# Religion, Ideology & Conflict in Africa

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## Prologue: Whose Political Agenda?

The last issue which *ROAPE* devoted entirely to religion ('Fundamentalism in Africa: Religion and Politics', No. 52, 1991) reflected what its editors saw then as the principal area of concern, particularly Christian fundamentalism often sponsored by US evangelical churches. Global events since the devastation of the 'twin towers' in New York on 9 September 2001, the election and re-election to the American presidency of a 'born again' Christian,[1] terrorist atrocities in Kenya and Tanzania and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, have altered the picture so radically that a revisit to the topic is now timely, if not overdue. In so doing it is appropriate also to update the terminology. 'Fundamentalism' has increasingly come to be seen as a problematic label, with a shift from its meaning of a dogmatism of belief that did not depart from literal interpretation of sacred texts. Concern today is not with religious belief per se, but faith as the basis for political activities and organisation, even if the rigidity of those beliefs adds intolerance to violent politics. This will be the focus of the current issue. In it we will tend to use the now more standard 'Islamism' and talk about Islamist movements rather than 'Islamic fundamentalism'; likewise, rather than Christian fundamentalism we will talk about ideologies such as evangelism or Pentecostalism and in organisational terms concentrate on the familiar 'Christian right'. There is also a contextual shift internal to Africa (and elsewhere globally) in the apparent burgeoning of religious bodies, of converts to new faiths and in the centrality of religious concerns, especially in politics – in turn reflected in the number of books, articles and conferences on these themes.[2]

The contemporary global backcloth is thus the starting point for looking at religion and politics in Africa. The Cold War has been replaced by a new global confrontation whose proponents couch their ideological stances in religious and indeed 'fundamentalist' terms. Bush's pronouncements lump together Afghanistan and Iraqi resistance, with phenomena like Hizbullah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine, and in August 2006 the alleged plot to blow up British planes, as sharing a common 'totalitarian ideology' and a desire to 'attack free nations'. This view reflects that of a sizeable minority (40% in some polls) of US citizens who believe their country is faced with a single global conspiracy by Islamists to destroy their society. Both leaders and citizens define the core of that society in Christian terms and use religious shibboleths to urge resistance to this threat. Moreover, the practice of the 'war on terror' has been one that has targeted Muslim societies and organisations, seeming to confirm the perceptions of most Muslims that the war is one against them. In August this year, Blair echoed Bush by stating in a major speech in the US that there was a 'crusade' in progress – seemingly mindless of the connotations of this term among Muslims. On the other side of the divide, there are clearly Islamist networks that are bent on a jihad against the US and the West more generally, to promote a political realm based on Islamist formulae, using religious

slogans to justify the use of tactics of terror against non-implicated civilians and the slaughter or forced displacement of opponents and 'infidels'.

Mahmood Mamdani, in his book *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* (reviewed in this issue), characterises the problem that such a world poses in these terms:

> *Both Bush and bin Laden employ a religious language, the language of good and evil, the language of no compromise: you are either with us or against us … The danger of bringing good and evil into politics cannot be underestimated … if the struggle against political enemies is defined as a struggle against evil, it will turn into a holy war. And in holy war, there can be no compromise. Evil cannot be converted; it must be eliminated.*

One first step to a saner world is to challenge this simplistic dichotomising. But Mamdani also holds out an organisational challenge: '… nothing less than a global movement for peace will save humanity'. He does not offer details of how such 'a mass movement within each country' might come into being. But it is one hope that the discussions sparked by this Special issue might focus on an alternative 'neither-nor' way forward in this dangerous era.

## The African Setting

Africa is not, of course, at the centre of this global clash but it has already been targetted in various ways as part of the protagonist's strategies, such as the bombing of the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam with their massive human damage. For many years, US fundamentalists saw the cause of the South in the Sudan as a religious crusade, which they supported in war and now still support in peace. Several African governments have accepted the 'for or against' formula and have been clamouring to sign up to membership of the global coalition against terrorism – among them regimes that had earlier been seen as among the new (progressive) leaders. Both Eritrea and Ethiopia, for instance, have been vying to be the favoured base for US operations in the Middle East. Djibouti has in fact taken in troops from the US and Germany to add to the permanent French garrison, and US navy patrols operate along the Red Sea coast to interdict possible terrorists into Somalian territory. A huge web of US military staging posts has been sited across vast tracts of Africa to provide logistics for military action by the US in the Middle East and to pre-empt 'terrorist' incursions or explosions within the continent – these were well documented in the last ROAPE issue on North Africa (September, 2006). Most recently, statements attributed to Osama bin Laden refocused attention on Africa, especially the north-east. He sees what is happening in Darfur (see Briefing by Alex de Waal in this issue) as evidence that the West is waging a war against Islam (BBC News, 2006), a curious conclusion when it is African Muslims who are bearing the brunt of what may be 'genocide' and where in early September 2006 the Sudan government rejected UN peacekeeping forces. In assessing the impact of the 'war on terror' in Africa, one should not neglect what the US sees as one of its 'successes', using diplomatic means, backed by the threat of force – the conversion of the Sudan government from what the US officially recognised as a 'state supporting terrorism', deemed also to be an Islamist state, to something of an ally (at least in the same ambiguous way as Pakistan or Saudi Arabia).

In these circumstances, an initiative in Africa to reject this subservient role, with its logic of adversarial political alliances, would be a strong building block in a global peace movement. What is needed, perhaps, is a new 'non-aligned' movement –

non-aligned as regards religion-based political loyalties and international ties. Any such movement would have to be based on popular movements and not just an assembly of states. As such, it is not only the 'extremist' groups on each side which need to be gathered in but also those in the mainstream of the great variety of denominations and sects in the different faiths which are practised on the African continent. An effective policy response requires a wider understanding of the links between belief and action, religious adherence and socio-economic circumstance, and between faith organisations and politics within Africa as much as internation-ally.

In the present issue of the Review we ground this debate on religion and politics in Africa. The 1991 issue of the Review contained little on Islam, but the events of 9/11 and their repercussions on US foreign policy, together with ongoing conflict in Sudan, Somalia and religious tensions in Nigeria, Algeria, and Egypt – where divisions within Islam and their relationships with Christian groups are all festering – has altered that perception considerably. Religion in the politics of health has also emerged as an issue. In addressing the HIV/AIDS crisis, the responses of churches and Islamic communities has been central but ambiguous, with many Muslims seeing it as a 'Christian' disease and many Christians characterising it as the 'wages of sin' while at the same time proffering 'miracle' cures – particularly in new Pentecostalist and charismatic churches. The pandemic has provided the perfect vehicle for US Evangelical Christians, often originating in the Baptist south, to impose their own concepts of 'family values' and moral rules on US official policy aided by a like-minded President. Similarly, the traditional objection of the Roman Catholic church to artificial forms of contraception has been reaffirmed in its negative stance on condoms in preventing HIV.

Where we can agree with our predecessors in 1991 is, first, that 'fundamentalism', of whatever variety, must be seen not as an atavistic throwback but as 'quintessentially modern … a complex, heterogeneous and often ambiguous response to events and processes – and above all to crises – in the contemporary world'. Second, that fundamentalist believers, whether Christian or Muslim, appear inevitably to be within the purview of right-wing politics (especially, as that issue pointed out, in gender relations). Third, in broadening the debate beyond 'fundamentalism' we are in agreement that 'the politics of belief' continues to be poorly understood and inadequately contextualised. We reiterate the view that the catchall term 'fundamentalism' is unhelpful, especially where the debate in Islam is more about attitudes towards Western values and the possibility of an Islamic state, whereas in Christianity a literal acceptance of the Bible is widely accepted in many countries by mainstream believers but with vastly different degrees of political involvement, and in all cases, including African Pentecostalism, expressing some engagement with modernity. Finally, the reactive link noted in that earlier issue between social conditions and religious revival or faith-based political action remains: in discussing new converts in apartheid South Africa, or amongst those negatively affected by Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), the editors of issue 52 declared that:

> these are people whose social and economic conditions of existence are substantially formed by their participation in capital and labour markets … religious beliefs are not simply 'imposed' but are generated and developed in the process of 'appropriation and reconstruction' of social and personal existence.

We continue to be in solid agreement with this view.

## Precedents

The study of religion in Africa has generally been the domain of social anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers, theologians and (usually Christian) missionaries. At times the analysis comes from the secular academic world and at other times from scholars within a particular faith denomination, with the distinction often not easy to discern from a casual reading. Frequently this is because of the hegemonic cultural perspective of the Western academy which not only dominates the field but, as Maia Green shows in this issue, implicitly tends to regard religious forms outside the West as an inferior or exotic 'other'. The appearance of a critical political economy of religion is rare and yet its absence is surprising, given the many ways in which religion enters processes of class formation and which in its institutional forms frequently contributes to capital accumulation and competition for control over resources. Religion has also provided a major source of ideological support, both for right-wing capitalistic, and often autocratic, regimes, but at other times for local oppositional groups.

A political economy view of religion was exemplified in several of the classic works on the analysis of the emergence of capitalism in Europe, with landmarks including Weber (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*), Durkheim (*Elementary Forms of the Religious Life; The Division of Labour in Society*) and E. P. Thompson (*The Role of Methodism in The Making of the English Working Class*). The history of Europe is replete with examples of overtly religious conflict, frequently disguising an underlying contest for land, or struggles to define national or sub-national identity. In Africa there have been similar struggles, often refracted through colonial rule and postcolonial settlements. Here is Fanon, for example:

> *religion splits up the people into different spiritual communities, all of them kept up and stiffened by colonialism and its instruments … sometimes American Protestantism transplants its anti-Catholic prejudices into African soil, and keeps up tribal rivalries through religion* (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961:129).

Colonialism is only part of the picture: Cabral noted how the elite group of 'chiefs, the nobles and the religious lineages' of the Muslim Fula 'secured … very large privileges in terms of land ownership and the exploitation of labour' (Cabral, 1964 quoted in Davidson, 1969:49), a situation echoed elsewhere, perhaps most notably in Imperial Ethiopia.

## Variety of Religions in Africa

It is useful to be reminded of the extensive variety of religious beliefs and groupings that are found in the continent today, partly as a warning against ill-considered generalisation and partly to highlight their degree of social breadth and depth. We have Islam with its various sects and oppositional parties across the Mahgreb, the countries of the Sahel, great parts of the Horn, and down much of the East African coast. Pockets exist elsewhere, including the Malay descendants in the Cape (having significant regional political influence) and amongst small trading communities throughout the continent. These are a reminder of the historical role of indentured labour, merchants and traders in the introduction of faiths such as Islam and Hinduism. Interestingly, that early source of inspiration for 'negritude' and pan-Africanism, E. W. Blyden, believed, as long ago as 1888, that:

*the influence of Islam in Central and West Africa has been upon the whole, of a most salutary character. As an eliminatory and subversive agency, it has displaced or unsettled nothing as good as itself* (Blyden, 1888 cited in Mudimbe, 1988).

In most of the rest of West Africa, and in West Central, Central, most of East and Southern Africa, where variants of Christianity dominate, many of the institutions are direct descendants of 19th century western missionary activities, with all their sectarian differences, such as the dominance of the Roman Catholic church in the former French and Portuguese territories. This influence cannot be separated from that of colonial administrators, settlers and expatriate employees of trading companies, all of whom contributed to the early establishment of Christian churches in urban areas which became the churches of the colonial elite. The 20th century saw the emergence of a large number of African variants of Christianity, and of alternative imports (Zion Christian Church in South Africa or the Church of the Lord Aladurah in Nigeria), many of which syncretised elements of African traditional beliefs, in essence 'Africanising' the alien faith. These African-initiated Churches are not to be confused with Pentecostalism[3] which has grown rapidly in Africa since the 1970s and which, in its promotion of 'prosperity gospel', is in many respects a reaction against all the older churches as a means of embracing modernity without guilt (Martin, 2001:133). Although locally autonomous, there are generally links with American and European evangelicals. Meanwhile traditional healers, diviners, soothsayers, shamans and a variety of occult practitioners continue to practice widely at grassroot and informal levels, while in parts of inland West Africa the wholly indigenous faith of voodoo is even today the dominant religion, claiming about half of the population of Togo and some 30 million adherents across the region. Finally, there is the grand exception of Ethiopia where the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, dominant in the highlands, traces its roots back to the 5th century AD, but where a large Muslim population and thriving independent protestant churches have a potentially destabilising presence.

There are clear materialist reasons why a religious revival may be underway, whether in additional converts or in transfers from older churches. On the one hand, there is the economic insecurity at household level of those adversely affected by structural adjustment, and who find solidarity and emotional support through organised religion; on the other hand, there are those who through, for example, 'prosperity gospel' seek moral approval for what they have gained or what they hope to achieve. Each is the product of a persistent and aggressive globalising capitalism and its wider parameters.

## A Political Economy of Religion?

For many readers it may seem that Marx, in a few words, says all that is required for a political economy of religion:

*Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people.*

It is an 'illusory happiness' responding to 'a condition which needs illusion' (Marx, 1844). The corollary to this is that once the class oppression of capitalism is removed then the need to construct such non-materialist mythologies will disappear, a hypothesis which generated much debate in the context of post-revolution Russia by Lenin, Kautsky, Pannekoek, and even Stalin. However, in the opening sentence of

the same paragraph, Marx also declares that 'Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress'. In other words, where other means of protest are unavailable then oppressed people will often turn to religion in a form of indirect or reactionary activism. This is clearly evident in the origins of many of the African independent churches in pre-independent South Africa (not least in response to the Dutch Reformed Church Act of 1911 which barred Africans from full membership!). If the pattern of protest and reaction by the disadvantaged can be regarded as on a continuum, then at the other end we also have those marginalised groups of youths who comprised the brutal 'bush armies' of the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone and their adoption of a self-legitimising set of semi-religious beliefs, drawn from elements of traditional and Christian eschatologies. The 'sigh of the oppressed creature' does not take us far in understanding the motives of the leaders of these groups and greater insight is provided from other sources. In this issue Paul Richards draws on Durkheim's theories of totemism and the social functions of rites and rituals to answer the challenging question of whether it is belief that causes violence, or violence which creates belief in the case of the RUF in Sierra Leone, a question whose answer has wider political significance.

Engels also anticipated much later writing in his observation that the English bourgeoisie promoted religious creeds in order to defuse the revolutionary potential of 'materialism and free thought' that had affected mainland Europe in the mid-19th century. It was from this tradition that Gramsci emerged in the 1920s with a view of religion as a key component in the formation of ideological hegemony in the emergence of capitalism. The following extract summarises much that is of relevance to the relationship between religion and power in Africa today:

> (The) problem is that of preserving the ideological unity of the entire social bloc which that ideological unity serves to cement. The strength of religions … has lain, and still lies, in the fact that they feel very strongly the need for the doctrinal unity of the whole mass of the faithful and strive to ensure that the higher intellectual stratum does not get separated from the lower (Gramsci, 1971:328)

That is, religion is at the heart of the evolution of capitalist ideological supremacy. Although Gramsci's examples were drawn principally from the Roman Catholic church in Italy, their general truth was implicit in the values brought to Africa by the early Christian missionaries and settlers from all denominations across Europe and in the churches and schools which they established. The latter in particular had profound impact. On noting the essentially selfish search for individual grace in the Judeo-Christian tradition, A. M. Babu observed that:

> around these assumptions revolve the ethics, and the cultural, political and economic values which are summarized, synthesized and transmitted in bourgeois education. All of us who are 'educated' are the products (the victims?) of this education, whether we come from English- or French- or Portuguese-speaking Africa (Babu, 1981:133).

Despite the role of religion in creating ideological unity, Gramsci's subsequent comments on how slow the Catholic church had been to anticipate 'the historical process which is transforming the whole of civil society, and which contains overall a corrosive critique of all religion' (1971:328), by which he appears to mean the scientific and rational philosophical advances of the Enlightenment, has a resonance which brings to mind the situation of the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia today, and of the many mainstream mission churches elsewhere which date from

the colonial period. Yet although secular thought may be corrosive of established religion, Gramsci did not foresee that, when broadened to include political and economic change, it is these same historical processes which, in diverse ways, are also generating the impetus behind many of the new Pentecostalist and revivalist churches in Africa. The same may be said of mainstream Islam and its various reactionary breakaways. What is clear, at least amongst the Christian independent groups, is that it is not the fundamentals of the ideology of capitalism that are being challenged – but rather how the older churches are failing to provide a strong enough salvationist programme in the context of neo-liberalism, as is illustrated in the example of 'prosperity gospel' in Tanzania discussed by Hasu in this issue. Furthermore, as a new generation of politicians emerge, the more organised of these 'new' churches and breakaway sects can frequently claim members of government amongst their adherents, thereby offering paths of influence into government, and of access to patronage, as strikingly shown in the paper by Obadare on Nigeria in this issue.

The theoretical tradition of Marx and Gramsci (and of others including Weber and Durkheim) is essentially drawn from the Christian-capitalism experience of Western Europe, though in Marx's lexicon it may also apply to other modes of production. Can it be generalised to other contexts? Is it meaningful to talk of Islam, or African traditional religion, as 'the opium of the people', given all which that entails in a political economy sense, bearing in mind that the 'people' Marx was referring to were an industrial proletariat? Is there an alternative 'political economy' within other cultures? These are questions too deep to investigate in an editorial review, but we may note, if we keep with the Western materialist position, that expansion of Islam in Africa went hand in hand with hierarchical, and essentially class-based, political structures headed by Caliphs, Sultans, and Emirs, or traditional chiefs and rulers. Many of the traditional religions of Africa also have special rituals and roles for chiefs, kings and their courts, or buttress councils of elders, almost invariably composed of senior males who hold power over land and labour in their villages and clans. In all such cases, religious belief is closely intertwined with the operation of a local political hegemony in such a way as to support a privileged male elite.

Yet in addressing the political aspects of Islam through a contortion of post-modernist anti-orientalism, and what Al-Azmeh calls 're-orientalisation of orientals', it is frequently denied that Western tools of analysis have relevance. It is worth quoting Al-Azmeh's rebuttal at length:

> The 'return' to Islam is in fact to a place newly created. Its different components are generated from romantic and vitalist ideological elements in the repertoire of universally available political ideas, no matter how much the rhetoric of 'identity' and of authenticity may deny this; they are crafted out of a social material which requires for its understanding not an ethnology of pre-colonial Arcadia but a sociology of structural marginality and of elite competition, a social psychology of middle- and upper-class youthful radicals in situations of normative schizophrenia and structural closure, and last but not least, a sociology of subcultures and cults. In short the understanding of Islamic political phenomena requires the normal equipment of the social and human sciences, not their denial (Al-Azmeh, 2003).

It is evident from the sheer variety of forms of government found in states with predominantly Muslim populations – ranging from the emerging capitalist economies of Turkey, Malaysia and Indonesia, to the state dominated society of Iran under the Ayatollah Khomeini, and oligarchic Saudi Arabia – that there are obvious

parallels with European struggles between church and state, from which the emergence of the secular state formed the background to critical social analysis by Marx and other commentators. While the empirical content of the arguments of these writers may be Eurocentric, their central concern with forms of social and political power, the emergence of dominant groups and their various means (coercive and ideological) of self-protection, aggrandisement, social reproduction and sustainability have universal relevance.

In addition to endorsing or otherwise engaging with a dominant ideology, religious organisations are themselves an organic part of that same materialist base which the ideology legitimises. Taking the growth of new Christian churches in Africa, it is clear that in order to preserve both their longer term legitimacy in the population at large and their financial sustainability the most effective churches also need to build up a mass membership. Requiring a material basis, they become business organisations, purchasing property and land, employing labour, even establishing universities, a process which adds to their legitimacy in political circles and civil society at large (for example the Redeemed Church in Nigeria discussed by Obadare in this issue). When this is combined with the mushrooming of a variety of smaller evangelical and Pentecostalist churches throughout the Christian parts of the continent then the phenomenon becomes an important element of capital accumulation, with an array of small to medium sized businesses not only sucking in donations which are then distributed amongst an elite who become key players in an emergent bourgeoisie, but also affecting the local economy through the construction of church buildings, purchase of uniforms, holy artefacts, demand for taxi services and so on. In many instances, churches are the largest wholly locally financed organisations in a community, exceeding the capital of most surrounding businesses other than those of multinational corporations. They may also be partially financed from evangelical faith groups in the US and Europe which, when combined with interchange between pastors, ensures that they remain linked to a global evangelical network and its ideological apologetics. A parallel Muslim example is described in Cruise O'Brien's work on Sufi brotherhoods in Senegal, reviewed here, and in the contemporary funding of religious establishments in Africa by Saudi and Gulf patrons.

Each country has its own specificity deriving from its colonial determinants, its pre-colonial history and its post-colonial economic and political patterns of social control. The Pentecostalist churches appear to be at their strongest in the most stable societies, where the environment for an emerging bourgeoisie is conducive and which encourages those who are persuaded by the promises of 'prosperity gospel'. Martin (2002) has also pointed out that organisationally they are extremely diffuse, that they have parallels with the rise of Methodism in England where there were no corporate political ambitions, and that they consist of an extensive variety of independent charismatically led groups where the primary reason for membership is personal salvation hopefully accompanied by material reward. On the other hand, E. P. Thompson reminds us of the role of religious non-conformity in the formation of the working class in Britain, from which many members of the early Labour Party and Trades Unions were drawn, though this must be qualified by Weber's thesis that such groups both crystallised bourgeois ambitions and allowed them a spiritual hold over the workers – enjoining them to live frugally and look for rewards in the next life (again with some parallels in Hasu's paper in this issue). A class analysis of new Christian religious groups in Africa may reveal their importance in the emergence of a distinctly bourgeois politics (see papers on

Tanzania and Nigeria in this issue), and although the different history of Islamic opposition makes a class analysis less straightforward, the compromises which the Muslim Brotherhood have had to make to gain influence in Egypt and Sudan, as shown by Zahid and Medley in this issue, are revealing of incipient class identities. Thus in any attempt to understand the role of religion in support of or in resistance to social change, it cannot in itself be an irreducible explanatory variable. It is either acting as a medium or idiom through which other social, economic and political actors have chosen to operate or it is a belief like others which are derived from social conditions and ambitions.

Finally, it is important to remember that in addition to the formal organised religions and their various sects there continues throughout the continent a pervasive belief across all social classes in some form or another of traditional religion. This is associated with a vast unrecorded informal economy of payments to soothsayers, diviners, faith healers, shamans, and practitioners of magic and witchcraft. These too, have been adjusting their patterns of organisation in response to social and economic change (Moore & Sanders, 2001), and to the impact on the ground of structural adjustment, leading to an expansion of what has been termed–'occult economies' (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1999) often involving illicit trade in body parts. Here we have at its most everyday human interactive level examples of the commodification of belief in the role of primitive accumulation. This may be direct or indirect, as Caroline Ifeka shows in this issue, where one response to externally or internally induced disruption of economic security is legitimised socially in terms of the fetishisation of guns and occult beliefs. The outcome, especially amongst disaffected and unemployed youth in environments like the Niger delta, is often violent, raising links with Richard's paper on the RUF and also the more general issue of the relationship between religion and violent conflict, to which we now turn.

## Religion & Conflict

Is there a link between the observations that across Africa religious belief is widespread, almost universal, and that many parts of the continent have been, and continue to be, marked by violent internal conflict since independence regardless of whether the setting is Christian, Muslim or animist? Can religion itself, in either institutional or ideological form, be a primary causal factor or is it only ever part of a complex mix of socially constructed ingredients which at particular conjunctures break out into civil conflict? There is no doubt that there are forms of belief which directly prompt violent behaviour which can lead to the destabilisation of secular states. Millenarian Christians, for instance, who believe that the second coming of Christ will follow an apocalyptic war between believers and non-believers, centred in the Middle East, and requiring the conversion of Jews, provides an alarming example. Believers then see themselves as instructed by God to accelerate the coming of this apocalypse, or Armageddon, by political means. Likewise, Islamists will frequently claim that only a 'jihad of the sword' will bring an Islamic state, using (as Christians do with the Bible) the Qur'an selectively to support their views. Finally, as already mentioned, there are the numerous smaller groups such as the LRA (and corresponding militias in Sierra Leone and Liberia) where a religious or magical immunity is believed by the perpetrators of violence to protect them from violence in return. There is also a more widely experienced fear of witchcraft, arising from belief in the manipulation of supernatural powers, which can lead to intermittent upsurges of witch hunts and the frequently controversial suppression by state authorities at local or national level.

In Africa the majority of conflicts have occurred within, rather than between, states, and the religious dimension is often expressed through differences between sects or denominations within a major faith, and only seldom between faiths (which is one reason, amongst many, why the 'clash of civilizations' arguments of Huntington oversimplify the nature of religious difference). Obvious examples of the former have been in Algeria, Sudan and Somalia, or in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa (where the Dutch Reformed Church and South African Council of Churches were on opposing sides). Conversely, different faiths have been on opposing sides in Sudan again and in the Biafran war where the Christian Igbos felt themselves to be under assault from the Islamic North (Kastfelt, 2005:3-4). In some conflicts the religious element has been indirect, as in Rwanda and Burundi where, first, Catholic missions were instrumental in defining 'tribal' differences between Tutsi and Hutu and in promoting the elevation of Tutsi to positions of authority during the colonial period, and second, in the subsequent inaction of church leaders during the slaughter of the 1990s which was construed as approval by Hutu killers (Longman, 2005). The complexity of the links between religion and conflict are exposed in the recent history of Southern Sudan where it has been argued that at the same time that SPLA militarism was a secularising force, there was also an acceleration in conversion to Christianity (though in multifarious sects) amongst the southern population at large. This can be seen as an important element in defining an oppositional local identity in the face of the Islamic central government (Hutchinson, 2005; Wheeler, 2005 – both in Kastfelt, reviewed in this issue). In these various ways religion can provide a vocabulary or discursive way whereby people not only make sense of conflicts that are not usually generated by differences in belief but add an interpretation that may fuel the conflict.

The complexity of the links between religion and violence is also highlighted by recent experience in Somalia, where the establishment of control over Mogadishu by the forces of the United Islamic Courts (UIC) in June 2006 appeared to have introduced an element of stability in that city. What is interesting here is both the US involvement behind the scenes in support of the 'warlord' faction which was defeated, but also how, as a process, the originally clan-based polity of Somalia has become transformed into a faith-based one with *shari'a* at its centre. The earlier establishment of *shari'a* courts in Mogadishu was usually reported in the West as Islamic opportunism arising out of the conflict and civil disorder, and indeed as being part of that disorder in Western eyes, thus way confirming an association between Islam and violence. But another interpretation is that the gradual spread of the Islamic courts was the result of community pressure to fill a constitutional vacuum, using coercive means only where necessary. The degree to which such local pressures prevail, in contrast to a more aggressive Islamism seeking to reject both secularism and US-sponsored 'westernisation', will be found in the ease with which compromise is reached between the UIC and the Western-supported Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in forming some sort of national coalition government (unresolved at time of going to press). The Somali case also provides an example of how 'the pot can be stirred' by the political interests of neighbouring states, producing a goulash in which the religious ingredient takes on a sharper focus. The complex situation of Somalia is explored further in the Briefings section of this issue in an extract from a recent report by the International Crisis Group (see also Samatar in issue 109).

There can be little doubt that the prolonged conflict between the Muslim north and Christian south of Sudan, together with central in-fighting between Islamists and

secularists, has contributed substantially to the economic neglect of other communities such as the Beja in Eastern Sudan (see Pantuliano in this issue and John Young in No. 109). The little known unrest in the east is again an example of conflict within a wholly Muslim community, and of the inability of such a major institutionalised faith to prevent it.

## The Secular State

Secularism may be defined as:

> *a refusal to believe that nature and history are governed by external, supernatural forces and a refusal to be guided by religion in political, social, educational, moral, economic and other matters* (Yared, 2002:9)

It follows that a secular state is one in which religious belief and religious organisations have no constitutional presence, influence or affiliation – such that the state is able to guarantee freedom of thought, speech and peaceful civil activity to all its citizens without prejudice. Arguments for the constitutional separation of church and state thus rest on distancing state policy from all religious groups, and not only the fanatic and disaffected. In the west this conflict was largely resolved in the prolonged aftermath of the Reformation, with variants of the secular state model which had developed by the middle of the 20th century incorporated into the newly emerging post-colonial states of Africa. It is important to recognise that the formal separation of faith and state is not always directly challenged by Muslims: both the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (particularly under the 'New Guard') and the various 'brotherhoods' in Senegal have engaged with the state in pursuit of resources for their own programmes of social welfare and economic development (see Madeley and Zahid, and review of O'Brien by Bujra, in this issue). Two major threats continue, however.

One is in those predominantly Muslim states where the demands of Islamists for their interpretation of *shari'a* law to prevail throughout state and governmental activities is a clear rejection of secularism. The outcome, in countries like Algeria, Tunisia, Sudan, Somalia, Senegal and areas such as Northern Nigeria, depends on the strength of complex alliances between traditionalists wary of Westernisation and younger members of extremist groups. We have already referred to Al-Azmeh's concept of the 're-orientalisation of orientals' in respect to the second of these. With regard to the conservatism of established Islam and its resistance to a wider secularism we can readily see parallels in the history of the medieval church in Europe. Lest this be dismissed as culturally and historically irrelevant, let us quote Fu'ad Zakariya:

> *The Middle Ages are not only a period in time but they are also a state of mind, capable of re-emerging in many societies and at different times … Many characteristics of this state of mind are present in our contemporary Islamic societies. This means that the reasons which pushed Europe in the direction of secularism are cropping up in our present Islamic world, and it means too that the widespread idea that secularism is the result of specifically European conditions in a certain stage of its development is baseless* (Zakariya, 1989).

Indeed, the development of secularism in Europe had parallels in Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt which prompted intense debate, especially at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi, 'Abd al-Raziq, Taha Hussein and others supported the idea of a secular state on the grounds that Islam is a

religion and not a political system (Yared, 2002). In her 1928 book *Sufur wa al-Hijab* (*Unveiling and Veiling*) Nazira Zayn al-Din wrote that:

> *religion has the power given it by God, and the world has the power given it by man, and both the spiritual and the temporal cooperate for what is right and good, but each is independent of the other* (cited in Yared, 2002:40).

The debate continues amongst more recent writers such as Muhammed Sa'id al-'Ashmawi (1987) and Abdullah Ahmed An-Na'im (1990).

In contemporary Northern Nigeria we have examples of campaigns to desecularise existing constitutions by using state assemblies to establish subsidiary courts based on *shari'a* law. In other instances, the initial formation of a new constitution can be seriously affected by religious lobbying (e.g. Sudan after 1989). This pattern is not confined to Islam The present state constitution of Israel is the result of a compromise between secular Zionists and Ultra-Orthodox Jews who retained influence over the rights of women, marriage, schools, and the view that Israel is a holy land uniquely given to Jews by God, with all the implications for national boundaries and settlements that are so familiar today. These sorts of dangers need to be anticipated in those African countries where a new constitution will have to be negotiated after present conflicts are resolved: Somalia, DR Congo, Western Sahara, Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire. In all such cases the political undercurrents are concisely summarised by Zubaida in reference to *shari'a:*

> *The quest for the shari'a is multifaceted: social protesters seek justice from corrupt regimes in its terms, clerics seek to restore their authority by imposing it, conservatives seek patriarchal virtues in its commandments, nationalists see it as a marker of authenticity and identity, and those same corrupt rulers seek legitimacy in adopting it. In practice it is an ideological project which has highly variable manifestations in the politics and legal systems of different countries …* (Zubaida, 2003:6)

These variations are evident in the contrasting ways in which the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and NIF in Sudan have retained support, where the former has had a stronger mass base as a result of its social programme (see Zahid and Medley in this issue). This, in some respects, also lies behind the success of Liberation Theology within the Roman Catholic church in Latin America, with social concerns at the heart of its activities, and although it is less in evidence in Africa there have been some similarities in Kenya and Nigeria (see extracts from Odion-Akhaine in Briefings).

