’ about Angola’s cooperation in combating terrorist links to conflict diamonds and engages in joint training exercises as well as providing aid in civic society support work, training for journalists and de-mining.

In October 2005, the Commission of the European Union denied presidential allegations of it cancelling the proposed donors’ conference, suggesting the Angolan government should request it. The European Parliament and the European Commission expressed doubts about Angola’s adherence to oil accounting transparency citing its qualification of its commitment to join the EITI, in saying that the move would only take place after the conclusion of a reform programme with the International Monetary Fund.

As well as continued good relations stemming from the loan the previous year and assistance on rebuilding other forms of infrastructure, the Chinese began construction of a new airport for Luanda with virtually all work being done by the Chinese. Beijing is also building a centre near Luanda for the Forcas Armadas Angolanas (FAA) for training elite troops as well as providing communication equipment. Japan is Angola’s second biggest donor after the US and opened its first embassy in early 2005.

Portuguese President Jorge Sampaio, visiting in November 2005, offered an alternative proposal to the international donors’ conference with a conference in Lisbon on multilateral investment in Angola. Visiting Portuguese Defence Minister Luis Amado Lisbon offered continuing assistance in training to the Angolan military and a $29 million agreement on health and education was also signed.

Relations improved with Bern after resolution of ‘Falconegate’ (Angolagate) in which French businessman, Pierre Falcone, was suspected of embezzling funds from the restructuring of Angola’s debt to Russia. Following an agreement negotiated by the Russian deputy minister of finance, an agreement (in December 2005) with the Swiss led to the release of Angolan funds frozen in Swiss bank accounts of $17m for humanitarian purposes (although $37 million held in a Luxembourg-based bank account owned by a Panama-based company called Camparal, which belongs to Dos Santos allegedly vanished into tax havens). The funds are supervised by Switzerland’s Directory for Development Cooperation and can only be spent on humanitarian projects. Relations with France continue to be cool due to the investigations into corruption by French and Angolan officials in an arms deal. The French oil company, Total, suffered collateral damage in this row and is being frozen out of lucrative contracts.
Conclusion

The ruling MPLA has for many years with some justification been able to blame the war for its repressive and unaccountable policies. Subsequently, it has also with some justification been able to point to the need to move from a war economy and polity into transition. But we do not have to believe the rhetoric over transition and how difficult a process it will be. Rather, Angola is in a ‘steady state’ with its economic and political policies marked heavily by the structures established both by war and from a command economy. It is able to use its oil wealth both for elite accumulation and for overcoming any resistance to its rule. Who is going to make it change this pattern? As its oil wealth and ultra deep oil exploration possibilities increase, it is also increasingly able to ride out any internal and mild international disquiet over its policies – accessing available, if expensive, oil-backed loans and able to put its resources where it wishes (whilst proclaiming a rhetoric of development and transition). Clientilism has replaced more repressive measures. There are some constraints in the present and future – such as wanting to present itself as not so corrupt to attract FDI, a lack of skilled personnel such as engineers and capacity, a desire to deal with its debts and its dependence on the maintenance of high oil prices – but not sufficiently to disturb the equanimity of the elite and its accumulation strategy despite some cosmetic changes. Any opposition can be marginalised, bought off or in the last resort got rid of.

Key questions including the date of elections remain largely unanswered, although the movement into a post-conflict (re)construction situation under government control continues. Little has happened in terms of the need for the government to spread growth beyond the capital-intensive oil sector to create the conditions for labour intensive poverty-reducing growth and to allow a genuine private sector to develop. This would have helped free up revenues available for social investment and for the increase in delivery of social services. Despite rhetoric on increased transparency, accountability and democratisation, little has yet been accomplished to overcome the gap between ruler and ruled. Nor was there much to overcome the needs or instability in rural areas or musseques.

Questions remain on what impetus there is to launch Angola towards widespread economic recovery and poverty reduction? How can the poor (i.e. the majority of Angolans) make their voice heard? Apart from some NGOs it seems there is little help they can expect in terms of support pressure from the international community who, despite claims otherwise, are as Sogge has pointed out, happy with the restricted form of citizenship and participation followed by Luanda. This is due to the increased autonomy of the elite in a context of high oil prices and vulnerable supply, and significant shifts in international and regional alliances in the face of the ‘Chinese threat’ and the war against terror. The election date is still uncertain but little can be expected from the process with the elite seemingly well in charge.

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Endnotes

1. Revised version following a short trip to Angola of a talk to the Africa Business Group at SOAS 16 March 2006 and based on a chapter on Angola for Africa Yearbook 2005 to be published by Brill
on behalf of Africa Institute in Hamburg, Afrikacentrum, Leiden and Nordic Afrika Instituut Uppsala. A shorter version was published by Pambazuka electronic newsletter 251 on 27 April 2006 and is available on the Progressio website.


3. Ibid. page 7

4. Although reconciliation here largely means (six) blanket amnesties, no truth commissions and inviting selected opposition elements into the elite.

5. Between 1997 and 2001, $8.45 billion of public money was unaccounted for (an average of 23 per cent of GDP): IMF.

6. There is an extensive literature building up on China’s role in Africa. For more immediate summaries see IRINs 24 March and 17 April, on the Sino-Africa relationship including the deal between China’s state oil company Sinopec and Angolan state oil company Sonangol to build a 240,000 barrel a day (BPD) refinery at Lobito in Angola. See also Angola News 2006 (June) and The Guardian, 22 June 2006, for details of the Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jibao’s visit to seven African countries including Angola.

7. ‘Revista Energia’, a publication that monitors the country’s energy sector, puts yearly government oil revenues at between US $4 and $5 billion

8. Nearly all of Angola’s production is offshore and for every million invested in the industry, only $100,000 is spent onshore.

9. A new round of signature bonuses has just been completed with some oil companies offering a reported $1 billion per bloc.

10. In the words of a civil society activist in Luanda ‘oil money is going to explode with $30 to $50 billion going to the government over the next seven to 15 years’. Interview, 1 June 2006.


12. They may also be considering lessons from the Brussels donor conference of 1995 (attended by the author) at which Savimbi promised never to return to war and the government appeared to have few ideas on how it would handle funding.

13. Two reports in October from Global Witness and Partnership Africa Canada questioned Angola’s compliance with the Kimberley Process on controlling conflict (‘blood’) diamonds.

14. There are reports that another Chinese loan is on the horizon since much of the original $2 billion has been spent. This one would be for a reported $1 billion.

15. Compared to Zimbabwe there also appeared to be little hostility towards the Chinese. Diplomatic sources described them as being in large numbers in Benguela rebuilding the infrastructure at a fast rate. A current joke in Luanda is that human rights organisations should set up a programme to combat how the Chinese are exploited through hard labour and very short lunchbreaks. Rumours that some are prison labour abound.

16. In January 2006, the National Statistics Institute estimated it as averaging 18.5 per cent over the year whilst the EIU country report thought 23.4 per cent more likely (EIU, Angola Country Report December 2005, p.11).

17. The papers from the conference are now publicly available via the government website. According to reports, Paul Collier’s paper offered the Angolan elite a future that was either Malaysian or Nigerian and said he would return in a few years to see what the choice had been.


19. A law on political parties allows government funding of parties not represented in the National Assembly during the election period (Diário da República, 1 July 2005).
20. See Southscan 2006, Vol. 21, 24 March 2006 for details of why Miala was sacked in relation to events in France and the DRC.

21. At a recent meeting UNITA made the interesting observation that ‘they would work out what their policies were once they knew the date of elections’.


23. Private Communication from David Sogge.

24. President Dos Santos said in April that they would occur ‘before 2008’. The government only has to provide 90 days notice of elections; voter registration has belatedly begun.

25. The UN is the channel for various electoral offers, none of which according to diplomatic sources have been taken up which a source believed was due to Luanda’s desire and undoubted financial ability to control the electoral process.

26. Although a Supreme Court ruling suggests that the President could serve up to three more mandates.

27. And UNITA alleging that much of this recruitment was forcible.


29. As so often, I am indebted to David Sogge for these insights.

30. The government’s mindset is shown according to local activists by its plans due to supposed health concerns to move the massive Roque Santeiro market (named after a Brazilian soap opera) away from its current popular location to an out of town site where no one can service it. Angolans see the move as more likely linked to providing building space for housing for the rich.

31. Personal communication from David Sogge.

32. Although only 6 per cent of Angolans who needed it received anti-retroviral treatment according to WHO report Progress on Global Access to HIV Antiretroviral Therapy (www.who.int/hiv/fullreport_en_highres.pdf).


34. It appears more likely however that urban drift is irreversible as is so often the case in African cities.

35. Average fertility rate is 7.2 for women.

36. It has a self-ascribed observer status.

37. Possibly over $3 billion according to French press reports.


39. Thought unsustainable without continuing high oil prices.

40. Local contacts believe Dos Santos was keen to blame others for the failure to mobilise foreign donors rather than the unwillingness to come to an agreement with the International Monetary Fund on transparent accounting for oil revenues. Equally, the IMF and World Bank were well aware of their lessened ability to provide pressure because of the large Chinese loan.
Africa: The Struggle, Intellectual & Political, Continues ...

John S. Saul

Introduction by Lionel Cliffe

The paper below has been written by John Saul, and is couched in his distinctive style. But it also represents a piece of collective work, integrating, as it does, a series of working papers by Saul on a set of related themes, and discussions around them. These papers were produced originally for a conference in Toronto to mark Saul’s retirement. The conference was attended by many ‘scholar-activists’, as he calls his target group, from Africa, Canada and Europe, including some members of ROAPE’s Editorial Working Group.

Apart from representing the product of a significant occasion, it is appropriate to reproduce this compilation in these pages for another reason. The discussion in the original papers, at the conference and in the article that follows, revolved around a selection of topics deliberately chosen as issues that matter to those who look at African realities from a left perspective. As such it offers a companion piece to the ‘Agenda’ that was served up in ROAPE’s 30th anniversary Issue (No. 102), one which broadens out the agenda and in some ways poses related but distinct challenges. Although there is some overlap, one distinction is that the themes around which the article below is organised are considerations about future prospects for possible action to bring social and political change, whereas the Agenda in ROAPE 102’s Editorial were more to do with headings for analysis and investigation. Thus, the latter put emphasis on the need to understand both the economic and current military character of imperialism and, by implication, contemporary capitalism; whereas the piece here is more concerned with challenging that world order.

We hope readers will read and dwell on this new offer of a radical agenda, and perhaps compare it with that in No. 102, and that some will be moved to enter these kinds of debates about Africa’s future and the future of ‘scholar-activism’. A couple of examples can be offered of where the differences in the two contributions might spark further debate. The discussion below of ‘class’ – a focus which has been central to left discourse – is juxtaposed to other bases for ‘identity’ such as race, gender and ethnic – a fair point. But No. 102 poses a different challenge to earlier forms of class analysis: the one posed by the common present-day patterns of social reproduction that place so many individuals and households in not a single unambiguous ‘class location’ but several. The implications for this, for the strategies and prospects of the struggles listed below, need to be worked out; they are scarcely recognised. Here, the phenomenon is mentioned in contributions in No. 102 but the implications for a range of actions are not worked out there, either.

Another example of a topic that No. 102 recognised as a central concern but which figures but little below is the prevalence of various forms of internal war and violent conflict in many parts of Africa. Perhaps this omission is related to the fact that many of the instances mentioned below are from southern and to some extent East Africa. It is the case that other
regions are more susceptible to violent politics – although what about Angola and not so long ago Mozambique? But a focus on southern Africa in a comparative framework might suggest the question as to why it seems that region may be overcoming major internal wars. More generally, neither ‘agenda’ poses the vital issue as to where does ‘peace’ fit in a programme for radical activism.

This essay integrates several ‘working papers’ written for the purpose of encouraging the ongoing intellectual and activist undertakings of committed scholars and practitioners in both the ‘South’ and the ‘North’ and they may serve here to focus our attention on a number of crucial development-related themes, especially as regards the African reality. This latter empirical focus is chosen because the chief ground of my own developmentalist praxis has been Africa, but also because these papers were originally prepared for a Workshop at York University in Canada on the theme, ‘Africa: The Next Liberation Struggle: Socialism, Democracy, Activism’. Nonetheless, they were designed not merely to promote further discussion of the African case there, but also to draw from participants more general reflections and debate and to encourage a level of understanding and action better able to comprehend the realities of the contemporary world and to support the actions of the marginalised and exploited everywhere.

Liberation & Democracy

The first working paper sought to focus the theme of ‘liberation and democracy’. It noted that the languages of both ‘liberation’ and ‘democracy’ have been particularly potent over recent decades in Africa. Thus, ‘liberation’ (generally cast, in the first instance, in terms of ‘national liberation’) helped drive the dramatic process of emancipation from white minority rule in southern Africa, while ‘democracy’ has been amongst the most salient of claims advanced by activists and intellectuals contesting the authoritarian states that have blanketed so much of Africa since independence.

In fact, however, there are few more contested concepts on the terrains of either political science or political practice than these two. For example, while few would deny the importance of the demand for more ‘democracy’ in Africa (or, for that matter, of the often parallel demand for ‘human rights’), the precise meaning and resonance to be attached to such demands is much debated. Particularly suggestive in this respect is a key differentiation made some years ago by Issa Shivji when he distinguished between ‘liberal’ and ‘popular’ democracy (Shivji, 1991:255). In so doing, he in effect linked his critique of ‘liberal democracy’ to those who have similarly seen that ‘thin’ form as exemplifying ‘polyarchy’ (Dahl and Robinson), ‘democratic elitism’ (Schumpeter), ‘low intensity democracy’ (Gills, Rocamora and Wilson) and ‘pseudo-democracy’ (Phillip Green). And he suggests his preferred alternative – ‘popular democracy’ – to be characterised positively by a much more vibrant form of popular mobilisation and empowerment and by ‘its position on imperialism, state and class, class struggle, etc.’

A more widespread realisation of even a primarily procedural democracy might represent a step forward in Africa, of course. It could provide fresh space for
disciplining from below various all too prevalent authoritarian tendencies and, in the pursuit of the goal of unity, could also assist in the discovery of acceptable mechanisms for reconciling differences, especially those that are ‘communally defined’ by ethnicity, regionalism and religion. For the left, it could also provide some relatively open political ground upon which to build its own institutions of long-run resistance and transformation. It is no wonder that demands for the formal guarantees of ‘bourgeois democracy’ in Africa have been prominent on the agenda not merely of the IFIs, international donors and some sectors of the African middle class but also of many popularly-based organisations.

Yet it has proven notoriously difficult to realise even a relatively vibrant liberal democracy in Africa. A situation of extreme scarcity renders the intra-elite struggle over spoils particularly intense. Meanwhile, global pressures to adapt to neo-liberalism narrow the range of options that can easily be articulated by newly ‘democratic’ governments and thus competed over in elections; popular cynicism and indifference are often the result. Worse, under such conditions, quasi-democratic competition can easily become reduced to the lowest common denominator of religious and regional infighting. Moreover, the pull towards renewed authoritarianism under such circumstances is very strong.

The possibility that democratic competition might merely increase fissiparous tendencies in Africa at the expense of national unity and national purpose is what led Nyerere in his time and Uganda’s Museveni more recently to argue for one-party/one movement regimes (albeit these were men driven by quite different agendas of national purpose: ‘African socialism’ on the one hand; neo-liberal policies on the other). Analysts have often suggested this kind of cure to be far worse than the disease, however. In Tanzania, it sanctioned TANU’s drive not only to sideline ethnic politics but also to undermine – in the name of unity – the potential for more progressive, popularly-based expressions from independent organisations of workers, women, youth and communities (Saul, 2005, ch. 7). And in Uganda it helped rationalise Museveni’s project of harbouring power to himself and his chosen associates. Indeed, in light of African experience, it is difficult to think that even quasi-benign intentions can overcome the costs to radical politics of the failure to secure an open terrain for the expression of oppositional politics. Moreover, the intentions behind the propensity on the part of leaders for political closure are often far more malign than those of a Nyerere or a Museveni.

Such questions become even more salient in light of the experience of those ‘successful’ movements for liberation that have achieved power in southern Africa. The demand for anti-colonial liberation, as directed against white rule, was an implicitly democratic one, although one that, in practice, often led to more authoritarian practices than any convincing definition of democracy would readily countenance. True, one could see, however briefly, some promise of a ‘radical nationalism’ guaranteeing both a socialist programme and a process of mass empowerment. In Mozambique, revolutionary elites did attempt, at least for a time, to realise policies and programmes designed to better the lot of the masses. But even in such a ‘best-case scenario,’ the vanguardist failure to really open up the political arena to the potential messiness but also long-term promise of mass politics helped undercut the revolutionary potential of the regime as surely as did the cruel acts of destabilisation inflicted upon an independent Mozambique by apartheid South Africa. There more formally democratic institutions, when they came, did help contain some of the internal contradictions that had sustained a cruel civil war but
they also produced a polity that, in other ways, drew the population away from any consciousness of shared public purpose that the socialist project had once seemed to promise in that country.

And elsewhere the region witnessed liberations that were even more unambiguously compromised from the outset: Angola, where the increasingly corrupt rule of the MPLA in Angola bent (like Mozambique) under the weight of South African and US destabilisation but also under the weight of its own neo-stalinist preferences; Namibia, where the appearance of a liberal-democratic outcome masked a SWAPO dominance that still reflected the autocratic character of that movement’s existence in exile; and Zimbabwe, where a combination of arrogant leadership and neo-liberal pressure led both to an upsurge of popular democratic resistance to the debased rule of Mugabe and his colleagues but also to the reinforcement of the latter’s ruthless attempt to retain their control (Saul, 2005, chapters 4, 5 and 6).

In South Africa the realisation, in the early-1990s, of a liberal democracy seemed to many a most positive outcome to the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. Yet as the ANC embraced ever more uncritically a neo-liberal economic strategy and a narrowly electoral definition of mass politics, the costs of that party’s overarching legitimacy (as the chief agent of liberation!) began to become more evident. In the event, the immense popular energies that many felt would carry over from the struggle into a mass politics of transformation in post-apartheid South Africa were contained, even effectively demobilised, by the ANC leadership. The bulk of the population, although now more impoverished than ever, apparently was expected to rest content with being little more than spectators at the intra-elite politicking that swirled above them.

Nonetheless, one of the most promising signals in contemporary Africa is the emergence of popular movements on the ground in South Africa that are increasingly inclined to resist the ANC, its policies and its politics (Saul, 2005, Section 3). From the authoritarian degeneration of liberation movements once in power, the left can perhaps learn, for Africa, a lesson that is also increasingly clear from historical experience elsewhere. Self-proclaimed vanguards – whether they be acting in the name of national unity or socialism – are more threat than promise to the grounding of a process of popularly-based, socialist politics. Of course, a simple assertion of the virtues of democracy or a tacit assumption of the likelihood of mass radical spontaneity are not enough. Organisation and ideology will remain crucial revolutionary tools, with the coordination of local resistances helping resultant movements to add up to become much more than the sum of their parts. There will also be a role for leadership to shape mass action even as that leadership must itself be held true to its task by pressure from below. The question of how to build and sustain a transformative politics, both in order to achieve power and to use it effectively once power is achieved, remains a daunting one.

From the assertion of claims to democracy that has begun to occur recently throughout the continent, the left in Africa can also learn lessons germane to its long-term project. Democratic demands have resonance certainly: the domestic authoritarianism which is rampant sees to that and so too, increasingly, may the self-evidently undemocratic global power system that dictates so many outcomes to Africa. There is a language here to be appropriated, albeit a language that is (as suggested above) also subject to abuse and self-interested manipulation both by local and international players. How best, then, to mould the project of democratisation into a truly popular weapon, rather than having it continue to be used, at least
as often, as a tool of the elite? Is ‘popular democracy’ enough of a marker to
distinguish the broader claims for socio-economic as well as political transforma-
tion that must be advanced in its name? If not, how overtly and self-consciously
must it blend with the attendant projects of ‘anti-capitalism’ and ‘socialism’ in order
to guarantee the seriousness of the project that it seeks to encapsulate?

Finally, the question of how local, national, even continental assertions in Africa –
for popular democracy, for socialism – plug into global struggles for the
transformation of capitalism and of the hierarchies of imperialist power is an
especially daunting one. For, self-evidently, it will be difficult for any individual
African local community or state to so democratise global capitalism and/or the
American imperium as to find sufficient freedom from the pressures such structures
assert in order to self-confidently and successfully launch their own transformative
projects. The dilemma of how popular democratic struggles can come to be mounted
at the various sites of possible contestation – local, state, regional, continental, global
– in such a way as to begin to tilt the balance of global power is at least as daunting
for Africans as it is for people elsewhere – and perhaps, given the extreme
vulnerability of the continent, even more so.

Class & Identity

A second working paper encouraged the workshop to focus on many of the same
complex issues evoked elsewhere (see also Saul, 2006, ch. 3), seeking to introduce for
discussion the theme of ‘class’ and ‘identity’ (gender, race, ethnie).’ It proceeded as
follows: Defining Africa’s major challenge with central reference to the negative
manner of the continent’s insertion into the global capitalist system also implies the
granting of a certain analytical centrality to the fact of social class, as both globally
and domestically structured. It is true that, however crucial to the discussion of the
gross inequalities that scar the continent, any such class analysis is complicated in
its own terms. Thus, the relative lack of saliency of any domestic bourgeoisie shifts
much of the burden of local class domination to the shoulders of various
bureaucratic and political elites. Moreover, the relative weakness of any African
proletariat in many countries highlights the importance, in terms of stratification,
both of highly differentiated peasantries and a diverse range of urban dwellers who
live alongside those more formally employed and organised as workers – many of
them more ‘marginalised’ and ‘excluded’ by capitalism than ‘exploited’ in any
straightforward marxist sense. As Post and Wright have written:

The working out of capitalism in parts of the periphery prepares not only the minority working
class but peasants and other working people, women, youth and minorities for a socialist
solution, even though the political manifestation of this may not initially take the form of a
socialist movement. In the case of those who are not wage labourers (the classical class
associated with that new order) capitalism has still so permeated the social relations which
determine their existences, even though it may not have followed the western European
pattern of ‘freeing’ their labour power, that to be liberated from it is their only salvation … The
objective need for socialism of these elements can be no less than that of the worker imprisoned
in the factory and disciplined by the whip of unemployment. These prices are paid in even the
most ‘successful’ of the underdeveloped countries, and others additionally experience mass
destitution. Finding another path has … become a desperate necessity if the alternative of
continuing, if not increasing, barbarism is to be escaped (Post and Wright, 1989).

Certainly, then, exploitation and oppression exist in Africa that are firmly class-
defined. Nonetheless, considerable subtlety of analysis is required to make the
relevant distinctions and considerable political creativity is required to make the transcending of such differentiations the stuff of a viable radical, class-based politics.

Of course, developing a class politics that can underpin revolutionary practices and implicate revolutionary goals has proven to be a far from straightforward matter even in much more developed regions of the world than Africa, and has given rise, over the past century, to a range of highly contested debates about the nature and promise of proletarian politics. Such debates are germane here, in particular the challenges posed by the existence of lines of identity and markers of diverse oppressions at play in Africa and elsewhere, that cut across class structures at any number of oblique angles. Bannerji has underscored the ‘absurdity’ of attempting to see ‘identity and difference as historical forms of consciousness unconnected to class formation, development of capital and class politics.’ But in so doing, she also emphasises the impossibility of considering class itself outside the gendering and ‘race-ing’ that so often significantly characterise it in the concrete (Bannerji, 1995:30-1).

This is most obvious with respect, precisely, to the fact of gender. The burden of patriarchy (borne across a broad spectrum of violence directed against women, for example, and highlighted by differential structures of opportunity) are visible enough. Nor can there be any doubt that capitalist-induced exploitation and marginalisation are uneven in their gender impact, generally producing patterns that reinforce the higher price of such realities that is exacted from women (witness in Africa, for example, the differential import of structural adjustment programmes). On the other hand, the mobilisation and activism of women has grounded a struggle that is important in its own right on the continent, however much it may often intersect with simultaneous expressions of class struggle. In sum, the terms of gendering both class analysis and class politics is a work-in-progress in Africa as elsewhere.

Whether, terminologically, gender is a fact of ‘identity’ may be disputed, of course. Generally deemed to fall even more clearly under this rubric are the more ‘imagined’ markers of differentiation of race, religion, region, nation and sub-nation (‘ethnic groups’, ‘tribe’). Not that the term ‘imagined’ should be taken to imply that the embrace of such categories to identify either a manifestation of oppression or a practice of resistance makes the phenomenon they refer to any less real and tangible. In Africa each of these variables has had pertinent effects with racism both defining and rationalising the subordination of Africa right up to the present day, and racial consciousness, emanating from the continent itself, having had countervailing emancipatory effects (albeit sometimes rather ambiguous ones) when it has emerged in such forms as Pan-Africanism and Black Consciousness. And since race is still one marker of social privilege in a country like post-apartheid South Africa, the ramifications of that fact can scarcely be expected to disappear very quickly.

Globally, too, the racism underpinning the workings of imperialism and contemporary capitalism’s worldwide reach has been cited as helping rationalise the West’s continued outward thrust. It is also a factor which, alongside potentially diverse material interests, has made the forging of alliances between subordinate classes, North and South, more difficult to achieve than might otherwise be the case. Meanwhile, reaction from below to such racism has helped encourage a vogue for ‘post-colonial’ studies and other less academic expressions of a racially-conscious
sensibility that can occasionally serve to illuminate, sometimes to obscure, the workings of the present global system and the promise of a more universalistic emancipation.

National assertions, albeit most often ones defined with reference to the territorial boundaries inherited from colonialism have, in Africa as elsewhere, also had meaning – although as often as not rationalising the domination of new elites (Fanon’s ‘pitfalls of national consciousness’) as focusing ongoing processes of popular emancipation. Nonetheless, Munck writes,

the critique of nationalist discourse should not blind us to the popular struggles it has [also] fostered and animated … The struggles of the subaltern may take many forms – nationalist, ethnic, regional and religious amongst others – and a marxism that seeks to have global influence needs to understand these and not just struggle to ‘demystify’ and reassert a ‘true’ class struggle (Munck, 2000:133).

Moreover, any argument regarding the potentially positive role to be played by (necessarily transformed) states in challenging capitalist globalisation must find itself flirting, to some degree, with ‘left nationalism’ in advancing its case. And then there are those, like Wole Soyinka, who have emphasised the contribution an achieved nationalism can make to blunting the edge of fissiparous intra-state ethnic and regional rivalry that has so been devastating, not least in Africa (Soyinka, 1996:139).

The distinction between national consciousness on the one hand, and ethnic (sub-national) consciousness on the other, is not an absolutely clear one and is, in any case, generally made more demagogically than with any real precision. It is also the case that ethnic sentiment, like nationalism more strictly defined, is too often merely mobilised and manipulated by self-serving elites. Still, even Soyinka acknowledges the possible wisdom, when all else has failed, of some ordinary Africans finding solace and sanctuary (of language, kin and territorial affinity) in the most proximate of (ethnic) self-definitions. If the latter tend not to find much in the way of long-term emancipation by choosing such a survival strategy, it is surely the failure of both capitalism and socialism to yet deliver on their promises of a genuinely humane ‘developmentalism’ that must be seen as providing a significant part of the explanation for the vacuum into which these and other far more ‘pathological deformations’ of consciousness enter (Milband, 1994).

For we exist in a world not only of global capitalism but also of exploding fundamentalisms – in which leaders like Bush and Sharon and many Muslim and Hindu protagonists not only wrap themselves in the flag for purposes of advancing their own schemes of domination but also blur the lines between their national claims and their religious ones. Not that there is any very convincing reason for marxists to reject, on first principles, the religious impulse that does help many to cope with questions of death, evil and spirituality. Too often socialists in power (in Mozambique for example) have declared war on religion and other identities, rather than find ways to acknowledge the latter’s claims to be heard, albeit possibly transformed, within the broader emancipatory project. Moreover, with regard to their implications for revolutionary aspirations, institutionalised expressions of organised religion has proven to be a potent force for both good (one thinks of ‘liberation theology’ in Latin America, for example) and also substantial ill (cf. Mamdani, 2005).
Leo Panitch has recently written that ‘class, as we are so often reminded, is not everything.’ ‘But nor,’ he continues, ‘is it nothing, and the costs of the marginalisation of class in the intellectual and political arena are becoming increasingly severe’ (Panitch, 2000:367). If this is so, on the religious front as on other fronts we need to understand a great deal more about the ways in which class analysis and class struggle can be articulated – non-reductively, non-economistically, non-Eurocentrically, but centrally – with other markers of social differentiation, both analytically and practically (Saul, 2006, ch. 3).

Socialism & Development

What, then, of those ‘imaginaries’ in terms of which people might be expected to mobilise themselves in order to realise more humane and expansive alternatives to the present status quo of existent global capitalism? What, in particular, of socialism in this regard? A third background paper sought, therefore, to introduce this theme of ‘Socialism and Development’ into the Workshop’s deliberations, proceeding as follows: The Third World in the 1960s and early-1970s was marked by the growing saliency of ‘socialism’ as an alternative socio-economic system to the capitalism that had underpinned European colonialism and that now drove the United States towards the role of presumptive global hegemon. While by no means the dominant premise throughout the continent of Africa, there was, here as elsewhere, a sense that such an alternative was available, perhaps in particular as an outgrowth of the success of national liberation movements in southern Africa. Alongside these developments in the ‘real world’, the world of scholarship also saw significant commitments to such a prospect both within Africanist circles but also more broadly. By the turn of the century, however, much less was heard of the once-presumed ‘necessity’ of socialist solutions to the problems of underdevelopment that stalked the globe and – perhaps most dramatically – Africa itself.

There is a paradox here. Capitalism as a global system is ever more ascendant in the wake both of the collapse of the decadent ‘state socialism’ of the Eastern bloc and the aggressive assertion of both its own inherent globalising tendencies and the political actions of its main protagonist – the United States military machine. And yet the system continues to produce the grossest of inequalities and, for an increasing number, the direst of poverties. The situation might seem, therefore, to cry out more strongly than ever before for the intensified articulation of both a socialist political/economic practice and a socialist-inspired scholarship. The fact that this has not generally been the case, and the implications of that fact, defines one of the key subjects to be explored under this rubric.

Of course, disillusion with the claims to be made on behalf of socialism has had much to do with its failure and/or defeat, both North and South, in the twentieth century. Certainly in most of the global South, and especially in Africa, there has been a strong push (in ‘the age of structural adjustment,’ as Bill Freund once termed the waning years of the twentieth century) towards the acceptance of a global framework that seems, nonetheless, merely to deliver growing inequality and ever crueler forms of marginalisation and exclusion to most inhabitants of the global South. Now, where there are signs of deep-seated resistance to this system, they are cast at least as often in terms of religious fundamentalism as in terms of the goal of mounting a socialist alternative. For many others, the apparent strength of the global capitalist system seems to dictate the judgment that, at best, it can merely be reformed at the margins (e.g., the Oxfam turn, the Mbeki project) or, perhaps, waited out until
the ripening of the system’s own internal contradictions place the possible struggle for alternatives to capitalism more realistically on the political agenda. The potentially unsettling nature of China’s growing presence in the global economy is sometimes cited in this respect, as is, more generally, the possibility of a global realisation crisis.

Any such disillusion with the socialism project, as indeed with the notion of ‘development’ itself, has been reinforced by the rise of ‘post-modernist’ preoccupations that question fundamentally the status of such ‘grand narratives’ in the name of what are said to be more diverse and localised ‘truths’ and less ‘Eurocentric’ preoccupations. As Bob Sutcliffe has argued, however, the merits of the goal of development – ‘the material, economic, productive basis of whatever satisfactory utopia can be imagined and democratically negotiated among the inhabitants of the earth’ – must not be lost to a ‘nostalgic, conservative post-developmentalism’ (Sutcliffe, 1999:150-2). Of course, Sutcliffe would be amongst the first to argue that the material goals of such a ‘left-developmentalism’ must be realised in ways that are equitably distributed, environmentally responsible and democratically defined, but his point stands. A similarly commonsensical claim can also be made for the theoretical validity of conceiving a socialist alternative to actually existing capitalism (this latter being, at once ‘contingent, imbalanced, exploitative and replaceable,’ in Albo’s phrase [Albo, 1997]).

In consequence, we will concentrate less on the ontological foundations of socialist preoccupations – and of their link to a drive for meaningful ‘development’ in both material and human terms – than on their practical viability, and this at a number of levels. Even in their own terms, for example, socialist experiments have not found entirely convincing ways to realise long term economic transformation: such is the record in Africa as elsewhere. Perhaps unduly influenced by the Soviet model, these experiments have often been disproportionally focused on high-tech, big project models and on ‘solutions’ to the rural problem that have fetishised collectivism at the expense of genuine local empowerment and planning. Short of seeking to realise an unlikely autarky on a state or regional basis, finding effective ways to negotiate the choppy waters of the global economy even while working with others to transform its grim logic, and discovering convincing means of blending, domestically, planning and market mechanisms so as to sustain ongoing transformation poses challenges; there is much to be discussed here regarding the manner, once again in Albo’s terms, of

> re-embedding financial capital and productive relations in democratically organised national and local democratic spaces sustained through international solidarity and fora of democratic cooperation.

‘Democratic Cooperation’? Surely the second great weakness of socialists in power in the last century was political – particularly with respect to the authoritarian practices they so often came to adopt. Instead of facilitating the more active expression of organised popular energies (unions, cooperatives, feminist initiatives), such ‘socialists’ proved far more likely to entrap them in an iron cage of vanguardism and ideological correctness. Even their apparently progressive predilections with regard to the transformation of gender roles often calcified in practice, and any necessary sensitivity to the complex bases of religious and other identities proved to be minimal. Not that mere spontaneism provides any effective and convincing answer in the building of an anti-capitalist counter-hegemony. A role for leadership must be acknowledged and defined, but the sustaining of an
effective dialectic between such leadership and mass action, with the popular
classes checking leadership from below even as they raise their own level of
consciousness, must remain as one of biggest challenges for socialist practice.

Perhaps, then, there are lessons to be learned from prior practice for next time, if and
when power is once again attained by socialists. For the moment, however, it is the
means – under contemporary conditions and in the wake of such failures – of
building movements to win such power that must be at the centre of our discussion.
The political critique presented in the preceding paragraph has relevance here: how
to avoid the perils of vanguardism and narrow-mindedness in seeking to focus
popular energies bubbling up from below. For, despite the residue of disillusion and
defeat referred to above, there are such energies, reflected in the stirring of multi-
faceted responses to the workings of global capitalism and spawning resistances
that have stretched from the global streets of Seattle, Quebec and Genoa, to the
national campaigns for political and socio-economic rights, and to the quotidian
fight-back of many local communities, groups and trade unions against the
inequities they face in trying to build decent lives for themselves and their children.

One suspects that these energies will continue to find expression in the contesting (i)
of the deepening exploitation of workers; (ii) of the marginalisation and exclusion of
vast numbers of people both urban and rural (those who are especially affected by
the increasingly Draconian neo-liberal commodification of a wide array of the
necessities of life: water, electricity, health, education, housing and the like); and (iii)
of the inequitable burden of costs borne in the sphere of social reproduction, not least
by women and those racially discriminated against. But how best to conceive the
means of pooling such energies at appropriate sites of struggle – local, national,
regional, global - and of creating the effective tools (of both organisation and
ideology) to generate an effective, democratic, counter-hegemonic force to capitalist
dictate? Gindin, in this regard (Gindin, 1998:15), has spoken of the ‘structured
movement’ (‘something transitional that is more than a coalition and less than a
party’) as a possible step towards what is needed, and a range of voices, stretching
from anarchist to vanguardist, have also been heard from. For there can be little
doubt that further developing the theory and practice of a politics of real, not merely
notional, revolutionary challenge to the status quo stands as a central task.