This leads to the second of the two threats mentioned above where, even under a secular constitution, there are sufficiently large numbers of extreme believers in a given community to elect, or otherwise bring to power, a government or head of state who questions secularism and where other constitutional checks and balances are compromised–by neo-patrimonialism. The US under Bush comes to mind, and the way 'Christian Right' views on gay rights, abortion, female priests, and definitions of the family have in recent years influenced US domestic and foreign policy. More critically for global stability is the influence of these same religious bodies on American Middle East policy (and its knock-on effects in North Africa and the Horn) where belief in 'end-time theology', Armaggedon and the second coming of Christ have made the US Christian Right in many respects a more influential pro-Israel lobby than Jewish Zionists. In this case is it really belief that is the driving force? Or is it a set of beliefs that are being piggy-backed by the same old military-industrial complex that drove US foreign policy during the Cold War?

In Africa such overt examples of religious lobbying have been confined mainly to Islamic constituencies, most notably in the electoral successes of the NIF in 1980s Sudan (discussed by Zahid and Medley in this issue). There have also been numerous informal cases where Christian adherents have had significant influence on government leadership despite a nominally secular state (see Obadare on Nigeria in this issue, and past examples which have included the Dutch Reformed Church in apartheid South Africa and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Haile Selassie's Ethiopia). This is not to gainsay the frequent progressive oppositional role which religion can play (individual clerics in Nigeria; the mainstream churches in Kenya) in challenging local inequality and corruption; it is rather to emphasise that the secularism of the secular state cannot be taken for granted. The example of the US also illustrates the fallacy of the so-called 'secularisation thesis' (Durkheim) in which religious belief and organised faith movements are expected to diminish as economic growth (or 'modernisation') proceeds. Across Africa religious activity expressed as membership of churches and mosques appears to be at universally high levels quite regardless of divergent economic growth rates and standards of living. The potential, therefore, for a regime to adopt religious clothing in order to legitimise its programmes (and repressions) or for a particular faith group to hijack government leaders, is an ever-present threat to the secular position of the state.

The presence of a secular state, in itself, is also no guarantee that religious divisions within civil society cannot be destabilising, as witnessed in the examples of Northern Ireland in the UK or in Algeria, Nigeria and Tunisia where the distributive policies of the state have been so highly inequitable (either in fact or perception) with regard to marginalised communities and ethnic groups that they provide fertile ground for recruitment to extremist oppositional movements claiming a faith-based authority. The state may also respond by defining the causes of unrest as religious extremism, and hence the problem of the instigators, rather than socioeconomic and the problem of the government in power. Repression, such as that of the Derg in Ethiopia or the apartheid state in South Africa – both at least nominally secular – had the effect of turning people towards religion, paradoxically creating openings for the subsequent expansion of Pentecostalist and other charismatic churches.

## Conclusion

In summary, religion in Africa is like the spiritual world which it claims to represent. It is ubiquitous and immanent; it is both amorphous and specific; it can be all things to all people; it contains both good and evil; and, like the air we breathe, it is so commonplace throughout all levels of society that we – especially political economists and political analysts – often fail to notice it and underestimate its significance. Yet, as belief, it is the motivator of all kinds of acts, the ex post justifier of others and a major contributor to the construction of conservative ideologies. In its many institutional forms it carries, as a social creation, the ambitions and self-preservative characteristics of all institutions; it often accrues wealth and serves as a conduit into government for its leaders. It is prone to schism and conflict as a consequence of the exclusive world views constructed by its ideologues. And while the search for meaning in life is a common human characteristic, the answers are also those of human thought which cannot be divorced from our experiences as social beings. The very fact that Western Christianity today is based upon a formulaic creed that dates from a gathering of bishops in Nicaea in 325AD, which was followed by major schisms, demonstrates how even the largest faith systems are at heart social constructions and should be analysed as such. It is precisely for this

reason that the distinction between the secular and religious takes on political significance and where the need for a secular state to safeguard universal freedom of thought, speech and lifestyle becomes essential.

All the above characteristics of religion are widely manifested across Africa, in both peace and conflict, and although it is impossible to do more than touch on aspects of their political meaning and significance in a single journal issue, the papers, briefings and reviews which follow do provide a cross section which represents, particularly in Nigeria, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Egypt, Somalia and Ethiopia the range of experience and problematic that is relevant to the wider political economy of religion in Africa. We begin with an important paper by Maia Green on the problems of sociological, anthropological (and by association, political and economic) analysis of religion in Africa by the largely Western academy, in a discussion which alerts us to the need for continued, critical reflection on method and interpretation. The two papers by Obadare and by Hasu address different aspects of recent Pentecostalism, the former in its capacity to serve as a high level networking facility for the political elite in Nigeria, and the latter in highlighting the links between 'prosperity gospel' and the creation of an ideology which condones primitive capitalist accumulation, with the emotive use of biblical imagery. These take place mainly in stable societies. Paul Richards, in a development of his previous work, applies a Durkheimian approach to an understanding of those elements of religious belief and practice which appear to hold together youth rebel groups (such as the RUF in Sierra Leone) which thrive in highly unstable political environments, while Caroline Ifeka draws our attention to the intricate connections (what she terms a 'double articulation') between the challenge to state authority by disaffected youth militias and their appropriation of traditional spirit beliefs to provide legitimacy, again in Nigeria though not untypical of West Africa as a whole. Religiously based political parties tend to be more common in Islamic than in Christian societies but Zahid and Medley show, with examples of the Muslim Brotherhood from Egypt and Sudan, that splits often appear between those faithful to the ideology and those who favour pragmatic compromise, both locally and internationally (with the West).

The penultimate article is by Pantuliano on the conflict in eastern Sudan. The regional and international dimensions of this conflict were covered by John Young in issue 109 but its internal dimensions, rooted in the political economy of marginalisation, and prospects for peace, are explored here. In the Briefings section we include important papers on the recent political changes in Somalia which can only be indicative of an ongoing crisis at the time of going to press, but which will be followed in subsequent issues. Other Briefings include humanism in Africa, liberation theology in Nigeria, and are followed by a number of book reviews on the impact of religion in Africa.

This Editorial opened with a prologue on the international context of a contemporary world in which the political and economic ambitions of major Western powers are disguised as a 'clash of civilisations' where the agenda is increasingly being driven by extremist believers on each side. The government and a majority of the population of the US believe that their country has the economic and military power not only to contain this global conflict in the medium term but ultimately to come out as winner, a belief which many, including George W. Bush, appear to accept as divinely ordained. As we have seen, these international fractures affect Africa in many ways: through movement of Islamic militants across boundaries from the Middle East, Christian evangelical missions from the US, the readily available

propaganda from each side on the internet, and the chain of US military bases sited strategically across Africa. In the meantime, in the vast majority of villages, towns and cities across the African continent, thousands of ordinary people attend a variety of churches and sects with conscientious regularity and faithfulness, but in a context of social and economic change which is generating new formations of class and identity. What this issue of the Review has done is to provide a snapshot of some key aspects of this process. There are significant gaps which time and space have prevented us from filling, such as the links between religion, civil society and the state in South Africa, an assessment of the role of Catholicism in Lusophone Africa, a measure of the real impact of foreign evangelising, and analysis of the most likely longer term outcomes in currently unstable situations like Sudan, Somalia and DR Congo. In ROAPE we aim to stand back and take the longer, secular, view, based on a radical critical analysis focusing on the central issues of political praxis, class, social conflict, economic contestation and exploitation, in what are often volatile historical processes. We shall continue to cast a critical eye in future issues of the Review on how religious beliefs impinge on and are manipulated by these social variables. We invite others of like mind to contribute to our cumulative understanding of the political ramifications in Africa of the ubiquitous, ambiguous and frequently inharmonious phenomenon of religious belief.

## Endnotes

1. The usual conventions regarding capital letters when referring to faith groups and sects are have been adopted, though not without reservation.

2. Most analysts and casual observers seem to take for granted this upsurge in religious adherence and its salience – but there is scant firm evidence. Paradoxically, one much cited recent text (Ellis & Ter Haar, 2004 – reviewed in this issue) that starts by proclaiming 'the blooming of religious movements' as a remarkable feature of the late 20th century, intriguingly makes a passing admission that '… recent research suggests that more Africans are indifferent to religion today than in the past' – offering two case study citations in support, but then never mentioning that 'fact' again! Perhaps both tendencies are occurring.

3. Pentecostalism refers to the Christian revivalist movement where adherents believe the 'Gifts of the Holy Spirit' are directly accessible to all as personal spiritual experience, usually through baptism and glossolalia. It is based on the biblical report that on the Jewish day of Pentecost (or harvest) 'suddenly there was a noise from the sky which sounded like a strong wind … Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire which spread out and touched each person there. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak' (Christian Bible, Acts 2,2).

The Pentecostal movement dates essentially from the early years of the 20th century in the US, has roots in Methodism, and has had considerable appeal to black Americans, before it spread to Africa and elsewhere, especially from the 1970s.

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# Confronting Categorical Assumptions About the Power of Religion in Africa

*Maia Green*

**This article examines the place of religion in social science accounts of Africa, particularly as they relate to politics and culture. It explores the significance of representational continuities across the twentieth century and across disciplines which present African social life as religiously determined, and considers the political implications of African exceptionalism as a mode of analysis and policy rationale. Finally, the article considers some directions of institutional change in southern Tanzania and the consequences for understanding religion.**

Religion and Africa are paired in the representational armouries of the social sciences, a pairing often proposed uncritically and without adequate reflection. This essay considers some of the reasons why religion and culture are commonly invoked to explain other social phenomena in African studies, and explores some of the repercussions of this kind of analysis. In arguing for an equivalence in analytical approaches to politics and culture within and outside Africa I call for greater sensitivity to the political consequences of exceptionalism and for an increased commitment to sociological approaches which seeks first to interrogate the categories of social organisation locally, rather than assume them. Finally, some directions of categorical change in Tanzania, and the implications for religion, are explored.

## Privileging Religion

Religion and religious thought occupy a special place in African studies. This privileging is not confined to disciplines dealing explicitly with religious issues, such as religious studies or theology. Accounts of life in Africa from the perspectives of political science, sociology and anthropology give consistent prominence to religion as both cultural practice and as a determinant of social action. This privileging is most recently exemplified in *Worlds of Power*, a book which claims to explain the unique role of religion in African politics and society, and hence to account for the particular attributes affecting African political and economic orders. Ellis and Ter Haar provide an overview of the place of religious ideas in popular and elite cultures across the continent. In the absence of an established media tradition, and where citizens rely on *radio trottoir*, the endless recycling of rumour and street gossip for their political information, these authors confidently assert that 'it is largely through religious ideas that Africans think about the world today' (Ellis & Ter Haar, 2004:2).

Such claims are not restricted to the writings of those keen to maintain that understanding political action in Africa necessitates a special kind of analysis. A

broad range of disciplinary positions have contributed to the representation of the African continent as a location and social context where religion not only matters more than in other places, but that the content of its mattering is more entrenched, more meaningful, more enmeshed in cultural practice than virtually anywhere else in the world. Indeed, assertions of an essentialising 'African spirituality' as culture continue to be a taken-for-granted aspect of the ways in which Africa is represented in Western discourses about it, representations doubtless influenced genealogically by celebratory histories of exploration and colonial mission (Pels, 1998; Mudimbe, 1988). Such representations underlie media accounts in the United Kingdom of the religious practices of immigrants from African countries, consistently emphasising dealings with spirits and witches at the expense of the more mundane forms of Christian or Islamic worship practiced by the majority. A similar preoccupation with the power of what is represented as 'African culture' is found in the accounts in the media and in medical sociology of what are claimed to be the uniquely cultural (hence behavioural) determinants on that continent of the HIV pandemic (Epstein & Packard, 1991).

Despite adherence to constructivism as a dominant theoretical frame within the social sciences and the impact of postcolonial studies, academic writing on Africa has done remarkably little to confront accepted truisms about the assumed place of religion in the political and social life of peoples on the continent. This situation is accentuated by the simultaneous representation of Africa religiously within Africa itself through proliferating media, including popular fiction, videos and religious tracts, which in turn become the basis of academic scholarship about Africa (e.g. Meyer, 2004; Bastian, 2001, 2003; Ellis & Ter Haar, 2004:41). Much work in my discipline of anthropology, my own included, has focused on witchcraft, occult economies and religious movements as comprising the analytical frame through which broader economic and social transformations can be apprehended (1994; 1997; 2003; 2005a,b).[1] In political science, two highly influential books have prioritised a largely untheorised concept of culture as the key explanatory variable in determining political behaviours and outcomes across the continent (Chabal & Daloz, 2006; Bayart, 1993). Given the prominence of cultural explanations within scholarship on and about Africa, it is not surprising then that Ellis and Ter Haar prioritise religion as the determinant of culture and politics across contemporary Africa, not only arguing that religion has a special place in African societies but that politics in Africa and, by extension, social practice can only be apprehended through the lens of religiously populated spiritual worlds (2004:23).

While such accounts are important in sensitising us to the salience of religion across diverse social settings, the privileging of religion as culture and of culture as an analytical tool actually constrains the range of analytical possibilities that could be brought to bear on particular social phenomena. Religion must be apprehended as a social and analytical category, the constitution of which, by the analyst as much as by the society in question, requires sociological explanation (Asad, 2003). The universalising and exoticising effects of these culturalist accounts of religion mask important differences in the range and effect of religious organisations and practices across different countries and communities. And, in directing focus on extreme religious forms which engage adherents within apparently totalising symbolic systems, such approaches may blind us to other significant social changes ongoing across the continent. These include the social effects of increased inequality, increased mobility, migration and economic transformation. Granted, these trans-formations have religious manifestations, as in the extent to which forms of religious

participation come to stand for, and accentuate, social differentiation. However, the apparently religious dimension of social change across the continent does not mean that such changes are religiously motivated, or that 'religion' as a category can explain them. It means rather that institutional and categorical separations between different dimensions of the same processes do not apply in the ways conforming to the analytical expectations of Western social science. These categorisations into separate domains corresponding to separate institutions are in any case misleading. Political power is nowhere confined to political institutions, economic activities everywhere transcend the narrow confines of what is defined as the economy. Delimiting the religious and isolating religious institutions is equally problematic. Like the other categories through which we think to understand the world economy, family and society – the 'religious' must be grasped as a category of analysis and practice which has origins in the political struggles around delimiting the power of certain institutions (Polanyi, 2001; Asad, 1993; Mitchell, 2002).

## Analytical Assymetry

The contemporary privileging of religion within the social science imagination of Africa reiterates the position of the continent as object of the missionary and colonial gaze. Culture and religion, representational antitheses of the rational and scientific, were utilised not only as points of differentiation between Western coloniser and colonised Other (Said, 1991; Scott, 2003). They provided a convenient rationale for Western involvement in African economic, political and social development, an involvement informed by an ideology of conversion, albeit conversion up to a point. Of course, missionary orders and colonial regimes did not share perspectives on the content of the new cultural orders to which colonial peoples should be subjected. Nor did they agree on the importance or otherwise of what were defined as religious or cultural values (e. g. Beidelman, 1982). British colonial rule, informed by Lord Lugard's principle of the Dual Mandate (indirect rule), claimed to valorise local cultural forms of organisation and leadership as the institutional building blocks of rural governance. A firm boundary was established against local cultural content which was viewed as inimical to the aspirations of colonial development, as were some religious aspects of missionary Christianity. Consequently, British colonial policy actively promoted the expansion of Western style education but remained critical of missionary influence where this was seen to impact on indigenous traditions of social organisation, particularly around control over young people and marriage (Mudimbe, 1988:20; Green, 2003:38-42). Christian missions, in turn, sought to select out those elements of cultural practice that seemed most closely to correspond to Western categories of religion in order to prohibit, condemn and replace them, often leaving more or less intact indigenous cultural and organisational forms (Bloch, 1986:26; Bond, 1987).

Narratives of conversion suited the purpose of colonial mission, acknowledging on the one hand the categorical difference between missionary and convert, coloniser and colonised and, on the other, the ultimate potential for this difference to be transcended. Conversion as a cultural process of transformation permitted the recognition of an equal and common humanity, but as a deferred promise. The category of convert continues to bear reference to a previous status and thus to the differentiation of the past (Thomas, 1994). As long as novel Christianity was brought into confrontation with indigenous cultural forms, and hence as long as conversion focused on separating out the religious, the transformative potential of conversion

as an equalisation strategy was restricted. Colonial narratives of development were similarly premised on an idea of deferred equality. Equality as an end point of conversion narratives, secular or otherwise, is compromised, in the sense that understandings of Africa remain stubbornly constituted within Western discourse as essentially Other. Africa remains defined by its propensity to the cultural determination of social practice, much of this pathological, with negative social, economic and political consequences. Conversion out of Otherness remains a possibility within this strand of contemporary discourse but, because of the essential power of culture, only up to a point. The report of the Africa Commission emphasises the significance of unique cultural forms in African societies, and the importance of uniquely cultural values, which would render alien organisational forms inappropriate impositions on African communities (2005).

While acknowledging the politics of inequality and colonial history which renders the issue of imposed forms problematic, there is something of a double bind to this politics of difference which further embeds the principle of unequal treatment in relation to Africa, legitimated through its claims to recognition as a special case. This principle of difference not only determines the ways in which social development policy in Africa is designed and implemented; for example, the constitution of social welfare policies with an emphasis on community mechanisms, or the utilisation of traditional birth attendants as weapons in the fight against maternal mortality, as opposed to greater investment in formal sector maternity services or public assistance programmes.[2] It informs the ways in which what is culturally claimed as 'traditional' medicine is politically valorised in many countries as equivalent to allopathic medicine (Ashforth, 2005:137). The disappointing outcomes of these kinds of approaches to health and social development strongly suggest that there are profound practical limits to the efficacy of special treatment, particularly where this relies on claims to cultural suitability rather than the design of effective institutions and policies.

The discourse of cultural difference as essentially African is not confined to colonial and development representation of African possibilities and limitations, nor to the culturalist politics of African post-nationalist alternatives (Ashforth, 2005:149-153). It is perpetuated by academic discourses about Africa, particularly in the social sciences which consistently interpret African social phenomena in terms other than those accorded equivalent phenomena in Euro American or 'international' settings (Green & Mesaki, 2005). The anthropologist Bruno Latour has referred to this process of analytical displacement as the imposition of asymmetry, whereby substantially different analytical standards are applied to the same phenomena depending on where these phenomena are situated (1990:20). This situation is not geographical or cultural, although it is often represented as such, but is actually constituted within Euro American classificatory systems and hence social ordering as deterministic of the assumed break between those societies categorised as 'modern' and those which are deemed not to merit this categorisation. The result is an inequitable analysis, where systems and practices which are fundamentally incomparable are brought into an unfavourable comparison (1993:91-104). An instance of this kind of approach is the well known paper by the anthropologist Robin Horton on 'African Traditional Thought and Western Science' (1967a, b). Horton's paper claims to compare equivalent 'systems of thought' in order to demonstrate certain similarities between them. Horton's argument is that 'Western' science and African 'traditional' – that is religious – cultures are equivalents as theoretical systems which are the domain of specialists. In this sense what Horton

terms 'African traditional thought' is 'scientific' because its objectives are concerned with what he represents as the core values of Science, that is the search for explanation and prediction of phenomena within the natural world (1967b:161). There are strict limits to this equivalence. Traditional thought may be scientific in one sense, but its explanatory potential is limited if confined within what Horton calls 'closed' systems, epistemological echo chambers in which ideas are neither subject to falsification nor free to make new associations. Western science as a system of knowledge based on the experimental method enables its progression into newer, yet decreasingly stable, realms of truth. African traditional thought remains stuck temporally and conceptually within the same, that is Other, paradigm. Equivalence up to a point.[3]

Social scientific accounts of 'scientific' cultures, actually the cultural practice of scientists, challenge this characterisation of 'Western' science (Latour & Woolgar, 1987; Law, 1994). Latour's analysis enables us to perceive that what Horton's article actually achieves is to compare two distinct institutional traditions of authoritative knowledge construction, both legitimated by powerful institutional complexes and both restricted to particular social contexts and personnel. African 'traditional thought' is not in actuality a mode of thinking, any more than laboratory science in Euro America is equivalent to popular rationality. A more balanced comparison between Africa and elsewhere would have been to take two equivalent systems, comparing, say, religious ideology in European tradition with the ideologies of certain religious specialists within an African one; or cross-cultural systems of divination like mediumship. A comparison of this sort would not only reveal similarities of structure and content. It would reframe discussions about purported difference within a new political context in which the conditions of sameness or equivalence become not merely possibilities but the springboard for analysis.

Studies by anthropologists, and others, of cults and sects, extreme cultural practices around witchcraft and the occult, and the tendency of some analysts to perceive political intentions in the symbolic meanings of ritual practices performed by some people in Africa has perpetuated the notion that the religious is the world for the majority of African citizens. Whether reduced to religion, culture or pathology, African political and economic situations become seemingly and authoritatively explicable, while Africa spins out of control on an axis of Otherness pushed into ever faster orbit by the contributions of Western claims to expertise. Here religion as explanation serves a dual purpose. In presenting an analytical category as explanation it renders what is apparently happening in Africa inexplicable sociologically. Society itself becomes comprehensible only in religious terms. Moreover, in asserting the redundancy of social analysis religion is sacralized, in the Durkheimian sense of the sacred, as set apart (Durkheim, 1995:44) with important consequences. As with other categorisations within extant Western discourses of social ordering, for example the private, the 'result is to enclave certain matters in specialised discursive arenas and thereby to shield them from broadly based debate and contestation' (Fraser, 1995:133).

## The Power of Religion

Just as religious ideologies sacralise the practices they promote, religion as an analytical category is accorded power in setting apart from the religious. This is not only because of the conflation of religion with thought, which we have already considered, but also because of entrenched ideas about African spirituality and

community, ideas which have been perpetuated by social science studies of religion and ritual which have tended towards the theological. Such studies have succeeded in making sense of the complex cosmological representations and ritual practices which inform religious sociality in Africa. At the same time, they have presented African social worlds as situated within totalising cosmologies and in which all social relations are not merely informed but determined by cosmological power. From books such as Placide Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy* (1959) through Godfrey Leinhardt's *Divinity and Experience among the Dink*a (1961) to *Worlds of Power* (2004), the mode of being human in African society is presented as not merely religious, but ontologically so. It is this, perhaps, combined with the search for theological equivalence, which renders the idiom of conversion persistent within academic accounts of religious transformation on the continent, in which effects and drivers of transition are once again understood in primarily religious terms.[4] Conversion to world religions, Islam or Christianity, is explained in terms of the appeal of ideas and the functional utility of world views permitting adaptation to incorporation within global social relations. The tenacity of cosmological accounts of social transformation in Africa in religious terms is explicable not so much because it is convincing, but because it speaks to those who already share to some extent its convictions about religious power and African culture. The concept of conversion itself, lest we forget, is derived from images of miraculous transformation in Protestant evangelical thinking (Weber 1985:143). Even where power differentials are acknowledged as in the case of Christianity, the catechist/teacher and the class of pliant children desiring access to the word is often for the practical purpose of reading and writing rather than salvation (Carmody, 1988); not only is conversion assumed to have occurred, its implications are claimed as cognitive. Adoption of missionary Christianity in southern African Tswana communities in the nineteenth century amounted to, in the words of the anthropologists John and Jean Comaroff, a 'colonization of consciousness' (1989).

This idealisation of religion as the driving force in social transformation on the continent has effects in other fields. It is evident in current initiatives promoted by international development agencies and the governments which finance them to foster 'faith based organisations' in sub-Saharan Africa. Of course, this drive to incorporate religion is also part and parcel of the armoury invoked to fight what is referred to as the 'war on terror' and the assumed role of religious organisations in promoting fundamentalism. The notion that there are organisations based primarily on faith is part of the same strand of idealist thinking, thinking which is blind to recognition of the other attributes of all human organisations, however categorised, including resources, leadership, political significance, power structures. It was the brute materiality of Christian power combined with political relations with colonial regimes which gave missionary Christianity an initial foothold in much of Africa – a foothold consolidated through the policies of colonial governments which gave missionary churches considerable control over education and health services (e.g. Green, 2003; Comaroff & Comaroff, 1992; Vaughan, 1991).

The appeal of Pentecostal and Evangelical Christianities and some of the more extreme cults derived from them is equally grounded as much in materiality as the power of ideas. Engagement with these forms of Christianity may be more visible now than previously, but it is a novel phenomenon. The mass popularity of these movements was attracting the attention of anthropologists and other commentators in the 1960s (e.g. Sundkler, 1976, 2004). Early innovative social manifestations of spirit-inspired Christianity, albeit derived from Catholicism, appeared in the 1950s,

as in the charismatic *Jamaa* movement of Zaire, a movement in part inspired by the theological writings of Placide Tempels, a Catholic priest and scholar of African religion (Fabian, 1971; De Craemer, 1977). Such movements then, as now, might have dealt with spirit but, like many forms of Christianity, they were and are structured through and around materiality.[5] This takes the form of experiences as in embodied healing through possession (the word made flesh), as well as through intense personal relationships with things, including biblical texts and tracts, uniforms and buildings (Green, 1996; Luedke, 2003; Hoehler-Fatton, 1996).

Related arguments concerning the centrality of experiences and institutions can be proposed to account for at least some of the tenacity associated with beliefs in the powers of witchcraft and associated practices and, by extension, for the continued institutionalisation of witchcraft in much of Africa. As the anthropologist Mary Douglas has shown, witchcraft beliefs do not simply exist in an ether of ideas which populations somehow believe because they believe them. For ideas about witchcraft to have social force, and hence social significance, they need to be embedded within the social institutions which support them. Ideas about witchcraft depend for their institutionalisation on the social consequences of accusations for those alleged to be witches or to practice witchcraft. In medieval Europe, the social traction of witchcraft gradually eroded once it become disarticulated from systems of ecclesiastical justice (Douglas, 1991 ). My own work in Tanzania has shown how the institutionalisation of witchcraft suppression practices necessarily contributes to the institutionalisation of witchcraft, just as academic writing on witchcraft has contributed to expectations about its normativity in African social settings (Green, 2005).

## Limits to Totalisation

Asymmetry, in Latour's sense, can be said to characterise academic and popular representations of religion in Africa. Social phenomena are reduced to religion as a means of interpretation with interpretation itself and the search for meaning becoming explanations for African social forms. The kinds of analyses of social institutions and politics which would pertain in other settings are not applied. The result is a swathe of studies privileging the religious as explanation for politics, culture and ideology in Africa today, and numerous studies of religious practices as coded commentaries on political and economic transformations. These accounts rarely consider why the religious should be accorded such importance for adherents in such places; that is how the category of the religious comes to be dominant at particular locations and particular times. This is partly because of the tendency to fetishise the religious in African studies, rather than to consider why such practices and representations should come to prominence. It is doubtless reinforced by the tendency, in anthropology at any rate, to study communities in which cultural systems appear totalising, where meanings become accessible to the outsider because they are endlessly reiterated through practices across all dimensions of the social domain, the kind of social systems subject to the systematised impacts of *doxa* in Bourdieu's sense of the term (1977:168). Indeed, this apparent uniformity of hegemonic order intellectually is what Horton, and others, have claimed characterises 'traditional' thought 'systems', and hence provides the basis for their apparent differentiation from 'non-traditional' ones (e.g. Horton, 1967; Levi Strauss, 1977:332, 340). In my view such assumptions about closed or open systems can no longer be maintained as genuine sociological analysis. I doubt whether such ideological uniformity was ever effectively imposed across social groups, whatever their scale, and this seems less and less likely in the contemporary global milieu. What may be

maintained is the power of this model of uniformity and conformity, a model sought by those seeking to establish communities of control which are inward looking and bounded. *Doxa* ceases to be the default state for whatever social unit is significant and becomes instead the desired end constituted in differentiation to the ideologies and cosmologies of other groups. Such strategies are invoked by leaders of ethnic factions, by fundamentalist movements of one sort and another, and often by small-scale religious congregations, all of which are at particular pains to systematically police the boundaries between themselves and others. For members of religious congregations, such as, for example, adherants of Zionist type Christian churches in southern Africa, this separation may be achieved through ritual prohibitions, most often on the consumption of various types of food and drink; on styles of dress; times and mode of ritual engagement, and explicit rules about socialisation (Comaroff, 1985; Ashworth, 2005).

Totalising cults and sects, small community based churches, and the communities of practice which coalesce within the client groups of particular healers and diviners conform to these sociological expectations. Such communities are not necessarily longstanding, but come into being around particular ritual agendas. In southern Tanzania clients seeking the services of one of the country's leading specialists in the suppression of witchcraft come to his homestead from all parts of Tanzania. They stay at his place for a few days only, but for this period of time they become members of a sacred community-in-waiting subject to the restrictions and regulations imposed by the diviner's ultimately spirit-sanctioned authority. People waiting for their witchcraft powers to be suppressed through a complicated ritual centred on shaving and purification adopt a series of restrictions around dress, the preparation of food and the use of fire and water – separating them from normal society and creating through external signification and internal orientation a community of dependants around the diviner's power (Green, 1994, 1996; Green & Mesaki, 2005).

Totalising practices and the communities they bring into being are appealing to social researchers, but they present only a partial snapshot of religious organisation on the continent. Although participation in practices around healing, witchcraft and divination are important for large numbers of individuals, and although minority Christian churches and Islamic sects attract considerable followings, the vast majority of religious adherents in African countries are formally affiliated to majority Christian churches and to mainstream branches of Islam. While these same individuals may also participate in non-sanctioned religious practices around healing and divination, many do not. Closer study of mainstream religious communities and of less totalising involvements would reveal enormous differentiation in the extent to which people are religiously engaged, not only between different social categories and locations, but between different genders, life stages and religious affiliations.

## Religious Realignment: Southern Tanzania

As institutional realignment continues apace in states subject to successive waves of liberalisation efforts – in the economy, political organisation and market – the monopolies once held by established religious organisations give way to fragmentation and increasing diversity of religious organisations and institutional possibilities. What seems to characterise religious affiliation and practice in contemporary Africa is its considerable diversity and the pace and scope of change. This situation

is not solely a matter of 'religious' choices, although these are significant. Such choices are rarely made on strictly religious dimensions but are related to social, economic and political factors. The institutional landscape of many countries in sub-Saharan Africa is shifting rapidly. What once consolidated the influence of religious organisations is increasingly being passed to other institutions and dispersed. Tanzania provides a good example of these kinds of processes in operation, as the socialist monopolies associated with the single party state under the *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (CCM) weaken and dissolve in a liberalised marketplace. In remote rural areas where majority Christian churches once provided the only alternative to state services and power, operating health and education facilities, providing access to employment and transport, market alternatives now come into play for those who can afford them. Ex-missionary churches now no longer hold the only keys to a better world. Their once totalising grip, an effect of the absence of alternatives under colonialism and socialism, loosens as the vacuum seal put in place by the single party socialist state is broken.