And just what kind of counter-hegemony might this political alternative be
articulating? The discrediting of socialism as a plausible practice has led to the
increased saliency of other imaginaries for grounding the global struggle against
inequality. ‘Radical democracy’ is one such alternative that is offered (by Laclau and
Mouffe, for example) as a way of acknowledging the multiple fronts upon which that
struggle might proceed. It is, however, a language that blunts unduly the focus on
capitalism and class struggle that seems necessary. A problematic centered on the
claims of ‘social justice’ has more to offer perhaps, as does the imaginary of ‘anti-
capitalism,’ this latter much evoked in books and political discourses these days.
But just where does that leave the socialist imaginary? Is it a battle-flag too soiled by
history to still attract support? Too bad if so, since the socialist tradition is one that,
for all its flaws, encourages us to move most efficaciously from a searching critique of
capitalism to a potential programme for building its alternative. Does it not seem
worth fighting to revive it if this is indeed the case?

True, even if the goal of a revolutionary socialism (‘realistic socialism’ as distinct
from ‘utopian capitalism,’ in Albo’s terms) should continue to be seen as providing
the most effective foundation upon which to build a real challenge to global
capitalism, it is crucial that this imperative not be reduced to mere rhetorical bombast. If ‘mere reformism’ holds no answer, then neither does a jejune ‘ultra-revolutionism’. Instead, we might find instruction in the kinds of revolutionary realism favoured by the early Gorz and by Kagarlitzky, amongst others. Such authors have deployed the notion of ‘structural reform’ to evoke the kind of struggles to realise intermediate victories that, even when pursued and won, keep the long-term goal of ever broader transformation in sight and also further empower the popular classes, organisationally and ideologically, to pursue it. (See Saul, 1993, chs. 4 and 5) Other related formulations are possible, of course, but on this front, where considerations of strategy and tactics meet the articulation of long-term goals, we also need creative thinking.

Scholar Activism

What then, finally, of the link between intellectual work and anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist activism? A fourth background paper argued as follows: Africa has been a regional site where the link between scholarship and activism has been a particularly strong one (Amin, 1990; Cabral, 1969). Many Africanist scholars from beyond the continent were first drawn to its study by periods of work there and/or by an association with the drama of national liberation struggles, especially those directed against the most calcified examples of white-minority rule in southern Africa. Such scholars often sought to blend their professional work with their activist work around African struggles (the anti-apartheid movement, for example). And much the same could be said, in terms of the impact on a younger generation, of the continuing drama of, and challenges presented by, the African post-colonial crisis – whether this be measured in terms of the dismal economics of structural adjustment, the politics of domestic conflagration, or the grim toll of the AIDS. Not surprisingly, such challenges have been even more important in eliciting the political commitments of a significant section of the African academy as well (see, amongst other examples that might be cited, Alexander, 2002; Ake, 2000; Cheru, 1989; Desai, 2002; Hyslop, 1999; Mamdani, 1996, 2001; Nzongola-Ntalaja and Lee, 1997; Olukoshi, 1998; Othman, 2000; Raftopoulos and Sachikonye, 2001; Sachikonye, 1995).

Africa is not alone in this respect, of course. In most settings there are pulls on scholars, particularly those working in the social sciences, to bring their scholarship self-consciously into creative interaction with their political commitments and practices. Indeed, many such scholars will argue that not only is this the only morally appropriate stance that they can adopt, it is also a crucial underpinning of the most effective kind of scientific practice in the social sciences. Some such starting point allows the exploration of the possibilities and paradoxes inherent in attempting to bring academic undertakings and meaningful political work together, both generally and in terms of the conditions that presently define the situation of the African continent (and other continents of the ‘global South’), of Canada and other advanced capitalist countries, and of the global capitalist system taken as a whole.

We should not underestimate, nor apologise for, the extent to which the business of scholars who are also dedicated to activism is, in fact, scholarship. Thus scholars (the reference is primarily to scholars of the academy, with the word ‘intellectual’, as Gramsci has reminded us, having a much more expansive connotation) can have the space and time to research, to debate, to raise in a particular (somewhat more
leisured, at least in some Western settings) way that does not come easily to others more immediately and ‘practically’ engaged. In consequence, they can hope to make a distinctive contribution to the task of discerning a line of march and revealing various problems, possibilities and complexities – always assuming that they sustain a critical self-consciousness about the inevitable limitations of their own perspectives and remain open to as wide a range of voices and experiences as possible. Just what the most appropriate kinds of contribution to struggle that a scholarship cast in these terms might seek to make is, of course, a matter for further discussion.

But if, at least in principle, scholarship has a contribution to make to revolutionary theory and practice, activism (as anticipated above) has an essential contribution to make, in turn, to scholarship ... and to science. For, as Hugh Stretton argued some years ago (Stretton, 1969:141), ‘neutral scientific rules’ cannot replace ‘values as selectors’ in the framing of the questions. Moreover, the ‘scientistic’ dream of developing an internally coherent, self-sustaining and (potentially) exhaustive model of society is not only misguided but dangerous – dangerous in the sense of encouraging a blunting of debate regarding the diverse ‘political and moral valuations’ that necessarily shape both the questions we pose, as scholars, about society and the explanations that contest for our attention regarding social phenomena. Hence his argument for the self-conscious embrace of what he terms a (necessarily) ‘moralising [social] science.’

We might wish to add that once the questions have been posed, social scientists can still be judged by their peers in terms of the data adduced in the attempt to answer them, and in terms of the coherence of the arguments presented in doing so. There are scientific canons of evidence and logic of presentation against which explanations can, up to a point, be judged and evaluated at least somewhat objectively. But as for the questions themselves, and the importance attached to finding answers to one particular set of questions rather than another, this will be determined by choices – by judgements as to appropriate emphasis and focus – of quite another kind. Nor is this realisation of the subjective (and inevitably, political) dimension of effective social scientific inquiry something that marxists should feel uncomfortable with. It is, at one level, what the unity of theory and practice (with, in Kitching’s words, its attendant ‘rationally motivated willingness to act to transform capitalism’ [Kitching, 1994]) is all about: theories grounded in radical commitments shape our scholarly undertakings and encourage us to discover things scientifically that more conventional, establishment theories merely serve to hide from sight.

Of course, there are dangers attendant upon the activist scholarship that embrace of a ‘moralising science’ valorises, including the obvious temptation to shape findings and quasi-scholarly assertions to fit the apparent imperatives of more immediately pressing political loyalties and goals. This can lead the researcher to self-deception, to wilful distortion, or, more subtly, to a distinct temptation to mask advocacy in the language of scientific justification. All scholar-activists will have been accused of such sins at one time or another and, in truth, these failings are difficult to avoid. Here the facilitating of open, critical but comradely debate within a broader left-scholarly community can act as some safeguard. Moreover, since the proposed alternative of some sternly objective, ‘scientistic,’ social science is largely a will of the wisp, at best naïve and trivialising, at worst highly ideological in its own right, honestly confronting such complexities involved in realising an effective scholar-activism remains a challenge for left-academics.
Such issues need further exploration, of course. But even if we arrive at a position which confirms that scholars can unapologetically assert strong reasons, both moral/political and scientific, to blend their particular professional skills with activism, and where activists can be encouraged to draw on the findings of appropriate scholarship to advance their cause, the larger question remains: just where, within the current neo-liberal conjuncture and in a world dominated by global capital, US imperialism and quasi-religious fundamentalism, can the progressive activist, including the scholar-activist, find the best entry-points for radical intervention (Bond, 2002, 2003).

The Struggle Continues

Such questions will continue to have to be canvassed, questions that turn around issues of site, agency and imaginary (see Saul, 2006, ch. 2). There is, to begin with, the question of the appropriate site for both analysis and action, with claims for the privileging of the local, the national/regional/continental, and the global all being widely trumpeted. Even more challenging for the scholar activist of radical persuasion is the issue of agency, for here real divisions of emphasis, often visible in the political realm, have also penetrated the academy. Thus, against claims made on behalf of class analysis (and a range of variants of marxist scholarship) one will sometimes find a congeries of oppositional post-modernism, identity politics and an advocacy of local, even spontaneist, initiatives challenging marxism’s erstwhile hegemony on the left, both within the academy and beyond.

Developing a class analysis sufficiently flexible to keep issues of exploitation, marginalisation and exclusion at the centre of our preoccupations while acknowledging the range of other oppressions that can both interpenetrate with class and give rise, as ‘militant particularisms’, to resistances in their own right presents us with a challenge (as discussed earlier). So, too, does the complex issue of arbitrating (and, where possible, blending) the claims of diverse organisational expressions that left impulses can take: the local community vs. the (national) state vs. ‘global civil society’; the political party vs. the trade union vs. the ‘social movement’ (whether this be premised primarily on considerations of gender, community or identity).

Finally, there is the question of the appropriate imaginary in terms of which we can best advance both left ‘theoretical practice’ in the academy and left practical activism beyond it. There is, for example, the question of the status of marxism as core analytical framework versus the range of post-marxisms, neo-marxisms and anti-marxisms that contest that status. Even closer to the coal-face of the struggle itself, and as also discussed above, radical democracy, social justice concerns, anti-capitalism (including the sub-sets of anti-capitalist globalisation and anti-imperialism), and socialism all stake their claims to primacy, and each has its advocates on the left.

As suggested above, the main focus of the workshop which the background papers integrated into the argument above sought to help guide was ‘Africa: The Next Liberation Struggle?’ an essay on this topic having first appeared in the pages of ROAPE, while its republication also serves to focus another, more Africa-centred, volume of writings recently published by the present author (Saul, 2005, ch. 11). I will therefore not seek to reproduce it here beyond noting the promise of its initial paragraph. For, in fact, it sought to bring
into focus the immediate challenges facing progressives in Africa [and in other continents of the global South] as they now seek to forge social and political initiatives that can hope to attain power and implement policies able to confront and ultimately to bend the apparent logic of global capitalism – thereby permitting more humane outcomes … .

Taking as a starting-point the moment of heightened reflection on such issues that occurred in Dar es Salaam in the 1960s and early 1970s, the essay sought to up-date the insights of that period with reference to the even grimmer circumstances in which Africa currently finds itself. Suggesting that mere ‘reform’ (NEPAD, ‘liberal democratisation’) offers little real promise of meaningful and substantial change of the continent’s desperate situation, the paper sought to then canvas the range of resistances in Africa that indicate the emergence of a more radical project of transformation. While acknowledging that it is easy to be pessimistic regarding such possibilities, the paper identified sufficient movement on the continent to suggest that Africa, in terms of the emergence of a ‘post-nationalist, post-neo-liberal’ revolutionary politics, now stands at a moment analogous with 1945 when few could have anticipated the speed with which African nationalist movements would win independence for their territories from colonial rule.

The essay concluded with the argument that, despite its current eclipse, the language and vision of socialism will have to become part and parcel of this continuing revival of Africa’s revolutionary endeavours and of its ‘next liberation struggle.’ Of course, it is no easier now than it was in 1945 to divine for the current moment the precise parameters of the likely struggle against present day domination. Or to answer the variety of questions that this moment will throw up. For, as Africans, like others elsewhere, seek to forge more effective organisations for resistance, for example, how will their new movements balance the rival claims to centrality of local, national, regional, continental and global sites of struggle in the focusing of their efforts? How will the trade-off of the relative priorities of plausible short-term reform against the necessary claims of long term structural transformation be handled? And (perhaps most importantly of all) in terms of what counter-hegemonic imaginary, or imaginaries, will this ‘post-nationalist, post-neo-liberal’ be cast?

African activists themselves, like activists elsewhere, will have to be in the front-lines in answering such questions. But the undertakings of a new generation of researchers and writers focusing critically, if also supportively, on the kinds of resistances that are necessary to a genuine liberation from capitalist globalisation will certainly have a positive role to play.

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Endnote

1. The papers, which are integrated into this article (a version of which has, in turn, been included as chapter 4 in Saul, 2006), were originally presented, as background documents, at the Workshop on ‘Africa: The Second Liberation Struggle,’ ably organised by Richard Saunders, Carolyn Bassett and Gigi Herbert and held at York University on October 15-18, 2004. Amongst those present, were many who presented quite specific ‘response papers’ to these ‘working papers.’ Included among the invitees and participants were Richard Saunders, Robert Drummond, Pablo Idahosa, Linda Freeman, Colin Leys, Darlene Miller, David Pottie, Greg Albo, Himani Bannerji, Marlea Clarke, Leo Panitch, Greg Ruiters, Atu Sekyi-Otu, Sam Gindin, Giovanni Arrighi, Carolyn Bassett, Manfred
Bienefeld, Trevor Ngwane, Leander Schneider, Lionel Cliffe, Jonathan Barker, Judith Marshall, Janet Conway, John Loxley, David Moore and Peter Lawrence. A number of their response papers, as well as some syntheses of the workshop’s discussions, are available at the Workshop web-site: http://www.arts.yorku.ca/african_liberation/

Bibliographic Note


Constitutionalism: A New Democratic Perspective’ [ch. 2] and ‘Contradictory Class Perspectives in the Debate on Democracy’ [editor’s Epilogue].


Briefings

Havana: The Scourge of Neo-liberalism in Africa & the Middle East

David González & Silvio Baró

CEAMO is a scientific, autonomous, non-governmental association. Its creation in 1979 responded both to the impact of African and Arab traits in Cuban culture as well as to the evolution of Cuban relations with Africa and the Middle East since 1959. It gathers a multi-disciplinary staff of researchers and collaborators who undertake studies with different approaches to social sciences, particularly history, sociology, politics, international relations and economy. Its research results reach Cuban and foreign specialised institutions and the public in general through its publications and the academic performance of its members.

* * * *

In late June 2006 CEAMO, the Centre for Studies on Africa and the Middle East, organised its 11th International Seminar in cooperation with the House of Africa and the House of Arab’s, in the historical centre of Old Havana. Despite some last-minute cancellations (the US blockade is making travel to Cuba increasingly difficult) some thirty Cuban experts were able to exchange views with nine foreign counterparts from six countries. Several others who were not able to attend sent their contributions by e-mail.

The three-day meeting gave continuity to an effort begun in 1987 by CEAMO in order to periodically convene colleagues from the world over to review the most pressing current issues in their areas of interest. This year the specific sub-topic of the seminar was ‘Africa and the Middle East vis-à-vis the Challenges of Neo-Liberal Policies’, that allowed participants to explore the consequences of several decades of economic as well as political neo-liberalism in Africa and more recent efforts to extend the model throughout the Arab world.

The first panel, structured around the general topic of ‘Neo-Liberal Policies, use of Natural Resources and their Consequences for Africa and the Middle East’ discussed how the present stage of neo-liberal globalisation has only deepened Africa’s traditional role in the world market – gradually established since the late 15th century – by forcing it to produce what it does not consume and to consume what it does not produce. In that light, the enormous amount of economic and other mechanisms used by major world powers to de-capitalise African economies in this neo-liberal stage of capitalism was reviewed.¹

Meanwhile, the ongoing escalation of oil prices (due in part to the interventionist policies of the Bush Administration in the Middle East) has in turn motivated greater US interest and aggressiveness to assure sources of supply in the Middle East and Africa was also taken into account. The reaffirmation of the Middle East as the world’s major oil exporting region and the gradual rise of the African continent as a supplier of this vital resource, together with the sharp competition between old as well as new actors in the international scene for the control...
of its main sources were some of the aspects discussed afterwards. Recurrent problems posed by deficient food supplies across wide parts of Africa, particularly after the severe 2004-05 food crisis were also dealt with. The consequences of neo-liberal economic policies – particularly in terms of the limitation of the role of states in the design of economic policies, in the amount of financial resources at their disposal and in the modification of the nations’ economic structures to favour export production to the detriment of the production of foodstuffs for the population at large – also came up at the seminar. Thus, the crucial issue of the elusive food self-sufficiency in Africa emerged through an in-depth discussion of interests and power relations that continue to hinder the formulation of policies to achieve food sustainability in many African countries.

The discussion around the relationship between neo-liberal economic policies and food self-sufficiency offered an appropriate framework to debate the issue of the need of in-depth agrarian reforms in order to solve problems of foodstuff production to feed the population of most African countries. But a crucial problem persists: the acute antagonism that opposes neo-liberalism to the fair redistribution of means of production, land in the first place. Obstacles carefully built by neo-liberalism hinder the implementation of true agrarian reforms while at the same time neo-liberal policies render agrarian reform more urgent still; all this was illustrated through ongoing events in rural southern Africa.

The second panel dealt more generally with ‘The Consequences of Neo-Liberal Adjustment’. It started off with an analysis of the particular case of Ghana, an African showcase of structural adjustment in the 1980s that soon became an example of failure, as exemplified in the fact that, by 2001, the country was opting for the benefits of the initiative for Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC). This was then followed by a discussion about the way in which repeated IMF and Work Bank failures led to the launching of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) that attempt to cope with the legitimacy crisis affecting SAPs, to recover certain international credibility for the IMF and the World Bank by putting forth social-oriented proposals and, while doing so, to strengthen the grip of neo-liberalism on sub-Saharan Africa.

The impact of neo-liberal policies on gender issues came up next with a debate around the increasing vulnerability of women and children in general contexts of deepening poverty. Attention was called on the fact that the negative effects derived from SAPs on those particularly vulnerable sectors are causing severe and irreparable damage to the very social fabric of African societies. The panel closed with a presentation (taking the Niger Delta as a case in point) about the way in which, by affecting the environment, predator Transnational Corporations (TNCs) are modifying the economic structure of certain regions together with the levels of employment and of incomes of the population at large, therefore causing explosive situations that run the risk of transforming into deep socio-political troubles. Because these TNCs, beyond depleting natural resources of African countries, also affect their environment, they often tend to generate additional socio-political pressures that can lead to unexpected upheavals as was the case in the region on which panel discussions focused.

The two subsequent panels concentrated their attention on ‘Neo-liberalism and Political Changes in Africa and the Middle East’ and ‘Neo-liberalism and Resistances in Africa and the Middle East’. Here, the complex but generally ambivalent role of African elites vis-à-vis true development planning in Africa was debated at length. Discussions centred on the way in which most present-
day African elites tend to promote consumers’ and not development strategies, and the relationship of this fact with the failure of strategies designed for the promotion of growth in the continent. Debates also brought out the comparable complexities of the reactions to various (including neo-liberal) modernising processes in the Middle East in which Islamist movements are most conspicuous, as well as those motivated by the impact of neo-liberal reforms on traditional African institutions, culture and thought. These panels also listened to extensive country-by-country overviews on Western-inspired reform projects in the Middle East as well as dramatic presentations about the extremely critical present-day situation in Palestine, the latter made by representatives of Palestinian political organisations.