These social shifts are evident in Ulanga District, Morogoro Region, in south-central Tanzania, where I studied the effects of Catholic Christianity in the early 1990s. Then, in the final days before liberalisation, at a time when the Tanzanian economy was in severe crisis, where access to imports was restricted and basic goods often in short supply, when the health service lacked sufficient drugs and equipment to perform even basic functions and where the Catholic church controlled more vehicles in the district than all the government offices combined, the church maintained a powerful influence over the local population, the vast majority of whom were at least formally affiliated to it and for whom being recognised as a good Christian offered some kind of security in uncertain times. During the period when local enterprise was severely restricted, ventures operated by the church provided services in vehicle repair, milk production and high quality accommodation for official travellers. In addition to its network of dispensaries and clinics, the Church ran trade schools in carpentry, shoe repair and tailoring, a couple of farms, a boys' secondary school cum junior seminary and a domestic science establishment for girls (Green, 1995). Popular religiosity was very evident in the ostentatious display of rosary beads and sacred hearts of Jesus worn mostly by women, and in the packed masses held on Sundays and at the main Christian festivals. Priests and sisters were spoken of with enormous respect, to the extent that mystical powers were popularly associated with senior male clerics. Being recognised as a good Christian had religious status for parishioners, but it also situated people in relationships of potential support and assistance from church personnel, profoundly important in the absence of other economic and social safety nets and at a time of economic crisis (Green, 2003).

The effective monopoly of the Catholic church was at that time challenged only by an established Lutheran congregation, and a small Muslim community. This situation was a legacy of colonial policies which had divided different parts of the country among different Christian missions, an allocation to some extent solidified by socialist disinterest in further promoting missionisation. Today Ulanga district is still largely Catholic and the church remains influential, but there is no doubt that the content of religious influence has changed. First, the Catholic church no longer enjoys an uncontested monopoly on Christian practice in the area. As migrants from across southern Tanzania move into the fertile valleys of the western parts of the district, they bring their churches with them. Seventh Day Adventist and Pentecostalist churches, among others, are establishing themselves in the district. In

the aftermath of liberalisation, the Catholic church no longer holds monopolies on transport and other services. Private enterprise is flourishing, transport services are available and the shops are stocked with basic supplies as well as previously unimaginable luxuries that had once been available only in the capital. Several private sector chemists sell medicines and equipment, the district hospital now has its own vehicle to transport the sick to regional and national referral facilities, and private sector businesses provide services in car repair, tailoring, furniture making and accommodation. The trades once offered by the mission vocational schools are no longer viable in the context of globalisation where high volumes of new and second hand manufactured clothes and footwear flood the country's markets. The church has recognised that times have changed and is diversifying. Although it continues to operate dispensaries, it has curtailed its vocational training programme and the range of services it provides to the general public. It has recognised that education services are still popular, but that these must reflect new markets and new economic demands. Domestic science for girls has given way to private academically oriented secondary education available at two sites within the diocese.

## Institutional Transitions

In many ways, the Catholic church in becoming less of a totalising institution within the district is being forced to operate like Christian churches outside postcolonial Africa do, where the institutional separation of church, state and enterprise is pronounced. What has happened is that the forced totalisation under socialism ensured that the church operated much as it had done during the colonial period, when in the absence of other institutions and accorded a degree of power by government through control over health and education services, the church was involved, and in a position of power, in every dimension of social and economic life in the locality. It did not confine itself to activities which could be categorised as religious, although it was keen to maintain its identity, and hence political autonomy, by insisting on its privileged role as a religious institution. As the institutional landscape diversifies and goods and services become available elsewhere, the Catholic church in Tanzania loses this totalising dimension and is reduced to becoming a more narrowly focused organisation, left with its core areas of responsibility. Perhaps for the first time since colonial mission, the Catholic church in Ulanga, and places like it, is functioning more like a 'religious' institution, focusing on core activities such as the organisation of masses, the Christian calendar of ritual action and mediating life crisis events like baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals.

The role of priests and sisters is also changing. Priests find themselves confined to more religious roles under a new regime of diocesan authority, sensitive to the changing responsibilities for the church in the postcolonial world. Popular religiosity is altered. The church and Catholicism seem less important in daily life, less imbued with mystical power. Priests, reduced to church officials who wear uniform on a Sunday, are perceived as ordinary men, not the powerful people of the past who occupied special status endowed with both material and magical power. The performance of Christian practice takes place on Sundays and holy days, an activity increasingly confined not only temporally but institutionally within the church, and, as this shrinks away from engagement in other sectors, increasingly limited to a narrower sphere of social action. These transformations in the location of the religious are not confined to Christianity. The place of non-Christian religious

practice is also shifting, again towards less totalising forms. These trends are clearly evident in relation to ancestral practices such as first-fruit rituals (when a portion of the crop is presented to the ancestors before it can be eaten by the people on whose territory in has been produced) and the performance of blessings and in relation to the traditional healing sector. The former have become in many communities a minority activity or are performed by a few individuals on behalf of their families. The latter is diversifiying and expanding, at the same time as user engagement increasingly adheres to the rules of the marketplace in constituting the basis of relations between healers and clients. Ulanga's famous anti-witchcraft institutions have been affected by these transitions. Whereas during the 1980s and 1990s those seeking anti-witchcraft services would voluntarily assent to becoming part of a residential community around the diviner's homestead, staying for several days or longer, today's services are carried out over a limited two day period. The proliferation of 'branches' (*matawi*) where witchcraft suppression is available closer to people's homes means that the long journeys and protracted stays of the past are no longer usual, although people are still expected to stay at least one night at the homestead of the diviner. Obtaining witchcraft suppression services has become efficient, functional even. In fact, modernisation and convenience were cited by Shaibu Magungu, the diviner responsible for initiating innovations after inheriting the practice after the death of his famous grandmother, Bibi Kalembwana (Green & Mesaki, 2005). Magungu is aware that totalisation is no longer the way in which all people operate religiously or culturally in contemporary Tanzania. Like many middle class Tanzanians, he sends his young son to an English language school in preparation for his future of secondary education and professional employment. Increasingly aware of and pressured into the new social conventions of differentiation, Magungu sees the world as changing. These changes have implications not only for his client base but for the interaction between people and traditional healing and divination services.

While modes of traditional healing and divination remain entrenched in Tanzania, often associated with the possession status of individuals and territorial shrines, the traditional healing sector is characterised by innovation in terms of its organisation and the ways in which its services are accessed and delivered. Well known healers like Magungu provide new forms of service delivery, strive to establish new specialist environments for the delivery of their services – for example wards and clinics – and self consciously adapt the signifiers of traditional, hence ancestral, authority. Elsewhere in Ulanga, shrine diviners unable to obtain the white *kaniki* cloth once demanded by the sprits must make do with, and must obtain the spirits acceptance of, synthetic colourful manufactured cloths, imported from Indonesia and China. Such innovations are not new in Tanzania (Redmayne, 1970; Feireman, 1986), but were probably put on hold or were less widely advertised, formally and informally, during the height of single party control and economic austerity. Similar processes are at work in other countries in Africa as they emerge from the constraints of statism into the confusion of competition and different kinds of uncertainty. These changes have created unparalleled opportunities for some, notably urban elites and well connected rural families who are able to capitalise on economic openings in the public and private sectors, to access improved education for the children and to travel outside their own countries with fewer barriers than previously. Their situation leads us to consider the implications of another asymmetry, the vast and expanding differential between rich and poor evident across the continent, and which will become more accentuated in the future.

It is undoubtedly the case that religious affiliations and modes of religiosity are becoming increasingly indicative of social status and social opportunity in many African countries, and that this too is a consequence of detotalisation. Certain forms of healing ministry and Pentacostal miracle churches have the largest followings amongst the poor and marginal, a following which is expanding as the number of disaffected grows and these churches split apart and reform endlessly around new prophets. In contrast, more mainstream evangelical and 'Born Again' churches offer spiritual succour of a more rational sort to the expanding middle classes (Marshall, 1991; Gifford, 1998). Lifestyle evangelism in Africa as in the US speaks with conviction to the values of self-made urban middle classes and even, as in the case of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria (Obadare, 2006), the elites. Religious affiliation here, certainly for the poor and followers of evangelical community churches, aspires to a return to totalisation, an attribute identified by Fernandez in his classic study of the *Bwiti* sect among the Fang of Gabon some twenty-five years ago (1982). Adherents of *Bwiti* pursued a syncretistic incarnation of Christianity and ancestral practice, renowned for its utilisation of a hallucinogenic drug, *eboga*, as the basis of communion with the divine. Although the withdrawal of *Bwiti* adherents from the world is more extreme than practices by other sects, they have much in common in seeking to create a totalising moral community which, like representations of a lost traditional sociality, is animated by divine power. The return to totalisation in this instance is voluntary, but seems also to characterise the situation of the excluded and the poorest, even within mainstream Christianities. In districts like Ulanga, while the rich and middle class can opt out of religiosity because they do not depend on the church for access to support and emergency assistance, the situation is more ambiguous for the poor. Indigenous religious practices and conformity operate in similar ways. To return to the example of witchcraft, in Ulanga and neighbouring Kilombero the poor are most likely to be publicly accused of witchcraft and to be taken for cleansing than elite people are. This is not only because the better off who have some education and status with district officials can access the protective powers of the state, but because the vulnerable would only increase their vulnerability by refusing to participate in what are widely accepted to be effective means of suppressing the powers of witchcraft, hence in refusing to be cleansed of their imputed witchcraft powers (Green, 2005). In this instance, as in others, it is clearly evident how social institutions work to create the effects of religious totalisation, and that the most significant institutions are relations of differential power.

Religious institutions are more likely to achieve coverage and influence where they are not competing with other institutions, or where social pressures work to encourage compliance. This is not to suggest that religious adherence is necessarily forced, although this has often been the case, as during the height of Catholic hegemony in central and southern Europe in the middle ages (Ginzburg, 1992; Moore, 1987), but merely to point out that the totalising impact of a single institution is unlikely to be achieved without considerable social support (Douglas, 1991). This may take the form of lack of alternatives, as was arguably the case in Ulanga during the 1980s. Conversely, where alternatives come into play, totalisation becomes a potential option for those individuals who either lack access to alternative social worlds or, as with the Nigerian elite, for whom new and morally enclosed social universes are perceived as an asset, a means of consolidating networks of influence and power (Obadare, 2006).

The options for the rich and the options for the poor have different social consequences. Lifestyle evangelism and membership of middle class Protestant churches among 'Born Agains' ventures close to the realm of the spirit, but never loses its grip on the rationality of modern forms of power (Marshall, 1991). As Obadare demonstrates (2006) elite members of these churches retain ties to professional associations, engage in mainstream educational institutions and remain involved in transnational networks of study and employment. The rewards offered by membership of contemporary spirit churches such as the *neneri* cult in Mozambique are strictly spiritual (Luedke, 2003) although, given the importance of healing, the spiritual gains are experienced materially within the body. Remaining enmeshed within totalised religious worlds, traditional or otherwise, may erect barriers to encroachments that could offer other forms of succour (cf Fernandez, 1978:216; Farmer, 1999:154). In Ulanga District in 2005 several traditional healers were openly claiming to have available not merely treatments but actual cures for AIDS, a claim seemingly more plausible to many than the formally free availability of anti-retroviral medicines at the neighbouring hospital in Kilombero District.

## Future Directions

In contemporary Africa, caught up in the economic and political reordering accompanying the consolidation of postcolonial geopolitics and the forces of liberalisation, religion seems to be becoming for some privileged individuals a matter of choice between competing options and alternatives. As disengagement or at least reduced commitment is now an option, religion becomes, for some at least, less a matter of contingency than of faith, in the process seeming to replicate the institutional arrangements and categorical divisions of a secular order. This ordering, depending as it does on fragile institutional realignments across state and economy as much as on the existence of otherwise of religious competition is not necessarily indicative of a future of secularism as predicted by modernisation theorists. Such orderings are, on the contrary, the result of specific institutional and political efforts to establish an institutional separation of kinds of power between different forms, creating the impression that the secular and religious are actually distinct spheres of influence and activity (Asad, 1993). The future alignments of various institutions and forms of power is uncertain in much of Africa. The current situation in Tanzania, and elsewhere, merely reflects the a current balance of power at a particular place and time. As power shifts this balance changes. The increased politicisation of religious movements in some countries and regions is paralleled by decreases elsewhere. There is no inherent inevitability about the triumph of the religious in some countries in Africa, or in some regions within countries. Rather, the question becomes what made this triumph possible? What social and institutional factors created the vortex religious organisations could fill? Often this vortex is created through the polices and interventions of agencies which in seeking to disestablish political institutions in Africa, either because they fail to conform to democratic forms or because they embody a different vision of the state and political morality than the current market ethos will tolerate, seek to in effect re-establish formal religious organisations as parastatal political institutions which can be represented as community or cultural organisations.

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## Endnotes

1. Recent examples include Comaroff and Comaroff (1993); Moore and Sanders (2001); Geshiere (1997); Ashford (2005).

2. South Africa, Namibia and Botswana are an exception to this, having extended their social welfare provision and enhanced the range of public support available to vulnerable people, through such instruments as old age pensions, child support grants and support for fostered children. For an overview see Seekings (2002).

3. Horton is aware how his piece can be interpreted, as a denial of the potentiality of equivalence. He maintains that this is not intended, and that his argument pertains only the specialist culture of science on the one hand and the domain of African religious specialists on the other. In actuality, Horton, insists, the 'Western layman' is as far from the scientists and the 'African peasant' (1967b:186).

4. For accounts of conversion see Horton (1971, 1975), Peel (2003). For critiques of idealist theological version of the conversion narrative see Fisher (1974) and Fernandez (1978).

5. Indeed, the gradual transformation of Protestant Christianity away from materiality and towards the inner soul, and hence associated understandings of religion as a matter of the spirit rather than total person, is relatively recent and localised within the history of Christianity (Asad, 2003:37). The majority of Christianities the world over remain oriented towards embodied religious experience with an emphasis on materiality as the mediator between person and divine power.

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# An Accidental Sect: How War Made Belief in Sierra Leone

*Paul Richards*

**Idealists consider beliefs cause wars. Realists consider wars cause beliefs. The war in Sierra Leone offers some scope to test between these two views. The main rebel faction, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) was, sociologically speaking, an accidental sect. It lost its original ideologues at an early stage, and absorbed others with a different orientation as a result of military misfortunes. Bombing reinforced the sectarian tendencies of an enclaved movement, and belief proliferated. This confounded military assessments that the movement could be rapidly brought to heel by a private military intervention sponsored by British and South African mineral interests. The movement became an uncontrollable juggernaut, driven by strange sacrificial notions directed against rural populations it had once set out to liberate. The war in Sierra Leone is consistent with the Durkheimian argument that performance forges collective representations. Dealing with armed insurgency in Africa requires appreciation of the artefactual and circumstantial character of social and religious beliefs.**

## Action Makes Belief

Many rationalists expected the spread of science and technology at the time of the industrial revolution in Europe to sweep away religious superstition. Among pioneers of sociology Emile Durkheim was distinctive in arguing that while science and technology were important forces of modernisation religion would never disappear. Religion, Durkheim taught, was the bulwark of social cohesion. Societies might change, but while people remained organised in groups religion would thrive; the sacred was a defence of collectivity. It is thus no surprise to a Durkheimian to find that religion figures centrally in profound social changes and interactive social enlargements at the beginning of the 21st century. But Durkheim was a realist not an idealist. Religion is effect, not cause. If religious difference is a factor in modern conflicts it is because people with different basic collective interests come into contention over those interests while expressing differences of organisation as differences of belief. War is not a product of clash of civilisations but clash of civilisations is a product of war.[1]

This realist proposition requires specification of a basic mechanism of belief, without reverting to categories invoked by belief. Durkheim began by challenging the arguments of nineteenth century German theology (and German idealism more generally) in which a foundational notion of a high god had devolved into a myriad of creeds as peoples diffused (much as it was imagined the languages of the Germanic tribes had devolved from a single foundational Indo-Aryan stock). He

concluded that the idea of god was a relatively late development in the history of religion. Godless religion was no contradiction in terms. In searching for evidence of religion without gods and spirits he turned to the ethnographic literature on Australia. Native Australians had abundant notions of sacredness, and invested much time and effort in rites of worship, but often with little or no need for spirit forces as a focus. One of the most brilliant sections of *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) elucidates the category of the piacular rite, defined by Durkheim's translator, Karen Fields, as 'rites conducted on the occasion of death, misfortune or collective crisis that are not expressions of individual feeling' (Durkheim, 1995 [1912], p. 392 fn).

Durkheim explains the piacular rite in the following terms. Some positive rites produce a sense of joyful anticipation. Others involve sadness, anger, and harm. Mourning the death of a community member can occasion extreme violence, including cutting the body to the point where the mourner dies. These rites of anger also address other kinds of disaster – drought, or the loss of cult objects. The connecting element is threat to community life requiring ceremonies of expiation. Mourners explain funerary rituals as necessary to ward off the vengeance of the souls of the dead. But why, Durkheim asks, would a person committed to the community become vengeful after death? Beliefs concerning the pacification of souls are secondary accretions. The rite – as performance – precedes the belief in souls. The priority of practice over belief in the piacular rite is clearly seen in ceremonies to stop famine or sickness. These operate without anthropomorphic entanglements (not even the spirit of the departed, as in a funeral rite). Durkheim concludes that for native Australians 'abstinences and blood-letting stop famines and cure sicknesses, *acting on their own*' (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 410, my emphasis).

For Durkheim the foundation of religion – its elementary form – is to be found in a type of collective action he terms the rite. It is useful to keep to Durkheim's term 'rite', and to differentiate it from ritual. Anthropologists have taken over the term ritual to mean some kind of signalling system whereby memories of earlier collective action are recovered, which lands us back in idealism (the 'clash of civilisations' from which we wish to escape). For example, Rappaport claims that 'at the heart of ritual … is the relationship of performers to performances of invariant sequences of acts and utterances which they did not encode' (Rappaport, 1999:405). Of course, religious ceremonies can serve recapitulative purposes. But this obscures Durkheim's basic point, that rites, as collective actions without practical purpose, generate social solidarity through emotional entrainment. The piacular rite at times is pure collective action; it invokes no god, nor does it allude to sequences of 'acts and utterances' encoded by others. 'It is always the cult that is efficacious ... we must act, and we ... must repeat the necessary acts as often as is necessary to renew their effects' (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]:420).

Thus at the heart of the Durkheimian account of religion is a notion of group improvisatory performance – the group believes because it acts together. Bodies and minds are co-ordinated and emotional commitments focused, through dancing, chanting and prayer – even through mutual acts of self-harm or harm to others. Durkheim is offering us a model of the initiatory experience. Collective representations are generated only through the stirring of group excitement. The Durkheimian term is 'effervescence'. A central example – surprising in a book apparently mainly about Australian religion – is the National Assembly of 4 August 1789 voting to abolish the French feudal system, which Durkheim sees as a decisive constitutional

step in the forging of modern France undertaken in a moment of effervescence. The Assembly 'was suddenly carried away in an act of sacrifice and abnegation that each of its members had refused to make the night before and by which all were surprised the morning after' (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]):212).

Elsewhere (Richards, 2006) it has been suggested that the Durkheimian notion of effervescence can be aligned with recent ideas about the evolutionary origins of musicality. Cross (2003, 2006) argues that in human evolutionary terms music and dance is coordinative activity with implications for the emergence of social intelligence.[2] Musical capacity is viewed as a sphere of 'unassigned intentionality' within which moves of potential social significance can be rehearsed as sonically integrated bodily movement. Cross offers a convincing argument for why such a capacity might be selected during human evolution, and thus gives new life to a basic Durkheimian notion, that the rite is, at root, performance through which emotional excitement is entrained upon collective representations. This is the mechanism of belief, in Durkheimian terms. The actual content of belief – its cognitive patterning as morals or shared notions of spiritual entities (Boyer, 2000) – is secondary to the actions through which group excitement stirs the possibility of collective commitment.

Subsequent interpreters have muddied the picture by claiming that Durkheim began as a realist (somewhere in the terrain of Marx) and latterly became an idealist. To such interpreters, Durkheim's interest in religion connotes a shift from the material practicalities of the division of labour to the world of ideas. This accurately maps 'the cultural turn' followed by a number of American social scientists (Geertz and Sahlins among the anthropologists, for example [cf. Kuper, 1999]) but makes nonsense of the Durkheimian corpus. Durkheim's view of labour relations was always 'sacrificial'.[3] It is basic to his first book – *Division of Labour in Society* [1893] – that social solidarity emerges through the commitments members of a group make via the work they offer (Durkheim, 1964 [1893]). The family makes itself through individual members sacrificing time and effort. The wider cohesion of modern society – organic solidarity – emerges from sacrifices individuals make in order to acquire craft or professional skills. The medieval and Roman guilds and their cults (the sodales) are Durkheim's basic model for linking work and religion.[4] A division of labour based on difference and complementarity requires skills to be both formed and socially recognised. This requires the tyro to be initiated into a specialism with due emphasis on rites.

Emphasis on the sodality as a basic social form makes Durkheim especially appropriate to understanding processes of trans-family social formation found in many parts of the West African coastal zone – initiation into a so-called 'secret society'.[5] The sodality forms social knowledge. But to seek to acquire this knowledge without passing through initiation is to misunderstand the kind of social solidarity formed within sodalities. Local terminology is a good guide. The Mende people of southern and eastern Sierra Leone talk about initiation as 'dying on knowledge' [lit. 'medicine'] (*ha hale ma*).[6] The content is perhaps unimportant. What matters is to be aligned with others in knowing what actions bonded the individual to the group and make the group recognisable to others. This alignment is generated through initiation; it is expressed in dance (foremost, in the dancing of the society masquerade).

Aspects of individuality are lost – often painfully – in forging a group capable of acts of solidarity in gruelling conditions. There is no success without sacrifice. You cannot know unless you are prepared to join. To join means to submit to the rites of initiation. On this reckoning, the broader society is product of accommodation among sodalities structured along mutually recognisable lines. It is probably important to add that this Durkheimian argument does not imply emergence of an ordered society along functionalist lines (as often alleged). The process of engagement through rites of initiation produces embattled mafia-life organisations as readily as it produces craft guilds and citizen-based organisations devoted to charitable purposes. But what Durkheim claims is that the process is inescapable. If the initiatory mechanism is neglected than other initiators will take it over. If the mechanism is not triggered for good it will be triggered for evil.[7]

Durkheim was, in particular, worried about the implications for French society of the kind of social exclusion implicit in the Dreyfus case. Young people in France were initiated into a world of increasing occupational specialisation through secondary and university education strongly oriented around a traditional literary canon (Richman, 2002). Reform was needed to secure a more open opportunity structure, capable of incorporating groups marginalised by a narrow literary culture (young Jews in Durkheim's day, young Muslims of North African origin today). His Australian excursion was intended to show that the ideals of the French Revolution could only be achieved through approaching the mechanism of social commitment as action (rite) rather than transfer of dogma (ritual). Without chances to sacrifice to the wider society through acquiring skill the marginalised would become anti-social, and liable to violence. Civil war would be the product of a forced division of labour. The forced division of labour was the first of the social pathologies addressed in Book III of *Division of Labour in Society*.

Durkheim's contemporaries understood what they were dealing with. Right-wing students agitated to have Durkheim removed from his chair in the Sorbonne, after the publication of *Elementary Forms*. Professor Durkheim, they charged, was undermining French culture by introducing 'savages into the Sorbonne' (Richman, 2002:66-109). In the 1930s, Georges Bataille and others artists of the Left tried to forge from the theories of the Durkheimian School an initiatory artistic practice capable of counteracting the sinister effects of effervescence apparent in the rise of Nazism (Richman, 2002). It is only latterly that the Durkheimian message has been lost, particularly in the post-modern carnival of idealism accompanying American victory in the Cold War. The present paper argues that the idealist doctrine of clash of civilisations needs to be countered through a reassertion of the realist position on religion. This requires taking seriously Durkheim's self-assessment that he was among the few intellectuals seriously to defend religion against the religious.

What tests are on offer of the validity of the central Durkheimian proposition – that belief derives from collective action? Durkheim went (mentally) to Australia, to show group rites precede collective representation. We believe because we pray, not the other way round. But the Australian example has always seemed, to some, a step too far. 'Elementary' is mis-read as meaning primitive (not foundational, in the sense Durkheim intended). We can dismiss the evidence of the Australians because they are deemed survivors from an earlier age. Durkheim tried to alert his readers to his true purpose by placing a discussion of the French Revolution at the heart of his book. Many (Anglophone) readers, however, are brought up on a history stressing the horror and barbarity of the guillotine rather than the constitutional significance of the National Assembly's vote to abolish feudalism.

Might it help to take a modern example – one where events can be read as fulfilling the Durkheimian prophecy that civil war is the result of extreme social exclusion? This will be attempted in the rest of this paper, via a case study of the civil war in Sierra Leone. Even here, however, we will have to struggle against the notion that geographically remote contemporary events are somehow to be dismissed as 'beyond the pale'. In a world of globalisation nothing is any longer isolated in the back-of-beyond. The Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda or the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone are as much manifestations of global modernity as Osama bin Laden's jihadi attacks on the United States.

## The Emergence of an Accidental Sect

The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (henceforth RUF) began as a small group of Libyan-trained dissidents attacking the forested border districts of Sierra Leone (Kailahun and Pujehun Districts) from across the Liberian border in March 1991. The movement was formed to topple the All Peoples Congress, entrenched in power under the presidencies of Siaka Stevens and General Joseph Saidu Momoh. Sierra Leone possesses considerable wealth from diamonds and other minerals, but under the APC poverty and marginalisation had become widespread. Initially, the RUF attracted considerable support from communities along the border – especially in areas with a long history of incomplete emancipation from domestic slavery and divided by colonial borders.[8]

A three-man leadership of the RUF was an offshoot of student-led radical activism centred on the Libyan Green Book (a populist text of youth empowerment). The only older figure in this leadership group was Alfred Foday Sankoh, a corporal in the Sierra Leone army dismissed and jailed for involvement in a coup plot against the APC in the late 1960s. He became a photographer, and plying his trade along the Liberian border, acquired considerable knowledge of local grievances to be exploited to the movement's advantage. The RUF expanded by forcibly recruiting young people from diamond camps and isolated village schools. At first it tried to implement Green Book inspired reforms in the districts it controlled, but suffered reverse when government forces, strengthened by Liberian irregulars, counter attacked. Sankoh eliminated the two other members of the RUF's collective leadership and assumed a position of charismatic authority over a movement increasingly made up of young captives.

Sankoh, and a loyal group of five young fighters,[9] took refuge in the Kissi village of Sandeyalu, in the extreme northern tip of Kailahun District, where they were subjected to intense bombardment from Nigerian Alpha Jets (Richards, 2005a).[10] The group decided the RUF should retreat into the forest (Peters, 2006). Their aim was to reorganise the movement as a guerrilla insurgency using only light weapons. Thereafter, the war was projected through pinprick raids mounted via a dense network of hunters' tracks criss-crossing the country.

Sankoh's small praetorian guard, loyal to the leader personally rather than to the movement's Green Book ideology, was ordered to found armed camps in secure forested areas closer to the main mining areas – the motor of the economy (Peters, 2006). Sankoh himself went south through the border Gola Forest complex, and established a camp in the Kambui West forest reserve, a few miles from the village of Sendumei (half way between Potoru and Blama). His retreat – the Zogoda – became the movement HQ.

The RUF maintained considerable influence in some of the farming districts bordering the forest where the insurgency was first established. Prominent among settlements it controlled in southern Kailahun District, was Bunumbu, a village not far from one of Sankoh's earlier photographic haunts in Segbwema. Pre-war, Bunumbu was the location of an important teacher's college, where training emphasised radical self-help approaches to the rural primary curriculum, influenced by (for example) Freire's 'pedagogy of the oppressed'. Some Bunumbu students and staff rallied to, or were inducted into the RUF, and helped reshape the movement's ideology to fit enclave conditions (Richards, 2001).

The Green Book agitation against Stevens had been student led and largely based in urban areas (especially Freetown). Government crack-downs resulted in some activists being driven into exile (in both 1977 and 1984). Re-located in the diaspora, the exiles began to publish commentary on the RUF from the mid 1990s (cf. Abdullah, 1997). To them, the movement was an incoherent break-away group with no valid ideological pretensions. Apparently unaware of the Bunumbu connection the exile intellectuals aligned with the dominant international perception of the RUF as a group of desperadoes and bandits. The Bunumbu group gave the forest-bound RUF a new ideological slant, based on a mish-mash of sources, including information about the Grameen Bank in Bangla Desh, Sandanista manuals from Nicaragua and the passages on forest survivalism from Kim Il Sung's memoirs of fighting the Japanese in the Korean mountains. The Pan-Africanism of Nkrumah and Gaddafi was sidelined if not forgotten (Richards et al. 2003, Peters, 2006).

Bombed into the forests in 1993 the RUF was now an enclave in both physical and sociological terms.[11] Most of its recruits were young abductees. Postwar studies by Humphreys and Weinstein (2004) show that the great majority of fighters came from impoverished rural backgrounds, and that as many as 87 per cent of the RUF intake claimed to have been abducted. Army atrocities against rebels and rebel suspects from the earliest days of the war, including summary executions of surrendered RUF captives, made it too dangerous for young people, once taken by the movement, to try to escape (Peters & Richards, 1998). Most settled to make what they could of ideological and military training on offer. The movement's message focused on the hiding of diamond wealth by the elite as the source of their own lack of education and self-worth (RUF/SL 1995). To many abductees the teaching made good sense (Richards, 2005b). They progressed from timid captives to willing stalwarts.

As analysed by Mary Douglas (1993), the enclave is one of the basic organisational forms of sectarianism in which internal equality is overruled only by charismatic leadership. The sectarian enclave is held together not by administration but by high costs of entry and exit. Entry ordeals serve as a kind of initiatory experience. Christian sectarians in the Anabaptist[12] tradition use adult immersion as a symbolic ordeal. The convert dies to a former life and is henceforth eternally bonded into the group. It is not hard to see that for RUF 'converts' the ordeal of being seized from school or family, marched through dangerous terrain and camped in the forest, to be showered with basic necessities from a caring movement, served a similar function. They 'died' to their former existence and the movement was henceforth their life.

For many rural young people already initiated into the two main (gender-specific) sodalities of forest communities along the Liberian border – Poro and Sande – being seized by the RUF must have recapitulated earlier experiences. But the RUF contrasted its own 'rational' political analysis to the mystical notions of the traditional sodalities. Today, stalwarts report having tested and rejected the magic

bullet proof 'jackets' used by opposing village civil defence units armed by South African mercenaries. They told Peters (2006) that the name Zogoda was Krio for 'the sorcerer will die'. The beliefs of the new sect included a concern for agrarian reform and an enthusiasm for modern communications (RUF/SL 1995, Richards, 1996; Peters, 2006). Extensive use was made of looted solar-powered radio sets. Radio chatter was the means by which, eventually, most of the camps were located by private security forces (Hooper, 2003).

The APC government had been pushed aside by a military regime in 1992, but the new regime was unable to deal with the resurgent sectarian RUF. By 1995 attacks had approached the capital, panicking the international community. The government was pointed (by the British) in the direction of private security options. It soon hired Executive Outcomes, a company using former black and white operatives from a special operations unit of the apartheid-era South African Defence Forces.[13] EO had been successful in helping the regime in Angola gain the upper hand over the Savimbi rebels.

EO was at the same time retained to protect the Sierra Leonean mine site of a British/Canadian mining company, Branch Energy. Branch Energy (today Koidu Holdings) levered a highly advantageous kimberlite mining concession from the military regime in 1995. It was assumed in many quarters that the EO contract was funded in part by mining concessions. Branch Energy was managed in Sierra Leone by a retired officer of British overseas military intelligence.[14] Again, it was assumed by many (not least members of the Sierra Leonean government) that the CEO's background implied some informal overlap between UK foreign policy in Sierra Leone and the development of the kimberlite mining option. A recent public call for recruits into MI6 states that the organisation's purpose is to safeguard British security *and prosperity* overseas (my emphasis).

The military regime granted elections after a palace coup in late 1995, and handed over to a new civilian president representing the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) in early 1996. A peace process begun by the outgoing regime was continued by the newly elected president, Ahmad Tejan-Kabbah, a lawyer with many years service to the UN system. Indefinite ceasefire agreements were signed between Kabbah and Sankoh in April 1996 to foster the negotiation of a peace agreement in Abidjan. Diplomats in Freetown were doubtful, however, whether the RUF was anything more than an unstable bandit organisation. The RUF War Council, including some of the Bunumbu ideologues, were airlifted to Abidjan, but Sankoh's evident difficulties in representing his movement in the bush provoked diplomatic impatience.

The British, in particular, viewed Sankoh and the RUF as little more than a nuisance. EO had worked out an alternative military option. (Wrongly) estimating RUF fighting strength in 1996 as being about 500 (Hooper, 2003) EO proposed to attack the camps during the cease-fire negotiations in Abidjan. Hooper (2003), a journalist close to EO, reports that the president came under considerable pressure from the private security company to authorise the attacks. A member of the cabinet at the time made clear that the government had been advised to wipe out the movement rather than go for a peace agreement (Richards, 2005a). A clear risk of legitimating the RUF through a peace agreement was that a movement obsessed with transparency in mining deals might have wanted to 'expose' the kimberlite mining concession.

During the middle months of 1996 EO was heavily involved in training and arming recruits to a greatly enlarged civil defence militia, a movement formed through use of local initiation techniques, but trained in counter-insurgency methods by the South Africans. Asked why he had formed a large civil defence unit, a Paramount Chief (once a mining engineer) from a chiefdom adjacent to the diamond districts answered that he had been advised to do so 'by Branch Energy, the mining company' (Richards, 2005a). Hooper (2003:8) asserts the comparative advantage of the (white) South Africans staffing EO in Sierra Leone was that they 'understood [black] Africa, [and] had been the architects and practitioners of an immensely successful military doctrine throughout their [South African Defence Force] careers'. This (presumably) alludes to the doctrine through which (for example) Renamo was shaped and launched as a 'spoiler' uprising against the government of Mozambique.

EO may have understood how to train and deploy a proxy force such as the quasi-traditional 'hunter' civil defence in Sierra Leone. Unfortunately, it failed to understand (or dangerously underestimated) the RUF and its sectarian dynamic. The rebel force was much larger than could be handled by a few thousand recently initiated hunters and small group of about 50 South African operatives, with use of one rented Mi24 helicopter gunship and a Nigerian Howitzer battery (see Hooper, 2003 for details). The attack on the Zogoda (probably in September or October 1996) succeeded in breaking up the camp, but not in rounding up the many in-mates, who escaped along bush tracks through the forest to re-group in northern Kailahun and the centre of the country. The attack undermined the Abidjan peace process, since it convinced Sankoh's praetorian guard that any paper signed in Abidjan would be no more than an expedient to round up and eliminate them. It also meant that key civilian figures in the movement – such as Bunumbu lecturer Ibrahim Deen-Jalloh, in charge of ideological training in the RUF (Peters, 2006) – were cut off from the movement in the bush. Henceforth, the armed cadres lapsed into a deranged fatalism and apocalyptic violence of a kind associated with the dying days of sectarian  sieges.[15]

Testimony from a former child soldier interviewed in Abdullah & Rashid (2004) implies the army was an early user of amputation as a tool of torture and punishment against RUF fighters.[16] If so, the atrocity was returned many times over by the RUF, and inflicted mainly on unarmed villagers, presumed to be supporting the civil defence fighters armed by the South Africans. Amnesty International (1992) was prompt in accusing the army of summarily executing suspected rebels in the early days of the war. Richards (1996) reports abducted children attempting to flee the movement being executed by the army, sometimes apparently at the request of villagers. Local reasoning was that the RUF was a new kind of sodality. Once children had been initiated they could never be recovered by their natal communities. They were 'witch children', to be dealt with only by elimination. Local paranoia about the potential dissidence of children reflected many years of post-emancipation social exclusion and forced division of labour in the districts over which the RUF operated (Richards, 2005b). Durkheim's first social pathology was fast taking deadly shape in rural Sierra Leone; implacably opposed sodalities, fed by a forced division of labour, were squaring up to a battle to the death.

Paradoxical to some, the RUF sodality was rich in worship. Every day camp life for the RUF began at 6 a.m. with compulsory prayers. A captured middle-aged woman (Richards, 2005) who served the movement as a clerk reports that those who did not go were:

*'in jail for three days … [in the] … guard room'. The prayers were both Muslim and Christian. 'They will appoint one person to pray. After you have prayed then you will say the Lord's Prayer, and then you will say the Alfatiyah'. Her interviewer asks, 'how did you ... [long pause] ... reconcile the fact that these people were forcing you … were making you pray everyday, and at the same time were carrying out such terrible things, both to the people within the RUF, and to their enemy?' She is at a loss for an answer. 'Yes, when they … when they will ... after the prayers, they have to pick ... these boys from the strike force ... to go at the front there, after the prayer ... but when they go, really they are out of control, now, you see.'*

RUF atrocity cannot be judged mindless or opportunistic violence. Appalling 'punishments', levied on citizens after the secure RUF camps had been dislocated, partake of the character of rites, specifically piacular rites reflecting the 'death, misfortune or collective crisis' visited upon the movement by EO cease-fire breaches. Captive spiritual advisers were maintained to supervise sacrificial acts, including amputation and massacre of captives (Richards, 2005c, 2006). Particularly revealing is the fact that amputations and decimations were deliberately randomised. Victims were chosen by lot. Amputees were at times told to choose their own mutilation. According to Douglas (1993) the lottery is a quintessential device among denizens of the sectarian enclave deeply distrustful of human judges.

R, perhaps trained as a fighter, describes this focus on rites as a preoccupation:

*'They worshipped a lot … during fast month the rebels kept fast, or … went to church to pray if they were Christians' … An unanswered question about her own involvement in the fighting switches her thoughts to some troubling scenes of violence. She talks about the role of more man dem (Krio, pl., from Arabic murid, pupil of the Koran, i.e. Muslim diviners) who prepared RUF fighters by making offerings (pul saraa [Krio: to give charity, from Arabic sadaga, alms]). Speaking without animation, she tells the story of a massacre perpetrated by XX (one of the movement's praetorian guard, and commander of the group in which she lived). Fresh from battle, and disturbed by 'heat' (i.e. anger), XX seeks the advice of his 'more' man. He is told to make an offering of civilian captives. A pit is dug and the victims are gunned down. Under the instruction of the 'more' man, XX climbs among the dead and dying, collecting five gallons of blood in a plastic container – the requisite 'sacrifice'.*

The details of how action and belief intermingled in the encamped worlds of the RUF, as eroded by EO, are as shocking as they are disturbing. These are not time-honoured ritual observances, but the actions of despairing practitioners, threatened with the loss of all sense of society. It is a recourse to the 'blood-letting' that stops famines and cure sicknesses, 'acting on its own' (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]:410). The latter days of the war in Sierra Leone vie with the horrors of the siege of the Münster Anabaptists in 16th century Germany. Much of the responsibility for the sociological implosion fostering such rites of lacerating violence must be laid at the door of those who chose to seek a total military solution.

To press upon the reader further details of the strange beliefs manifested by the RUF in its dying days would be gratuitous. It is more important to consider how the war in Sierra Leone was ended. Eventually it was realised that the advice to seek a military solution had been flawed all along.[17] There was no 'military solution', since the more the armed sect is attacked the more determined it is to fight to the bitter end. Action creates belief. All the attacker achieves is to convince the cadres that indeed the end of the world is nigh. A new approach was needed.

The solution adopted was pure Durkheim. The forced division of labour was reversed by the promise of a job. A large group of RUF fighters was flown to Abuja in November 2000, and questions of ideology and belief were kept off the agenda. What was put in its place was a series of proposals about training in return for handing over a gun. DDR[18] promised initiation into skill. Much of the training then offered proved a false hope, but this is another story (Richards et al. 2003). What clinched the peace was the very idea of making a sacrifice to society through being able to provide socially-useful work. The combatants could see a way back to social acceptability by acquiring a valued trade. Sadly, too few have since acquired lasting skills, and many have drifted back into diamond pit labouring, though this time under much closer government control (Peters, 2006). But some of those who succeeded to 'go it alone' have done so by developing entirely new activities sometimes incorporating lessons learned as combatants. Motorcycle taxi services, dominated by ex-combatants – a post-war development in Sierra Leone's main interior towns – is one such success story, leading to reintegration and acceptance (Fithen & Richards, 2005; Peters, 2006).

In a recent memoir of a brief time administering Maysan Province in Iraq in 2003-4 the young British diplomat Rory Stewart reports a revealing exchange of views between Paul Bremer, the US administrator, and a general of the coalition forces. The general is reported to have said, regarding the incipient Iraqi insurgency,

> *this is not just a security problem; at heart it is an economic problem … hundreds of thousands of young men do not have jobs and that is why they are joining the insurgency.*

Bremer snapped back:

> *'we do not have an economic problem with a security dimension; we have a security problem and it is your job to solve it.' He then reminded his audience its true work was to create 'a democratic Iraq where the government, elected on the basis of the constitution, respected human rights'.*[19]

The stand-off between idealists and the realists could not be more starkly posed. Bremer asserted that belief (in democracy) might create work; the general thought that work might create belief and societal commitment. The story of how religion emerged from nothing in the case of the RUF in Sierra Leone is striking confirmation of Durkheim's most basic claims about the essentially performative character of beliefs in society. 'It is always the cult that is efficacious … we must act …'. If Durkheim is correct then the 'War on Terror' is, right now, forging the matrix of belief to sustain global conflict indefinitely. Some way out of such madness must be found. *Division of Labour in Society* and *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* are pieces cut from a single cloth. The story of the war in Sierra Leone suggests that action on jobs and opportunities for the unemployed is the best potential antidote to misdirected effervescence.

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## Endnotes

1. The allusion is to Samuel P. Huntington's book *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order* (Simon & Schuster, 1997)

2. Many thanks to Ian Cross, Music Faculty, Cambridge University, for making available the text of his forthcoming article in *Musicology Australia*.

3. Cf. Rene Girard, *Violence and the sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univeristy Press, 1979).

4. On Durkheim's discussions of the Roman sodales and medieval guilds, and their religious functions, see especially *Professional ethics and civic morals* (trans. Cornelia Brookfield, Routledge, 1957).

5. A large part of the Upper Guinean coastal forests of West Africa, from Guinea, through Sierra Leone, to western Liberia belongs to this zone in which the passage from childhood to adulthood is marked by initiation into an appropriate sodality, Poro and Sande. Several writers have commented on links between secret society initiation and the recent civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Explanations vary according to whether the social commitments involved are seen as culturally determined (Ellis 1999) or as an artefact of initiation (Richards, 1996), cf. Kastfelt (2005) for a good summary of the issues. See also Hojbjerg (2005) for a valuable case study.

6. *Hale* is usually translated 'medicine', but the term is broader than medication or treatment, and includes aspects of skill and knowledge.

7. Durkheim terms the negative implications 'social pathologies', the topic of Book III of *The Division of Labour in Society*.

8. Particular support came from communities in the extreme east of Sierra Leone. Here, the Kissi people are split into three countries (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone) and, isolated from three distant capital cities, have long cherished separatist ambitions.

9. Samuel Bockarie ('Maskita'), Augustine Gbao, Eldred Collins, Issa Sesay and one other.

10. A Nigerian-led West African peace-keeping force was attempting to enforce an end to the uprising of Charles Taylor in Liberia, and mounted air attacks on Taylor's allies, the RUF, to cut supply lines from Sierra Leone.

11. On the politics of the enclave see Douglas (1993), ch 2.

12. Anabaptist – meaning those who re-baptised – the chosen term of their opponents in the Reformation. The Anabaptists rejected the procedures of Zwingli and other reformers in sprinkling infants in order to secure their civic registration as a perversion, for political purposes, of the Biblical rite of adult immersion.

13. EO was founded in the early 1990s and disbanded in 1998, after a change in South African law banning mercenary activity. Military operations appear to have been directed by Eeben Barlow, a veteran of 32 Battalion, the special operations unit of the former South African Defence Forces. Some light has been thrown the *modus operandi* by subsequent events. Among company founders was Simon Mann, a British former SAS officer, based in South Africa. In 2004 Mann was arrested in Zimbabwe and jailed for seven years for his part in a coup plot in Equatorial Guinea, involving the former British Prime Minister's son, Mark Thatcher. On arrest, Mann was accompanied by 62 veterans of 32 Battalion. In Equatorial Guinea the plotters sought a lucrative oil exploitation concession. A major difference between the operations was that in Sierra Leone EO supported an internationally recognised, if unpopular, military regime; in Equatorial Guinea the aim was regime change

14. Oxford-educated Arabist and poet, Rupert Bowen. Bowen retired from a posting in Namibia in 1992. He was later present at several discussions between Col. Tim Spicer and the newly appointed British High Commissioner to Sierra Leone, Peter Penfold, over a replacement for EO in Sierra Leone, Sandline International; for further information see *Sierra Leone Arms Investigation*, 'A Report into the Sandline Affair' by Sir Thomas Legg and Sir Robin Ibbs, The Stationery Office, London 1998 (available at www.fco.gov.uk, follow links to official documents).

15. Members of the RUFP – the political party formed after the Lome accord in 1999 – explained in a recent interview (Richards & Vincent 2006) that many of the problems of the movement – specifically its loss of political momentum – stemmed from the arrest of Sankoh and marginalisation of the ideological leadership in 1997 (Sankoh was detained in Nigeria, eventually to be returned to Sierra Leone to face a treason trial and death sentence), and the subsequent take-over of the movement in the bush by the 'five man leadership' personally loyal to Sankoh, but not to the political ambitions of the movement. Münster and Waco are among the more famous instances of sectarian implosions under siege.

16. A leader of the RUF women's wing told me that her decision to join the movement had been as a result of the torture and death of her husband in army detention in Daru Barracks, in Kailahun District in 1991. He, too, appears to have been amputated.

17. A similar change appears to have taken place recently in northern Uganda, regarding the Lord's Resistance Army/Movement.

18. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration.

19. Rory Stewart, 'My moment in charge', *The Guardian Weekend*, 10 June 2006, pp. 20-24

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# Pentecostal Presidency? The Lagos-Ibadan 'Theocratic Class' & the Muslim 'Other'

*Ebenezer Obadare*

**This paper analyses the politics of regime legitimacy through the instrumentality of religious discourse purveyed through a putative Christian 'theocratic class' surrounding the Obasanjo presidency in Nigeria. Though the emphasis is on Western Nigerian Christian discourse because of its undeniable influence in the polity since 1999, it incorporates Muslim and northern Nigerian religious discourse in so far as it is seen as constituting the significant discursive 'Other' with which the predominantly Christian geo-political south has historically been in contention. The paper contends that the 'Pentecostalisation' of governance has raised the stakes as far as the struggle to define the Nigerian public sphere is concerned, further politicising religion, even as lip service continues to be paid to the secularity of the Nigerian state.**

> *Religion and region are deep in the Nigerian heart and cannot be swept away by fiat* (Alhaji Lateef Kayode Jakande, former Federal Minister of Housing).

When President Olusegun Obasanjo assumed office in May 1999, relations between the two ethno-regional power blocs located in the north and south of the country respectively were on the verge of a complete breakdown. The decade preceding Obasanjo's second term of office (he had been the country's military head of state from 1976-1979) was dominated by bitter political, religious and ethnic feuding which had cast serious doubts on the very survival of the country as a sovereign entity. A political impasse which had opened up since the annulment of the 12 June 1993 election by the regime of Ibrahim Babangida (followed by two subsequent military regimes) was only resolved with Obasanjo's election.

Obasanjo was the beneficiary of a negotiated pact among the country's political elite. At the heart of the compact was a design to placate the western political establishment which was still seething over both the annulment and the subsequent death in jail (in 1998) of its putative winner, Bashorun M.K.O. Abiola. The presidential election that resulted in Obasanjo's victory was contested by two southern Yoruba Christians, Obasanjo himself, and Chief Olu Falae, a former Secretary to the Government of the Federation during the Ibrahim Babangida era. Although this was a result of elite consensus, it was also a measure of how deeply ethnicity and religion have penetrated social and political culture in the country.

My aim here is to employ a critical sociology to examine the impact of religious discourse on the self-presentation of the Obasanjo regime, while paying attention to

the use of the same ideology as a tool for socio-political legitimacy. The discourse in question is Pentecostalism, what Gifford (2004) calls the 'New Christianity', defined by Habermas as a combination of 'biblical orthodoxy and a rigorous morality with an ecstatic form of worship and an emphasis on spiritual healing' (2005:3). He adds that,

> Such born-again Christians share the opposition to cultural modernity and political liberalism, but they comply more easily with motivational requirements for modernisation.

In Nigeria their influence has encompassed both the Presidency and the leading lights of the major Pentecostal churches. I call these figures a 'theocratic class' after Haynes (1996). While I am by no means suggesting that this 'theocratic class' is always homogenous and ideologically coherent (indeed there is evidence of critical divergences), my argument is that disagreements have unfolded within a common worldview in which Obasanjo's 'Second Coming' is claimed as divinely pre-ordained. The paper empirically substantiates recent scholarly attempts to illuminate and understand the public role of religion, and the implications of this in a world increasingly torn between the contrasting claims of secularism and religious ideology. In Nigeria, this investigation is lent additional justification by the travails of secularism following the imposition of *Shari'a* law in a majority of northern states.

## The 'Theocratic Class': Towards a Conceptualisation

Despite being a key sociological concept, class has always evaded critical capture. To complicate matters, its linguistic currency appears to have declined somewhat in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the global intellectual crisis of marxist theory. Yet, it is hardly open to conjecture that profound social and economic inequalities continue to determine social intercourse, not least in the 'developing' world where state power has been historically controlled by a small segment of the society. In a work which emphasises religion, ethnicity and politics, Haynes borrows the term 'class' to describe religious leaders joining together in a '"theocratic class" which seeks to advance their personal and institutional position in relation to competitors' (1996:9); it is this conception which I employ to look more closely at religious ideology in Nigeria.

A Weberian conception of 'class' is rooted in an understanding of social agents as being fundamentally driven by economic interests (1948:181). Other than economic interests, the category of people I am describing here as a 'theocratic class' also share other important attributes, among them enjoyment of a social standing that derives from a variety of traditional sources and common endorsement and usage of salvationist discourse to analyse Nigeria's political process. Falola, grappling with the conundrum of how religious leaders apparently acquire power and influence without the police, army, or money on their side, argues that:

> The power comes instead from traditional religious sources – the power to preach, teach, dogmatize, and lead congregations. They depend on perceptions of moral uprightness and justness, opposing themselves to the corruption of those in political power. They also rely on their charisma, their ability to arouse, inspire, and stimulate a crowd (1998:104).

However, contrary to what appeared to have obtained almost a decade ago when they did not have 'money on their side', one of the most notable features of Nigeria's contemporary Pentecostalists is their massive wealth. These days, leaders of Pentecostal churches are not merely generally rich (or at least their churches are),

they are also conscious of being seen to be prosperous, and the trope of prosperity is a recurring refrain in their sermons (see Hasu for a Tanzanian equivalent in this Issue). Such is the role that money plays in the 'New Christianity' that reports of financial scandals and other shady deals in the churches have lost their shock value in Nigeria. Such clearly damaging reports have not necessarily had any concrete effect on the reputation of religious leaders. On the contrary, their fame, power and influence have continued to soar in a society that, partly due to economic upheavals, has become even more susceptible to mystical 'enchantment' (Gauchet, 1997). For Larkin and Meyer, the success of the 'theocratic class' and their churches resides largely in their ability to link:

> the prospect of prosperity with deliverance from evil forces such as witchcraft, ancestral spirits and other demons … [They] have had tremendous appeal for people, and in particular young men and women, who desperately seek to make progress in life (Larkin and Meyer, 2006:290).

Mention must equally be made of the specific social and political conjuncture which has simultaneously thrust this category into the vortex of politics, enhanced their visibility, made them an apparent fulcrum for projecting the grievances of the mass, and thus a perceived repository of social power. As Ellis and Ter Haar have noted,

> The rather sudden and radical political changes in Africa in the 1990s encouraged the irruption of spiritual movements into political space as people sought alternative sources of authority and at the same time were freed from institutional constraints previously imposed by single party governments (2004:100).

In Nigeria, this continent-wide upheaval was followed by a certain apathy, even repugnance, towards politics in general. The political class was widely believed to have failed, particularly following the moral abjection which hollowed out the struggle to validate the 12 June elections. Into this lacuna stepped Christian spiritual leaders, whose campaign to restore the ethical foundations of politics led to a virtual 'Christianization' of the struggle itself, and certainly the construction of the Christian faith simultaneously as a 'religious, cultural and political vehicle in the ethnic, regional and national struggles for power and primacy in Nigeria' (Adebanwi, 2006:2). A group of powerful religious leaders – in my terms an aspirant 'theocratic class', have become aware of their position in society and have organised to transform it. The emergence of a Christian 'theocratic class' is clearly related to suspicion of 'the desire of the Muslim population to shape and define Nigeria as a theocratic Muslim state' (Adogame, 2005:133).

## From Apathy to Engagement: The Emergence of Political Christianity

The emergence of the 'theocratic class' is enfolded in the larger process of Christianization of politics in Nigeria, what Adogame has described as 'a Christian scramble for a role in national public life' (2005:130). This, in turn, is enclosed in the global dynamic which has seen, first, 'an increase in concern on the part of ostensibly religious collectivities with governmental issues', and second, 'an inflation of interest among those with declared religious commitments in coordinat-ing the latter with secular-ideological perspectives and programmes' (Robertson, 1989:12).

Writing in 1986, Bienen made an observation that was basically correct in the context of that period in Nigeria's political history. 'So far,' he observed, 'the impact of Christianity in Nigeria has been less directly consequential for the struggle for political legitimacy and control of authoritative roles at central and state levels than has been the impact of Islam' (1986:60). The history of the intervening period can be described as one of the metamorphoses of Christianity in Nigeria. At the heart of this transformation is the evolution by Christian leaders of what Kalu captures as a 'theology of engagement' (Kalu, 2004:259). This transformation is indexed by two broad attitudinal shifts: the first from a basic insistence on the secularity of the Nigerian state to an affirmation of the imperative to Christianize it; and second, a quiet but significant abdication of the former position on Christians' involvement in public office. The following statement by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) illustrates these shifts:

> *Truly politics may be a dirty game – but who will make it clean? If Christians distance themselves from politics that leads to leadership, then demons will have a field day as had been the case with Nigeria up till today. If demons govern and rule us and burn our churches and marginalise us and treat us like second class citizens in our country of posting, then why should the Christian complain? ... When will the righteous be in authority? Is it only when Christ comes? We do not think so … The righteous cannot rule if he is taught not to be interested in governance. Christians ought to be interested in politics which is the vehicle used in reaching the position of leadership in this country. Genuine, properly born-again Christians, filled with the Holy Spirit should come and contest elections* (CAN, 1989, cited in Adogame, 2003).

Founded in August 1976 as an umbrella organisation to defend and advance the interest of Christians in Nigeria, CAN appeared initially to have adopted a conservative stance on political issues, before developments apparently alerted its leadership to what it saw as the creeping 'Islamization' of the country. At the same time, the establishment of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) in 1991 gave a fresh and uncompromising impetus to Christian agitation. Feeble if predictable protestations against perceived ill treatment of Christians gave way to a more assertive tone. Subsequently, leading Christian figures openly declared their interest in party politics – S.T. Ola Akande, the General Secretary of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, for example, put himself forward as a presidential aspirant. Incidents of religious violence in which Christians were thought to be victimised met with more vigorous condemnation and, more significantly, a readiness to use the occasion to articulate fundamental grievances about the nature of the state. By February 2006, when violent protests over the publication of images of prophet Mohammed in a Danish newspaper resulted in killings and the burning of 35 churches in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state, PFN president and founder of the Word of Life Bible Church, Ayo Oritsejafor described the riots as 'unwarranted, irrational and a clear disregard for the Christian faith in a secular country like ours', and warned that, 'Unlike past incidents, we will not tolerate a situation where the criminal acts of irrational extremists go unpunished.'[1] Other Christian leaders equally condemned the protests, demanding a national conference to sort out the country's structural (including religious) problems. More worryingly, there were retaliatory killings in parts of south-eastern Nigeria, with some claiming as many as a hundred casualties.

Underlying Christian advocacy of a 'theology of engagement' and a more vigorous political agenda was a suspicion of Muslim political ambitions, plus a recognition

of their relative success in achieving political dominance (Kukah, 1993). This suspicion has been fuelled by the perceived electoral majority of the north, and the subsequent number of Muslim presidents. More recently, the decision in 1986 by the Babangida government to make Nigeria a full member of the OIC (Organisation of the Islamic Conference), as opposed to its previous observer status (Oyebade, 2002); statements by former civilian president Shehu Shagari and military ruler general Muhammadu Buhari respectively to the effect that Muslims should refrain from voting for a non-Muslim; and the adoption of *Shari'a* law in some northern states have aroused Christian protest. Conversely there was the Muslim furore over the Miss World beauty pageant (2002) which was eventually cancelled following violent protests in Abuja and various parts of the Muslim north (Obadare, 2004).

The crisis that ensued after the annulment of the 12 June 1993 election opened the road to political agitation (and a greater say in political matters) for several Christian clerics, among them Bishop Alaba Job, Archbishop Anthony Olubunmi Okogie, Archbishop Sunday Mbang, Rt. Revd. Emmanuel Gbonigi, and Revd. Ayo Ladigbolu (Adebanwi 2006:4). This is not to suggest that that they had been apolitical before then, but it was in this context that 'The status of PFN and CAN as important political voices became apparent' (Adogame, 2005:132). This voice definitely became louder as the society came under more severe repression under the succeeding rule of General Abacha. The smouldering controversy over the adoption of *Shari'a* criminal law by several northern states (Uroh, 2002) also sharpened political mobilisation among the Christian community.

## Obasanjo: The Making of a 'Born-Again' President

By 1999, the entwinement of religion with the tissue of everyday life could be seen in every facet of society, and the rise of Islamism and Pentecostalism which had begun in the late 1970s and early 1980s was an established fact of social *praxis* (Ruth Marshall, 1991; Larkin and Meyer, 2006). President Obasanjo's victory at the polls and his eventual swearing-in as president on 29 May 1999 was heavily steeped in Christian Pentecostalist symbolism. To many Christians, Obasanjo's 'second coming' was a spiritual metaphor, one that went beyond the ordinary fact of his fortuitous emergence as a beneficiary of political compromise between the country's geo-political power blocs. The northern power elite had acquiesced to this 'power shift' in a desperate attempt to bury the ghost of '12 June' and bring down the rising political temperature. For Christians, it was a fulfilment of God's promise to liberate his children (southern Christians) from the yoke of northern (Muslim) leadership (Ojo, 2004). A politically exigent 'second coming' was therefore invested with a spiritual halo, and Obasanjo himself became transformed into a virtual 'messiah' almost overnight. It was pointed out that between 1979, when the same Obasanjo handed over power to civilians, and May 1999 (minus 84 days of the Ernest Shonekan-led Interim National Government), no Christian had occupied the highest office in the land (Agbaje, Okunola and Adebanwi, 2005), and hence Obasanjo's 'second coming' was part of a 'divine plan' to adjust the imbalance.

Obasanjo's messianic status had been enhanced by his personal circumstances before his election as president. Jailed by Abacha on charges of plotting to overthrow the government, Obasanjo languished in various jails in the country until his eventual release by General Abubakar following Abacha's death. Following his release, Obasanjo went public with the fact of his 'spiritual rebirth' in prison. He had, to use the popular Pentecostal parlance, become 'born-again', and soon

commemorated his new-found freedom with a mandatory church service. Although he was following a path already taken by other Nigerian leaders such as Chief Akin Omoboriowo, Professor Ishaya Audu and Chief Solomon Lar, all of whom had made public their conversion to the 'New Christianity' (Gaiya, 2002:26), Obasanjo's status as a former military ruler and one-time advocate of the potency of African *juju* meant that his conversion was of far greater import. For many Christians, his survival of the terrible living conditions in Nigeria's jails was itself an indication that God had preserved his life in order for him to 'accomplish great things'. In the thinking of some, the fact that he was jailed was itself part of God's 'master plan' for both Obasanjo and the country. Oby Ezekwesili, then Minister for Solid Minerals, now Minister for Education, was quoted in *The Guardian on Sunday*:

> And so God took that person, took him away into jail and the enemies thought they were the ones doing it: they took him into jail and when he was there, he had an encounter. **The President had an encounter; he had an encounter all in the agenda of God to resurrect the nation.** He brought him out after the encounter and then orchestrated a lot of things. God himself orchestrated a lot of things and took a person, who now had understood what total submission to the Almighty really is: that no matter your height or position, there is none greater than the Almighty God. At that place of revelation, he could use him. **He now set up events and got him back into the covenant of the nation. What do you think it was about? It was for the re-building to start** ('A daughter of Zion: Oby Ezekwesili speaks on what it takes to be a Christian in public office', Lagos, 1 January 2006, emphasis added).

As if to justify these expectations, the new president published a book, *This Animal Called Man*, a poorly written and barely intelligible jumble of prison recollections, Christian 'theology', Nigerian history, and 'philosophy'. However, the book's glaring intellectual failures were compensated for by its runaway political success. For many Christians, it was a seal on Obasanjo's nascent Christian credentials.

At the same time, Christian Pentecostal leaders (many of whom had personally visited Obasanjo in jail while he was serving his sentence for coup-plotting; Gaiya, 2002:26) were racing to 'claim' him as a personal embodiment of divine response to their prayers and prophecies for the nation. As Ojo puts it, they collectively 'adopted Olusegun Obasanjo as a symbol of the Christian control of the political sphere, believing that he was an answer to prayers about the ending of oppression and mis-governance and the ending of a Muslim political dominance' (Ojo, 2004:2). In addition, such was their joy about the election of a Christian President that they gathered in Abuja for an all-night prayer to usher in a new (spiritual) dispensation (Ojo, 2004:2).

A notable exception to this evangelical hysteria was Pastor Tunde Bakare, founder and leader of the Latter Rain Assembly who, very much against the grain, declared even before the election that Obasanjo was 'not the messiah'. Although other Pentecostal leaders immediately denounced Bakare's prophecy, such was the seriousness with which Obasanjo himself regarded it, that he convened a congress of sympathetic pastors in his Ota farmhouse to pray for him (Obasanjo) and apparently to nullify its negative impact (*The Sun*, Lagos, 10 April 2006). The incident thereby illustrated important divisions within the ranks of the 'theocratic class,' but also its emergent solidarities.