The fifth panel dealt with ‘European Policies Towards Africa and the Middle East’. Here, the changing nature of the European Union’s cooperation policies with Africa as a consequence of new elements appeared in the international environment was extensively discussed. Two presentations centred on the changing nature of the EU’s economic and cooperation policies vis-à-vis Africa: this change was viewed in the framework of what was defined as new trends of globalisation that seem to be leading to a greater convergence and systematisation in the process of designing economic policies – by major world powers and international organisations – for African countries. There was a wide consensus around the idea that these trends are provoking the emergence of a new stage characterised by a deeper implementation of neo-liberal economic policies on the continent. These panels also debated the way in which new socio-economic projects for Africa presented as African initiatives are really exogenous and to a certain extent imposed on African countries; as the more recent strategy proposed by the Commission for Africa, none of them are poised to generate sustainable development but rather exploitation of the continent, because, in a more or less explicit way, they follow the dictates of neo-liberal economic concepts.

The sixth panel was dedicated to ‘US and Chinese Policies for Africa and the Middle East’, and in this context an appraisal of current debates within US governing circles around Middle Eastern policy in order to further the objectives of neo-liberal globalization was presented. Other presentations included an analysis of the implementation of the Broader Middle East and North of Africa Initiative, contemplated as an extension of economic and political expressions of neo-liberalism designed for the Middle East. In this case, special attention was dedicated to the mostly religious-based resistance that has been provoked by economic and political reforms pursued by this initiative throughout the region.

Finally, the growing economic and political presence of the People’s Republic of China in Africa was the object of a debate the objective of which was to determine to which extent those increasing China-Africa links might hinder Western policies for the region.

In short, presentations as well as debates allowed for a characterisation of the particular interest of the present-day juncture in Africa and the Middle East. On the one hand, imperialist powers and international organisations under their control exercise strong pressures in order to quickly extend neo-liberal concepts in the framework of globalisation. But, on the other hand, contradictions and symptoms of crisis multiply as a result of those same policies, and therefore an attempt is made to solve the situation through partial tactical adjustments that very soon lead to new crises. Meanwhile, in spite of occasional positive macro-economic results, the explosive social situation that affects almost
all countries tends to aggravate. The lack of sustainability and utter failure of neo-liberal policies throughout Africa and the Middle East was well established by presentations and ensuing debates.

What is now needed are clearly defined alternatives. In the past, both regions have seen numerous blueprints, carefully drafted, that were never seriously allowed to be put to the test – a consequence of strong pressures exercised from abroad and by minority elites from within.

The Memoirs of the Seminar should be soon appearing in an English-Spanish bilingual edition published by CEAMO, Ave. 3ra, N° 1805, e/ 18 y 20, Miramar, Playa, La Habana, Cuba.

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Endnotes

1. Ong’wen, Oduor (SEATINI, Kenya): ‘Neo-liberal framework and externalization of Africa’s resources’.

2. Pichs, Ramón (CIEM, Cuba): ‘World oil juncture: challenges for the Middle East and Africa’

3. Mayaki, Ibrahim (UNOPS, Kenya): ‘State and agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa: Which public policies should be implemented in order to build food sovereignty?’

4. González, David (CEAMO, Cuba): ‘Neo-liberalism and the agrarian question in Southern Africa: the cases of Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa.’


9. Lange, Klaus (ITS, Germany): ‘African elites: solution or part to the problem?’


11. Álvarez, María E. y Ernesto F. Domínguez (ISRI, Cuba): ‘Neo-liberalism and tradition in Sub-Saharan Africa’.

12. Arias, Emilio, Aracelis Torres, Francys Marrero y Yaniisleidy León (ISPEJV, Cuba): ‘Considerations about current reform projects in the Middle East.’


16. Alzugaray, Carlos (ISRI, Cuba): ‘The ongoing debate within the US dominant class around policy towards the Middle East’.

17. Brooks, Idalmys (CEAMO, Cuba): ‘The Broader Middle East and North of Africa Initiative: Neoliberalism vs Islam?’

The Miracle of Mogadishu

Abdi Ismail Samatar

Life for the majority of the Somali population since the collapse of the state in 1991 and the disintegration of the country’s political order has been difficult at best. After nearly two decades of warlords and faction leaders’ rule Somalia leads the world in infant mortality. Further, life expectancy has declined by as much as those southern African countries devastated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic but without high HIV incidence rates. The awful conditions which have produced these deplorable vital statistics are products of the combined effects of internal and external forces. Warlords’ and faction leaders’ domination and an international community least concerned about the blight of the people had the consequence of disabling the local population from organising in order to create an environment conducive to reconstruction.

Over a dozen reconciliation conferences dominated by warlords were held in different locations outside the country but none produced the desired result. The most promising conference was the one organised by the neighbouring government of Djibouti in the resort town of Arta. This gathering brought together non-combatants, but the major warlords boycotted it as they were not allowed to dictate the terms of the reconciliation. Ethiopia, the main regional ally of the warlords was not happy with developments in Arta and subsequently organised an association of these warlords called SRRC. The Transitional National Government (TNG), which was formed in Arta, floundered due to the corruption and the incompetence of its leadership and challenges from Ethiopia supported warlords. This ultimately led to its demise and the convening of yet another Somali reconciliation conference organised by IGAD, held in Embagathi, Kenya, which lasted for two years. The Embagathi conference was dominated by the warlords and was fully financed by the European Union and other donors. The rational for warlords predominance in the conference was the belief among the organisers that the ‘merchants of violence’ were the real actors who should drive the process as their exclusion would derail the peace process. In addition, the IGAD managers allowed Ethiopia to gerrymander the conference in order for it to reward its clients to form the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). Despite the preponderance of misgivings about the legitimacy of the process, the international community blessed the imposition of a government of warlords on the Somali people, and the population begrudgingly decided to accept the TFG as the government of the land in the hope that the warlords would act responsibly as national leaders.

Once more the people’s faith was dashed as the warlords failed to agree to work together for the common good. Immediately after the formation of the government, its two leading figures went to Addis Ababa and requested the deployment of 20,000 foreign troops, including Ethiopian forces, to Somalia in order to restore stability and enable the TFG to take control of the country. This strategy was opposed by many MPs and most of the warlords based in Mogadishu. The Somali President and his Prime Minister appealed to the international community for support but received little help and the process stalled. In the midst of this stalemate, several of the major warlords in Mogadishu formed a new ‘Anti-terror Alliance’ whose purpose was to capture international terrorists – fugitives they claimed were sheltered by the Islamic Courts in Mogadishu. The United States government has accused some Islamicists in Mogadishu of harbouring three fugitives who have allegedly participated in the bombing of US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and...
the Israeli-owned hotel on the Kenya coast. For several years now the US authorities have subcontracted bounty hunting of ‘terrorists or radicals’ in Somalia to some of the warlords. The warlords exploited the American offer and a number of innocent people have been killed or snatched by the warlords over the last few years. This scheme put every major religious person at risk of being kidnapped. It seems that the snatching operations were not able to capture and deliver key suspects and consequently, in January 2006, six warlords in and around Mogadishu were urged to form a ‘Counter-terrorists Alliance’ with the hope that this association will be more effective. The warlords alleged that the alliance was financed by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the United States.

It has been widely reported that the CIA provided funds for the warlords to purchase weapons and other materials necessary for war. Members of the alliance repeated the US Government claim that foreign terrorists were hiding in Mogadishu and demanded that the Courts must hand them over or face the consequences. The Courts denied the presence of such foreign individuals in the city and subsequently the warlords commenced their attack on the Courts in February 2006. After the first engagement, the public overwhelmingly rallied behind the Courts and a bloody war ended the long tenure of the warlords and liberated the population of Mogadishu and the surrounding communities in July 2006. Subsequently, the Courts formed the Union of the Islamic Courts (UIC) to coordinate their activities.

The Turning Point

The defeat of the fearsome warlords and the rise of the Union of Islamic Courts to power in Mogadishu have alarmed certain circles in the west who have accused them of either being extremists or having ties with terrorists. The Courts have operated in a dozen neighbourhoods since the mid-1990s and their duties were confined to dispensing Sharia-based justice in the absence of government institutions. Residents of the communities have consistently indicated that criminal activity was significantly reduced in city areas where the Courts operated while criminals freely roamed elsewhere in Mogadishu. Several factors have made possible the speedy and unexpected success of the people’s uprising and those of the Courts. These included the terror warlords have visited on the population over the last 16 years and resultant social and economic devastation of the region. Second, the corrupt peace process managed by IGAD and supported by international donors that imposed a divisive and fraudulent transitional government of warlords on the Somali people has alienated the public. Third, the international community that sanctioned the warlords government failed to give it the necessary support for it to become functional and this has thoroughly undermined the TFG’s credibility and that of the peace process. Further, the AID mafia based in Nairobi which nurtures the hope that it will operate from their comfortable environments is deeply despised by the Somali population. Fourth, the perceived notion that the west, fed by false Ethiopian intelligence, is opposed to Islamic values and is using terrorism as a pretext to sustain the dominance of their client warlords or impose a corrupt and sectarian TFG on the population, has galvanized public support for the Courts.

Despite the relative effectiveness of the Courts in securing the neighbourhoods it seems that their ambition was limited to that role until they sized the initiative and took over the capital and the surrounding regions. The dislodgment of the warlords who were opposed to the TFG from the capital immediately situated the UICs on a national platform. The TFG leadership which has been silent, at
best, about the struggle between the warlords and the Islamic Courts, began to find itself in opposition to the Courts. The turning point in their relationship was the fall of the key town in the Middle Shabelli region of Jowhar which was the seat of Mohamed Dheere, the chief ally of the Prime Minister (PM) and a major recipient of Ethiopian military support. The PM accused the Courts of looting the property belonging to the defeated warlord and some of the town residents. Independent journalists have contradicted the PM’s claims. Shortly thereafter, the President of the TFG, based in Baidoa, added to the PM’s assertions and stipulated that the Courts relinquish their weapons to his sectarian militias. These accusations poisoned relations between the Courts and the TFG, and nearly foreclosed dialogue. Western governments who were reluctant to recognise the TFG prior to the emergence of the Courts panicked, to use the phrase of the former US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, and unconditionally supported the TFG in order to stymie the spread of the UICs to the rest of the country. Such an opportunistic and unconditional assistance for the government reinforced the dictatorial and sectarian predispositions of the leading figures on the TFG. Shortly thereafter, enough resources were made available to the leadership to pay off a majority of MPs in order to induce them to endorse the government’s request for deployment of foreign troops in the country.

The Somali people have been consistently opposed to the deployment of foreign troops – that include Ethiopia in their country – and the Courts have reiterated this stance particularly now that Mogadishu has been liberated from the warlords tyranny. The West, swayed by the Ethiopian agenda, and weary of anything that smacks of an independent Islamic movement, are trying to intimidate the Courts in order to empower an illegitimate government of warlords. The threat to deploy foreign troop had the unintended consequences of enhancing the popularity of the Courts and their claim to national leadership while eroding whatever little legitimacy the TFG had. The TFG’s credibility has already been dealt a fatal blow by the fact that contingents of Ethiopian troops have entered Somali territory and occupy several regions of the country, including the President’s residency in Baidoa, and the latter’s opposition to the Arab League sponsored mediation talks in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum.

After Liberating Mogadishu: What is Next?

The Courts were thrust into the national limelight once the warlords were defeated and as the TFG’s ineptitude became increasingly apparent to the population. The UICs were ill-prepared for the new role since most of their members had neither the education nor the work experiences to manage or administer national or regional institutions. Furthermore, the defeat of the warlords was so quick and unexpected that the Courts had no time to re-organise themselves and mobilise sympathetic others into a national coalition. Members of the Courts themselves were a diverse group whose only common denominators were dispensing Sharia-based justice in the neighbourhoods and opposition to foreign intervention, particularly Ethiopian and their IGAD allies. The first real challenge that faces the UICs, apart from securing the city and the region, has been how to transform their loose association into a cohesive organisation with a coherent social and political agenda that can galvanize the population. Their first attempt entailed the formation of their advisory council, the Shura, and its executive committee. The Shura consists of representatives of the various groups who collectively contributed to the ousting of the warlords. Although, the council originally had 73 members, currently it has 94 councillors.
The *Shura* acts as a vehicle for setting broad policy ideas while the executive committee is the implementation arm of the new organisation. Although the UICs claim that these two units deal with matters internal to their association, it is apparent that they represent the victors and consequently have an agenda much broader than matters particular to the organisation. Despite the fact that the population gave critical support to the Courts during the war, the organisation determines the way forward for the region. For example, the organisation selected the team that will negotiate with the TFG in Khartoum. The team included several people who are not members of the associations – an act of inclusion that is symbolic of the willingness of the Courts to involve other citizens in dealing with the affairs of the city, region, and the nation.

The cautiously slow pace of the Courts to engage other segments of society in setting up an arrangement for governing the city and region has been troubling to some actors. There seems to be some merit in these complaints as there are no formalised channels of cooperation between the different actors. However, the critics fail to be self-reflective as there exists neither a business community nor an inclusive civil society organisation with a coherent and serious civic agenda that can provide a basis for cooperation.

The dearth of organised civics was in part due to the threat of warlords violence against broad-based community associations. The warlord free environment has created an opportunity for such associations to develop and those who complain about not being invited by the Courts in their deliberations and decision-making should not only get organised but also focus on dealing with some of the challenging social problems such as cleaning the city’s refuse that has been accumulating for the past 17 years. Engaging in these actions can be an excellent confidence building measure between the diverse individuals that nominally form the business and civil society groups. Such events are critical to generating trust which is an essential ingredient for building community. Until members of such nominal communities invest labour and other resources in these endeavours they will remain guests to those who have made the sacrifices to challenge the ‘merchants of violence’.

The UIC and their associates have won the battle against the warlords, however serious challenges remain that will dwarf past encounters. The foremost of these are: a) how to mobilise a fragmented society into an inclusive movement that would defend and rebuild the city, the region, and the country; b) how to keep at bay Ethiopian aggression and its Somali clients including most senior TFG leaders and western powers who see terrorism in anything Islamic.

Mobilising the population for reconstruction is not going to be easy, but the public’s confidence in the Islamic faith is a major asset that should be strategically deployed to facilitate this effort. One of the first tasks in this regard is the transformation of the identity basis of the

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<th>Membership of the Shura</th>
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<td>1. Union of Islamic Courts</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td>2. Youth</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>3. Hamar &amp; Hamerdaye (Balad)</td>
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<td>4. Shabeelda Hoose (Lower Shabeele)</td>
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<td>7. Raskanboni (Turki)</td>
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<td>8. El Bur (Tawakal)</td>
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<td>9. Nahyani Wal Munkar</td>
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<td>10. Daynile</td>
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<td>11. Culumada iyo Agoonyahanka</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Golaha Midnimada Badbaadada</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>13.</td>
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Courts. The Courts premise was on the basis of clan identity despite the fact that they all dispense Islamic justice. Such sectarian identity orientation was necessitated by an absence of a viable civic political association in the midst of violent civil war. However, the risk imposed by the terrorist warlords bounty hunting induced an environment in which common Islamic faith brought people together. Once the warlords were defeated, more clan-based Courts have been created in new areas to secure the peace.

Now, the challenge is how to transform the clan based identity of the Courts to the neighbourhood and faith-centred operations. Attempts are being made to link Islam to common citizenship in order to surmount the divisive exploitation of genealogical identity. While some progress has been made, overcoming clanist fragmentation is a difficult long-term project. Transcending genealogical cleavages must go hand-in-hand with sustained peace, a commitment to justice and establishing an honest and transparent management of the people’s business. To initiate this sojourn on a sound basis will require an urgent appeal to Somalis skilled in city administration, public management and development to offer their advice and services. An autonomous organisation should be set up immediately to manage this task. Such an orientation will have two advantages. It will demonstrate that the UICs are very serious about leading an inclusive movement, and that professionals will have the needed autonomy to initiate programmes that serve the public. A move in this direction will be the clearest manifestation of the UICs intention to establish an inclusive and accountable national order.

Meandering around Ethiopia’s political and military machinations and the cruel traps of the ‘war on terror’ will require clear thought and committed leadership. When it became clear that the Islamic Courts drove the warlords out of the city President Bush’s first remarks about Somalia indicated his concern that Somalia might become a bastion of Islamic radicals. The rhetoric has since cooled down a bit although key segments of the administration have endorsed the Ethiopian agenda of arming a feeble and illegitimate transitional government and sending foreign troops to protect it if necessary. The Associated Press reported that:

*Ethiopia is prepared to invade neighbouring Somalia to defend the country’s internationally recognised government against what appeared to be an imminent attack by an Islamic militia … We have the responsibility to defend the border and the Somali government. We will crush them, Ethiopia’s Minister of Information Berhane Hailu.*

The irony is that Ethiopia and none of its allies came to rescue the population from the terror of the warlords. Instead, they armed the ‘merchant of violence’ and continue to harbour some of the defeated warlords contrary to IGAD’s promise. Further, the Ethiopian threat has become a reality as nearly 7,000 of its troops have deeply penetrated Somalia and completely control the headquarters of the TFG; it is also arming defeated warlords along its border.

The regime in Addis Ababa’s claim of the Islamic threat, not withstanding, the purpose of this incursion is to destabilise the peace brought about by the triumph of the UICs and undermine the possibility of re-emergent Somalia that is independent. Given this context, the best defence against such ill-will is to galvanize the population to defend their new freedoms and abstain from being preoccupied with petty and personal affairs that will alienate the population and create opportunities for those who want to demonize Islamic based movements and undercut Somali independence.
Another challenge facing the UICs and their associates is how to deal with the so-called Transitional Federal Government. The Ethiopian invasion and occupation of Baidoa has dealt a fatal blow to the TFG’s hope of finding legitimacy with the Somali people. Even some of its supporters in parliament have declared that the TFG is an Ethiopian outfit. It would seem that the only way which the TFG can gain any level of legitimacy with the population is if the Arab League mediated Khartoum conference is reconvened and bears fruit and the UICs and the TFG are amalgamated. However, such a fusion is unlikely given the TFG leaders’ commitment to ally itself with Ethiopia and the Tigray regime’s intent to preemptively foil the conference as it has done with many others. As unworkable as it may seem, the most feasible (and peaceful) way forward is a compromise between the two entities.