## The 'Theocratic Class' & the Obasanjo Presidency

In Haynes' view, 'leading religious figures are very often class actors in partnership with political elites to seek to achieve mutually advantageous goals' (1996:6). Such goals include, but are definitely not limited to 'the tendency for politicians to seek spiritual power, and for spiritual leaders to develop substantial material power' (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004:99). The social proximity between religious and political leaders in Nigeria is a genuine and long-standing one. For example, studies of the patterns of insertion of Christianity into Yoruba land (Peel, 2001) confirm that the emergent Christian clergy soon formed 'an important component of the super-elite' (Adebanwi, 2006:3). And today, amid all too familiar existential rigours and spiritual vulnerabilities, religious functionaries 'including Pentecostal/Charismatic pastors' remain important 'as purveyors of powerful prayers, potent medicines, and amulets for protection against evil' (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005:93). The late General Abacha famously surrounded himself with a retinue of Islamic *marabouts* and spiritual hangers-on who became centres of power in themselves.

Although I contend that the Pentecostal/Charismatic 'theocratic class' has had a clear influence on the Obasanjo presidency, particularly in securing a form of moral legitimacy, especially amongst Christians, that has to be seen within a history of alliance between secular and spiritual figures. What seems to be new however, is a determination (as part of a project of 'winning Nigeria for Jesus') to embed the New Christianity into the heart of the state. As Larkin and Meyer have noted, this symbolises a clear philosophical congruence in the attitudes of Islamism and Pentecostalism towards (state) power. For Islam, 'religion has never been something outside of state structures, but is profoundly intertwined with them' (Larkin and Meyer, 2006:310), while Kalu argues that state power is perceived 'as central in promoting religion; thus, control of the centre of the federal government remained a cardinal goal' for Muslims (2004:246). Pentecostalism's new ideological turn also consummates Ellis and Ter Haar's forecasts, first, of the likelihood of 'unprecedented configurations of power' between African politicians and charismatic religious leaders, and two, that 'the search for spiritual power, so prominent in Africa's new religious movements, must find institutional channels if it is to endure' (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004:101).

The workings of this new power nexus can be illustrated through analysis of two related processes: one of the specific social imaginary which has been produced by Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity in Nigeria; and the other of particular instances of the practice of the 'theocratic class'. Evidence of a virtual Charismatic take-over abounds – the manipulation of religious symbols, in particular the performance of religious rituals in public offices, institutions and functions (Akinola, 2006), the use of religious (Christian) criteria in selecting individuals for appointment into public offices, a moral triumphalism which seems to draw its oxygen from the demonisation of both Islam and traditional forms of belief, the proliferation of religious groups, especially Charismatic churches, and last but not least, the inundation of public 'debate' with Christian rhetoric.

Both the faith-based recruitment of public officials and the demonizing of Islam should be viewed in the context of southern Christians' grudge that when power was in the hands of the Muslim northern elite, both the appointment of officials and the sharing of social largesse were based on the singular criterion of religion. According to this view, an apotheosis was reached during the Buhari-Idiagbon era when the Supreme Military Council included eleven northern Muslims (and one

non-Muslim northerner) out of a total of 19 members. At the same time, fears of Islamic hegemony had been fuelled by the building of three mosques by successive Muslim leaders in Aso Rock, the seat of power. A Christian presidency became an opportunity to recover lost ground. One of the first things that the new president did in Aso Rock was to organise regular Christian services to pray for Nigeria; a Christian chapel was also built and a Baptist chaplain, Revd. Aliyu Yusuf Obaje, was appointed. Having regular morning Christian prayers in Aso Rock, attended by many public office holders, was seen as deeply symbolic. After decades of northern Islamic rule, it was imperative to reconstruct the presidency *and* the presidential villa itself (both materially and symbolically) as a Christian bastion against both 'Satanic' and invading 'Jihadist' (Caliphate) forces. The account by Ezekwesili (cited earlier) vividly illustrates this thinking and gives us a clue to the spatial organisation of daily life in the Aso Rock Villa:

> *So, everyday at the Villa, it was like, the two-edged swords being in my hands: one to work, doing my policy thing and everything: the other one, to pray. It has to be a blend of both because* **Satan had been sitting pretty before. Now, God has dislodged Satan but we needed to clear all the debris that Satan had put in what was his former territory** (emphasis added).

Given this view of the world, it is hardly surprising that a significant number of appointments are made based both on membership of the charismatic community and subscription to a common ideological vision. This is not to suggest of course that only Christians are appointed into public offices, but that in a number of crucial cases, individuals' theological affiliation seemed to have played an overwhelming role. The confession of Oby Ezekwesili (who, together with her husband, had attempted to convert Obasanjo before God apparently took charge of the future president's heart in jail) is particularly instructive in this regard:

> *Look at somebody like the Minister of Finance. She is a sister. She is a member of the Everlasting-Arm Parish of the Redeemed Christian Church of God. The Parish my husband pastors. She is a sister in Zion. She understands that without God she cannot do anything. She knows that … You think people don't know? They know that what we are it is God that is using the President. The President is a powerful instrument in the hand of God. If it were not for Olusegun Obasanjo, you think the likes of me and … and the rest of us … of this world would come anywhere near this government?*

The 'rest of us' are here named as Ahmad E-Rufai, Minister of Federal Capital Territory, Okonjo-Iweala, (former) Federal Minister of Finance, Ribadu, former Deputy Commissioner of Police and head of the anti-corruption agency, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, Bode Agusto, Director-General, Budget Office of the Federation and Charles Soludo, Executive Governor, Central Bank of Nigeria. These appointments fitted perfectly in the wider framework of the discursive construction of the Obasanjo regime as existing to fulfil an ambiguous divine mandate. This ideology has been sustained through, among other things, a social network of friends, husbands, wives and sundry divine supervisors (for example the Minister of Finance is a member of the Parish pastored by Oby Ezekwesili's husband); the president's continued personal posturing as a 'born-again' Christian and, perhaps most significantly, the cultivation of Pentecostal leaders whose word carries a lot of weight among the Christian public. There have been reports in the Nigerian media of the president extending invitations to these leading pastors to visit Aso Rock for 'prayer sessions', and it was this pattern that Tunde Bakare of the

Latter Rain Assembly denounced in the interview cited earlier. Asked why 'men of God are no longer speaking up the way they used to', he speaks of the apparent collusion of the Obasanjo regime with elements of the 'theocratic class'.

This story cannot be told without addressing the special role of Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye and the Redeemed Christian Church of God. A focus on the Redeemed Church is important, not only for the light it helps to shed on the obvious influence of its Overseer, Pastor Adeboye (and how that has been crucial in the government's quest for political and spiritual legitimacy), but also because of the way it reveals the all-important role of the church itself as the hub of a real nexus of what might be described as a tightly linked spiritual family.

Founded in 1952 by Pa Josiah Akindayomi, the Redeemed Christian Church of God is quite easily one of the fastest growing churches in the entire world. It has no fewer than 5,000 parishes worldwide, with a majority of them (4,000) in Nigeria alone (Sengupta and Rother, 2003). The church describes itself as a:

> *'spirit filled assembly multiplied in small and large groups all over the world'*[2] *and seems well on its way to Adeboye's reported wish to 'plant' it, within the next decade, 'in every nation of the world … every town of the nations, and then in every village of the nations, and then in every home of the nations* (Murphy, 2006).

It currently has members in more than 90 countries, including China, Bulgaria and Pakistan. Murphy rightly describes it as 'the face of 21st century Christianity: colossal, restless – and African' (p. 1). With its own university (Redeemer's University), satellite television (World Dove Media Plc) and a wi-fi internet provider, it is safe to say that the Redeemed Church is no longer, properly speaking, merely a church.

This is not to say that it does not promise its followers spiritual sustenance. In fact, that it is seen as succeeding in doing so (and quite spectacularly too) is one of the reasons behind the church's astonishing spread. More crucial however is the way the Redeemed Church is perceived as the 'church of power' (spiritual and material), attended by the powerful. The common attraction to power makes perfect sense in a context in which, to borrow the words of Ellis and Ter Haar, 'power is located other than where the law proclaims it to be' (2004:190), and personal security more often than not lies either in personally hoarding that power (using legitimate state resources for personal, illegitimate ends), or, failing that, ensuring proximity to whoever is seen to be in possession of it.

A main part of the attraction of the Redeemed Church, alleged miracles aside, is the opportunity it provides to meet people outside the immediate vicinity of one's social location. Thus, every first Friday of the month, the Church's Holy Ghost Night service, held in the 12,000 acre Redemption Camp, Kilometre 46, Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, draws in excess of an estimated 300,000 people, including successful professionals, bank managers, university professors, business magnates and, most symbolically, leading political figures. In this regard, the Church has transformed into a real space of social and economic networking, an important resource in a context in which official channels for self-enhancement are notoriously clogged. For the Church therefore, the trinity of a 'driven leadership, loose global oversight and staggering cash flow' (Murphy, 2006) has become an enviable recipe for success.

At the centre of this burgeoning empire is the revered figure of Enoch Adejare Adeboye, a former university academic, and the iconic figure of Nigeria's 'theocratic class'. A journalist admiringly refers to his 'towering spiritual height as a scandal-free, awesome miracle worker and fantastic teacher of the gospel of Christ.'[3] The 64-year-old Adeboye succinctly embodies Haynes' insight that 'leaders of religious institutions are always products of their times and of the particular social class they come from (or grow into)' (Haynes, 1996:233). Although Adeboye hails from a humble background (his rags-to-riches, Satan-to-Salvation story is the subject of a recent movie, 'The Covenant Church' produced by Charles Novia and Ope Banwo), he has 'grown into' another social class through a creative re-packaging of both himself and the church he inherited. Part of the public persona of Adeboye is his presentation as a mellifluous, spartanly-clad, but extremely powerful man. Such is Adeboye's assumed spiritual clout that newspapers have reported incidents in which church members scrambled to occupy a seat just vacated by him, apparently to share in his perceived spiritual gifts. Given his Goliath-like presence in the Pentecostal/Charismatic community, Adeboye's initial support for the Obasanjo regime was a godsend. He was among those to whom the new regime turned in 1999 when it was desperate for social legitimacy in the aftermath of a murky presidential election. In the course of his presidency, Obasanjo has attended the Holy Ghost Night Vigil on at least one occasion – with the 2003 elections looming, and his public approval at an all time nadir.

If Adeboye was central to the construction of a spiritual façade for the Obasanjo regime, it is important to note that he is not alone in 'dusting off the image of the government as God-fearing and righteous' (Oha, 2005:36). Mention must also be made of other influential figures like Chris Oyakhilome of the Christ Embassy, Mathews Ashimolowo of Kingsway International Christian Centre, Mike Okonkwo of the Redeemed Evangelical Mission, David Oyedepo of the Living Faith Ministries (also know as Winners Chapel), and Taiwo Odukoya of the Fountain of Life Church (Ihejirika, n.d.).

Such is the influence wielded by these religious leaders that private landmarks involving them are turned into an occasion for celebration by the government. For example, when David Oyedepo celebrated his 50th birthday in 2004, part of the president's public congratulatory message read thus:

> … *you have touched millions educationally, you have crowned it with the establishment of Covenant University, economically, you have provided jobs, morally God has used you to recreate moral integrity among millions. Physically, the grace of God has enabled you to provide infrastructure for a ministry related environment (sic). In all these and many more, we give thanks to God for your life.*[4]

More instructively, the President went on to implore the celebrant to:

> *Continue to pray for religious tolerance and avoidance of any religious conflicts which might contribute to the delay or derailment of our effort to build a greater Nigeria. Continue to pray for all three arms of government for divine wisdom to continue to work together as a team towards Nigeria's greatness.*

The public intervention of the 'theocratic class' has manifested in two distinct ways. First they have taken it upon themselves to pray for the peace and prosperity of the country, and, more important, for the preservation of the Obasanjo regime which has been divinely ordained to break the northern 'Islamic yoke'. Second, and as a

corollary, members of the class also see it as part of their spiritual responsibility to counter the northern Muslim elite. For example, when the Jamaat Nasril al-Islam protested against what they perceived as the imbalance in federal appointments and the consequent marginalisation of Muslims, the Christian leaders, under the umbrella of CAN (Christian Association of Nigeria) dismissed the claims as unfounded.

For Haynes, this alliance between religious elites and representatives of state power comes with mutual benefit for both sides, as 'being a de facto member of the state framework gives senior religious leaders opportunity to amass personal wealth, in just the same way as other leaders of important societal groups … may do' (Haynes, 1996:10). At the same time, 'politicians try to associate themselves with charismatic religious leaders, in the hope that spiritual power will be reflected on themselves' (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004:101). As we have seen in the case of the Obasanjo regime, such closeness to charismatic religious leaders is then used as a resource for regime legitimising, with religious leaders sacrificing their right to criticise the same government.

Although fissures have recently emerged in the alliance between the state and religious leaders, particularly over the government's ultimately vanquished attempt to prolong its stay in office beyond 2007, such is the domination of the public space by religious rhetoric that *both* the government's position on tenure elongation and its rejection by the opposition were couched in strictly religious terms. Thus, on the one hand, President Obasanjo, obliquely advancing reasons as to why he should be allowed a third term in office, said that 'I … believe that God is not a God of abandoned projects. If God has a project, He will not abandon it.'[5] At the same time, opponents of the so-called 'third-term' agenda laced their opposition with Christian parables. The following statement from Femi Adesina, a columnist for *The Sun* newspaper best summarises this pattern. As he put it,

> *Jesus came on a divine mission. You know how long it took him? Just three-and-a-half years. Was the job fully done by the time it became imperative for him to leave? Not by any means. But was the job abandoned? Not at all. Since he left over 2000 years ago, faithful disciples have continued with the job. Now if Jesus had said, oh, no one else can do the job, it is only me that can. Then it means he would not have gone to the cross, and the work of redemption would not have been accomplished. This is a vital lesson for Obasanjo, who is attempting to turn himself to Nigeria's God* (*Saturday Sun*, Lagos, 8 April 2006).

## Conclusion: Whither the Secular State?

This paper has focused on the rapid ascendance of the Pentecostal imagination, and its virtual capture of the Nigerian public space. The immediate background to this was the innovation of a new theology of engagement within a Christian community that saw the Islamic north as both a political and spiritual threat. For the Pentecostal community, the Obasanjo regime was a godsend, simultaneously encapsulating the desired geographic and spiritual shift in the centre of power in the country. While Christian religious leaders have prayed for the stability of the regime as a way of countering perceived northern/Muslim hostility, the regime has reciprocated not only by milking its endorsement as a way of legitimising itself, but also by regarding religious leaders as de facto members of the state structure.

The capacity of Christian-Islamic rivalry to 'delay national integration' because of the 'negative tendency' to 'create competing social orders' and to define 'the most

basic community', thereby challenging 'the national community of Nigeria' has been sufficiently remarked (IDEA, 2000:80). What I wish to briefly address in this conclusion is the direct implication of the new alliance of political and religious leaders (the 'theocratic class') on the constitutional status of Nigeria as a secular state.

Although Section 10 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria states that 'The Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion', religious communities have often argued that this apparent affirmation of secularity is not the same thing as a total rejection of (the validity of) religious practice. In any case, they argue, the introduction to the same constitution mentions the positive resolve of the people of Nigeria 'to live in unity and harmony as one indissoluble sovereign nation under God'.

In truth, secularism has never enjoyed a good press among Nigeria's religious communities, and when not being equated with atheism, tends to be viewed, especially by radical Muslims, as a synonym for Western civilisation. This position is best captured in the following statement by Lateef Adegbite, secretary general, Grand Council for Islamic Affairs, who insists that 'Secularism is alien to Islamic doctrine. Islam is a way of life and subsumes both spiritual and temporal matters under its doctrine. Islam necessarily regulates adherents' conduct politically, socially and economically' (quoted in Uroh, 2002:2). Conversely, Christian leaders have often defended secularism as a state ideology, seeing it as the best way of securing their corner in a multi-religious and poly-ethnic society such as Nigeria.

It has never been possible for what might be regarded as an authentic secularist-humanist perspective to emerge in Nigeria. This is one consequence of the growing religious suffocation of Nigerian public space (Obadare, 2004). Femi Fani-Kayode, Special Assistant (Public Affairs) to Obasanjo, clearly referring to Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka, declared that:

> *It is always very difficult to reason, debate or have any form of meaningful discussion or dialogue with any person who does not believe in God.*

The narrowing of debate has intensified in recent times as Muslims and Christians have continued to trade arguments over different issues. Arguably the most divisive of such issues has been the adoption of the *Shari'a* criminal code by twelve states in the northern part of the country. In the heat of the crisis, Obasanjo in fact seemed to have acknowledged the virtual division of the country along sectarian lines when he responded to a question about the adoption of the *Shari'a* criminal code by some northern states by saying that: '*Shari'a* is for the Muslims as the Ten Commandments (are) for a Christian' (Tayler, 2006:3).

In sum therefore, a position of moral equidistance from the two 'world religions' seems almost utopian at the moment. In any case, such a position is thought to be odd, if not unsustainable by those who are convinced that religiosity of some sort is genetic to, and constitutive of, the African identity. An idea of how avowed secularists are regarded within Nigeria's religious communities emerged in the aftermath of the recent demise of Beko Ransome Kuti, one of the country's leading human rights and democracy activists. Responding to news of Beko's death and the late activist's insistence on a secular outlook, Femi Adesina wrote in his column as follows:

*The only unfortunate part is now that Beko knows the truth where he is, he can't tell anyone. If he ended in the hell he talked so glibly about, he would have by now have found out that it's not a tea party (*Saturday Sun*, Lagos 18 February 2006).*

Nigeria's increasingly religious public sphere brooks no 'third way', and one might reasonably expect religion to play a massive role in next year's all-important elections.

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## Endnotes

l. Sam Eyoboka, 'Okogie, Oritsejafor, others warn: Those who killed our people must not go Scot free', *Vanguard* (Lagos) 26 February 2006, p. 1.

2. See http:www.rccg.org/ the homepage of the RCCG, accessed 10 June 2006.

3. See '"The Covenant Church" reveals Pastor Adeboye's life secrets', *ThisDay on Sunday* (Lagos), 12 April 2006.

4. See 'From OBJ to Bishop Oyedepo', *Nigerian Tribune* (Ibadan), 23 October 2004, p. 26.

5. See 'I leave third term to God-Obasanjo', *The Punch* (Lagos), 4 April 2006, p. 1.

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# World Bank & Heavenly Bank in Poverty & Prosperity: The Case of Tanzanian Faith Gospel[1]

*Päivi Hasu*

**This article discusses the articulation of religious rhetoric with neoliberal principles of the market economy in Tanzania, looking specifically at Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity. Religion is interpreted here as a reflection of and model for a lived reality. On the one hand, a lived reality generates and shapes religious beliefs and ideas. On the other, religious beliefs and ideas inform the ways that economic circumstances are perceived, interpreted and acted upon in specific social and historical contexts. This is a discussion of charismatic Christian perceptions and of the perceived spiritual and economic changes in Tanzania ahead of the general election of 2005. These Biblical allegories, as well as the gospel of prosperity, are brought together through an account of the activities of one particular charismatic ministry. The rhetoric and logic of prosperity through giving are discussed within the anthropological notion of gift exchange as well as with some born-again understandings of the significance of offerings to God as a means to prosperity and accumulation.**

Pentecostalism and other forms of charismatic Christianity are the fastest growing forms of Protestantism in Africa. Consequently, they have received a great deal of scholarly attention during the past few decades in different parts of the continent. Many of the studies have concentrated on claims to healing and deliverance. Some have looked at the global media culture and yet others have discussed consumption of commodities in the context of born-again Christianity (Hacket, 1998; Maxwell, 1998; Meyer, 1998; Stambach, 2000). Although faith gospel, also called prosperity gospel or health and wealth gospel, has received attention as well, detailed ethnographic studies on the significance of offerings for accumulation and divine fundraising are more scarce. Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity and faith gospel are here interpreted in the Geertzian spirit, as a model for and model of lived reality. Religious beliefs and ideas inform the ways that economic circumstances are perceived, interpreted and acted upon in specific social and historical contexts. Furthermore, lived reality generates and shapes religious beliefs and ideas (Geertz, 1973:93).

Faith gospel is a theological programme shared by many of Africa's charismatic churches.[2] It asserts that God has met all human needs in the suffering and death of Christ and that every Christian should share the victory of Christ over sin, sickness and poverty. A true believer has the right to the blessings of health and wealth and these can be obtained through a positive confession of faith. Several American

evangelists contributed to the development of this idea. A. A. Allen taught that God is a rich God and that those who want to share in his abundance must support God's servants. Oral Roberts added the idea of 'seed faith', that one prospers through planting a seed in faith and the return of that will meet all needs (Brouwer et al. 1996:26-27, 171; Gifford, 2001:62).[3] Approaches to faith gospel in terms of the local and the global have ranged from analysing the homogenising influence of the American originated gospel to analysis of more local, African-born concerns (Brouwer et al.; Maxwell, 1998). I will here discuss the ways that prosperity gospel and its rhetoric gets special form and content from the specifically Tanzanian realities.

Common elements in the broad variety of Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity are baptism of the Holy Spirit and miraculous experiences for the individual believer such as prophecy, healing and speaking in tongues. Pentecostals describe their churches as 'full Gospel', meaning that believers are filled with the 'Holy Spirit' in a way that was promised to the early Christians in the books of the New Testament; that is, they have access to miraculous power, 'the gifts of the Spirit', including rites of healing and driving out demons (Brouwer et al. 1996:5).

The contemporary Pentecostal-charismatic ideas of spiritual change, salvation and material progress seem to be an inversion of Max Weber's views of ascetic religiosity. In his analysis of Calvinism, salvation results from the systematic rationalisation of life. This form of Protestant ethic led to accumulation of wealth and investment rather than consumption (Weber, 2004 [1930]). Whereas early Calvinists accumulated wealth but rejected consumption, in contemporary charismatic Christianity the spiritual change and economic progress together with access to consumption are linked. In this form of Christianity, salvation is the result of the individual choice to become born-again. Here, the construction of the individual in relation to the divine is parallel with neoliberal assumptions of individual 'choice'. By virtue of becoming born-again and confessing faith the true believer has the right to health and wealth and the possibility of consumption.

This form of Protestantism is a combination of both rationality and the possibility of a miracle in its notions of economic activity and means to prosperity. There is the emphasis on such things as sound business practice and a rational mode of market research in creating wealth. Yet, it also concentrates on developing the charismatically expressive, irrational side of its nature and seems to be satisfying emotional needs that legitimise evolving economic structures (Brouwer et al. 1996:234). Comaroff and Comaroff have found parallels between occult economies, the use of magical means for material ends, and the new religious movements across the world (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2001:23). Both of these economies have two dimensions: a material aspect founded on the effort to produce wealth or to account for its accumulation by appeal to techniques that defy explanation in the conventional terms of practical reason; and an ethical aspect grounded in the moral discourses generated by the production of value through magical means (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2001:19) In both prosperity cults and occult economies, accumulation of wealth, prosperity and the possibility of consumption may take place not by way of rational, but by miraculous means. For those in the margins of the global economy, the Pentecostal-charismatic ideas of economic activity reach beyond where the access to rational means comes to an end.

## Revival in Tanzania

Christian revival is not new in Tanzania. East African revival movement that originated in Rwanda spread to the north-west of Tanzania by the end of the 1930s (Munga, 1998; Sendoro, 2000, 2002). It was re-integrated into the Lutheran church during the years after independence (Ludwig, 2002 [1996]:221, 222). Although Pentecostalism appeared in Tanzania in the early 20th century in the form of the Holiness Mission, Assemblies of God, Swedish Free Mission and ELIM Pentecostal Church, it was during the 1970s that it started spreading more rapidly. In consequence of the challenge presented by the Pentecostal churches, charismatic revival has been allowed to exist also within protestant denominations such as the Lutheran church. A distinction is usually made between the older Pentecostal churches and the new charismatic churches and ministries. This case study deals with one such new charismatic ministry (*huduma*). Today, Pentecostal-charismatic churches are among the fastest growing forms of Protestantism in all of Africa. Ludwig estimated that there were about 500,000 Pentecostals in Tanzania by the early 1990s (2002:222).

Tanzania is one of those African countries where the relationship between different religions had been perceived as harmonious. During the 1980s and 1990s this started changing (Ludwig, 2002:217-219). Some factors contributing to this development are Islamic revivalism, increasing importance of the Pentecostal churches and the growing influence of the charismatic movement in the Protestant churches as well as mass evangelisation crusades (Veller, 1992:139; Ludwig, 1999:16). At the same time, the structural adjustment programme and liberalisation of the economy driven by the World Bank and IMF has provided opportunities for some, but increased unemployment and a lowered quality and availability of social services for many others. This has taken place in the context of mass poverty (Munga, 1998:37), leading to a paradoxical situation where a few who have profited turn to religion for approval and justification, while those who remain poor also refer to God to rescue their aspirations and hopes.

One important development was the birth of the Big November Crusade, an organisation geared toward conducting evangelical crusades in the country (Ludwig, 2002 [1996]:223; Mlahagwa, 1999:301). The organisation united repre-sentatives of the Assemblies of God, the Lutheran Church, the Anglican Church as well as some other churches and its first non-denominational crusade was organised in 1986 in Dar es Salaam (Ludwig, 2002:223).[4] Pentecostal churches did not join the established Christian Council of Tanzania. Consequently, the Pentecostal Council of Tanzania was established in 1993 as their umbrella organisation. Today, the organising work for some of the large crusades is done by teams from the New Life in Christ ministry.[5] Internationally established evangelists such as Reinhard Bonnke have also visited the country.

Today, Pentecostal churches and evangelical ministries run extensive media activities. They run three of the five Christian weekly newspapers: *Msema Kweli* published by the Word And Peace Organization (WAPO), *Nyakati* published by the Registered Trustees of Evangelism and Media Network Trust (EMEN) and *Habari Njema* which also has a Pentecostal background. There are also five Pentecostal radio stations in the country: *Safina* in Arusha, *Uzima* in Dodoma run by the Pentecostal Church of Tanzania (*Kanisa la Kipentecoste Tanzania*, KLPT), *Wapo* in Dar es Salaam run by WAPO mission, *Praise Power* in Dar es Salaam under Assemblies of

God (AG) and *Morning Star* in Dar es Salaam run by the Seventh Day Adventists. One of the most challenging of charismatic ministries is run by a professional economist who brings Old Testament analogies to bear on the promises of the market place in his preaching. In the detailed description of the operations of his ministry which follows we see how skilfully these biblical narratives are used to raise expectations about socio-economic conditions in Tanzania, while at the same time we use concepts of 'gift exchange' to account for the fact that the returns from donations to the church (or to 'God') may not necessarily take monetary form. These ideas are explored in the following sections.

## Worldly Economy

Tanzania is one of the world's poorest and most highly indebted countries. Neoliberal policies of structural adjustment in the 1980s and early 1990s sought to dismantle the regulation that was seen to constrain market forces in many postcolonial African economies (Gould and Ojanen, 2003:29). In 1999, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank announced that SAPs would be replaced by poverty reduction strategies.

The PRSP (Poverty Reduction Strategy Process) in Tanzania has been followed and monitored among others by the Tanzania Social and Economic Trust (TASOET), an NGO with Christopher Mwakasege as its Executive Director. Christopher Mwakasege worked as a senior economist at the head office of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania where he had responsibility for church-run social and development projects. He also served as an advisor under the President's office in matters related to the national external debt crisis and debt reduction strategy. He has been a member of the Government Public Expenditure Review Working Group as a representative of NGOs. He travels internationally on a regular basis to meet with people from the IMF, World Bank, and UN in his role as an economist and NGO activist.

TASOET was established for the purpose of carrying out research, advocacy, negotiations, lobbying and awareness education in the area of social, economic, debt and development issues in Tanzania. A TASOET report on Tanzanian experiences with PRSP concludes that the macroeconomic progress that Tanzania has registered between 1995 and 2000 is not reflected at the grassroots level where poverty is still widely and deeply felt. There are large gaps between urban and rural populations and Dar es Salaam is better off by almost all measures. The report establishes that over half of all Tanzanians live on less than $1 a day and over one-third of them live in abject poverty – below 50 cents a day (Mwakasege, 2001).

## Heavenly Banking

Besides this conventional professional activity, Mwakasege has also established a charismatic ministry called *Mana* (Manna) which links declarations of faith, donations from followers, their expectations and anticipated returns. The leading motto of *Mana* is from the book of John: 'Feed my sheep'. This message reflects the spiritual as well as the material needs of Tanzanians: 'It is not God´s will that we are poor'. Mwakasege is an inter-denominational preacher but Lutheran by back-ground. He travels around the country and arranges 'seminars' that last up to two weeks. Ten to fourteen meetings take place annually. His strongholds are Dar es Salaam, Arusha, Kilimanjaro, Kilombero and Dodoma. His preaching activities

have grown during the 1990s into national and now even international proportions as he has made preaching trips to England and America. The outdoor seminars can presently seat 15,000 people, with the largest attendance estimate (in Moshi) at up to 30,000 on a single day.

Mwakasege has chosen to operate within the established denominations, particularly the Lutheran church and New Life in Christ. The NLC that Mwakasege also heads is often the primary organiser of the seminars, at least in Dar es Salaam. The organising committees are divided into several sub-committees that are responsible for various tasks before and during the seminars such as building, food, security, accommodation and so on. Mwakasege's success does not lie solely in his charismatic character but also in his inter-denominational approach and his respect for the established mainline churches. He insists that born-again Christians should remain in their denominations, an approach which makes him less threatening in the eyes of mainstream leaders.

In addition to organising seminars, the ministry produces audio and videotapes for sale. It also broadcasts on several radio stations such as Radio Free Africa that can be heard in nine countries in East and Central Africa,[6] radio *Wapo* and *Upendo* in Dar es Salaam as well as radio *Faraja* in Shinyanga. The Lutheran church in Kilimanjaro allocates two hours of prime time per week at the church-run radio station *Sauti ya Injili*. Mwakasege writes columns in a Christian weekly newspaper *Nyakati* and advertisements of his meetings are published in *Msema Kweli.* Furthermore, he maintains a sophisticated website that includes prayers, testimonies, teachings, questions and answers, pastoral letters, seminar reports and information about possibilities of contributing to the activities of the ministry. The website is being translated into English.[7]

At the seminars, the morning hours before lunch are often devoted to youth and to prayers. In January 2004 special prayers were organised for the state and the forthcoming general election of 2005. The daily evening sessions start at 4 p.m. with a warm-up of gospel music often performed by some of the most popular gospel groups in the country. Then follow praise and worship, testimonies and prayers, offerings, blessing of personal belongings, burning of amulets and sorcery objects and auctioning of donated goods such as chicken, roosters, calves, pigs, bananas, maize, eggs, clothes, *vitenge* (wrappers) and so on. Teaching and preaching usually lasts for 1-2 hours, followed by altar prayers for those who want to become born-again. Mwakasege and his wife also perform special prayers for the ill, for the possessed, for those suffering from AIDS, for the youth and for married couples. Testimonies focus on the doings of God and Jesus in the individual's life ever since the person attended a seminar, was prayed for or heard prayers and other services through the media such as radio, TV and the homepage. Mwakasege seems to be particularly interested in having people give testimony about the effect of these media in the work of God. In contrast to some other examples (e.g. Gifford, 2004:50), prosperity, wealth and money are remarkably absent in the testimonies and they tend to concentrate on health and healing. In 2003 about 40,000 people became born-again at the seminars.

It is very difficult to estimate the finances of the ministry, including possible foreign sources. According to publicly given information, the cost of each seminar lies somewhere between Sh.4-10 million.[8] The annual expenses of the seminars are between Sh.80-100 million. Most seminars take place in a tent that has been constructed out of iron bars and pieces of plastic. In Dar es Salaam, however, the

meetings take place at various meeting venues. The rent of Diamond Jubilee Hall in Dar es Salaam for example, was Sh.350,000 per day and chairs were rented for Sh.2 million per seminar. The organising committee opened an 'office' at the Moshi seminar in January 2004, where people went to 'buy their own chair' for Sh.6,000 each.

Apart from the seminars, media activities also require funding. The expenses of the broadcasts are Sh.30 million per year. The broadcasts at *Sauti ya Injili* in Kilimanjaro cost Sh.5.2 million shillings annually. In January 2004 in Moshi an appeal was made to the audience to support the radio broadcasts on *Sauti ya Injili.* Within a few minutes more than 50 people had lined up each volunteering to contribute Sh.100,000. At every seminar Mwakasege addresses the importance of giving offerings to God. An insider informant claimed that at the Moshi seminar in January 2003 the collection was Sh.20 million in sixteen days. In other words, whilst the costs are high, the income from believers is probably much higher.

Mwakasege tells us that God determines what the themes of his seminars should be. They are adapted according to the location and particular themes of prosperity and are selected for Dar es Salaam because it is the city of business. The audience is predominantly female and primarily Lutheran town dwellers as well as the farming population from the rural areas in the North. In the urban areas such as Dar es Salaam the seminars appear to attract a relatively well to do urban population, professionals and people in small businesses. Apart from the more biblical message, he discusses the changes in the Tanzanian economy, the consequences of economic liberalisation on the economy of private people, free health care and education, the principles of making a successful business, market research, discovering one's personal talent and so on.

## It is Not God's Will That We are Poor!

Establishing the exact theological and media influences from which Mwakasege draws has proved difficult. It seems to be clear, however, that his message is based on the American-born prosperity gospel. In this form of gospel, sacrificial poverty is not a virtue since it denies everything that Christ has won through his death, that is, prosperity for the born-again believers (Hunt, 2000:334). In public Mwakasege has described some difficult personal times in the mid-1980s when he and his wife became born-again but also faced serious economic difficulties. After prayers, they understood that one of the reasons was that they were too tied to the 'worldly economy' instead of relying on the 'economy of heaven'. They also realised that they were more inclined to receiving than to giving or harvesting what they had sown. In his opinion it is entirely justified for born-again Christians to think that they deserve to become healthy and wealthy in this life by virtue of the death of Jesus Christ at the cross. Wealth should be there for the satisfaction of basic human needs and for spreading of gospel:

> *I know that God wants me to be successful in everything. And if you say that it is God's will that you have not been successful I do not agree on that. God created man as his own image; God is not poor and therefore he did not create man as the image of the poor. Do you think God put these things, food, clothing and soap in the world for Satan and his people? Do you think that once we are in heaven we still need food, clothing and soap? God gave these things for us to use now. God is the one who gives man the power to gain wealth. God is the one who teaches man to make profit. Our God whom we worship is not a God of loss but a God of profit. Man has*

*been created internally in such a way that he likes to be taught to make profit in what he does. If God teaches you to make profit then the way you use to make profit is a just way. The wealth that one gets from God is there to spread gospel. The ones who believe in him and follow his commands will get back hundred-fold when still in this world* (Mwakasege, 2004).

In this thinking it is not sinful to be wealthy; wealth is needed for two purposes: to satisfy human needs and to make offerings so that the Gospel can be spread and meetings such as his arranged:

*It is Satan's work to wage war against Christians who want to make money in a just and legal way. Satan knows that if a good Christian has enough money he will use it to spread gospel! Many have failed to build churches because they lack money. The clergy is paid low salaries because there is not enough money. Evangelical conventions and seminars are not held because of lack of money. Who do you think will donate money for the purpose of spreading gospel if not the Christians? And how do the Christians give money if they don't have it? And how would they have money if they think that it is sin to have a lot of money?* (Mwakasege, 2003).

## Biblical Allegories of Tanzanian Economy

In Tanzania, the Government has placed restrictions on religious organisations and their involvement in politics, and politicians are prohibited from using language intended to incite one religious group against another or to encourage religious groups to vote for certain political parties. But it is undeniable that Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity has political ramifications. In 2005 Mwakasege devoted considerable attention to the general election, the role of the President in the economy as well as the forthcoming economic and spiritual changes in the country. But he carefully avoided politically explicit commentary:

*I do not talk politics, I talk about your stomach, of you being satisfied (*matumbo yanashiba*). We are not in a political meeting, we are in the house of God* (Mwakasege, 2005c).

His religious rhetoric picks up elements from the everyday realities of Tanzanians, the failings of the state in providing education and social services as well as from the principles of the market and the private sector. Mwakasege draws many allegories of the Tanzanian economy from the books of the Old Testament, particularly Exodus, Deuteronomy and the book of Joshua. He presents the transit of Tanzania from one economic model to another by using biblical allegories. He discusses the role of the President in the economy of Tanzania as well as in the economy of private individuals, and he juxtaposes the leadership of the president and himself by representing them as Joshua taking his people into the Promised Land.

Economic changes are described in terms of three stages in the wandering of the Israelites from slavery to the Promised Land: Egypt, Desert and Canaan. In this rhetoric, 'Egypt' refers to the era of colonial rule in Tanzania, 'desert' to the period of socialism under president Nyerere and 'Canaan' to the present liberalised economy.

*In Canaan people had to pay taxes to the king and give tithes (*sadaka*) to the priests. In the modern language they entered the private sector; it wasn't easy after having been fed for 40 years in the desert by way of miracles! It was like Tanzania now; the economic system of Tanzania is like that of Canaan. But there are three different groups of people: those who still want the system of Egypt (to be fed by the government) when they in actual fact are in Canaan in the private sector. Secondly, there are those who know nothing about Egypt – only hear*

*about it – but who are also not prepared for the private sector and the economic system of Canaan. These people are dependent on their leaders. Lastly, there are the people like Joshua and Caleb who have experience of all systems and who are prepared to change their mind-set. There are people who were born before the Arusha Declaration,[9] people who were born after that and people who have experience of all of them. There are people who were taken care of by the government for more than thirty years as regards free education and health care. In the private sector you have to pay for these. Also, many were educated by the government but they have no employment in the present system* (Mwakasege, C & D, 2005).

The book of Joshua is a key text to understanding the role of economic leadership. Joshua inherited the leadership of the Israelites from Moses in order to lead the people to the Promised Land. The key tasks of the President in terms of the economy are to lead the people through economic changes that they have not experienced before, to prepare Tanzanians for a better economy in circumstances of hard competition and to build up economic circumstances in such a way that all Tanzanians can succeed. The book of Joshua is used by Mwakasege to describe the tasks of the president but it also refers to himself as a leader:

*When God called me he told me of this book. I knew that instructions for me were in the book of Joshua. I knew that I needed to cross the river Jordan because I had a group of people. There is a group of Tanzanians that is ready to take the spiritual step forward. God has given me the word to help them cross Jordan together with me* (Mwakasege, 2005c).

In 2004 Mwakasege claimed to have received a message from God saying that the economic and spiritual changes of the country would go together. He used the creation narrative to explain that God created all the riches for man to have on earth; in a similar vein, the riches have to be there first in order for the evangelical services to function and to be paid for. God told him:

*I will go to Tanzania again to bring revival (*uamsho*) that you have not yet seen. But before I bring the anointment (*upako*) of revival I will bring the anointment of wealth (*utajiri*) to my people so that they will be able to pay the cost of the forthcoming revival* (Mwakasege, 2005a).

He is very conscious of his own preaching and teaching skills as he declares that one should listen to those who have the know-how to prosper. Furthermore, he seems to suggest a parallel between the occult practices and prosperity gospel:

*If the teacher is not wealthy do not plan to become his disciple. If his education has failed to make him wealthy how is he going to make you wealthy? Some people go to a medicine man who says: 'I will help you to get money'. But he himself sleeps in a shed. How does he take you to a route that he has not passed himself? Explain to me, who will listen to and believe an evangelist or any other servant who tells you to trust everything with God if he has patched clothes himself! People will ask: 'If Jesus has failed to give his servant good clothes how could he help an ordinary Christian like me?'* (Mwakasege, 2003).

Running a ministry and preaching of prosperity gospel is also an income generating activity for supporting evangelists. This is what the American prosperity evangelists such as A. A. Allen teach and this is what Mwakasege is also clear about:

*Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk?[10] It does not help me if you say that 'Mwakasege, I wanted to help you in the service but I do not have money to give you'. In your heart you really want to help me by paying a part of the cost of the service but you don't have*

*the money! God wants to deliver you (*akufungue*) so that you are rich in everything in order to be generous with everything. It is not enough as such to say that you will pray for me. I do not need just prayers but I need both prayers AND money (Mwakasege, 2005a).*

However, there is more to it than this. Although he appears to be forthright in declaring the need of his church for monetary donations, he is more subtle in indicating the way in which donors may receive a return.

## Reciprocity & the Heavenly Economy

The issue of donations lends itself to a discussion about gift exchange and reciprocity, including the temporal basis of the exchange, and the nature and value of gifts given and received. In terms of the language of gift exchange, Mwakasege seems to be talking about reciprocal gift exchange between two parties as well as pooling, a form of collective action (Sahlins, 1972). It is about gifts and the spirit of reciprocity, sociability, and spontaneity in which gifts are typically exchanged. But in the examples that he provides, he also seems to discuss the profit-oriented, self-centred, and calculated circulation of money as a commodity.

Mwakasege generates a rhetoric of genuine gift giving, he talks about the nature of a true gift in contrast to the exchange of 'commodities'. The distinction is that between grace (*neema*) and law (*sheria*). Giving offerings according to the law does not give the same spiritual reward (*thawabu*) as giving a true gift; giving by a rule or regulation reduces the offering to a tax. Offerings are divided into three categories: first fruits (*malimbuko*), tithes (*zaka*) and sacrificial offering (*dhabihu*). He also makes a difference between tithes (*fungu la kumi*) and those offerings that are meant for the upkeep of servants. What makes the rhetoric of genuine gift giving so convincing is the temporality: the power whose doings cannot be questioned and whose ways are not known to human beings respond whenever it is suitable for him. It is the responsibility of Christians to give to God his due share not only to receive a hundred-fold but also to spread the Gospel.[11] Mwakasege uses the biblical narratives as the justification of his activities and actions. In his view, it is the right of every Christian to give contributions to God at his meetings in order to receive hundred-fold and he himself has no right to refuse this experience of a miracle:

> *One day I was preaching at one church. After I had finished we were outside greeting people. Then a widow came to me and gave me Sh. 300. She said: 'My son, take this money that I have so that it help you in God's work'. If God had not delivered me I would have returned the money. How can you take the last 300 shillings of a widow who has problems? And I have pockets full of money! But that woman gave her last money to me to help in the work of God. Had it been the time when I was struggling I would have returned the money. But after God taught me a lesson I knew that the possibility of a miracle for that woman was in the fact that she was giving me the money. It is difficult to explain to anybody who has problems that the miracle awaiting you lies in giving the last money to me (Mwakasege, 2003).*

Hence, Mwakasege describes that he had no difficulty accepting the offering of the poor widow.[12] Who is he to deny the woman her chance to get back hundred-fold what she has given to God? According to Mwakasege:

> *We have to remember that it is not God's will that we be poor, that we have hard living conditions (*hali ngumu*) with clothing, food and health. It is usual that man gives and relies on receiving. One does not necessarily receive from the one to whom one gave but from somebody else (Mwakasege, 2004).*

As Mauss has suggested in his classic text, *The Gift* (1925), a man can maintain his status and standing as a moral person only if he gives. Accumulation of wealth is not evil as such but a person who has possessions is considered moral depending on the way he uses his wealth. Failure to give or receive, like failure to make return gifts, means a loss of dignity (Mauss, 1970 [1925]). This seems to be exactly what Mwakasege is talking about:

> *To give offerings is not part of your daily expenses. It is part of your capital that you invest in the company of Lord Jesus. God does not want you to give offerings as part of your daily expenses. God wants you to give offerings as your capital that you invest in the company. Those of you who understand matters of stocks and shares know that they are not part of your expenses; they are your investment. You believe that the company that you have invested in will make profit and you will get returns. God wants you to have enough money to continue buying more of his stocks in the company of Lord Jesus. This means: continue giving. And when you continue giving in this way Lord Jesus continues making profit and he will return back to you* (Mwakasege, 2003).

However, in this rhetoric, the calculated and self-interested profit-seeking risks collapsing the distinction between the sacred and the profane, with the relationship between man and God in danger of being reduced to a simple self-interested business partnership. Mwakasege avoids these risks by making clear the different nature of the counter gift. The return gifts may come in forms other than money, which is even more valuable:

> *God himself comes to receive the tithes but he does not come empty-handed. He comes with bread and wine in his hands. Bread stands for God's word and wine for the Holy Spirit. And you will be given the word of revelation to move you ahead. If God says that he will bring you word do not expect money. He says that he will bring you revelation to get you out of the trouble but you say: 'God I want money to get out of this trouble'. God says: 'No, I have something bigger to give you, I will give the revelation, I will give you the word, and I will give you know-how'. God I will empower you to prosper. It is not a matter of dropping money from heaven* (Mwakasege, 2005b).

As Kelsall and Mercer suggest, in liberal understandings of empowerment, it is *individuals* that should participate in development efforts and who ought, thereby, be empowered. This is linked to the central role of the rational, self-authoring, autonomous individual self in liberal philosophy and ideology (Kelsall and Mercer, 2003:293-294). All this goes well together with the Pentecostal-charismatic individualistic ideology and the consequences of conversion in the personal life of an  individual.

Ideas about the temporal delay in reciprocating the gift and the different nature of the counter gift relate to two issues. First, the immediate return or an exactly similar kind of counter gift, i.e. money, would mean denial of gift exchange, as the counter gift must be deferred and different from the original gift (Bourdieu, 1977:5; Coleman, 2004:433). Second, by suggesting that God's counter gift is not only different but also essentially non-material, i.e. the revelation and the word, Mwakasege manages to maintain the difference between the sacred and the profane. What is more, he avoids making literal promises about material counter gifts.

## Audience

Although Mwakasege himself attempts to convey the message that God's return gift comes in non-material forms such as the revelation and the word, some born-again Christians think literally of the hundred-fold return of their monetary savings. One example is Shose, an unmarried woman of 24. She came from a rather modest background and was not able to continue her education beyond Form 2. She became born-again as a child and is now heavily involved in the revival movement. She explained how she perceives the idea of offerings to God:

> *I follow these matters a lot. If I give offerings I write down the date and I follow it. It depends what kind of offering I give and what I say to God. 'God I give you Sh.100, I do not ask you to give me hundred-fold'. I sow the seed for the sake of my life. At other times I say: 'God, I pray to you. I have placed savings with you, I ask you to give me a hundred-fold, return to me a hundred-fold'. And I follow my offering. It is like you have opened a depositor's book. And I record. I have given to God and how many times have I received? I follow until I have come to fold. I sow the seed, it is my savings.*

> *I prayed to God to give me roofing sheets in order to build a house. Then it happened that God gave me money and I bought 16 roofing sheets. I built a house with earth walls and two rooms, a small sitting room and a bedroom* (Shose, Moshi, Tanzania, January 2004).

Shose was at one time in the business of second hand shoes; she bought stock in Dar es Salaam and sold them not only in the capital but also up-country. One day she was robbed of over a million shillings of business money and she was about to break down, but recovered partly by checking her accounts with God:

> *I took my depositor's book and a calculator and did some calculation. Strangely enough, I had not lost as much as I thought. It was not as much as the savings I had already placed with God.*

This rationalisation allowed her to question the appearances of a money-making ministry:

> *…. ordinary Christians complain that the reverend just likes money. Only money, the reverend just talks about money. People like that just complain, because they don't understand the meaning of giving to God. But we who are born-again, we know the profit we get from God. You cannot harvest if you have not sown. You wait patiently after you have sown. God replies when it his time to reply. You don't know how many years. But I know that God replies. If he does not reply today, he replies tomorrow. If he does not reply tomorrow then the day after tomorrow* (Shose, Moshi, Tanzania, January 2004).

## Conclusions

It is evident that prosperity gospel has its global aspect and cannot be understood without reference to its American origins. But it also finds resonance in the hardships that Tanzanians face and their concerns about material wellbeing in this life. I have sketched the logic of receiving through giving by using the anthropological notion of gift exchange. I touched upon the nature and value of the gift and the counter gift as well as the temporality of the exchange in the metaphoric expressions. The distinction between the sacred and the profane is maintained by presenting the ultimate counter gift in essentially non-material form. The relationship between 'man and God' is thereby not reduced to a mere business partnership. It goes

without saying that the persuasive promise of a hundred-fold return in the indefinite future is an effective means to divine fundraising. The three-way win gives the income to the evangelist, a true gift to God and a promise to the Christian about hundred-fold return in the indefinite future.

Neoliberal rhetoric of free markets and the policies of the international monetary institutions are reflected in the religious language and practices. At the same time, notions of salvation and prosperity are a means to interpret the lived world and criticise economic reforms. Pentecostal-charismatic views of salvation and worldly action echo Weberian ideas, though in a very different setting. Salvation is free individual choice, and prosperity and wealth its divine consequences.

The example of cases such as that described in the present paper provide some insight into the reasons for the current spread of prosperity gospel in much of Africa. To many people Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity offers substantial promise and hope of a better future. The Holy Spirit means not only emotional security at the times of affliction, poverty and uncertainty but it also retains the possibility of miracles that might enable material survival. Economies at the margins must conform to the rules of a global network of business and finance, and to the attraction of the expanded marketplace. Global capitalism fuses hope and hopelessness, possibility and impossibility in the lives of many people, and the neoliberal age emphasises a privatised as well as an individual rather than a communal sense of salvation and prosperity. For the individual struggling to cope with daily life in a context where such distant forces are at work, the immediacy of the promises of the charismatic preacher, in a context of congregational community with reassuring rituals and an explanation for everything, has an obvious appeal.

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## Endnotes

1. This article is based on over 24 hours of recorded preachings and teachings as well as numerous full days of participant observation at the seminars organised by the Mana ministry, led by Mr Christopher Mwakasege, in Moshi January 2003 and January 2004, Arusha February 2003 and Dar es Salaam December 2003. I am grateful to my assistants, Sia Mseke and Avelin Chuwa, who facilitated this study with their devoted assistance.

2. For a more detailed account of the US origins and development of prosperity gospel, see Brouwer el. al. 1996. For the purpose of this article, Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity is understood broadly as the experience and working of the Holy Spirit and the practice of spiritual gifts. This definition would also include the African Initiated Churches (AIC), classical Pentecostals originating in the Western Pentecostal missions and the new independent churches, fellowships and ministries (Anderson, 2002:168).

3. Also, Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity* (1974); Gloria Copeland, *God's Will is Prosperity* (1978); Kenneth E. Hagin, *How God Taught me about Prosperity* (1985).

4. Today, Tanzania Assemblies of God is the largest Pentecostal church in Tanzania with over 200,000 members (Ludwig, 1999:183).

5. Previously called New Life Crusade. NLC represents mainly Lutherans, Moravians, Anglicans, Baptists, African Initiated Churches but also some Catholics and Pentecostals (A. Mmanyi, 12 December 2003).

6. Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Congo, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique.

7. There are 10,000-15,000 full-time internet subscribers in Tanzania, 70 per cent of whom are in Dar es Salaam (Mercer, 2004:52).

8. In January 2006 the exchange rate was approximately Sh.10,000 to £5.

9. The Arusha Declaration was made by Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, 5 February 1967, outlining the principles of *Ujamaa*, Nyerere's vision of socialism, to develop the nation's economy.

10. 1 Corinthians 9:7

11. Luke 6:38, Galatians 6:7 and 2 Corinthians 9:6-12.

12. Luke 21:1-4, Mark 12:41-44.


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# Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt & Sudan

## *Mohammed Zahid & Michael Medley*

**This article compares the evidence from two related movements: the contemporary Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and the cluster of organisations that have been closely associated with Hasan al-Turabi in Sudan, in order to query the extent to which Islamism is compatible with liberal democratic politics. The answers suggested are, in the Egyptian case, hopeful, but for Sudan decidedly pessimistic. However, there are complexities within both stories. The comparison indicates ways in which the outcomes are related to the framing circumstances, but also points out the limitations of the information currently available in the academic literature.**

How far is Islamism compatible with liberal democratic politics? This question, which was implicitly posed by the break-up of the Ottoman Empire and later at the decolonisation of countries with large Muslim populations, has been widely seen as more pressing after the end of the Cold War, and particularly after the events of 11 September 2001 (Huntington, 1993, 1997; Esposito and Burgat, 2003; Abou El Fadl, 2004). Of course, Islamism has in the contemporary era varied in its character and effects in different times and places, but we would broadly define it as a politics which promotes systems of governance and political solutions in terms of religious doctrine rather than, say, utilitarian considerations, or the supposed interests of classes or nations. The factors that influence the variations in organisations committed to such a politics are consequently of great interest. One way of learning about them is to compare cases which have substantial areas of similarity, but also significant differences. The present article tries to do this through a comparison of the acts and experiences, tactics and strategies, of Islamist groups that share the heritage of the Muslim Brotherhood in the neighbouring countries of Egypt and Sudan.

The Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun*, hereafter abbreviated as MB),[1] was founded in Egypt, 1928, by a young schoolteacher, Hasan al-Banna. In its first twenty years it gained about half a million members in some two thousand branches throughout the country. Many were involved in co-operative and charitable community work, creating and running mosques, schools and social clubs; small hospitals, firms and trades unions. Members were engaged in these programmes of good works at the same time as encouraging and monitoring each other as regards the precepts of personal morality laid down in Islamic Law (*Shari'a*). But the MB also had a larger political vision. Banna continued a tradition of Islamic ideological responses to the decay of the Ottoman Caliphate (the prime embodiment of a Muslim polity) and the encroachment of Western colonialism and neo-colonialism. The MB was consciously a movement of resistance – which became apparent in the 1940s. Its leaders considered that Islam intrinsically opposed Westernization not only in matters of personal belief and comportment, but in public culture, law and political constitution. And this was not only in each country individually, but also

geopolitically, uniting Muslims everywhere against domination pursued by the West through such acts as the creation and inflation of the state of Israel.

Nevertheless, the MB has of necessity pursued its struggle mostly in the circumstances of particular nation-states. In Egypt, the context has on the whole been one of severe constraint, varying between conditional licence and outright repression by governments, initially a monarchy that was heavily dependent on Britain, then (from 1952) the authoritarian regimes of Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak. Until the late 1930s, at least, the MB functioned as a movement of social revival rather than of open political agitation. Membership could be compatible with activism in other political parties (Mitchell, 1969:18). In this way it developed a wide-reaching organisation. But although Banna sometimes said that the aims of the movement were primarily educational, some of its forms and activities suggested a preparation for seizing state power, by force if necessary, although it was denied by Banna. The MB seemed to be using many of the same organisational technologies that had been adopted by communist and fascist revolutionary movements in the early twentieth century: attention to propaganda, programmes of physical and ideological training, insistence on discipline and obedience, secret cells, a large youth corps. In 1942 Banna declared himself a candidate in the national elections, but was instead persuaded to withdraw and support the party of the Prime Minister in return for greater freedom for the MB's activities, and government action against the trades of liquor and prostitution (Ibid. pp. 26-27); the agreement did not hold for long. Three years later, Banna and other Muslim Brothers actually stood in elections, but were defeated, probably as a result of rigging (Ibid. p. 33). Meanwhile the MB had sprouted a secret military unit. This was probably behind the assassinations in the late 1940s of British army officers and Egyptian governmental officials, including (following his banning and attempted dissolution of the MB in December 1948) Prime Minister Muhammad al-Nuqrashi. The MB supported Nasser's revolution in 1952, but returned to violence (including an attempted assassination attempt on Nasser) when it became clear that he was not going to co-operate with them. Nasser, in return, set in motion an even more virulent programme of suppression, in which not only were the assets of the MB confiscated, but six of its leaders executed, thousands of its members arrested, and many more imprisoned and tortured without open trial.

The MB eventually re-emerged in the 1970s and provided inspiration for new organisations in Egypt and other countries. In these new cases there has usually been a recurrence, in some form, of the conflict of priorities between, on the one hand, moral and spiritual consolidation at the level of the individual, family and local community and, on the other, the projection of Islam politically at the level of the state and beyond. Within the latter there is always a question of legitimate means, and whether practices of deception, subversion and violence are justified by the Qur'anic concept of *jihad* (holy struggle). Usually, it has to be said, these MB-related organisations do contain at least a fringe of activists for whom such an interpretation of *jihad* is attractive. It is a stance which, as we show next, has helped bring a MB-related group to control of the state in Sudan, but has not enabled it to build anything resembling an ideal Islamic polity. And, as will be seen afterwards, it is a stance from which the contemporary MB in Egypt appears to be trying to distance itself.

## The Islamist Project in Sudan: The Path to Government

The independent MB organisation established in 1954 in Sudan faced a rather different set of opportunities and constraints from that of al-Banna in the Egypt of 1928. First, although colonial rule was more formal in Sudan than it had been in Egypt, its duration was not indefinite; indeed it was due to end imminently, at the start of 1956. The challenge was thus to address the society and politics of a newly-independent state, rather than to build a framework of resistance under a foreign-dominated administration. There was also a big difference in the composition of the country. Sudan, spatially far more extensive than Egypt, had seen much less modernising development. Communications between centre and periphery were far more tenuous. It was ethnically heterogeneous; indeed, vast areas (particularly in the southern part of the country) were occupied by people who were non-Arab and/or non-Muslim.[2]

A third difference was in the available space for political mobilisation. Egypt, due to its proximity to Europe and a long history of more or less formal colonisation, had developed a large – and largely secular – political elite. Between the world wars, a section of this had broken away from dependence on both the king and the British to form a dominant nationalist party, the Wafd. The Wafd relied on supporters among local patrons – including diverse sheikhs of Sufi sects – to mobilise the wider population (de Jong, 1983). Since MB membership was initially compatible with activism in the Wafd it was evidently not too hard for the organisation to become established in localities through educational work and other projects, before the phase in which the MB became a political competitor on the national stage. But in Sudan at the time of independence the educated elite was much smaller, and the main political parties were subordinate to one or other of two long-established and competing sects: the Ansar, belonging to the al-Mahdi family; and the Khatmiya, led by the al-Mirghani family.[3] The networks of these sects were already practising an Islamist politics, linking religious teaching and observance in their localities with the articulation of policies at the national level (Voll, 1983; Warburg, 2003). True, compared with the mechanism that the MB pioneered in Egypt, their workings were less modern and disciplined organisationally and doctrinally. Mohammed Salih (2004:162) criticises the sects for failing to invest in formal kinds of education). Nevertheless, their influence presumably presented the MB with a greater obstacle to its establishment in the villages of Sudan than it had faced in Egypt. Furthermore, it meant that the task for the MB here was to destabilise and reconstruct an existing Islamic hegemony, rather than to introduce religion into a predominantly secular political system.

The struggle between religious and secular politics had long predated the arrival of the MB in Sudan. Colonial officials had tried to control and limit the influence of the major sects through techniques of administration using designated tribal chiefs, and by partitioning off areas of the country that did not have a predominantly Muslim population, notably the Nuba Mountains and the South (Warburg, 2003:57-103). They even established an orthodox school of Islam to administer *Shari'a* under the supervision of the government (Khalid, 1990:50-51). Later they tried to nurture a secular politics in Sudan by the establishment of a Graduates General Congress in 1938, and through the creation of a Socialist Republican Party in 1951. But the sect-based power-blocs took over the first of these, and made the second irrelevant (Khalid, 1990:104-141). By the time of Independence (1 January 1956), the best hope for secularity was that competition between the parties associated with the Ansar

and Khatmiya would make them focus on representing the interests of different constituencies and on forming alliances with minority groups, and that in this way the explicitly religious element would gradually diminish.

But another dynamic was at work. The people who, in ever increasing numbers, advanced in formal education were more likely to take a critical view of the traditional sects. Some became less overtly religious, but many adopted a view of Islam that was internationalist and fundamentalist (Voll, 1983:137). It was among intellectuals – with a nucleus among staff and students at Khartoum University – that, in 1954, an independent MB organisation was created in Sudan (Esposito and Voll, 1996:88; Sidahmed, 1997:45-47; Woodward, 1997:98).

As in Egypt, the Sudanese MB at first refrained from setting itself up as an outright competitor with existing political parties. When it established a political front, it did so on a single issue that already had much support among the Muslim majority: the creation of an Islamic constitution, which would make *Shari'a* the pre-eminent form of law. This Islamic Front for the Constitution (IFC) played a considerable role up to 1958 in preventing the entrenchment of secularism, for, once the call for an Islamic constitution was raised, it was hard for sectarian parties to reject it outright (Fleur-Lobban, 1991:77-78; Esposito and Voll, 1996:88; Abdelmoula, 1997). In each of Sudan's periods of parliamentary rule (1956-58, 1964-69 and 1986-89) the dual question of constitution and *Shari'a* became a hot topic and a rallying-point for Islamists, but each time the process was interrupted by a military coup. Each time, the Islamists grew in strength and used different tactics.

After the fall of Sudan's first military dictatorship (the regime of General Ibrahim Abboud) through a popular uprising in 1964, the MB reorganised itself. Hasan al-Turabi – a lawyer who had taken postgraduate qualifications in Europe, and who was the son of one of the *qadi*s (state-sponsored *Shari'a* judges) that the British had hoped would help insulate law and administration from the politically-powerful sects (Ibrahim, 1999) – emerged as the MB's leader. Turabi argued that the movement should aim for political power in its own right, rather than resting content with educational and lobbying activities (Esposito and Voll, 1996:89-90; Sidahmed, 1997:191-192). Accordingly, the IFC was superseded by the Islamic Charter Front (ICF) – a political party rather than just a pressure group. It was formally separate from the MB, but in fact represented the latter's views and interests. Despite being new, the party was awarded a cabinet seat in each of the two transitional governments that followed Abboud's fall, thanks to its relatively strong mobilisation among the urban elite, and especially the students who had demonstrated against Abboud (Sidahmed, 1997:76-79; Lesch, 1998:40). In the 1965 general election, the ICF won only a few seats in parliament (Esposito and Voll, 1996:90; Sidahmed, 1997:88; Holt and Daly, 2000:158-159); it was a bare toe-hold but it was important. In November 1965, when a Syrian communist speaking publicly in Sudan mocked religion, the MB organised demonstrations that amounted to an attack on secularism generally. A measure was passed by parliament in response, banning and dispossessing the Communist Party (Holt and Daly, 2000:161; Sidahmed, 1997:89-94). This particularly assisted the MB in the students' union, as the CP was its main opponent there (Sidahmed, 1997:203-4). Furthermore, it contributed substantially to destabilising the political system (by setting the legislature against the judiciary) in a way that the MB was later to exploit (Simone and Simone, 1994:51; Miller, 1996:189-190). The ICF continued to press the major parties on the matter of an Islamic Constitution. In 1968 a clause was introduced to the constitutional bill

saying that Islamic jurisprudence should be the 'source of law'. Most of the canvassed constitutional drafts since that time have addressed the question of 'source' or 'sources'; it is a loaded question, as it can hardly be answered without giving a dominant role to *Shari'a* (Abdelmoula, 1997). In May 1969 the sectarian parties agreed the principles of an Islamic constitution.