**The Prospect for Sustained Peace**

The uprising of the Somali population in and around Mogadishu led by the Union of the Islamic Courts has created the best chance for peace in the city and the country. There is a single and legitimate authority in the Somali capital for the first time in 16 years and freedom is in the air. The Courts have not interfered with the free press and in fact the Voice of America and the BBC programmes are rebroadcast by local private FM stations. The image of the Courts as extremists peddled by some alarmists, such as the regime in Addis Ababa, should not be taken seriously. Instead the international community should fully engage the people’s revolt and its leadership in order to deepen the peace and stability that prevails. Unless the EU, USA, and the AU exert tremendous pressure on Ethiopia to let Somalis sort out their problems the prognosis for peace in the region is bleak. One of three will scenarios will transpire depending on the role the international community plays:

1) The TFG and UICs will fail to strike a compromise (in the absence of a concerted effort by the international community) and each will maintain areas under its control, leaving the country Balkanized. This situation will not be sustainable for a long time and will most likely lead to a confrontation;

2) The worst scenario seems to be already unfolding as the Ethiopian government has admitted that its troops are in Somalia (when the TFG is still denying it). Ethiopian authorities claim that they have moved into Somalia in order to preempt dangers to its national security as Eritrea, with its renegade allies such as Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), are poised to attack with the support of the UICs. This is an attempt to justify widening the conflict in order to shore up support for its Somali clients and undercut the popularly supported UICs. These Ethiopian actions have virtually killed the Khartoum negotiations with the UICs delegation leaving Khartoum for Mogadishu after waiting for the TFG team for two weeks. The UICs has asked the Somali population to be prepared to wage war against invaders and their Somali supplicants. If such misfortune transpires it could spell the beginning of a regional civil war.

3) An agreement is reached in a rescheduled Khartoum conference between the parties and a government of national unity is formed. Such a development is only feasible if the USA and EU con-
strain Ethiopian influences over the TFG and the latter is instructed to enter the negotiation in good faith. If a genuine rapprochement develops it will pave the way for the TFG to move to Mogadishu and focus its attention on reconstruction. A peaceful transfer of government institutions and operations to the capital will mean that the resources that would have been wasted on deploying foreign peacekeepers will instead be invested in reconstruction.

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Endnotes

1. I would like to thank the people of Mogadishu for their help during my two weeks of working trip to the City in June/July 2006.

2. To demonstrate the restoration of peace to the city owners of new cars who have kept them hidden for year held a demonstration on 18 July in a long parade of cars. For the first time in sixteen years people drive their private cars with armed guards.


4. The Speaker of Somali Parliament has challenged the President’s opposition to the talk and has warned that parliament will send a delegation to Khartoum.

5. The Ethiopian Minister and the regime in Addis Ababa do not see the irony of Ethiopia defending the TFG from its population. This attitude is clear testimonial that the regime in Addis is loathe to citizens’ wishes and rights. They do not see the paradox of Ethiopia defending Somali government from challenges coming from the country’s citizens. For the regime’s attitude to citizens’ rights, see Abdi I. Samatar ‘Ethiopian Federalism: Autonomy vs Control in the Somali Region’, *Third World Quarterly*, 25, 6 (2004):1131-1154.


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**Ethiopia’s Oromo Liberation Front**

**Martin Plaut**

**My Enemy’s Enemy is my Friend**

Since the end of the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 2000, both countries have attempted to use third parties as weapons against each other, in their ongoing conflict over their disputed border. To this end each has aided and encouraged opposition movements active in the other’s territory. In January 2005, sixteen Eritrean political parties met in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum to establish the Eritrean Democratic Alliance (EDA) with Ethiopian support. This included some of the oldest Eritrean parties which had been defeated by the EPLF during the civil war of the 1970s (the ELF and the ELF RC). Also included in the EDA were parties closely aligned with Ethiopia (like the Eritrean Revolutionary Democratic Front) and Islamist parties (the Eritrean Islamic Reform Movement).

In May 2006, Ethiopia’s largest opposition party formed an alliance with four rebel groups, including the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). The new Alliance for Freedom and Democracy (AFD) said its policy was to focus on peaceful struggle against the government, although its armed groups would continue to stage attacks on the authorities. Key members of the Alliance have their headquarters in the Eritrean capital, Asmara.

**Somalia: A Seething Cauldron**

These developments come as radical Islamists have taken control of the Somali capital, Mogadishu, and a large area of central Somalia, to the considerable surprise of some commentators.
This is difficult to understand, since the rise of fundamentalism was noted for some time, and warning bells were sounded.1

It may be that most attention was focused on the excruciatingly slow process that led to the selection of the Transitional Federal Government in Nairobi in 2004. This was followed by the election of Abdullahi Yusuf as president in October of that year. His support was always rather thin: he did not come from the capital, and was not a member of the clan that dominates the Mogadishu area. He did, however, have Ethiopian support, and there was strong speculation that he won the presidency by paying for the privilege with money provided by Addis Ababa. Ethiopia has also provided him with at least three consignments of arms, according to a UN report. The same report names Italy, Yemen and Saudi Arabia as further sources of weaponry for the government.2

This still left Mogadishu in the hands of the warlords (some of whom were cabinet ministers, but that cut little ice.) As a result, the president established himself first in Jowhar and then in Baidoa. In the meantime, the Islamic Courts were strengthening their position inside Mogadishu, with help from Eritrea and conservative supporters in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. In May 2006 they felt strong enough to challenge the warlords who had dominated Mogadishu for years, and on 4 June, to the great relief of many residents, drove them from the city. The UN Monitoring group for Somalia has found clear evidence of Eritrea supplying weapons to the Islamic Courts. In the opinion of the UN Monitors, Eritrea has done this to counter Ethiopian support for the Transitional Government. The Monitors maintain that Eritrea provided arms to the Islamic Courts and the Ogaden National Liberation Front on eight different occasions between February and May 2005. Then, in November 2005 Eritrean foreign office officials arrived in Mogadishu posing as businessmen. Eritrea provided arms, ammunition and military equipment to the Islamists on an additional four occasions. This included anti-aircraft and anti-tank ammunition, as well as rocket-propelled grenades, mines and remote-controlled bombs.3 There are also suggestions that the Eritreans provided weapons to the Oromo Liberation front in Somalia – something they are accused of doing during the border war with Ethiopia between 1998 and 2000.4

Ethiopia Enters the Fray

On 20 July Ethiopia – which had previously sent small numbers of troops into Somalia, while training forces loyal to President Abdullahi Yusuf – dispatched a major force into the country. The BBC received reports of around 100 vehicles, some of them armoured personnel carriers, entering Somalia. The action was in response to an advance on Baidoa by the Islamic Courts, whose forces came within about 40 kilometers of the town. Around 150 of President Abdullahi Yusuf’s troops defected to the Courts, further undermining his hold on power. There are reported to be around 5,000 Ethiopian troops now inside Somalia, holding a number of locations. It is reported that the airstrip at Baidoa is being widened to take larger aircraft. Ethiopia has persistently denied it has forces in the country, but a number of eye-witnesses have seen them.

It was against this background that Brigadier-General Kemal Geltu, an Oromo commanding the eighteenth Army division on the Ethiopia-Eritrea border, defected to the Oromo Liberation Front in early August 2006. The United Nations confirmed that the general, together with 150, troops crossed into Eritrea. The Oromo Liberation Front claimed he brought closer to 500 troops with him, and said that further defections were expected. This has given the OLF a considerable boost. Coming as it does...
after reports of sporadic clashes between the OLF and the Ethiopian armed forces, and student protests, the Oromo are exhibiting more confidence than they have for many years. It is in this context that the author interviewed a founding member of the OLF, Fido Tadessa Ebba. He is head of the head of the diplomatic division in the foreign affairs department of the Oromo Liberation Front, and in charge of its Washington office.

**Plaut** Let’s look at the current situation. The OLF has for many years tried to launch a military campaign against the Ethiopian government. Sometimes it’s gone well and sometimes it’s not. And in recent years, you’ve had discussions about whether to lay down the armed struggle. Where is that debate now?

**Ebba** People, governments, international organisations raise this issue with us. The thing is we took up arms to defend ourselves. If the cause that we started was accomplished, if the oppression of our people is removed, then there’s no need for arms. A year-and-a-half ago, we issued a paper, indicating that we are ready to suspend armed activities if the Ethiopian government is willing to negotiate – to talk. Meles came out and he said he’s willing, but this never materialised.

**Plaut** When I spoke to Prime Minister Meles last year, he said that he had been prepared to talk to you, that he had sent out elders from the Oromo community to come and meet you, but he’d not received any positive reply.

**Ebba** I’m not aware of that. I don’t think our organisation is aware of that. This is not true. We have been trying to reach him through different organisations and individuals, particularly the Norwegians. We have been in touch with them and with Meles and nothing positive has been achieved. Meles first said it was okay, but finally it was closed. This happened not only once, maybe over twelve times with Carter and a committee in the congress, the Lutheran World Federation, a group of ambassadors from Ethiopia, the Germans, so many. They just don’t want to make progress.

**Plaut** So have you given up with that possibility?

**Ebba** We never give up, but you know, it’s not in their culture – in the culture of Abyssinians to find a negotiated solution through dialogue. There has never been a transfer of power, political power, peacefully. So I’m personally concluding that this won’t happen. And Meles knows if he allows OLF to work freely, to operate among the Oromo people, that he wouldn’t have a chance to win, to be prime minister. And so he wants to hold on to power. Some governments in the West are very supportive of him. They want to keep him in power. It seems that it is easier to work with dictators than democrats.

**Plaut** The OLF has its headquarters now – as I understand it – in Eritrea?

**Ebba** Yes, the major one, but we are all over.

**Plaut** How do you find working in Eritrea?

**Ebba** Well, we have been friends with the Eritreans during their struggle for independence, so this relationship has been there for maybe over thirty, forty years.

**Plaut** But there was a time when the OLF was actually in the Ethiopian government back in 1991 and there was a very bitter split with the TPLF. There were also allegations that you appealed to the EPLF for help, but that the EPLF didn’t assist you.

**Ebba** Well in ’91, during the transitional government, we were in the government. But in ’92 the TPLF didn’t want us around. The Eritreans and others worked hard to resolve our differences, our political differences with them. At that time the Eritreans were not independent, they hadn’t declared their independence. So the issue was in the hands of Meles. They couldn’t fight with Meles at that stage. They couldn’t disagree.
Plaut But your impression is that they tried hard to resolve the differences? Because I’ve heard the opposite.

Ebba They did. Issias came several times to Addis. We work together. We had meetings. He sent a high-level delegation. I thought that it was genuine.

Plaut You were there in Addis?

Ebba Yes, I was there at many of the meetings, together with Isaias, Meles and so on. They were telling us that, Meles is becoming dangerous. Eritrea was warning us really. It’s my belief that Eritreans really wanted a democratic Ethiopia so that they could have a peaceful neighbour, with whom they could trade. That’s what I felt. I don’t think that the Eritreans really wanted to dominate anyone in the area. They are a small country – just four million people. They are against Ethiopia, with seventy-five million people. So its unimaginable that they would dominate Ethiopia.

Plaut So you then left the government and began the armed struggle against the TPLF and against Prime Minister Meles that has been going on ever since.

Ebba Yes, with the help of Eritreans and the American government, we made an agreement with the Meles group to encamp our arms. We did it. They didn’t. In fact, they actually sent their army to kill our fighters in the area where they were camped. They were able to capture a lot of them and put them in prison. And, yes, the armed struggle has been going on since them. Not only an armed struggle. Our struggle is also diplomatic and political, in all aspects.

Plaut In recent months, there’ve been reports that the pace of the armed struggle has been increasing. But there has been a lot more clashes between the Ethiopian government armed forces and yourselves, particularly in eastern Ethiopian. How in your view is it going?

Ebba Well it’s not much yet. We have a small force. We have our forces in the east and west, in the south and southeast. Still we have a small group in the centre. If conditions allow, this group could grow very fast, we are just waiting for an opportune time. It’s easy to, if you have trainers and equipment, you can recruit thousands of people within a short time.

Plaut You say you have small numbers. Can you give me some idea of how many fighters you have?

Ebba I think it’s very difficult … a few thousand.

Plaut Between five and ten thousand?

Ebba Maybe.

Plaut So, you say that you lack the weapons and the training. But there have been reports, particularly in the last month or so, of Eritrean planes arriving – particularly in the Somalia capital Mogadishu – to provide you with weapons.

Ebba We are not there to receive it. We are not in Mogadishu. We are outside. We are bordering on the Ogaden, which is very far from Mogadishu. So we are not there to receive equipment. We don’t know about this equipment. We don’t have any relations with the Union of Islamic Courts, so this is just an allegation. We are not there, even though we have a lot of Oromo refugees in Somalia still, since the late 60’s Oromo refugees are in Somalia.

Plaut But are you not receiving arms indirectly from Eritrea?

Ebba Perhaps there could be a link to provide us with arms, but our land is very far from Eritrea. Our land borders on Kenya, Somalia, but not on Eritrea. It’s a long distance.

Plaut But reports indicate that the arms are coming from Assab to Mogadishu,
from Mogadishu they’re going in either directly to yourselves or through the ONLF, the Ogaden National Liberation Front.

**Ebba** No Martin. Again, we are very far from there. We wish we were close by to receive from any source, from any assistance, from people who believe in our genuine cause. We are ready if it’s support without any strings attached. Any help for our cause is welcome, but at present we are not operating this with this group.

**Plaut** A few weeks ago, Brigadier General Kamal Geltu went across the border from Ethiopia into Eritrea with a number of troops. Had he been in contact with you before he made that decision?

**Ebba** We have contacts with almost all sectors of Oromo society, including in the army. We have Oromo members in the Ethiopian army who are working undercover. We’ve been in contact with many of them.

**Plaut** But were you in contact with him before he made his decision to come over the border?

**Ebba** I believe he knew that we are there and he has indicated, he has actually in his interview indicated that they have been looking forward to rejoining the OLF.

**Plaut** So did you negotiate his decision to come over to Eritrea?

**Ebba** We didn’t negotiate, but we have been in touch and he has an obligation to come and join the OLF as an Oromo national.

**Plaut** So you were in touch with him before he came across the border?

**Ebba** Not directly. He was in battles with some members of his group and other Oromos in the Ethiopian army.

**Plaut** So he’s now joined your organisation?

**Ebba** Yes.

**Plaut** Approximately how many troops did he bring with him?

**Ebba** Perhaps a few hundred, around five hundred or something like that.

**Plaut** It must be a very substantial increase then, in your overall armed ability, to have somebody at that level with those kinds of troops to come over to you?

**Ebba** The propaganda, the psychological effect is enormous, in the Ethiopian army, it has a most demoralising effect on the Tigrayans.

**Plaut** I can’t remember it ever happening at that kind of level before.

**Ebba** Or ever happening in the country actually – a general joining a rebel group. It’s very rare, if it has ever happened. But in his interview, he really indicated that they have been working hard to democratise the country, so that Oromos can play their fair share in all aspects of Ethiopian life. This is not happening. The Tigrayans are digging in, strengthening their ability to exploit more of the Omoro resources, human resources, material resources, so they decided finally that they can’t continue to wait forever. So, as he said, we’ll try force.

**Plaut** Now you’ve said that it’s a long way from Eritrea to Oromia. So how are going to deploy him then?

**Ebba** Well, individuals can be deployed. We have several ways of doing that. I’m talking of a large quantity of arms.

**Plaut** But if you’re going to move five hundred men that you say he came across the border with, that’s a very large redeployment.

**Ebba** Five hundred?

**Plaut** ... well that’s what you said.
Ebba Yes. No. I mean removing five hundred into Oromia. It won’t be a big problem, no. It won’t be a big problem.

Plaut How would you do it?

Ebba There are liberation fronts with which we have formed an alliance.

Plaut Such as?

Ebba Such as the Ogaden National Liberation Front; the Ethiopian People’s Patriotic Front from the north; the Beni Shangul, the Anuak.

Plaut So might you send them through Somalia then?

Ebba If the situation allows. The present situation is very risky. Ethiopians are there. It could happen, but we’ll choose the best way. These people may not go in one group. We might find a way of taking these people in a small group.

Plaut Does this mark a significant transition in your armed struggle? From one level perhaps, to a different level to a more active phase? The fact that he’s come over with these troops, increasing your strength, increase your ability, maybe coming with some arms as well. Will this transform the way that you are fighting?

Ebba Not at this stage, but we are expecting more.

Plaut You’re expecting more recruits from the Ethiopian side?

Ebba From the Ethiopian army, not only from Omoro. From others – from the Amhara and from others. They are mistreated, so we expect more to defect. In fact, our worry is ... you see, as there is a division, this mistrust in Ethiopian society based on the ethnic line, there is also this division, mistrust in the army. Disproportionately, the Tigrayans are on the top. The rest are suspected. They are not treated as equals, as Ethiopians. They are suspected. So this causing a lot of apprehension, and we are fearful that there could be a problem in the army itself. There could be fighting which would be a disaster.

Plaut A disaster?

Ebba Yes. Within the Ethiopian army ... there’ll be fighting against the Oromo, the Amhara, people fighting. The whole of society, it could be chaotic.

Plaut You mean it could be a civil war?

Ebba Exactly.

Plaut And this wouldn’t be an opportunity for you to, perhaps, further your aims?

Ebba No. We really don’t want a civil war. We want a change of government, but we don’t want people to kill each other.

Plaut So how do you think a change of government will take place?

Ebba If we have more of the army on our side, if people in the Ethiopian army refuse to fight. And the security force, the police, refuse to obey orders. Student uprisings, strikes and demonstrations have been going on and on now for almost ten months. This might be intensified, particularly after the formation of this alliance.

Plaut Which alliance are you talking about?