But the path was again blocked by a military coup, later in 1969. Jaafer Numeiri came to power as a leftist and banned most of the existing political parties, including the ICF. Its leaders were detained or forced into exile and Turabi himself was imprisoned for several years. But in 1977, when Numeiri found that he needed to shore up his rule through a process of 'national reconciliation', Turabi agreed to cooperate with a strong-man who still nominally espoused radical socialism (Sidahmed and Sidahmed, 2004:33). He joined the regime and soon became Attorney General. From this political eminence he was able to supervise an expansion of Islamist activity. The MB greatly increased its membership, and Islamist-controlled banks, companies, newspapers and voluntary organisations began to appear (El-Affendi, 1991:115; Miller, 1996:192). All this was powerfully fuelled by the oil boom of the early 1970s. For many of the Gulf magnates, organisations linked with the MB had a particular attraction as investment opportunities and outlets for charitable activity. At the same time, there was a great increase in the number of Sudanese providing migrant labour in the neighbouring oil-rich countries. New Islamist financial organisations in Sudan, which had been given a privileged position in the economy, channelled many of their remittances and, it has been claimed, came to control a substantial black market (Shaaeldin and Brown, 1988; Brown, 1990:177-178; Simone and Simone, 1994:37; Burr and Collins, 2003:23-24; Sidahmed and Sidahmed, 2004:52-54). By 1979 Turabi was able to justify his pragmatic accommo-dation by its success. 'We have eliminated secularism', he said, adding that much work remained to be done as regards the creation of an Islamic society (al-Turabi, 1979 quoted in Voll, 1983:135). As Numeiri tried to cling on to power he increasingly appealed to Islamic sentiment; this culminated in September 1983 with the promulgation of a legal code based on *Shari'a*. There is some disagreement in the literature over what formal role, if any, Turabi played in drafting the code. It seems to have been the case that Numeiri was trying to take possession of the public agenda that Turabi had fostered (Johnson, 2003:56). Although the September Laws came to be widely recognised as poorly-drafted and hard to apply fairly, no subsequent government proved ready to repeal them until a new formulation of *Shari'a* could be put in their place.

Turabi was again imprisoned in the latter months of Numeiri's rule, but he refused to endorse the Charter of National Salvation drawn up by a coalition of the regime's opponents, on the grounds that it was too secular. His resistance was shrewd. When Numeiri fell, in 1985, an interim government was formed under the former defence Minister, Suwar al-Dahab. Dahab and his prime minister both proved to harbour marked Islamist sympathies (Lesch, 1998; Burr and Collins, 2003:34-35). Their administration, besides declining to repeal the September Laws, adopted an amended version of the old interim constitution that increased the emphasis on Islam as the basis of national life.

Prior to national elections, Turabi reassembled his Islamist movement in a new party – the National Islamic Front (NIF). Unlike the ICF, the NIF incorporated within itself most of the grassroots network of the Sudanese MB. In the elections of 1986, the NIF emerged as an important parliamentary force. The pattern of its constituency

victories – mostly in Khartoum and from the college of graduates (Lesch, 1998:72) – indicated that its support was mainly among the urban elite. This parliamentary presence was large enough to bring the NIF a share of government in 1988, during the course of Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi's attempts to balance atop an unstable collection of political forces. As the price of his support, Turabi demanded the promulgation of a new set of Islamic laws within sixty days. Al-Mahdi agreed, but failed to deliver. Whilst apparently amenable to an Islamist agenda, he has always sought to locate himself in a pivotal position, closer to the centre ground of Sudanese electoral politics than Turabi. The reason for Al-Mahdi's broken promise seems to have been that the NIF's ultimatum galvanised a powerful opposing alliance, between the Khatmiya and the many people (notably including senior officers in the army) who wanted to negotiate an end to the civil war against the predominantly non-Muslim insurgents in the south of the country. Counter-ultimatums by the Sudanese army's high command helped push al-Mahdi in 1989 towards a peace process which would be based on secular values. As part of the process, the application of traditional Islamic *hudud* punishments (such as amputation of limbs in cases of theft) was suspended. It was to prevent the process going further that, on 30 June, NIF sympathisers within the army, led by Omar Hasan al-Bashir and other middle-ranking officers, carried out their coup.

## The Islamist Project in Sudan: A Compromised Government

Turabi, like many other leading politicians, was imprisoned in the immediate aftermath of the coup, but his imprisonment seems to have been a matter of disguising the nature of the new regime and also, perhaps, keeping him safe in the early months. He soon came to be widely seen as the state's prime mover. He may not have been personally involved in planning the coup, but the Islamist network within the army owed much to his work, and the NIF's wider cadres were quickly incorporated in the regime. Non-Islamists were purged from the judiciary, army, civil service and unions. Turabi became chair of an unofficial but influential 'Council of Forty' guiding the regime according to Islamist ideology and strategy. (Lesch, 1998:114-115; Burr and Collins, 2003:1-12; de Waal and Abdel Salam, 2004:84-85).

The capture of the state in 1989 was a partial vindication of the strategy that Turabi had laid down in 1964. Stage One had now been successfully completed. A new *Shari'a* code was set in place in 1991. Next, the Islamist task was to use state power to create a new society approximating to an Islamic ideal. Turabi and his colleagues had theorised widely on this subject (al-Turabi, 1983; National Islamic Front, 1987; Moussali, 1994, 1999:155-180). Many of these texts available in English stress a convergence of a modern conception of Islamic governance with Western democracy. It is sometimes hard to gauge the likely practical implications of theoretical differences[4] but there are some telling clues. From his published work in the early 1980s, it appears that Turabi sees *Shari'a* not just as a matter of private morality or family life, or a symbol of the community, but as a binding political force. The ideal Islamic republic is:

> *not strictly speaking a direct government of and by the people; it is a government of the Shari'a. But, in a substantive sense, it is a popular government since the Shari'a represents the convictions of the people and, therefore, their direct will* (al-Turabi, 1983:244).

Turabi supposes that shared religious belief can overcome conflicts of opinion and interest, hence obviating the need for Western-style political parties:

> [A]n Islamic government should function more as a consensus-oriented rather than a minority/majority system with political parties rigidly confronting each other over decisions (1983:245).

In order to find the correct consensus, there is a role for *ulama* or religious scholars. Turabi does not here equate *ulama* with the people usually designated as such under existing structures of Islamic authority, such as links to the al-Azhar mosque school in Cairo; rather, he says that it can include 'anyone who knows anything well enough to relate it to God' (p. 245). He thus holds open a prospect for special channels of influence by educated and religiously-committed people, people rather like the MB's core members.

For the young Bashir-Turabi regime, mechanisms of 'guided democracy' were already familiar from the Abboud and Numeiri periods. It quickly started setting up its own committees to dispense patronage and exert control in parallel with existing structures of local government (Woodward, 1997:102; Lesch, 1998:120-121). These committees doubled, in theory, as sites of popular representation, elements of that well-known alternative structure to liberal democracy: a pyramid of congresses. However, having consolidated power some years later, the regime organised its first show of a national election by having only about 30 per cent of MPs elected through the congress system, and the remainder through geographical constituencies, though the banning of political parties and widespread reported intimidation and other irregularities suggest that the results were generally rigged (Lesch, 1998:122-125). Bashir, standing for President as a civilian, was duly awarded an impressive majority of the vote. Turabi became speaker of the National Assembly.

The Assembly ratified a new constitution for the Sudan in 1998. It stopped short of declaring Sudan explicitly to be an Islamic state, and was presented by the regime internationally as a liberal document (al-Turabi, 1998). However, it entrenched *Shari'a* and many of its provisions appealed to the Qur'an and Muslim tradition (Republic of the Sudan, 1998; Tier, 1998). It envisaged the existence of 'political associations', but provided scope for severe regulation of political parties.

Less than two years after putting the new constitution in place, Turabi sought to amend it. The matter at stake increasingly appeared to be personal power. He sought to make the President more accountable to parliament and to transfer many of his powers to an executive Prime Minister. By December 1999 it seemed likely that the amendments would succeed and that the latter post would eventually be taken by Turabi himself. With timing reminiscent of the 1989 coup, Bashir dissolved the Assembly and imposed a State of Emergency to halt the process. Turabi appealed to the Constitutional Court, but the judiciary had long since lost any robust independence, and his petition was rejected. In May 2000 he was removed as Secretary-General of the ruling party. Since then, he has been allowed limited freedom to pursue political activities, no longer assisted by the state's facilities for coercion and patronage. Many of his former close associates have aligned themselves to Bashir, notably including Ali Osman Mohamed Taha, Sudan's current Second Vice President, who many believe is now the real power behind the throne (Lusk, 2004). Turabi's ambition of establishing a model system of Islamic governance had proved too far beyond even his adeptness as a political tactician (de Waal and Abdel Salam, 2004:106-113). National elections in December 2000 theoretically allowed the participation of opposition parties, but the main parties boycotted them, as did UN and EU monitors (Amnesty International, 2002).

The Islamist regime also failed to get near to realising the Islamic ideal of treating non-Muslim minorities with respectful fairness, let alone the liberal-democratic ideal of affording equality under the state. For hundreds of years, the economy of Sudan has been geared to the dispossession of people in peripheral areas for the benefit of capitalists and traders in and around Khartoum (and, through them, to foreigners) (Johnson, 2003:1-7). The economic pattern here, as in the history of the world economy generally, is facilitated by racism in which religious sentiment plays a part. It has led to civil war in southern Sudan for almost the whole of the post-independence period. In peace talks, Northern governments tried to insist that the rights of non-Muslims were guaranteed. But the main rebel group, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) had no confidence that practice would match this theory. Their trust was not enhanced by the religiose brutality with which the Bashir-Turabi regime often fought the war. Amid numerous public promises that the rebels would be crushed in a *jihad*, hundreds of thousands of civilians were killed by counter-insurgency tactics, including the inducing of famine (African Rights, 1997; Human Rights Watch, 1999; Prendergast, 2002). A theology of martyrdom facilitated the sacrifice of tens of thousands of young people from the North. Yet the rebels, with support from the US and other Western countries, refused to be crushed. When a peace agreement was reached in 2005, it could only be done by agreeing to let the South vote on its secession. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement agreement involves replacing the 1998 constitution with a new interim arrangement in which the dominance of *Shari'a* is restricted to the north of the country (GOS and SPLM/A, 2005). But if the hope of some Northerners was that this amputation would create a peacefully homogenous Muslim population, the current Darfur conflict has shown how far they underestimated the capacity of actually-existing Muslims to slaughter each other (Flint and de Waal, 2005).

As in many parts of the world, charitable activity in Sudan has helped govern the borderlands between the realm of civic life and the territory of people who may not be considered quite fit as citizens or as beneficiaries of the natural resources that they occupy (Duffield, 2001a, b). Islamist volunteers and NGOs have been active in the peripheral areas of Sudan, such as Darfur, the Nuba Mountains and Southern Blue Nile. Some of their work seems to have been genuinely benevolent (see, for instance, testimony about the work of Muslim Brothers in the Darfur of the early 1980s, Flint and de Waal, 2004:18-20). But much, particularly under the government's programme of *al da'wa al shamla* ('comprehensive call') has clearly supported cynical political and military policies (African Rights, 1995:242-274, African Rights, 1997:186-235; de Waal and Abdel Salam, 2003:80-106; M. Salih, 2004:155,177-178). In terms of governmental provision of basic social services, the performance of the regime appears to have been weak and discriminatory, even compared with other sub-Saharan African countries, and even after the coming of substantial oil revenues (see data in the report of the Joint Assessment Mission, Volume III (2005:143-190).

Internationally, the Bashir-Turabi regime supported Islamist rebel groups in Zaire, Uganda, Eritrea and Ethiopia partly as a way of retaliating against neighbours that assisted the SPLM/A. But it also – initially at least – used the Sudanese state as a resource for militant Islam on a wider international stage. It supported Saddam Hussein in the first Gulf War and Turabi established the Popular Arab Islamic Conference (PAIC), with headquarters in Khartoum, as an alternative to the more conservative Arab and Islamic international groupings. Prominent terrorists, including Osama bin Laden, were sheltered in Sudan during the early 1990s. Sudan was implicated in an attempt to assassinate President Mubarak of Egypt in 1995.

However, as international sanctions on Sudan accumulated, it appears that Bashir tried to restrain such costly expressions of ideology. Bin Laden was asked to leave in 1996, the PAIC headquarters was removed in 2001, and US security agencies are reported to have received co-operation from al-Qaeda in the aftermath of 9/11. Nevertheless, at the time of writing, Sudan remains on the US's list of states supporting terrorism (Johnson, 2003:177-178; de Waal, 2004; Lusk, 2004; Sidahmed and Sidahmed, 2004:79).

The regime's inability to find a convincing source of legitimacy, its retreat from pan-Islamism, its participation in moral atrocities and its sordid in-fighting have led some recent authors to characterise the period since 1989 in terms of a Islamist revolution that failed (Burr and Collins, 2003; de Waal and Abdel Salam, 2004). This seems to say that there is no longer a unified project in which Islamist ideology credibly coheres with political action. And yet Bashir remains head of state, *Shari'a* operates as the basis of law in the North of the country, and Islamists friendly to the government have benefited greatly from cronyism, particularly as a result of the sell-off of public assets in the early 1990s (Simone and Simone, 1994:36-40; Elbeely, 2003; de Waal and Abdel Salam, 2004:85; Sidahmed and Sidahmed, 2004:107-111). It isn't a failure for everyone.

## Conclusions from the Sudan Case

In the Sudan case, then, a network which was apparently elite-based and opportunist, basing its ideology and methods on those of Hasan al-Banna's MB, succeeded in gaining control of the state without showing any great commitment to liberal democratic politics, either on its way to government or afterwards. Indeed its rise depended upon – and considerably contributed to – the instability of Sudan's parliamentary system. Its apparent negligence of the problem of basic social services for many parts of the rural population is one of the features that suggest that it does not see itself as bound by a strong social contract.

At the time of writing, the National Congress party of Bashir and Taha has formed a Government of National Unity incorporating the SPLM/A. It intends to hold office until new elections, probably in 2009. This is as per the stipulations of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in which the United States and European countries have invested a great deal (Lusk, 2004; de Waal, 2005). Hence there is likely to be more external pressure on the government in the coming years to conform to a model of liberal democracy. But if the elections are open, how will the Islamists fare? Will Turabi (who has formed a new party, the Popular Congress) regain the upper hand against Bashir and Taha? Will they patch up their differences to defend the modern Islamist position against the old sectarian parties and the secularists? And if so, can they demonstrate that they have used their years in power to build up a wide base of electoral support in the country? If the South secedes and the other regions gain more constitutional autonomy, does that create an easier space in which Islamism can find an accommodation with liberal democracy?

The difficulty of answering these questions reveals the weakness of available evidence, in English academic literature at least, about the nature of the Islamist movement in Sudan. We have presented this evidence broadly in the form to which it most readily seems to lend itself: that of an historical narrative around the career of Hasan al-Turabi. Turabi conveniently combines the roles of politician and published theoretician. His career thus shapes a story almost on the lines of

Shakespearian tragedy, in which ideas, actions and events seem naturally related. Motivated by a dubious mixture of high ideals and personal ambition, the protagonist schemes to capture the state. He succeeds in this, but his attempts to use the political high ground to change the nature of the polity go horribly wrong and he is toppled from power. But the fascinating figure of Turabi has perhaps distracted us too much from our ignorance about what goes on backstage. This opens up a range of more fundamental questions: What is the shape of the Islamist network in Sudan? How much is it dependent on government patronage or foreign donors? How far, and by what means, does it control the economy? How is it organised in the cities and villages? How and why do its core members think as they do? To what extent and in what ways does the Sudanese population (as Abdelwahab El-Affendi asserts in his book review, this issue) increasingly feel the attractions of modern Islamist ideology and institutions as opposed to Sufi traditions? Directly-relevant information on these questions is fragmentary, sparse and mostly anecdotal, reflecting the difficulties of serious field research in Sudan in the modes of sociology and political economy. The opportunities in Egypt are a little better.

## The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt

The experience of the MB in Egypt has been somewhat different to the case of Sudan and unlike the Sudan case there is evidence to suggest that the MB has been moving towards secular politics, characterised by a change in its shape and character. This has resulted in the MB changing its ideas, behaviour and attitudes in order to harness the legitimacy required to operate in the context of secular politics in Egypt. For example, the MB has systematically changed its views and positions on issues such as the rights of Coptic Christians, human rights, the role of *Shari'a*, democracy, relations with the wider Muslim world, and resistance to the West (El Said, interview, 2004). The MB's view and positions on such issues are becoming clearer in response to the wide media coverage it has gained since its success in the 2005 legislative elections, in which the MB acquired 88 out of 444 seats. As a result of its position in the legislative assembly, it is likely that there will be a continuation of the shift towards secular politics, which has characterised the MB from the late 1970s to the present day.[5] The key catalysts for the changing shape and character of the MB are a new cadre of activists, known as the New Guard, which joined the organisation during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The New Guard are distinct from the Old Guard which have dominated the power structure of the MB since its emergence in 1928 (Altman, 2006; Choubaky, interview, 2004). Importantly, formal politics has been viewed in a pessimistic manner by the Old Guard as a result of the oppression which the MB faced from the Nasserite state during the 1950s and 1960s (Choubaky, interview, 2004; Rishwan, interview, 2004). For example, the present leader (*murshid*), Mohammed Akif, who was already a member before al-Banna's assassination in 1949, was sentenced to death after the failed 1954 assassination attempt on Nasser and was imprisoned until 1974. He and others of his generation are generally more zealous, conservative, and committed primarily to long-term spiritual work and to preserving the movement's unity. The Old Guard remains deeply suspicious of other groups and unforgiving toward such former political rivals as the Nasserists, Arab-Nationalists and marxists due to ideological differences and bitter past confrontations. Therefore formal political participation did not really enter the mindset of the Old Guard.

In contrast, the New Guard is made up largely of student leaders from the 1970s, when Anwar al-Sadat allowed the MB to take over the university campuses in order

to combat the influence of the Left. This relative openness and the New Guard's experiences in student politics – involving daily interaction with students of different ideologies, alliances with different student groups and standing for student union elections – seems to have influenced their thinking and behaviour, bringing them more into line with secular politics. The New Guard of MB activists includes people like: Essam El-Eryan, Assistant Secretary-General of the doctors' syndicate, Ibrahim El-Zaafarani, Secretary-General of the Alexandria chapter of the same syndicate, Mohamed Habib, an Assiut University professor and Abu Al Futuh from the Guidance Bureau Council (al-Awadi, 2004). The New Guard has assigned greater importance to the political than to the spiritual role of the movement. They see Egypt rather than the Muslim world as the MB's real frame of reference, and show interest in building alliances with other political organisations. These two competing trends in the MB have been in conflict with one another for the last 25 years, with the New Guard gaining ground. This was enhanced by the limited pluralism granted by Hosni Mubarak during the 1980s. The willingness of the New Guard to participate in secular politics can be seen through their participation in the 1983, 1987, 1995, 2000 and 2005 parliamentary elections, their building of alliances with political parties from the right to the left and their willingness to enter a policy of accommodation with the secular Egyptian state.

## The New Guard & its Art of Secular Politics

A key indication of the New Guard's taste for secular politics can be seen through its involvement and participation in the politics of professional syndicates. This became a key pillar of MB strategy in order to challenge the power of the Egyptian state in the 1980s and 1990s. There are approximately 24 professional syndicates in Egypt, representing a number of professions ranging from pharmacy to teaching. Membership is important for a new graduate who wishes to gain employment. In addition, syndicates offer economic benefits, such as pensions, subsidised goods and cheaper health insurance. These institutions represent the educated middle class in Egypt and have historically played an important role in challenging the economic and political power of the Egyptian state. This was the picture in the 1970s, when the lawyers' syndicate challenged the Egyptian state's liberal economic reforms and the Camp David Accords with Israel. The social make-up of the syndicates and their ability to contest power made them an enticing political prospect for the New Guard in their drive for power, but importantly would also demonstrate their commitment to secular politics.

The New Guard assumed an active political role when they started to prepare and organise themselves during the 1980s in order to contest syndicate elections (Nafa, interview, 2004; Hamzawy, interview, 2004; el Said, 2004). The rise of the New Guard in the syndicates was facilitated by the existing state of syndicates. Constituents had become dissatisfied with the performance of the syndicate boards, which had led to the paralysis and disablement of most syndicates. Problems endemic within the syndicates included a lack of transparency, no clear decision making processes, political in-fighting, corruption and financial mismanagement. Leading New Guard individuals such as Abu al-Futuh and Abu Ella Madi tackled head-on the problems present in the syndicates. Campaigns were launched on a wide variety of the issues and concerns which plagued them. For example campaigns against *fasad* (corruption) were attractive and won favour from syndicate members who had been negatively affected by fraudulent behaviour (Fahmy, 2001; Qandil, interview, 2004). The New Guard was successful in halting major abuses of

resources and ensuring more transparency and accountability in the allocation of syndicate resources. The fight against corruption and improving the management of syndicates was assisted by the experience of individuals like Abu Futuh and Ella Madi. Both had gained vital knowledge concerning the management and administration of resources from their time on university campuses during the 1970s. They realised that the need to develop social legitimacy, trust and credibility amongst the syndicate members was a priority, before moving onto political work. This would allow them to use the syndicates to construct a social base in order to challenge state power (Ella Madi, interview, 2004).

The success of Abu Futuh in the medical syndicate elections in 1984 led the New Guard to contest elections in the other syndicates. Soon they were on the council boards of all major syndicates. In 1986, the MB took control of the engineers' syndicate, and in 1988 of the pharmacists' syndicate (al-Awadi, 2004). The MB continued to make progress in syndicates throughout the late 1980s as a result of their superior administration and financial management. During the 1990s, the New Guard intensified their efforts in the syndicates especially given the fact that they decided to boycott the 1990 elections.

The early 1990s was important from a syndicate perspective, as the New Guard began to shift from merely using syndicates as platforms to develop social legitimacy through the provision of public services, to using syndicates as political platforms. This shift allowed the New Guard to demonstrate their understanding of secular politics at a national level (el Said, 2004). They began to use the syndicates to hold meetings and conferences on political reform, economic policy and foreign policy. Importantly, there was an audience in the syndicates who wanted to listen to what the New Guard had to say on pressing economic and political issues. The growing strength of the New Guard in syndicate politics was demonstrated in 1992 when they secured electoral success in the lawyers' syndicate. This development shocked the Egyptian state and the secular opposition, as the lawyers' syndicate had been a vanguard of secularism, and comparatively well-managed. The ability of the New Guard to use a blend of pragmatism and secular politics, instead of ideology as practised by the Old Guard, had appealed to the lawyers' syndicate members, in addition to their good performance in other syndicates. Despite the New Guard's commitment to secular politics, the potential capability of the New Guard to mobilise syndicates in order to contest power worried the Egyptian state (Al Fatah, 2004). Concern within the Egyptian state was heightened as it had recently adopted economic reforms and it feared that the New Guard could use the lawyers' syndicate to mobilise opposition and dissent against them.

It did not take long for the government to bring the New Guard's domination of the syndicates to a halt. In 1993, the government issued Law 100 which was a direct attempt to reduce the influence of the New Guard in the syndicates. The government defended the law on the basis of its attempts to increase voter participation in the syndicates but the real objective behind the introduction of this law was clear for all to see. The law specified that for the elections to be valid there must be at least a 50 per cent turnout, and if this mark was not reached, the elections would be re-run twice. If a turnout of 33 per cent was not attained in the second re-run, the syndicate would fall under the administration of officials appointed by the government until new elections were held (Kienle, 2001). The law remains in effect to this day and the 'nationalisation' of the syndicates has been a major control on political life in Egypt, in particular the New Guard's drive for power.

## Prospects for the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood

The New Guard's involvement in syndicates, along with participation in municipal and national elections, has been indicative of the changing shape and character of the MB. The New Guard represents a secular-leaning Islamic approach towards politics and has been instrumental in reforming and changing the MB along these lines. The use of religious ideology in the discourse of the New Guard is still central to mobilising grassroot support but it plays a minimal role in their discourse in contrast to the Old Guard. The latter sees this civil approach as a threat to its position and power in the MB. The New Guard, as it continues to fight for political power and demonstrate its commitment to secular politics, is likely to push for further changes in the shape and character of the MB, possibly leading to a head-on clash. The Old Guard continues to control the main levers of power in the MB, but it has had to provide room for the New Guard to express itself to prevent a rupturing of the MB. The New Guard continues to be looked upon suspiciously by the Old Guard, which sees a potential challenge to its domination in the MB, mounted by individuals such as Mohammed Habib and Abu Futuh. These individuals are public figures in Egypt and have been able to construct a following in the MB, a base to potentially challenge the Old Guard. One will have to wait and see what develops in the future but not all is smooth and comfortable in the MB, with a divergence of views and approaches becoming more evident and apparent than ever before.

At the time of writing, the Egyptian government has launched a campaign of arresting MB members throughout Egypt. This has raised tensions in the MB between the two camps, as to whether it is in the interests of the MB to continue its political activities, given the draconian measures being applied by the state. The future political strategy of the Egyptian government will also have an impact upon discourse in the MB. It is an interesting time to observe developments in the shape and character of the MB.

## Conclusion

The cases of Sudan and Egypt seem to give contradictory answers to our question about the compatibility of Islamism with liberal democratic politics. The story of the MB and its legacy in the Sudan indicates, at the very least, that the Islamist agenda is one that is susceptible to co-option by people who try to re-engineer democracy and are willing to flout many democratic values in the process. We have particularly noted that it has not shown itself greatly concerned with securing its legitimacy through consistent provision of basic social services to the population as a whole, though it has used relief and other welfare provision tactically in different times and places.

In terms of the Egyptian case, the MB followed a different path, with a strong commitment to social welfare as a means to build up its following, and it now shows a movement towards secular politics. This has been driven by the New Guard, distancing itself from the conservative approach of the Old Guard. The New Guard has been a key actor in changing MB views on crucial issues such as democracy and human rights, and bringing them more in line with secular politics. It seems, then, that religious ideology can be taken in different directions, according to circumstances, even among organisations that share a common root. But these organisations remain poorly-understood by outsiders. The next few years will certainly see interesting developments in them, and hopefully also some more detailed research.

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## Endnotes

1. This paragraph and the next, on the foundations of the MB draw on overlapping accounts in Mitchell (1969), Gomaa (1983), Esposito (1998:136-148), Armstrong (2000:218-232), Abdel Salam and de Waal (2004:26-35).

2. It is widely estimated that about two-thirds of the national population is Muslim. Non-Muslims mainly live in peripheral areas and have usually been electorally under-represented, partly because those areas have often been deemed too insecure for popular elections to take place.

3. Both of these sects, though they have important differences in character, can be labelled Sufi. That is to say they incorporate mystical traditions of religious practice such as special reverence for hereditary holy men. See Trimingham (1949), Karrar (1992), Warburg (2003).

4. See de Waal and Abdel Salam (2003:83-84) for an interesting characterisation of al-Turabi's writings in Arabic.

5. This has been the case for the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey which has become extremely pragmatic in order to survive in a secular polity held together by the coercive arm of the military.

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# Comprehensive Peace?An Analysis of the Evolving Tension in Eastern Sudan

## *Sara Pantuliano*

**Eastern Sudan is the site of a little known armed struggle by popular forces against the government in Khartoum, which in turn has been engaged in counter-insurgency and repression there. A complex set of interrelated factors is driving the war: historical grievances, feelings of exclusion and marginalisation, demands for fair sharing of power between different groups, inequitable distribution of economic resources and benefits, underdevelopment, the absence of a genuine democratic process and other governance issues. The article documents the particular patterns of marginalisation and underdevelopment among the predominant population of the Beja people, whose livelihoods are mainly based on pastoralism. It also shows the patterns of political alienation and the emergence of the Beja Congress as a movement that has given voice to those grievances. Excluded from normal political expression or dialogue with the government and then from the political dispensations that the South gained from its peace agreement with the North, the Congress has made common cause with the Rashaida Free Lions, formed among a smaller group of pastoralists of Bedouin origin and other small groups to form the Eastern Front. Operating from logistical bases on the Eritrean border, the Front has made armed incursions into Eastern Sudan and controls some territory. Pressures from inside and outside Sudan have finally led to both sides agreeing to talks, which have finally started in August 2006 under Eritrean mediation. The prospects of these talks leading to a sustainable agreement are explored.**

Eastern Sudan (covering the regional states of the Red Sea, Kassala and Gedaref) is primarily inhabited by Beja pastoralists and agro-pastoralists, although a wide variety of ethnic groups from across the Sudan can be found in Port Sudan and Kassala towns. Over the centuries the Beja and other pastoral groups in the region have devised flexible and dynamic strategies to cope with the complexity and the variability of their eco-system and to recover from droughts and outbreaks of famine. Such strategies include mobility, herd diversification and redistribution, rules for environmental protection (e.g. the prohibition of cutting live trees) and the development of a multi-resource economy where livestock keeping is complemented by a set of alternative livelihoods. The life of Beja groups has been regulated by a customary law called *silif*, a complex but flexible body of rules based on Beja traditional values which regulates access to and redistribution of resources, reciprocal use of environmental resources (grazing land, water points, arable land or firewood), conflict resolution and reciprocity around major social events (birth, marriage and death). Clear land rights codes embodied in the *silif,* supported by the

mediation of tribal authorities who were entrusted with the management of land rights, have helped minimise conflict. However, the resilience of this system has significantly weakened over the last three or four decades due to a number of external factors.

Under the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, the Beja suffered from colonial policies which contributed to undermine the basis of their economic and social well being. A number of agricultural schemes, introduced by the Turko-Egyptian administration in the southern part of the Red Sea region (Gash and Tokar Delta) and in the nearby province of Kassala to the south, were considerably expanded by the British to increase cotton cultivation. The expansion of the schemes deprived the Beja of key pasture reserves which they had used in years of severe drought and laid the basis for the decline of their pastoral economy (Niblock, 1987:148). In the northern part of the region the Bishariyyn Beja were affected by the impact of the damming of the River Atbara for the irrigation of the New Halfa Agricultural Scheme, which reduced the amount of downstream water in the area they occupied.

Another factor which contributed to the weakening of Beja livelihoods security was the imposition of the Native Administration system on the Beja by the British colonialists. The system was hierarchical, rigid, did not reflect the established internal structure of the group and did not take into account the essential flexibility of the Beja leadership that had been adapted to the dynamics of pastoral life over the years. As a result, the newly introduced administrative policy created profound imbalances in the power system and undermined traditional leadership. The overall consequence of the British policy was the creation of an artificial ruling elite of Beja appointees handpicked from amongst the many tribal leaders, which did not truly represent the Beja and very rarely advocated for the genuine interests and needs of the tribe. This new elite ruled until the 1970s, when the Native Administration was dismantled by the Nimeiri regime, and maintained its influence until the beginning of the 1980s, notwithstanding the attempts of the Beja Congress, an indigenous political movement created in 1958, to oust them. The unrepresentative character and inactivity of the Beja elite became untenably evident during the drought of the mid-1980s when they failed to mobilise central government and international donor organisations to provide support in time to avoid disastrous losses of human life and livestock (Pantuliano, 2000:189).