Ebba The Alliance for Freedom and Democracy. That’s bringing in the Amhara, Sidama and other ethnic groups. Actually the aim of this alliance is more than toppling the present government, it’s to create harmony among society, the ethnic groups.

Plaut Almost to put back together again the ethnic differences that the TPLF brought in?
Ebba: Exactly, so we have to assure the people that they can live together in peace. In particular, there are a lot of Amharas among the Omoros as settlers. And these will have been there for four, five generations. And through this alliance we are trying to solve this problem of mistrust.

Plaut: The OLF has been active now since the 1970s. That’s more than thirty years, maybe forty years. Do you think that you are now coming finally to a moment when your aims might be realised?

Ebba: I feel so, particularly the consciousness, the level of conscience of our people. The youths which makes up almost, you know, people of age thirty alone, make up almost 70% of the population. These are the people who are being affected by what’s going on. They want change. These are new people. And, yes, thirty years … but South Africa, struggled for how many years. The Palestinians did the same and finally, they see the fruit of it.

Plaut: Finally, are you not embarrassed by the lack of democracy among your major allies, the Eritreans? The repression, the lack of toleration? It is now one of the most repressive states in Africa. Does this not embarrass you?

Ebba: You know we have been there. The degree of human rights violations is just incomparable to what’s taking place in Ethiopia. And the West is impressed with Ethiopia, with Meles. There’s no comparison.

Plaut: You think there’s more repression in Ethiopia?

Ebba: Unbelievable. This goes to the family level. There’s no comparison. The Eritreans, they are very different. They have a different outlook on their lives, on their society. They want to be independent. They don’t want to be influenced by others if it’s not to their advantage. It appears that the West doesn’t like that. That’s what I feel. I have many Eritrean friends. The situation of about 3.5 to 4 million people confronting the largest army in Africa, with the huge population of Ethiopia, and at the same time, a country which the West is helping, ACTIVELY. It’s very hard to blame them.

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Endnotes
Eastern Sudan: Caught in a Web of External Interests

John Young

The frontier between eastern Sudan and Eritrea and northern Ethiopia has been the site of conflict for generations and as negotiations take place in Asmara between the National Congress Party (NCP) led Government of Sudan (GoS) and the Eastern Front rebels, with the Eritrean Government serving as mediator, this area is again becoming a focal point for external interests. Having pressed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) on a reluctant NCP and the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) in the south, and then used that agreement as a template for the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA), the international community (read the US and its allies) is anxious to resolve the conflict in the east.

The Naivasha and Abuja peace processes that produced the CPA and DPA were initiated by African states and their organisations, but in their final and crucial stages they were taken over by the US and its allies, notably Britain, and as a result the agreements share similar characteristics. They are externally driven, elitist, concerned with achieving stability at the expense of overcoming outstanding injustices, and while claiming to be comprehensive the agreements ignored the interests of key players (who are then labelled ‘spoilers’), demonstrated little concern for human rights, and gave short shift to the need for a democratic transition (Young, 2005). Moreover, these agreements are based on a misplaced belief that the conflicts could be resolved in a regional context and thus they ignored the role of the centre in generating them.

No doubt a similar approach is favoured by the US for resolving the conflict in eastern Sudan, but its capacity to dominate the peace process in the east is complicated by Eritrean resentment at the Americans’ perceived support for Ethiopia in the Ethio-Eritrean border dispute. Indeed, US interest in the Horn of Africa is largely based on the ‘war on terror’ and in that light has given primacy to its relationship with Ethiopia with which it has collaborated closely in Somalia and other areas. Moreover and unlike Kenya and Nigeria, which could be counted upon to carry out the bidding of the US during the Naivasha and Abuja peace processes, Eritrea under President Isias Aferworki has aggressively pursued his country’s national interests as he sees them. And for Eritrea there is a lot at stake in the eastern Sudan conflict since the area is of considerable strategic significance, as well as being at the centre of a dispute between Sudan and Eritrea, and its resolution will have important implications for the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia. As a result, there is a danger that a weak Eastern Front will not have the facility to defend its interests in a peace process that will be dominated by external powers.

Eastern Sudan Conflict in Context

Eastern Sudan takes in a vast swath of territory between the Red Sea and the western lowlands of Eritrea and northwestern Ethiopia in the east, north to Egypt, south to Blue Nile State, and west to the Nile River, but it has a population of less than four million. It is made up of three states, Red Sea, Kassala and Gedaref, although the latter state was removed from the region by the NCP. Probably the poorest and most underdeveloped of Sudan’s regions, eastern Sudan has a polyglot of peoples of whom the Beja constitute about half, forming a large majority in the Red Sea state, but steadily declining to the south. In the recent past most Beja were pastoralists, but environmental decline, war, and misplaced government policies have forced many to leave the land and eke out an existence on the fringes of Port Sudan.
and other urban centres. Providing Sudan’s only access to the sea, eastern Sudan also takes in crucial road and rail networks and an oil pipeline that sends the country’s primary export to world markets. It also has a productive gold mine and large agricultural schemes that encouraged the migration of many destitute farm workers from Darfur and West Africa to the region, but produced little employment for the indigenous inhabitants, and by using scarce grazing land served to further undermine the pastoralist economy of the Beja.

Faced with a declining economy and little influence in the centre, the Beja National Congress (BNC) was established in 1958 to fight for development and against marginalisation in a state dominated since its inception by elites drawn from central Sudan. However, unable to use political means to achieve its ends after the National Islamic Front (NIF, the forerunner to the NCP) came to power in 1989 and destroyed the country’s democratic institutions, in 1993 the Beja Congress joined the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Based in Asmara the NDA brought together northern opposition parties and the SPLM/A committed to toppling the Islamist government and overseeing the construction of a New Sudan of democracy and equality. But these hopes all but collapsed when the SPLM/A signed the CPA in January 2005 and entered the Government of National Unity (GNU), after which the NDA effectively ceased to exist.

The struggle of insurgents in the south, west, and east for an equitable distribution of power and resources and an end to marginalisation, NCP initiated civilisational projects, and dictatorship make clear the common origins of all these conflicts in a dysfunctional state. The threat these conflicts posed to regional security explains the leading role that the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) played in the initial stages of the southern peace process, before it was taken over by the US, Britain, and Norway. The Chadian government of Idris Deby in turn assumed an activist role in peace-making efforts in Darfur, before it too was shunted aside by the African Union, which likewise fell under American and British domination. And after long supporting the Eastern Front, Eritrea has been accepted by the NCP as the lead mediator and the host of peace talks between the GoS and the eastern rebels.

A pattern can thus be discerned: Eritrea, Ethiopia and Uganda strongly supported the SPLM/A, and then through the auspices of IGAD led peace making efforts between the rebels and the NCP; Chad hosted peace talks between the Darfur rebels and the GoS before later supporting the same rebels when Khartoum assisted Deby’s armed opposition, and Eritrea gave strong backing to the Eastern Front and is now hosting peace negotiations between the Front and the GoS. Indeed, these examples are consistent with a longer historical tradition in the Horn of Africa whereby local conflicts foster inter-state tensions and conflicts. Cliffe has called the practice of neighbouring states supporting the enemies of their enemies ‘mutual intervention’ (Cliffe, 1999:89), but he and others have also drawn attention to the fact that these same neighbours often play leading roles in resolving the disputes. Drawing from the examples of southern Sudan and Darfur another pattern can be seen of neighbouring states and their organisations initially taking the lead in Sudan’s peace processes, but then losing control to the US and its allies during the final stages. Whether this pattern will be played out in eastern Sudan remains to be seen, but it would not be a surprise.

**Struggle for Dominance in the East**

Since the mid-nineteenth century eastern Sudan has been fought over by Italians...
and Egyptians who attempted to establish imperial domains in the lands between the Red Sea and the Nile before all of Sudan fell to the British in 1898. With Sudanese independence in 1956 eastern Sudan became the site of conflict between successive Sudanese and Ethiopian governments trying to incorporate the disparate peoples of their peripheries and secure their borders. The background to the contemporary situation began with the 1961 revolt of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) against the Haile Selassie regime after the emperor overrode an international agreement protecting Eritrea’s autonomy. While only nominal assistance was given by Sudanese governments to the ELF, it gained widespread support among the tribes on both sides of the international border, and in particular from the Beja. Ethiopia responded by supporting the Anyanya rebels of southern Sudan in a tit-for-tat pattern that would bedevil relations between the two countries for the next three decades. Although exacerbating one another’s conflicts, neither Addis Ababa nor Khartoum was the cause of their neighbour’s conflicts, and Haile Selassie’s leading role in reaching the Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972, which ended Sudan’s first civil war, made clear that problematic neighbours could nonetheless contribute to resolving local disputes; indeed, they are almost certainly necessary to ending them.

However, with the collapse of the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1983 the GoS and elements in Sudan resumed support of the ELF and later the Eritrean Peoples’ Liberation Front (EPLF), the Tigrayan Peoples’ Liberation Front (TPLF), and a host of smaller armed groups in Ethiopia. And this led the Derg, the successor to Haile Selassie’s regime, to give enormous financial, logistical, and military support to the SPLM/A (Young, 2005b). Although relations were tense between Sudan and Ethiopia throughout the 1980s, they did not produce open war. And with the end of the Cold War and the rise to state power of the NIF, EPLF, and TPLF, there was hope for a new era of peaceful coexistence in the Horn. Indeed, the incoming Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF, the TPLF led coalition that took power in 1991) forced the SPLM/A to leave its bases in western Ethiopia. Eritrea also opposed foreign adventures and endeavoured to maintain good relations with its neighbours. Furthermore, both Asmara and Addis Ababa assumed a leading role through IGAD in peace-making efforts in Sudan, Somalia, and Djibouti, but particularly to end the southern civil war.

While Ethiopia and Eritrea directed their energies to development and regional security, the NIF supported Eritrean Jihad rebels from bases in eastern Sudan and armed groups along Ethiopia’s western frontier in an attempt to impose Islamist governments on its neighbours. Asmara responded by closing Sudan’s embassy and hosting the NDA. And after concluding that the NIF was complicit in the June 1995 attempted assassination of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on the streets of Addis Ababa, the EPRDF also began giving large-scale support to Sudanese opposition groups. Both Ethiopia and Eritrea concentrated on establishing a cordon sanitaire between their territories and the NIF supported groups in eastern Sudan. With the Eritrean and Ethiopian armies (together with that of Uganda) directly engaged in the fighting in Sudan, something close to a regional war took form in the mid-1990s that had the objective of overthrowing the NIF government.

But before this goal could be realised war broke out between Eritrea and Ethiopia on 6 May 1998 and both countries feared that the other would gain advantage by reconciling with the NIF. Recognising Ethiopia to be the bigger threat to its security and the likely victor in the war, the NIF reconciled with the EPRDF, while the Popular Front for Democracy
and Justice (PFDJ, the successor to the EPLF) continued assisting the Sudanese opposition and in addition began aiding a range of Ethiopian dissident groups. Support for these latter groups was designed to pressure the EPRDF to accede to the ruling of the Border Commission that ordered Ethiopia to leave the territories it occupied in Eritrea as a result of the 1998-2000 war. The EPRDF in turn began assisting a number of anti-PFDF groups in alliance with Sudan, and later with Yemen, which was still smarting from its defeat by the Eritreans who briefly occupied its Red Sea Hanish Islands. The ties between these three countries were subsequently formalised with the establishment of the Sanaa Pact. Although officially a regional security organisation, its strong anti-PFDF orientation could not be disguised.

Just as Eritrea and Ethiopia have taken opposing stances on Sudan, they have also placed themselves in contrary positions in the on-going crisis in Somalia. With Somali irredentionism and the Islamist Al-Itihad held to pose a major security threat to Ethiopia, Addis Ababa has been a strong backer of the Somaliland government and the interim administration in Baidoa, while Eritrea in turn is supporting the Union of Islamic Courts that controls Mogadishu. In late July there were widespread reports that Ethiopia had moved troops into the country to support the besieged Baidoa government and Eritrea was sending arms to the Islamists in Mogadishu. While NCP dominated government in Sudan has been very circumspect with respect to its dealings with Somali Islamists, at least in part out of sensitivity to the concerns of Ethiopia, it has recently begun strengthening its ties with the Islamic Courts and this cannot fail to cause alarm in Addis Ababa. The crisis in Somalia thus becomes another outlet for the expression of regional tensions.

The failure to date of the international community and the PFDJ to reach a satisfactory resolution of the Ethio-Eritrean border dispute means that a return to war cannot be discounted. But a major obstacle to Eritrea launching a war against Ethiopia to regain its lost territories or defending the country in the event of an Ethiopian attack is insecurity on its western border with Sudan. And that border can only be made make safe by a comprehensive peace agreement that would undermine or displace the NCP, or an agreement between the Eastern Front and the GoS that would provide Eritrea with the necessary security. But prospects of a genuine comprehensive peace were dealt a severe blow when the SPLM/A signed the CPA and entered the Government of National Unity as a junior partner. And although Eritrea began supporting the Darfur dissidents and endeavoured to put together a broad anti-NCP alliance, this could not overcome its declining influence in Sudan or ensure the security of its western frontier. Moreover, the Eastern Front has not proved effective in either liberating more than minuscule territories along the Eritrean border or in mobilising the majority of the people of the region, and hence has not come to the negotiating table in a position to either forcefully press its own demands or those of its benefactor, Eritrea.

**Eastern Front and the Search for Allies**

Formed in 2005 to unite the Beja National Congress and the Rashida Free Lions, the Eastern Front is the weakest of all the major rebel groups in Sudan and hence the most susceptible to outside influence. Indeed, after developing relations with a host of countries and political organisations in the region during its early years the Beja Congress and the Free Lions increasingly put all their eggs in the NDA basket. And when that organisation effectively collapsed, it was almost completely beholden to the Eritrean Government. Under these conditions the conflict in eastern Sudan has
sometimes been overtaken by the disputes between Eritrea, Sudan, and Ethiopia, and has reached a stage where it is almost inconceivable that the local conflict could be ended without progress towards resolving the broader regional conflict.

Aware of its weaknesses, the Eastern Front has looked to the Eritreans in the first instance for support, then to the SPLM/A and the international community led by the US (Interviews with the Eastern Front leadership, Asmara, November 2005). This search for external support speaks to the vulnerability of the organisation and also to the degree of wishful thinking it is bringing to the peace process. Eritrea has been a consistent supporter of the Eastern Front, but it cannot carry the Front to power and ultimately must give priority to its own interests, which cannot be expected to correspond completely with those of the Front. The SPLM/A also provided considerable support for the NDA and the Beja Congress and Free Lions, but this support was always based on strategic considerations that involved maintaining a northern military front to divide the GoS army. When the SPLM/A had to choose between continuing the struggle for a New Sudan, or pursuing a peace process for the south, there was little sign of angst on the part of the leadership when it decided on the latter option. The presence of the SPLM/A in the Government of National Unity initially led the Eastern Front to hope that this would serve their interests. However, even the Eastern Front leadership has noted the ineffectual performance of the SPLM/A in the GNU, its unimpressive role during the Darfur peace talks, and they suspect that its representatives in the negotiations will be dominated by the NCP (Ibid.). In any case, it can be assumed that the SPLM/A will strive for a peace agreement that fits within the terms of the CPA.

Eastern Front leaders also retain a faith in the international community, which they believe will be sympathetic to their demands, support the resulting peace agreement, and act against expected NCP cheating. None of these assumptions is valid. The international community led by the US has consistently accepted the timing of the peace processes favoured by the NCP, supported its desire to have regional based negotiations which it is better placed to dominate, ensured that the peace agreements in the south and Darfur did not result in fundamental changes at the centre, supported the NCP in ensuring that only tepid moves to democratic change were agreed upon, and most importantly made sure that no provisions of the Darfur Peace Agreement undermined the CPA. Moreover, the US has done little or nothing to stop or even seriously object to the widespread NCP cheating on the CPA. US policy in the Horn is guided by its commitment to the ‘war on terror’, endorsing a flawed peace processes and working closely with the NCP intelligence services (Los Angeles Times, 29 April 2005) when they were held to advance its interests.

**Negotiations & the Way Forward**

Although the Eastern Front opposes the CPA, its principal concerns with autonomy for eastern Sudan, greater wealth-sharing, development, and unity of the three states of the region (Ibid.) do not challenge the CPA, or the dominant position of the NCP in the state. The NCP will thus not contest the general thrust of the Eastern Front demands, but can be expected to propose an agreement along the lines of that negotiated with the SPLM/A for the Nuba Mountain and South Blue Nile, which left the government holding majority control in those regions (Protocol Between the GoS and the SPLM/A, 26 May 2004) and as a result produced considerable local disenchchantment. Since any agreement that gave the Eastern Front a majority posi-
tion at the local level would probably deepen dissent in the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile, the international community could be expected to fall in line with the NCP position. In any case, it appears highly unlikely that the NCP would agree to relinquish more authority in the strategically significant east than it did in far less important areas.

While the negotiating positions of the Eastern Front and the NCP can be anticipated with some accuracy that of Eritrea is more problematic. Eritrea has always favoured a comprehensive peace that would bring about the collapse or dismemberment of the NCP and the rise to power of groups in Khartoum sympathetic to Asmara. But the Eritrean people have paid a high price for what has proven to be a long-term strategy. In particular, they have suffered from a closed border at a time when food and commodity shortages are rife and the country’s border to the south with Ethiopia is also closed and a source of considerable tension. Indeed, it appears that local level politicians most sensitive to the privations of the people, particularly those in western Eritrea, strongly favour a rapidly reached peace agreement so that tensions between the Eritrean and Sudanese governments ease, full-fledged trade resumes, and people can cross the border without fear. However, this local level interest must compete for acceptance with the commitment of the PFDJ (at least to date) to a comprehensive peace and a fundamental change in the make up of the Sudanese Government, as well as the interests of the army, which for decades has looked upon eastern Sudan as a rear base necessary for its survival, the more so now with a threatening Ethiopia on its southern border. Indeed, much as Eritrea has suffered from a closed border and tense relations with Sudan, its engagement in the eastern Sudan peace process will be strongly influenced by how it impacts on the country’s security relations with Ethiopia.

Against the background of the American endorsed southern and Darfur peace agreements, both of which entailed regional focuses at the expense of a comprehensive approach, Eritrea does not have the capacity to challenge US policy and impose an inclusive peace process, or seriously undermine the authority of the NCP. As a result, the PFDJ is left with the option of either continuing to support its long-term policy, which means the peace process will go nowhere, or pursuing a process that will produce yet another regional agreement, and one which would leave the NCP in a continuing position of dominance in Khartoum.

While the NCP position in the negotiations looks decidedly stronger, it faces the problem that a peace agreement in the east must go hand-in-hand with improved relations with Eritrea and that is problematic in its own right, and in addition will upset its allies in the Sanaa Pact, and in particular Ethiopia. Having concluded that Ethiopia posed the biggest threat in the region, the NCP endeavoured to establish a strategic alliance with its eastern neighbour built around its need for security and the EPRDF’s interest in acquiring support for Ethiopia’s economic development. In practice this meant Sudanese exports of oil, non-interference in one another’s internal affairs, and – at least implicitly – joint opposition to the regime in Asmara. Breaking the anti-PFDJ alliance would not lead to a rupture between the two countries, but it would weaken what has been a generally successful, if not warm, relationship. For its part, the EPRDF will be concerned that demilitarisation of the Sudanese-Eritrean border would free up forces that could be used in any war with Ethiopia. Thus east-west peace could increase the likelihood of war between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Two other complicating factors in the peace process are the roles of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) from
Darfur and the US. JEM has an agreement with the Beja Congress, and in an attempt to become a national organisation has recruited in the east and began carrying out joint military operations with the Eastern Front (Khalil Ibrahim, 2 December 2006, Asmara), and by early 2006 was conducting military missions on its own. Many Eastern Front leaders are suspicious about the suspected links between JEM and the Popular National Congress of Hassan El-Turabi, but they are softening in the face of its increasing military effectiveness in the east (Eastern Front leader, 23 May 2006, Gedarif). Nonetheless, they continue to oppose the request of the Darfuri rebels to participate in the peace talks. It remains to be seen how JEM’s involvement will figure in the future dispensation of the east because the Eastern Front favours a peace agreement that gives central place to local autonomy, while JEM is committed to overthrowing the NCP and achieving a nation-wide peace agreement. Whether Eritrea, which permits JEM to have an office in Asmara and carry out military operations from its territory, will continue to support this position depends on what its ultimate approach to the negotiations are, and that as yet is unclear.

Lastly, while the formal role of the US and its allies in the eastern Sudan peace process remains in doubt, its significance to the outcome cannot be overestimated. Having concluded that the Horn of Africa is an area where its security interests are at stake, it played the leading role in both the southern and Darfur peace agreements, and it is inconceivable that it would be prepared to see any elements of these agreements be undermined by developments in the east. Moreover, because of the strategic significance of eastern Sudan, any changes brought about by the peace process could have a marked effect on broader issues of regional security and that would ring alarm bells in Washington.

**Conclusion**

Despite the lack of attention by the international community, the conflict in eastern Sudan is potentially of greater significance to regional security than those in the south and Darfur. Moreover, because the Eastern Front is weaker and more beholden to external supporters and interests than rebel groups elsewhere in Sudan, it will be under even greater pressure to reach an agreement that meets their needs, rather than those of its largely destitute supporters. Although Eritrea’s interest and leading role in the peace process suggests a level of local engagement that was not seen in the peace processes in the south and Darfur, the concerns of the US can nonetheless be expected to figure prominently in the outcome. And unfortunately, as the US has repeatedly made clear, its primary interest is the ‘war on terror’ and not a sustainable comprehensive peace, and even less the realisation of a democratic Sudan.

Moreover, the experience of the south and Darfur suggests that any agreement in the east is unlikely to address the manifold injustices of the people, and even less, uneven development and the exploitative centre-periphery relations that produced these injustices. Indeed, the misery of the people of Eastern Sudan, even more than that of the south or Darfur, is less the product of overt violence, than the cumulative effect of years of neglect and marginalisation. As a result, an agreement on wealth and power-sharing arrangements will not in and of itself produce sustainable peace or end the largely structural inequities that produced the conflict in the first place.
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**Military Bases, Construction Contracts & Hydrocarbons in North Africa**

**Jeremy Keenan**

Since publishing Mustafa Barth’s article on US military basing in Algeria three years ago, ROAPE has published a series of articles and briefings on US involvement in North Africa. These have focused primarily on the launch in 2003 of a ‘Saharan-Sahelian’ front in the US’s global ‘War on Terror’ and the implications of this ‘war’ for the peoples of the region. These articles have revealed that this front has been largely fabricated by US and Algerian military intelligence services, with the main building blocks being disinformation, obfuscation and dissemblement. It has therefore been difficult to ascertain the truth about such things as military bases and installations, troop deployments, related construction contracts, etc. The situation has not been helped by the fact that America’s pursuance of the so-called ‘War on Terror’ throughout much of Africa has been closely associated with the accelerated exploitation of the continent’s oil and gas resources by corporations which are rarely paragons of virtue.

However, in the last few months, an increasing amount of light has been shed on some of these questions, notably the location and nature of US military bases in the Sahara, the role of the US company Halliburton in their construction and the state of oil exploration and production in both Algeria and Mauritania.

**The Tamanrasset Base**

There have been several references over the last few years to the construction of an American military base (or bases) in southern Algeria. Media reports about such a base stem from around May-July...
2003 when the US let it be known that it was pushing for permanent military bases in North Africa, notably Algeria. In fact, the construction of what we now know to be the main US military base in southern Algeria, alongside Tamanrasset’s Aguenar airport, 12 kms NW of Tamanrasset, the administrative capital of Algeria’s extreme south, commenced in 2000-01. At that time the billboard attached to the base’s perimeter fence proclaimed it to be a NASA project, leading local people to believe that it was part of the US space programme. Questioned about US bases and troops in Algeria in 2003, Algeria’s Foreign Affairs Minister at that time, Abdelaziz Belkhadem (currently Prime Minister), fearful that reports of a US military presence would cause domestic problems, was quick to point out that his country’s policy had always been to deny a foreign military presence on its territory. The US also went to great lengths to explain that its new concept of basing rights in Africa was designed to overcome such potential friction with host nations by moving towards the concept of ‘lilypads’ in a ‘family of bases’ across Africa.

These were outlined by EUCOM’s Supreme Allied Commander, General Jim Jones, who explained that basing rights in such sensitive countries as Algeria would not involve a major or permanent military presence, but rather highly flexible facilitative arrangements which would enable the US military to deploy quickly, as and when required, into the sort of ‘forward operating bases’ envisaged in EUCOM’s new strategy. Such facilities would involve the provision of equipment to pre-positioned platforms overseen by a small American maintenance and logistics staff under some sort of joint command and control arrangement with the host country. The impression given by General Jones at that time was that the Algerian military would provide the fighting personnel with the US providing the maintenance and logistics staff. However, that vision belongs to the halcyon days of 2003 when US President Bush and his Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, overly confident in US military capabilities and their vision of a new world order, were quick to proclaim victory in Iraq.

Things have since changed, both in Iraq and in terms of General Jones’s ‘lilypads’, which is one of the reasons why both the US and Algeria have continued to deny the existence of a US military base in southern Algeria. At least one Algerian newspaper, with particularly close links to Algeria’s secret military intelligence service, even tried to lay a false scent away from Tamanrasset by stating that the US was constructing a military surveillance base at Iherir, 500 kms as the crow flies to the NE of Tamanrasset and close to the Libyan frontier. Detailed reconnaissance of the Iherir region revealed no traces of any such base or US presence.

Thanks to the continuous flow of reports from construction workers in the base and other local residents, we can now (re)confirm that America’s proposed military base in southern Algeria is, in fact, the same project that was disingenuously labelled as a NASA project. The dimensions of the base make it sound more like a ‘reed-bed’ than a ‘lily-pad’. Encircled by a high plastered wall with sentry pill-boxes at 100-200 metre intervals, the base’s circumference is estimated by the workers as being around 10 kilometres. Its runway is estimated by the workers as approaching 4 kms. While this will be capable of taking America’s largest military aircraft, it should be pointed out that the airport’s altitude is over 4,000 feet above sea level. By early 2005, at least 5 hangar-like buildings had been constructed. Since then, further construction by the Canadian sub-contractor RSW-SCATT has, according to the construction workers, added lodgings for 2,000 personnel as well as an Olympic-sized swimming pool. This
work is now more or less complete. The workers also confirmed that some 400 US troops (along with their dogs) were flown into the base in early 2006.

The precise status of these troops is not entirely clear. Senior personnel in both the US State Department and the Ministry of Defence (Pentagon) are adamant that the US does not have troops based at Tamanrasset. On the other hand, numerous local residents, including senior members of the airport police, air control, workers within the base and local businessmen are equally adamant that they have seen them there. US Special Forces have been in the region since 2002 and rumours of some 400 US troops being stationed at or near Tamanrasset have been widespread for at least two years. Because of the base’s secrecy, it has not been possible for me to gain access to it. However, the multiple sources mentioned above have all confirmed that they saw in the order of 400 US troops within the base at dates which they place between end-January and mid-March 2006, with the general consensus being the early part of February. They were all also under the impression, gained from Tamanrasset air control, that they had been flown in over a two day period from Europe, and almost certainly from Germany, and that all or most of them later deployed across the border to northern Mali.

The US ‘War on Terror’, especially in its Sahara-Sahelian front, which paralleled the invasion of Iraq, has been based almost entirely on disinformation, with the result that US government statements regarding basing agreements, military deployments and related matters have little credibility. In this particular instance, however, I have the strong impression that those personnel within both the US State Department and Pentagon with whom I discussed the Tamanrasset basing genuinely believe that the US has no troops based there. I believe this is a slightly more sinister version of the ‘left-hand-right-hand’ tendency prevalent in most bureaucracies. In the US, much of the intelligence and conduct of the ‘War on Terror’ has been managed through new offices and command structures established within the Pentagon by a network of ‘necons’ who effectively took over many of the more sensitive branches of the US government in the wake of George W. Bush’s advent to the White House. One of their aims was to keep other branches of government who might be expected to check their activities, including desks within both the State and Defense Departments, ‘out of the loop’. The key military-intelligence chain of command in this operation, particularly the management of ‘intelligence disinformation’ and the responsibility for certain key Special Operations ran directly through the Donald Rumsfeld–Paul Wolfowitz–Douglas Feith hierarchy, numbers 1, 2 and 3 respectively in the Pentagon. Wolfowitz and Feith both left the DOD under clouds: Wolfowitz was appointed in 2005 to head up the World Bank while Feith, reportedly described by US Army General Tommy Franks as the ‘fucking stupidest guy on the face of the earth’, resigned from his position as Under Secretary of Defense for Policy on 8 August 2005.

At the centre of the Zionist cabal which infiltrated and took over many of the higher echelons of US government following the Bush election take-over, Feith is currently under investigation by both the Pentagon’s Inspector General and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. In March 2006, the news organisation Rawstory reported that Pat Roberts, the Republican head of the Senate Intelligence Committee, was not allowing a complete investigation of Feith and his role at the Pentagon’s controversial Office of Special Plans. ‘One former intelligence official suggested that part of the reason for deferring the Feith inquiry was its sensitivity. A Feith investigation might unravel a
bigger can of worms, the source said.’

Part of that can of worms is the disinformation used to fabricate what became known as the ‘second front’ in the ‘War on Terror’ across the Sahara-Sahel and the role of US Special Forces (including the Tamanrasset base) in its pursuance.

Construction Problems & the Cheney-Halliburton Connection

Construction of the Tamanrasset base has been beset by a number of difficulties. Completion of the runway has been delayed by the necessity to blast and remove extensive amounts of harder-than-expected granite, while RSW-SCATT has also had to build a number of dams and ‘bridges’ (presumably culverts) to protect both the runway and the lodgings from flood water. Neither of these problems would have arisen had the main contractor undertaken a proper survey of the site. This would have revealed the granite structures and the fact that the site was in a shallow valley (oued), the Oued Aguenar, and subject to flooding. In fact, a few words with any number of locals might have saved the proverbial taxpayer (which ones?) a few million dollars. In addition, there was insufficient water on site for the crushing, cement and other plant. This problem was resolved by sinking a deep well into the Oued Otoul, some 10-15 kms to the north, and pumping water from there to the Base. Not surprisingly, this lowered the oued’s water table and dried up the wells of the local residents whose main livelihood was horticulture. Such ‘collateral damage’ is certainly not good for the ‘hearts and minds’ stuff, about which US foreign military policy has long made much ado, and hardly in keeping with General Jim Jones’s ‘family of bases’ philosophy.

However, such problems should not be blamed on either EUCOM or the Pentagon’s Office of Special Plans, but rather the main contractor, Brown & Root Condor (BRC), a company which is currently under investigation on the direct orders of Algeria’s president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

BRC was formed in 1994, just as Algeria’s ‘dirty war’ was turning very dirty indeed and few western countries or companies were prepared to do business in the country. However, one person prepared to take advantage of this ‘market opportunity’ was Dick Cheney, President of the Halliburton Company and future Vice-President of the United States. BRC is a joint enterprise registered in Algeria between Brown & Root, a Halliburton subsidiary, and Condor Engineering Spa, an Algerian company owned by the Algerian national oil company, Sonatrach. Its social capital at that time was reported as being 368 million Dinars (US$8 million), of which Halliburton held 49% and Sonatrach 51%.

On one side of the Halliburton-Sonatrach relationship was Dick Cheney, who had close contacts with senior members of the Algerian government and military and who became the main architect of the US-Algerian relationship in the Bush-Cheney era. His counterpart in the BRC deal was to be Chekib Khelil. Although an Algerian citizen and currently domiciled in Algeria, his wife and sons are American citizens. He himself received a PhD in petroleum engineering at Texas A&M University and lived for almost 20 years in Washington, reportedly as a close friend of Dick Cheney, and where he worked for the World Bank before becoming Head of OPEC. In 1999 he returned to Algeria as Bouteflika’s Minister of Energy and Mines and to become by far the most important and respected person in Algeria’s very substantial hydrocarbons industry.

BRC’s website, perhaps not surprisingly, makes no mention of the Tamanrasset base, especially as Algeria cannot admit to the basing of foreign troops on its soil.
However, the company’s activities did not go entirely unnoticed by President Bouteflika who, in March (2006), ordered an investigation into its dealings, especially those relating to Algeria’s public sector, notably the Ministry of Defence (including the country’s security and intelligence services), for whom BRC built a number of facilities, and the Ministry of Energy and Mines, for whom BRC built (amongst other things) a new Ministry building. The investigators handed their report to the President on 23 July 2006. According to sources close to the presidential office, it confirms the rumours that BRC was being given public contracts, especially by the Ministries of Defence and Energy, at inflated prices and without recourse to public tender, as required by Algerian law. Having received such contracts, seemingly illegally, BRC then simply sub-contracted the work out to other companies making what appears to have been a substantial profit in the process. What seems to have angered Bouteflika is that 21 of the 26 sub-contracted companies noted in the investigator’s report were Algerian. It is presumed that these companies might have won the contracts themselves and at a lower price had they been allowed to tender for them. The latest indications are that the President has forwarded the dossier to the Justice Department.

Irrespective of whether the BRC investigation results in prosecutions, its public exposé of Halliburton is extremely embarrassing to the US administration. Not only does it once again finger the rather messy Cheney-Halliburton-Pentagon-public contracts syndrome, but on this occasion it also concerns a base whose existence has been repeatedly denied, and in a region where the US administration’s launch of a new front in the ‘War on Terror’ has been based almost entirely on disinformation that would appear to have been disseminated, at least until its closure, by the Pentagon’s Office of Special Plans and which is now under investigation. It would appear that America’s southern Algerian base is as much about straightforward corruption and dissemblement as military strategy.

Questions about Algeria’s Oil Production

One question being asked in Algiers political circles is whether there is a link between the President’s strong line over BRC and the almost synchronous approval by Algeria’s Cabinet of a bill that
would effectively reverse the hydrocarbons legislation of 2005 by giving the state-run company Sonatrach a more central role and introducing a windfall tax on international oil companies. The most obvious link between the two is Chekib Khelil, Algeria’s powerful and hitherto much respected Minister of Energy and Mines.

The proposed windfall tax, is seen as a step towards resource nationalism along the same lines as adopted by Russia and South American countries. Emboldened by high oil prices, producer countries are angling for a greater share of their resource wealth. Indeed, the prime exponent of this trend, President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, visited Algeria, along with other oil producing countries in the region, earlier this year. Rather than admit to such opportunism, Algeria has couched its proposal in political rhetoric, arguing that the proposed tax is designed to leave some reserves for future generations. Slowing foreign investment by the imposition of such a fiscal disincentive will help the conservation of the country’s reserves.

Such altruism seems incongruous for a regime that is so endemically corrupt. Indeed, discussions with a number of analysts and oil producers in Algeria, France, the Gulf and the USA in early August suggest that this political rhetoric may be designed to mask both a political as well as a ‘technical’ problem.

The political problem is associated with President Bouteflika’s attempt to amend the country’s constitution. His four main proposals are: to extend the term of presidency from 5 to 7 years; to end the two-term limit; to create a new position of vice-president; and to exonerate anyone in power from prosecution. While jokes abound as to what he has learned from Messrs Chirac and Berlusconi in Europe and any number of African presidents, Bouteflika’s amendments are likely to have negative implications for the democratisation of his country. While his amendments may appear to be shifting power from a military to a civil executive presidency, they are a further move away from any democratic opening up of the country. This has not gone unnoticed by the populace at large. One way of strengthening his share of the up-coming referendum vote on the constitution amendments is to ensure the support of the country’s relative powerful trade union movement, which was strongly opposed to the previous year’s ‘hydrocarbons law’ that began the break-up and privatisation of the state’s national oil company, Sonatrach. The effective reversion of this law could thus give Bouteflika the trade union vote in the referendum. This is clearly a political blow and loss of face to Chekib Khelil who was responsible for engineering last year’s hydrocarbons law.

The technical reason is to do with Algeria’s oil production. Although this was expected to peak around 2010, many analysts are inclined to believe that it may have already plateaued. While this may not do too much damage to Algeria’s standing and influence as a significant ‘second-tier’ oil producer, much of the blame for it will be laid at Chekib Khelil’s door for having failed to secure the technical expertise for field optimization and also for not securing certain foreign markets.

While there has been some talk of the ‘three strikes and you’re out principle‘ amongst foreign analysts, it is hardly likely that Chekib Khelil has reached such a point. Not only is there no obvious replacement for him, but his standing in the international oil community is considerable and his removal from office could be extremely damaging to Algeria’s credibility and standing in the international market. However, it may well be that Bouteflika’s decision to go public on the BRC investigation is a warning shot across his bow.
Oil Production Problems in Mauritania

Neither does the oil output situation in Mauritania look quite as rosy as it did earlier in the year. Mauritania joined the fast-growing club of African oil-producers in February 2006 when the first oil was pumped from its off-shore Chinguetti field. The Australian company Woodside Petroleum, the field’s developer and operator, initially estimated the field’s reserves at 135-150 million barrels, with daily output forecast at 75,000 bpd (barrels per day) for 8-9 years. However, since pumping commenced, output has fallen consistently. By May, daily average output was down to 41,000 bpd. By July it had fallen to 37,000 bpd, while August figures suggest it has fallen even further to 27,000 bpd. In July, Marquarie Equities downgraded the reserves to an estimated 85 million barrels, while Woodside has itself reduced the value of the field’s reserves by a billion dollars.

Measuring oil fields and predicting their behaviour is neither easy nor an exact science. However, questions might well be asked as to how Woodside got its forecast so disastrously wrong. According to one of North Africa’s largest producers, only one exploration well was drilled, which struck it lucky! Since then, Woodside’s ‘luck’ in North Africa seems to have run out. In 2005 the Americans called in the Australian government to reign in Woodside’s questionable activities in Iraq. This led to questions being raised about their Libyan operations, while earlier this year they had to pay a US$100 million in what was referred to as a ‘bonus payment’ to the Mauritanian government as an out of court settlement following (as yet unproven) allegations that the company had bribed the country’s former oil Minister. They also had to renegotiate their contracts with the government. The Australian Federal Police are reported to have opened an investigation into the allegation of Woodside’s corrupt practices. Woodside is not the first, and it will certainly not be the last oil company to chance its arm once too often. However, the possible repercussions for Mauritania and its economy, especially at a time when it is in such a delicate stage of democratic transition, could be serious.

It is still far too early to make serious predictions, but there are already a number of signs suggesting that the frenetic pace of oil exploration across much of the rest of the Sahel, notably in Mali, Niger and Chad, not to mention Darfur, quite apart from the massive social and economic dislocations usually associated with such activity, could result in equally disappointing and damaging outcomes.

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Endnotes

5. Note 1.
6. On 18 May 2004, an Algerian delegation, including the Commander of the Tamanrasset Air Base, Yazid Zeraibi and Commander Ahmed
Mouhamou of the Algerian Defence Ministry, visited RSW-Scatt in Canada.

7. Personal communications with both US State Department and Ministry of Defense personnel.

8. 80% of the US intelligence budget is now managed through the Pentagon.


11. Much of this ‘can of worms’ has already been published in ROAPE (Note 2). Its complete story is being published shortly (2007) in J. Keenan, Alice in the Sahara: Moving Mirrors and the USA’s War on Terror in the Sahara (Pluto forthcoming).


13. If this assessment is correct, it may also go some way to explaining both Sonatrach’s aggressive exploration in Libya, Niger and Mali as well as Algeria’s recent display of paranoia over Libya’s forays into the Sahel.

14. The Chinguetti field is owned by Woodside 47.83%, Hardman Resources (19.01%), Roc Oil (3.25%), British Gas (10.23%), Premier Oil (8.12%), Mauritanian government (11.56%).


EU Support to Family Farming: Swazi Sugar-Sector Reform

Paul Goodison

EU sugar-sector reform looks set to give a big boost to family farming in the sugar sector in Swaziland, with some 36% of the Swazi sugar industry being taken over by family farming. Unfortunately the ‘family farm’ benefitting is not one of the 5,000 Swazi smallholder sugar farmers, brought together in a growing number of farmers associations, but the family of George Weston, chief executive of Associated British Foods (ABF), which owns 55% of the company’s shares. ABF is at this moment in takeover talks with Illovo, which controls 36% of sugar production in Swaziland, 100% in Malawi, 95% in Zambia, 45% in Tanzania and 22% in Mozambique.

Currently Swazi family farmers are struggling to survive in the face of a 21% decline in the sucrose price since 2002. This has been driven by a 37% decline in local currency earnings on sugar sales to the EU market, as a result of the devaluation of the euro against the South African rand. These smallholder sugar farmers are facing growing levels of indebtedness, an indebtedness which will become terminal with EU sugar-sector reform reducing prices by a further 36%, unless immediate remedial actions are taken.

Proposals have been put forward to the EU for financial support for a restructuring of smallholder sugar sector to financial solvency. However the bureaucratic delays inherent in EU aid administration are likely to mean that these funds will come too late (if at all) to save the family-farming sugar sector in Swaziland.

Meanwhile the Weston family looks set to snap up Illovo’s nearly 2 million tonnes of annual sugar production, at a cost of around 200 euros per tonne. This contrasts with a price of 720 euros per tonne if British Sugar (ABF’s sugar subsidiary) wishes to buy the right to additional quotas under the reformed EU regime. Clearly taking over Illovo is a much more profitable prospect, particularly with duty-free access for least-developed-country sugar exports to the EU from 2009 onwards. Of course this take over of Illovo will be financed from ABF’s own resources largely as a result of the super-profits earned by British Sugar under the previous EU sugar regime, which, according to Oxfam UK, saw average rates of return of around
20% compared to around 6% for ABF as a whole.

There seems little doubt that the Weston family will get hold of over a third of the Swazi sugar industry before Swazi smallholder farmers see any support from the EU. But never mind: if Swazi smallholder farmers are driven out of the sugar industry and existing planned smallholder schemes on the Lower Usuthu river prove non-viable, this will not be the end of family farming in Swaziland. After all the Weston family could always graciously step in to take up the use of the newly irrigated lands under the LUSIP scheme, turning this multi-million-dollar scheme into the single largest family farm in Africa!

Although the negotiations continue to start and stall and the text remains a total secret, based on the experience and precedent of other US FTAs, it is not difficult to anticipate how the US-SACU FTA will unfold. Looking at the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), US-Chile FTA, and Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) models helps us anticipate what will be included. After twelve years, the accumulated evidence surrounding NAFTA demonstrates that any agreement crafted along the lines of that accord would have potentially adverse environmental, economic and human consequences for many people in the United States and Southern Africa.

Democratic Participation & Transparency

US-SACU governments should take active steps to facilitate direct and meaningful engagement from civil society in negotiating the proposed US-SACU FTA. The exclusion of both US and SACU workers, women, indigenous, ethnic populations, and others whose community will be affected by the FTA is unacceptable.

Although South Africa has established The National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac) to serve as a mechanism for civil society to discuss social and economic policy concerns with government, broad participation and full transparency between all parties remains a hurdle.

The US and other SACU countries do not have such formal structures. US and SACU governments and trade officials must bridge the gap between the formal negotiating process and civil society by formally establishing a mechanism allowing affected sectors in all countries direct influence in negotiations. Further,
US-SACU negotiations have not made available draft texts, proposals, timelines or agendas for the established channels of civil society to have an informed debate. It is essential that US-SACU FTA negotiations extend, beyond the business sector, the appropriate mechanisms for democratic participation.

*Negotiations should not move further without direct involvement from the affected communities and civil society groups in both the United States and SACU countries. We call for access to draft texts as they develop so that an informed public discussion can shape the outcome of negotiations.*

**Worker Rights**

The US-Jordan Free Trade Agreement (2000) was the first trade agreement that contained an enforceable commitment to respect the International Labor Organization (ILO) core labor standards, as well as enforce domestic labor laws, in the core of the agreement that were subject to the same dispute settlement as the commercial provisions. Since that time, every FTA negotiated has dramatically weakened the Jordan provisions, by making only one commitment in the labor chapter subject to dispute settlement or enforcement (to enforce own laws), and setting up a parallel and inferior dispute settlement mechanism. In this model, the only worker rights requirement is that countries should effectively enforce their own labor laws. Although provisions in CAFTA show an attempt to use fines as an enforcement mechanism, they will likely be ineffective because penalties are levied on governments of the countries where the violations occur, not the companies that violate.

With corporations’ increased ability to relocate in search of lower labor costs, a ‘race to the bottom’ has ensued. This trend is disproportionately felt by low-skilled labor that are forced to compete for jobs. Communities are also forced to compete for investment by requiring less of employers. The global race to the bottom has been a significant factor in the stagnation of job quality in the US and the spread of sweatshop labor in Southern Africa. With no existing social provisions in the SACU mandate and the lack of resources for enforcement of member country labor laws, the US-SACU FTA is likely to perpetuate rather than help this problem.

Lesotho saw an increase in jobs under the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act, but many of these jobs had people working under sweatshop conditions, including coercion. With the demise of the global Multi Fiber Agreement and its quota system, investment became more volatile with factories closing literally overnight and managers leaving the country without fulfilling their obligations to pay employees. Those that did not leave use the threat of doing so as a way to gain leverage over workers, thereby preventing them from organizing or joining unions. With little job security and low wages many women in Lesotho paid for food through sexual favors leading to increased HIV/AIDS infection rates.

*The US-SACU FTA should provide the space for participating countries to create policies that retain and create jobs that respect ILO labor standards.*

**Small Farmers in the United States & Southern Africa**

In Southern Africa, where about 70% of the population lives in rural areas and suffers the greatest poverty levels, the impact of a trade agreement which does not address all farmers, especially poor ones, will lead to increase inequalities. In the region, the average per capita dietary energy supplies have declined over the past 15 years, to 2,160 calories per day.
against a requirement of 2,700; endemic drought turns chronic hunger into serious malnutrition, for the young and the weak (e.g. people living with HIV/AIDS). Impoverished and small-scale farmers (often female heads of households) produce primarily for local and national markets and simply cannot compete with large agribusinesses on the national or world markets. Regional food security relies most on access by rural women to productive resources, such as land, credit, farm inputs and market infrastructures.

Any trade agreement on agriculture must recognize national food sovereignty by guaranteeing governmental authority to pursue tariffs and subsidies that safeguard food security, increase food crop diversification and protect the environment. The United States government must prevent private and public dumping of US grains in the region that adversely affects small scale farmers. Such farmers are unable to compete against imported agricultural goods sold below their own production costs or indeed, below the cost of agribusiness production in the US.

Current US domestic farm policy, despite subsidies of billions of taxpayer dollars, is destructive of small and medium producers as well as the environment, and therefore, if exported via trade agreements, this agro-system could become harmful to other regions. Free trade agreements are inappropriate instruments to provide sustainable rural development and entitlement to food, either in the US or in Southern Africa.

The US-SACU FTA must contribute to rural development strategies, in the US and Southern Africa, that promote subsistence and small-scale farms, dedicated to enhance food sovereignty and environmental sustainability. Countries should be able to enact legislation that protects products with special economic, social or cultural importance, such as corn and beans, from trade liberalization.

**Intellectual Property Rights**

The SACU agreement must not promote the monopolized control over nature, science and technology by global corporations. Instead, the fundamental right of governments to safeguard traditional knowledge, protect public health, and expand access to essential medicines must be upheld.

**Access to Medicines**

The SACU countries have the highest rates of HIV in the world and AIDS, as well as other treatable diseases, threaten to devastate the societies and economies of the region. Any trade treaty must not diminish Southern African countries’ rights to secure the production, import, export and provision of affordable medicines to respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and other public health problems. The 2001 WTO Doha Declaration, to which the US and SACU countries are signatories, explicitly reaffirms governments’ rights to ‘protect public health and, in particular, to promote access to medicines for all.’ The United States must not pursue provisions, known as ‘TRIPS plus,’ that would undermine countries’ rights to act in the interest of public health. These TRIPS plus provisions include restricting compulsory licensing or preventing access to test data by governments and potential generic manufacturers.

Given the concerns around intellectual property and access to necessary medicines especially in this vulnerable region of the world, the US should take Intellectual Property provisions out of the current negotiations.
Traditional Knowledge

The Africa Union has long opposed patents on life and therefore, no trade agreement should require private intellectual property rights over bio-resources (seeds, plants, animals). In Southern Africa, the Africa Model Legislation provides legal alternatives for protecting breeders’ rights, while fully honoring farmers’ rights over seeds. Private intellectual property rights over bio-resources rewards transnational corporations, not small scale farmers growing food crops from saved seeds.

Southern African governments must be allowed to enact restrictions on genetically-modified organisms that they deem necessary to sustain regional crop varieties. Any US-Southern African trade agreement must recognize governments’ authority to determine and implement publicly legislated safety standards for imported food products and not require abrogation of other international treaties, such as the Cartagena Biosafety Protocol. Under this Protocol, member governments cannot be required to permit entrance of food or agricultural products whether as food aid or commodities – treated with specific forms of technology that are of public concern, such as genetically modified organisms and irradiated foods.

In the US-SACU FTA, small agricultural producers’ rights should take precedence over Intellectual Property Rights where agricultural genetic resources are concerned. Additionally, the US-SACU FTA should not interfere with a country’s ability to live up to the commitment it made in ratifying the Cartagena Protocol and its parent Convention on Biological Diversity.

Investment & Capital Flows

Any trade agreement should preserve government authority to regulate foreign investment in order to achieve national sustainable development policies. Governments should be able to protect public interest laws from suits and establish performance requirements in order to support an emerging productive sector or meet community development plans. This includes using government contracts to promote gender equality, social justice and respect for human rights. Equally, governments should be able to impose capital controls to protect their economies and citizens from destructive flows of speculative investment.

Despite the need to offset the economic legacy of colonialism, conflict and apartheid, participating countries could lose the right to enforce their affirmative action policies. This includes programs like South Africa’s Black Economic Empowerment initiative that asks companies doing business in the country to grant equity ownership to black business partners and appoint black executives to company boards.

The rights established under international human, labor and environmental agreements and conventions should take precedence over investor rights. The Investor-State clause in NAFTA, the US-Chile FTA and CAFTA grants foreign investors the right to sue governments for compensation over public-interest laws that could undermine their potential profits. Alarmingly, 42 cases have been filed thus far by corporate interests and investors under NAFTA’s ‘Chapter 11’ investor provision, many against local environmental, public health and safety laws. With only 11 of the 42 cases finalized, some $35 million in taxpayer funds have been granted to five corporations that have succeeded with their claims. Investment disputes between countries should be resolved in an accountable and transparent manner, and with the participation of all affected parties.
The US-SACU FTA should preserve government authority to regulate foreign investment, avoid prohibiting performance requirements, and have no investor-state clause.

Essential Services

Essential services are services that help meet peoples’ human rights to food, education, health and basic utilities like water and electricity. Fundamentally, services are not tradable commodities and access to basic necessities must not be subject to the negotiated rules of free trade. As such, they should not be included in FTA negotiations.

At a minimum, essential services must be exempt from the ‘national treatment’ standards, which mandate foreign service providers be treated at least as well as domestic providers. Unlike in CAFTA and the US-Peru FTA, it is also essential that a blanket ‘negative list’ approach to service sector liberalization, which would apply to all services not specifically excluded by the state party, be rejected.

Previous liberalization and commodification of essential services in Southern Africa has been deeply contentious and led to increased prices, stratification of service levels by wealth, and inability of governments to effectively and proactively protect health and safety of people through these services.

Fundamentally, the rights of governments to decide which, where, when or whether to open services to foreign providers must be upheld. All services essential to the people and development needs should be excluded from the US-SACU FTA.

Conclusion

In 2002 when the US Trade Representative notified Congress that the Administration intended to initiate free trade negotiations with Sub-Saharan nations, the claim was that this FTA would ‘bring new hope and prosperity to Southern Africa,’ and ‘further drive regional growth and development.’ By excluding the principles laid out in this statement, the resulting FTA will fail to provide sustainable development. Unfortunately, indications are that current US-SACU negotiations will model other FTAs (such as the CAFTA and the US-Chile FTA) that ignore these principles. This is a matter of grave concern to all who seek equitable and just trade relationships between the US and the nations of Southern Africa.

The elements and standards in this statement are essential to a trade agreement that could foster a more just, sustainable and prosperous human society, and US-SACU FTA negotiations must be evaluated on the basis of their inclusion. To summarize, these include:

1) Negotiations should not move further without direct involvement from the affected communities and civil society groups in both the United States and SACU countries. We call for access to draft texts as they develop so that an informed public discussion can shape the outcome of negotiations.

2) The US-SACU FTA should provide the space for participating countries to create policies that retain and create jobs that respect International Labor Organization labor standards.

3) The US-SACU FTA must contribute to rural development strategies, in the US and Southern Africa, that promote subsistence and small-scale farms, dedicated to enhance food sovereignty and environmental sustainability. Countries should be able to enact legislation that protects products with special economic, social or cultural importance, such as corn and beans, from trade liberalization.
4) Given the concerns around intellectual property and access to necessary medicines especially in this vulnerable region of the world, the US should take Intellectual Property provisions out of the current negotiations.

5) In the US-SACU FTA, small agricultural producers’ rights should take precedence over individual property rights where agricultural genetic resources are concerned. Additionally, the US-SACU FTA should not interfere with a country’s ability to live up to the commitment it made in ratifying the Cartagena protocol and its parent Convention on Biological Diversity.

6) The US-SACU FTA should preserve government authority to regulate foreign investment, avoid prohibiting performance requirements, and have no investor-state clause.

7) Fundamentally, the rights of governments to decide which, where, when or whether to open services to foreign providers must be upheld. All services essential to the people and development needs should be excluded from the US-SACU FTA.

This Statement is endorsed by the US-SACU FTA Working Group Members. Contact: Jessica Walker Beaumont at jwalkerbeaumont@afsc.org or 215. 241.7277; March 2006.

Books Received

5. Towards a New Map of Africa by Ben Wisner, Camilla Toulmin & Rutendo Chitiga; published by Earthscan, London.
13. US Foreign Policy & the Horn of Africa by Peter Woodward; published by Ashgate, London; £50.