Following the mid-1980s crisis the Beja Congress renewed its original efforts to draw attention to the underdevelopment and marginalisation of Beja areas and to advocate for more administrative and political autonomy. The Congress was banned in 1989 along with other political parties under accusation of fomenting political destabilisation in eastern Sudan. Repression against Beja dissidents, the execution of the former Governor of the Eastern Region, M. General Mohammad Karrar, following his participation in a coup attempt, the continued alienation of land and the reported conscription of Beja into the Popular Defence Force combined to create a resurgence of Beja resistance (Johnson, 2003:138). The Beja Congress resurfaced again in Asmara under the umbrella of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), a coalition of northern opposition parties a well as the SPLM/A, and for the first time in its history it became involved in military operations in collaboration with other NDA forces. In 1996 the Beja Congress was charged with having backed a failed coup attempt. Fighting between the parties intensified in the southern area of Tokar and Kassala Provinces, with the NDA eventually occupying much of the border region, including the towns of Telkuk and Hamashkoreb.

Over the last few years the Congress leaders have worked to expand their political platform to other groups living in eastern Sudan. This has led to the formation of the Eastern Front in February 2005. The Front is a political alliance between the Beja Congress, the Rashaida Free Lions (the Rashaida are a Bedouin group who migrated from the northern Arabian peninsula in the 19th century) and representatives from other small ethno-political groups belonging to the Shukriya and the Dabaina. The formation of the Front is an attempt by the Beja Congress and the Rashaida Free Lions to de-ethnicise their political agenda and appeal to other communities in eastern Sudan to unite in the fight against the marginalisation and the underdevelopment of the region.

## The Causes of Tension

As with many other conflicts taking place in the Sudan, there is no single root cause for the fighting in the East. A complex set of interrelated factors is driving the war. Historical grievances, feelings of exclusion and marginalisation, demands for fair sharing of power between different groups, inequitable distribution of economic resources and benefits, underdevelopment, the absence of a genuine democratic process and other governance issues are all interlocking factors to the conflict, but none of them is a sole or primary cause. Unequal access to resources and services and disparities in resource distribution have been exacerbated by the long standing failure of national leaders to address the grievances stemming from the region since independence. Dissatisfaction about the lack of political representation for the Beja, socio-economic marginalisation, underdevelopment and lack of services were amongst the reasons which led to the formation of the Beja Congress in 1958. Today the causes of the conflict do not appear to be much different from the grievances voiced by the Beja Congress 60 years ago. One of the most recurrent complaints quoted by communities, local and political leaders and external observers alike as a cause of conflict is the socio-economic marginalisation of the people in eastern Sudan, particularly the Beja, and the feeling of social exclusion which is so pervasive within their communities. Eastern Sudan is one of the poorest regions in the country and most of the people resent the state of neglect in which its communities have been left, both in the rural areas and in the urban slums. People complain consistently and incessantly about the lack of services (education, health and water), lack of job opportunities, barriers to access to natural resources, general state of underdevelopment, extremely high rates of maternal and infant mortality, poverty, food insecurity, vulnerability and morbidity.

Most actors link the general state of neglect and marginalisation of eastern Sudan to the lack of eastern Sudan representatives, particularly Beja, in the central and to a lesser extent in the state government. During the study several people emphasised that eastern Sudan is a very rich region, considering that it has prime agricultural land, gas, gold and other minerals, livestock, fisheries, oil potential and the only port in the country, as well as being crossed by the highways to Egypt and to Khartoum, the railway and the oil pipeline. Some Beja leaders commented that the Beja occupy the most strategic piece of land in the country and one of the richest, but do not share any of the wealth which is produced by the region. Similar comments were made by Rashaida leaders who remarked that the Rashaida do not receive any services in return for the levies they pay on their livestock, remittances and trade.

The almost total absence of services and development initiatives in the rural areas has pushed much of the population to the towns, particularly Port Sudan. In town,

where services are available, people complained that rampant poverty does not allow them to be able to afford school fees or pay for drugs. In Port Sudan anger was palpable amongst many communities about the mechanisation of the port, which has had a direct impact on individual and household income for thousands of families (the number of people laid off was reported by local government officials to be in excess of 28,000) and which people felt should have been compensated by parallel employment creation. The mechanisation of the port in Port Sudan has undoubtedly contributed to radicalising anti-government feelings amongst the Beja. Beja men, particularly Amar'ar/Atmaan, have been working on the docks as porters and casual labours since the early 1930s and stevedoring work was a crucial safety net for many Beja. Seasonal male youth casual labour on the port was a key source of complementary income for rural households, but the port also provided an alternative source of livelihoods for those who have lost all their livestock. Much frustration was voiced by young graduates in the towns of Port Sudan and Kassala about the general lack of job opportunities for educated people as well and about the perception that ethnic Beja were being discriminated against when applying for jobs. In Kassala Region people resented the alienation of land to non-indigenous landowners who have progressively come to own many of the large commercial agricultural schemes. A number of Beja actors claimed that their culture and their language have been discriminated against by a series of governments and that it is important for the Beja to preserve the use of *TuBedawye*.

The Beja youth, particularly in Port Sudan, are seething with anger and resentment and many feel that armed confrontation is the only means to reverse the situation in the region. Some of the actors observed that such feelings can be easily manipulated for political purposes. Whilst this is undoubtedly true, the feeling of desperation ran so deep amongst the communities at all levels in Port Sudan slums that the youth were prepared to do whatever they could to attract national and international attention to the situation in eastern Sudan. It is clear that the call for action has been prompted by the Naivasha process to resolve the North-South conflict in the Sudan as well as the fighting in Dar Fur. Feelings have been aggravated by the killing of an estimated 25 Beja men and the wounding of 196 others by the police during the demonstrations by a large number of Beja in late January 2005 in Port Sudan to protest against the exclusion of eastern Sudan from the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The events of 29 January 2005 have become a symbolic turning point for many Beja in Port Sudan Many have reportedly started to feel that the police action was the proof that dialogue with the government is not possible.

Leaders of the Eastern Front (the political alliance recently formed between the Beja Congress and the Rashaida Free Lions and representatives of other small ethnic groups) emphasised that their demands are not any different from those of the groups fighting in Dar Fur or from the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). Lack of development, basic services and employment in eastern Sudan are in their opinion the direct result of the concentration of power in the hands of a restricted elite, which has resulted in political marginalisation and lack of attention to the peripheries throughout the country.

## Comprehensive Peace?

There is no doubt that the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) has prompted the Beja and other groups in eastern Sudan to seek redress similar to that gained by the SPLM in the South. The CPA was seen by most actors in the region as

a bilateral agreement between the National Congress Party and the SPLM/A, which has failed to take into account the instances of the many different groups living in the Sudan. Many people emphasised that the title 'comprehensive' is highly inappropriate for an agreement that has been so exclusive. Most of the people interviewed in eastern Sudan felt that the signing of the Machakos Agreement between the Government and the SPLM and the process leading to the signing of the other Protocols has led other groups to resort to armed confrontation (e.g. in Dar Fur) or to escalate fighting (e.g. in eastern Sudan). However, many actors, including representatives from the Eastern Front, believed that the CPA also represents an opportunity for stakeholders in eastern Sudan and elsewhere to address and resolve some of the grievances which lie behind the tension in the region, including issues of power and wealth sharing. One commentator emphasised that attention should be placed on the CPA as a process, rather than on its text, as the process deriving from the CPA could inform change in eastern Sudan, unlike the letter of the agreement which focuses exclusively on the North/South conflict. Some of the issues addressed in the CPA, e.g. fairer political representation and effective decentralisation are relevant to eastern Sudan and many interviewees felt that if the CPA were effectively implemented, it would definitely carry benefits for the region. In order to do so, though, the agreement would have to be 'Easternised', with power and wealth sharing made relevant to the different parts and groups in the region and through in-depth restructuring of local institutions. Many of the demands raised by the Front and the other groups fighting in eastern Sudan are framed along the lines of the CPA and focus on allocation of power for eastern Sudanese actors at both the national and the regional levels and fairer redistribution of wealth in the region. Many external observers saw the Two Area Protocol for the Nuba Mountains and Southern Blue Nile as a possible framework for negotiation between the government and the Eastern Front.

Many Beja youth, in Port Sudan in particular, felt that there is no real guarantee that the CPA in its current formulation will bring real redistribution of power and wealth in the country. They emphasised that the CPA process has heightened the feeling of exclusion amongst the Beja and that people have gathered together to ask for the agreement to be extended to include provisions for eastern Sudan (this is what they were demanding during the January 2005 demonstration). They remarked that the CPA could provide an entry point for the solution of other conflicts in the Sudan if the international community strongly supported an extension of the CPA process to Dar Fur and eastern Sudan that would make the agreement truly comprehensive. Some international observers commented that the CPA could provide a framework to reach a separate agreement between the Eastern Front and the government.

One obvious gap in the CPA highlighted by many of the people interviewed is that the provision envisaging the withdrawal of the SPLA from the NDA controlled areas and the handover of the region to government forces has not taken into account the presence of other armed groups in the area. Eastern Front leaders emphasised that they are not bound by any agreement to withdraw their forces and that since they do not have a cease-fire agreement with the government they will continue military operations in the area after the withdrawal of the SPLA unless an agreement is reached with the government. Representatives from the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), which has been militarily active in eastern Sudan over the last two years, stressed that UN monitors should wait to move in until an agreement is reached between the government and armed groups operating in eastern Sudan because the region will be the theatre of military operations until a negotiated solution is reached.

An important element which emerged throughout the assessment is that most people, particularly rural communities as well as of much of the people living in urban slums know very little about the CPA, its provisions and the implications it will have for the East and the country as a whole. An important issue for the region, for instance, is the establishment of the Land Commission envisaged in the Wealth Sharing Protocol, but it is not clear how people in remote rural areas will be made aware of the Commission in order to claim back land where they are entitled to it. The mechanisms of implementation of the agreement are not even clear to some of the leadership in the region.

## Escalating Tension

While the withdrawal of SPLA forces from eastern Sudan, which was completed in June 2006, has meant an inevitable reduction of the military capacity of NDA forces in the region, other factors have surfaced in recent months that seem to suggest that the possibility of an escalation of the tension should not be discounted. The events of Port Sudan in late January 2005 have exacerbated feelings among the Beja there, particularly the youth. Many of them were reported to have joined the fighters in the NDA controlled areas in the months following the killings in Port Sudan and several others of those met during the study spoke openly about their willingness to join the fight since they felt that they had nothing to lose and, as they put it, '*they are dying of a slow death anyway'* (Deim al Arab, Port Sudan, 31 July 2005). It was astounding to hear young Beja women, who are traditionally confined to a very secluded life away from public and political life in Beja society, speaking vehemently about their desire to 'sacrifice' themselves for their tribe. In addition, the presence of new actors such as the JEM has bolstered the military capacity of the armed rebellion in the East.

Despite the recent strengthening of their military capacity and the support of new allies, the Eastern Front seems to be aware that the withdrawal of the SPLA will have inevitably weakened its capacity on the ground. However, discussions with several well informed actors seem to point to a change of military strategy and an escalation that would focus on 'hit and run' operations and targeting of the many strategic economic installations located inside government controlled areas of the East. Beja leaders commented that the port, the highway and the pipeline could all become targets of a military escalation which would find many supporters amongst the Beja and other communities in eastern Sudan. Beja youth representatives in Port Sudan argued that so far economic infrastructure in the East have not been attacked in sign of respect for the tribal leaders who asked Beja communities to protect key installations such as the pipeline. However, they felt that now there is no alternative but to resort to new military tactics. There was awareness amongst Eastern Front leaders that resorting to unconventional military tactics and guerilla warfare may alienate the sympathy of the international community towards the plea of the Beja people. However, some of them commented that the international community has never offered any meaningful support to the Beja, so they would not stand to lose. Notwithstanding the stated intentions to escalate the fighting, all Eastern Front political and military leaders stressed vigorously that recourse to further violence would be the last option and that they are keen to find a negotiated settlement with the government. Should an escalation ever take place, some actors have pointed out that it will be important to try and prevent clashes between Beja groups, particularly between Beni Amer and Hadendowa, in the Kassala area. Other observers also saw the possibility of a split within the Rashaida, with some taking arms in support of the government along with existing Beni Amer militia.

## Looking to Find a Solution

There are attempts underway by many actors to try and mitigate the tension in the East. These include government initiatives such as the launch of a recruitment drive of Beja graduates from Port Sudan, a two year project financed by the Chinese government to divert water from the river Nile in Atbara towards dry areas of eastern Sudan, and the expansion of the electricity grid in Red Sea and Kassala States. The government has also set up a Higher Committee for Eastern Sudan, chaired by the Minister of Finance and National Economy. The Committee is overseeing some of the projects mentioned above as well as others, including an intervention to eradicate the mesquite trees from the Tokar Delta in order to clear land for people to cultivate, the building of small dams in various parts of Red Sea State and the initiation of studies to explore the potential for treatment of salty water. These government efforts are not, however, being met with much enthusiasm by many community leaders and youth representatives. Importantly, both Beja youth leaders and some Beja Congress representatives have acknowledged that after the events of January 2005 there have been efforts by the government to take initial steps to address some of the main grievances in the area. However, Beja youth leaders commented that projects have been planned by the government unilaterally, without community involvement, and that some of the initiatives mentioned (e.g. the extension of the electricity grid) will not benefit the communities at the grassroots level, but only middle class urban dwellers. Much of the blame was apportioned to traditional leaders working closely with the government for not raising the issues which local people consider as key. In addition, several actors commented that much of the food for free distribution in the region went astray and held traditional leaders responsible for its disappearance.

Many Beja leaders, particularly in Port Sudan, remarked that because of the chronic neglect and marginalisation, people have completely lost their trust in the government, so even initiatives aimed at improving the situation locally are looked at with suspicion. Local leaders and external observers stressed the importance for the government to promote confidence building measures aimed at rebuilding the social contract between the government and the communities in eastern Sudan. An immediate priority area highlighted by the majority of the interviewees is that of employment for the youth, followed by provision of services in the rural areas and the initiation or rehabilitation of large scale development schemes aimed at rebuilding people's livelihoods. The implementation of real decentralisation as well as fairer redistribution of power and wealth were also mentioned. People emphasised the need for the government to open a dialogue with the communities throughout the region, not just in Port Sudan. Mention was made of the fact that Halaib *mahallia* has never received an official visit by the central government (or at least this was the local perception).

## The Plans for Negotiations

During the study, the need for a negotiated solution to the conflict in eastern Sudan was highlighted by all actors as the key element to reduce tension. The declared readiness of the government to negotiate was seen as having contributed to prevent the immediate escalation of the conflict. Preliminary attempts in early 2005 to create a dialogue between the parties were made by the British NGO Concordis International, which organised a consultation between the government and the Eastern Front in February 2005. However, in June 2005 the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General to the Sudan, Jan Pronk, offered his good offices to identify

a venue and a mediator for the talks, but there was no concrete outcome. Well informed observers attributed the delay to internal technicalities which had slowed the action of the UN in identifying a suitable venue and mediator. In addition, several actors commented that there was a lack of clarity as to the extent to which this initiative had been fully institutionalised within the UN Mission in the Sudan (UNMIS), given that the mission's mandate does not extend to eastern Sudan beyond the monitoring of the SPLA redeployment. The delay in starting the negotiations spread suspicions amongst Eastern Front leaders that the government was not genuinely interested to negotiate and was buying time.

In late 2005 the parties accepted the offer made by the Libyan government to open a forum between the Government of the Sudan and the Eastern Front. However, this initiative was hindered by internal differences within the Eastern Front over the suitability of the Libyan government as a mediator and later on by escalating tension around the town of Hamashkoreb on the eve of SPLA's planned withdrawal from the NDA controlled areas in January 2006. In June 2006 the parties finally came to the negotiating table in Asmara, having accepted the Government of Eritrea as a mediator. No observer from the international community had been admitted to the talks, although the Eastern Front felt that the presence of international observers would have been very useful to ensure transparency and help check against possible manipulation during the talks. By August 2006, the dynamics at the talks certainly warranted a greater involvement of the international community to ensure that the process would achieve a fair and just settlement.

## Lives & Livelihoods Under Stress

It is clear from the description of people's perceptions and perspectives presented in the previous section that issues related to marginalisation and underdevelopment are key in explaining the conflict and the current state of tension. Whilst the region suffers from a chronic lack of reliable data, some indicators are available to illustrate the situation on the ground. UNICEF data presented in the World Bank Country Economic Memorandum (2003:3) indicate that neonatal, post-neonatal and infant mortality in Red Sea State are the highest in the country; Kassala State is the second worst for post-natal and infant mortality and third worst for under-five mortality. With 56 deaths for 1,000 live births Red Sea State is also the third worst state for child mortality (after the two war affected states of Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan) and with 165 deaths for 1,000 live births is second only to Blue Nile for under-five mortality. In the NDA controlled areas crude mortality rates (CMR) are estimated to be at 1.01 per 10,000 per day and under-five mortality rates are reported to be as high as 2.01 per 10,000 per day (IRC, 2005:19).

The TANGO report undertaken last year in rural Kassala and rural Red Sea State uncovered severe levels of malnutrition in the two states. The same study showed that the annual income per household in rural Kassala is approximately 250,000 SD (US$156 per capita) while in rural Red Sea States is 125,000 SD (US$ 93 per capita); both indicators are well beneath the international extreme poverty line of US$1 per capita (TANGO, Ibid. p.28). In the NDA controlled areas a recent survey using a sample size of 625 children indicated that the percentage of Global Acute Malnutrition is at around 21.5% while the prevalence of wasting is 7.8% with a 2.1% prevalence of severe wasting (IRC, 2005:35). Reliable data on income levels in NDA areas are not available, but the vast majority of the population is believed to be below the extreme poverty line (IRC staff, Rubda, August 2005). The TANGO study also

**The TANGO Report Undertaken Last Year in Rural Kassala & Rural Red Sea State Uncovered Severe Levels of Malnutrition in the Two States as Follows:**

| Levels of malnutrition | Red Sea State | Kassala State |
|---|---|---|
| *Acute Malnutrition* | | |
| Severe wasting (<-3.0 z-score[1]) | 3.7% | 5.8% |
| Global Acute Malnutrition (<-2.0 z-score) | 19.4% | 17.7% |
| *Chronic Malnutrition* | | |
| Severe stunting (<-3.0 z-score) | 15% | 19.1% |
| Global Chronic Malnutrition (<-2.0 z-score) | 38.5% | 43.8% |
| *Underweight* | | |
| Severe underweight | 17.0 | 17.5 |
| Moderate + severe underweight (<-2.0 z-score) | 45.4 | 42.3 |

Note: Wasting, stunting and underweight are all expressed using z-scores with internationally defined cut-off points for normal, moderate and severe levels of under-nutrition, as follows (TANGO, Ibid. p. 43): Normal: > -2 z-scores; Moderate malnutrition: < -2 z-scores and > -3 z-scores; Severe malnutrition: < -3 z-scores.

showed that there is a significant correlation between the illiteracy of household heads and chronic and acute malnutrition in Kassala State and Red Sea States: in rural Kassala State 43% of the household heads are illiterate, compared with 54% in rural Red Sea State; amongst the population over 15 years of age, 56% are illiterate in rural Kassala State, against the 62% in rural Red Sea State (TANGO, Ibid. p.17). Official Ministry of Education data relative to the entire region (including urban areas) show that the illiteracy rate for the over 15 is 48% in Red Sea State, 56.7% in Al-Gedaref and 62% in Kassala State (World Bank, Ibid. p.19). A survey conducted in 1999 in Halaib *mahallia* revealed though that the illiteracy rate is as high as 89% in Halaib *mahallia*, where children currently in school represent 86.7% of those educated; only 0.75% have secondary education in the *mahallia*, of which only 11.5% are women (Abdel Ati, 1999). During the assessment people complained frequently about the lack of school feeding and of qualified teachers and whilst they acknowledged that some nomadic communities would be reluctant to send their children to school, they also pointed out that the abolition of boarding schools has had a very negative impact on the capacity of mobile children to attend school.

Health services are mostly concentrated in Port Sudan and other large centres like Sinkat or Kassala; only 20% of rural Red Sea State villages has a health centre or a clinic, while in Kassala State half of the villages have some form of health facility, although these often lack doctors, laboratories and medications (TANGO, Ibid. p.17). In the late 1990s in the whole of the then Halaib Province (80,000 km2) there were only five basic primary health care centres (Pantuliano, 1998: direct observation). Access to water is grossly inadequate throughout the region, especially in the rural areas. Drought and mesquite infestation have significantly contributed to the decrease in water levels, but generally there is a scarcity of boreholes and micro-catchments throughout the region and where boreholes exist they invariably suffer from lack of maintenance. People quoted the shortage of water as one of the key factors in contributing to push people out of the rural areas towards urban centres. In Red Sea State the urban population has grown from 38% of the total state population in 1993 to a dramatic 61.2% in 2003. The development gap and the disparity between urban and rural centres are significant. However, although in town there is a greater availability of services, people complain about the fact that very few of them can afford to pay for school fees, water or drugs. Unemployment rates have risen sharply as a result of the mechanisation of the port in Port Sudan and the laying off of many of the port workers, particularly Beja labourers who were

left with very little alternatives on the market. Many people survive by resorting to charcoal making, especially out of mesquite which is said to be a very good source of charcoal. In Kassala labour opportunities are available on the agricultural schemes, but people also complained about the lack of work on the schemes, especially since the mesquite infestation has made much land uncultivable. Very few people from the region are employed in the formal sector, most likely because of the very low level of education. Constraints to livestock marketing in rural areas and restricted availability of credit for the poor make living in much of the region a survival challenge.

The mechanisation of the port in Port Sudan has created unacceptable levels of unemployment amongst the Beja. This warrants the need for interventions which can compensate for the loss of employment on the port. People feel that the government should identify ways to use the revenues from local resources, including port, gold, customs and minerals, to fund labour intensive programmes. People also observed that much money has been spent to improve the appearance of the city through increased street lights and tarring of roads, while no allocations had been made to meet community priorities. In Kassala several communities complained about the loss of land and pastoral community representatives remarked that there is no arrangement to register land for transhumance routes in the current government plan for redistribution of land in the Gash. They stressed that there is a need to engage with pastoralist communities to identify solutions for them as well, since conflict between pastoralists and farmers (both within Hadendowa communities and between Hadendowa and Rashaida) breaks out frequently in and around the Gash scheme. The loss of key land resources for many Beja because of drought, ecological degradation and land alienation, the consequent forced abandonment of the pastoral sector without alternative opportunities and inadequate service provision have played a clear role in creating resentment and tension in the region. Youth representatives in Kassala complained that assistance by the international community is mainly concentrated on IDPs and refugees from Eritrea, while no attention is paid to destitute Beja pastoralist communities whose living conditions is far worse than those of the refugees.

## The Impact of International Assistance in Eastern Sudan

Communities, government officials and armed opposition alike lamented the limited involvement of the international community in eastern Sudan. UN interventions have traditionally been very restricted and have largely focused on food distribution and assistance to the refugee and IDP populations. A number of INGOs also operate in the two states, some of which have been on the ground for nearly two decades. There was strong dissatisfaction amongst communities, government and leaders about the performance of most international actors in the region. People complained that their action was mostly focused on emergency assistance and that projects were short term, small scale and often inadequate to address people's real needs. People also cited examples of resources going astray, particularly around relief distribution. There was dissatisfaction with the biases towards a few target groups, with IDPs and refugees being particular favourites and rural areas being perceived to receive more assistance than the urban slums where many of the worst socio-economic problems are found and which are also the hotbeds of discontent. When projects are undertaken, communities observed that there tends to be something of a predictable package that is offered and that many of the responses frequently do not address critical needs in a strategic fashion. Whilst

recognising the contributions of INGOs particularly in the service sectors, often addressing immediate needs, people commented that there has been a dearth of interventions which have created employment or sustainable increased income. The perceived lack of appropriate programming comes despite the high number of assessments of which people are tired of being the subject and which informed observers point out have invariably been of very low quality. In addition, community leaders have noted that INGO and UN responses have tended to be scattered and isolated and that there has been a lack of co-ordination between actors. Community leaders and youth in Kassala also complained about the lack of a facilitative and co-ordinating role of the Government of the Sudan's Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) in the state, which was seen as confined to office work and 'permits screening' rather than facilitating co-ordination between national and international actors and supporting the harmonisation of plans to avoid duplications and share lessons. HAC officials as well as international aid workers operating in the region indicated the lack of capacity within HAC as a major constraint in playing a more productive co-ordination role.

The shortcomings of the international response need however to be contextualised. Whilst international agencies may have a number of the weaknesses described above, there is no doubt that they have been constrained by certain key factors, chief amongst which is the long standing lack of availability of donor funding for rehabilitation and development programmes in the Sudan. Furthermore, eastern Sudan has never been able to attract major donor interest notwithstanding the fact that its development indicators are amongst the worst in the country. The little funding that has been made available has often reflected donor rather than community priorities. While the overall picture is not very positive, there are a number of exceptions to this. People in Red Sea State remarked that INGOs working in their region have contributed to organise communities, build their capacities and raise their awareness about their entitlements. A notable success has been the catalytic role in bringing about changes in gender relations in Halaib *mahallia.* Beja women who until ten years ago could not even meet with other women from outside their immediate communities are now involved in joint project management and community initiatives with the men. Positive comments have been made concerning the life-saving impact of some of the emergency assistance, both in government and NDA controlled areas. NDA officials pointed out that mortality rates in the area had declined thanks to the support INGOs were providing in the health sector. However, throughout the region the overall feeling is that international agencies are failing to tackle the root causes of underdevelopment and poverty sustainably.

Appropriate assistance could however greatly help to mitigate the tension in the East, where the conflict is closely linked to socio-economic marginalisation and livelihoods issues. Two main areas should be prioritised by the international community and the national actors to develop a cohesive response to the deteriorating situation in the region. First of all, international agencies should better co-ordinate interventions amongst themselves and with the local authorities and focus on strategic responses to key livelihoods issues for the region, including joint advocacy to catalyse attention to the situation in the East and enlist donor support for a large scale, integrated, strategic and sustainable response to the development needs of the region, aimed at de-escalating tension. Secondly, the international community should prioritise supporting the warring parties and the mediators during the ongoing peace negotiations and support the implementation of a possible agreement with adequate resources. Rehabilitation and development assistance to the East should though start immediately to strengthen people's

confidence in the peace process. A timely and informed intervention by the international community could help stem the escalating crisis in eastern Sudan with relatively little investment at this stage, while the costs of a potential humanitarian crisis further down the line would be much higher.

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# Youth Cultures & the Fetishization of Violence in Nigeria

*Caroline Ifeka*

**In this paper I develop a conceptual framework for analysing youth cultures of resistance and violence in the context of customary and world religions in which old and new gods are important sources of ideological resistance. Condensing around points of intersection between capital and non-capitalist kin-based economies, I argue that militant youth cultures develop through a 'double' articulation between 'parent' cultures largely producing use values, and capitalist cultures pervaded by world religions (Christianity, Islam). The former construe social relations between groups struggling to establish rights over strategic natural resources (land, oil, water) in terms of spirit beings and their protective powers against attack; the latter preside today over production for sale and profit according to impersonal market forces that dissolve the social into relationships between 'things', the products of labour exchanged in the market place.**

'Small' wars, triggered by conflict between communities, transnational corporations, gatekeeper states, and, increasingly, religiously-defined communities for control over natural resources and populations are key to economic and political transformations across nation-states in the post-Cold War era (Ifeka, 2004a). Globalisation inserts the private sovereignty of corporate capitalism inside the political, public sovereignty of the nation-state (Joxe, 2002:155). Some of globalisation's political impacts can be seen all too clearly in Africa, where state decomposition seems linked to an intensification in the incidence and brutality of political violence between communities across ethnic, religious, political and territorial 'borders'. Some West African societies, settled and migratory, are militantly reconstructing their worlds in ways that draw on symbols of ethnic distinctiveness and traditional faiths; others in the front line (e.g. the Niger Delta) are also demanding independence from or semi-autonomous status within the nation-state.

In Nigerian locations where I have worked since the mid-1990s,[1] highly conflictual processes of decomposition and reformation are most pronounced in places where the customary commons – pasture, arable land, fisheries, freshwater rivers – are being privatised and the original users marginalised. As social-economic differentiation, political inequality, and perceived injustice grow, where formerly there were relatively cohesive bonds between ethno-religious and occupational groups exercising agreed rights to exploit the same areas at different times of the year according to the seasons, now competition for land is breaking bonds and opening up spaces in which ethnic formations identifying with the same god(s) are hardening. Some demand full or qualified rights of juridical sovereignty over their

peoples, territories and 'god-given' resources. Political violence is densest at intersections of the global and local where capitalist production for profit, as in the oil producing Niger Delta, exists alongside non-capitalist fishing, agricultural or pastoral economies.

Here Royal Dutch Shell, ExxonMobil, ChevronTexaco, and the Italian company Agip have been subject in the past decade to intensifying attacks on their installations by individuals, youth militias and other groups, some hired by national, state or local elites who are based in or related to families in wetland kin-based moral economies.

Shell seeks to relate to communities it once publicly regarded as disposable and whose increasingly militant youth they defined formerly as a criminal menace, by providing development assistance – capitalism's panacea for poverty (Shell, 2002). 'Restive' youth are recruited for menial low paid casual work in and outside terminals, or paid 'sitting allowances' to keep them at bay. Some 'oily' development projects are in partnership with a government parastatal, the Niger Delta Development Commission, to demonstrate oil companies' good intentions to the state and communities.

In such situations of resource conflict traditional cosmologies, secret societies and modern religions (Islam, Christianity) provide ideological inspiration upon which people draw for resistance. People in general, but especially aggrieved or unemployed youths, are becoming increasingly fervent (and fundamentalist) in their religious views. They may seek relief in a greater fit between faith and the political collectivity (through *Shari'a* law), or they may find personal salvation and relief from poverty and unemployment in 'miracles of fire' that bring money and salaried positions (through Pentecostal, i.e. Gospel of Wealth churches).

It is these socioeconomic conditions that account for the growth in the past two decades of militant youth organisations at points of greatest strain between centrifugal (decentring primordial kin-based) and centripetal (centring for capitalist accumulation) ethnic and religious identities. Markers of difference empower three major stakeholders – kin-based communities, capitalist economic interests (land-owners, oil companies) and political elites (the state) – to define their boundaries and defend their interests. Each group is confident that they alone are entitled and authorised to battle for exclusive control of common lands now being privatised by powerful interest groups (for profit-led farming and fishing as well as crude oil production). What tends to be common to all such groups, however, is reference to the 'supernatural' support of a god, gods or other spiritual powers from which they claim to have a mandate approved by the community (Boyer, 2002).

A general trajectory, whereby political and economic issues are re-presented in terms of religion, may sustain subtle but significant processes fetishizing violence. Youth interpret social relations amongst themselves, and between their organisations and the enemy 'other', in terms of relations between supernatural agencies of the singular (world religion) or multiple (animism) varieties. Attacking or killing enemies appears as a property inherent not in human ability but in the 'thing' (gun). Inanimate objects (guns) bought in the market are animated and objectified (fetishized). As Taussig (2002:479) explains, the political and indeed the economic is absorbed by a mystical matrix of 'things'.

## Youth Militancy & Ethnic & Religious Divisions

The Nigerian nation is made up of numerous ethnic and religious communities which have evolved their own moral orders, derived from a mix of mission and indigenous beliefs among the clan or lineage groups which constitute them. The amalgamation of these social systems to form the local governments, states and federation of Nigeria carried into this wider arena the pursuit of material and ideal interests, 'but not the institutions and procedures for regulating, balancing and adjudicating them at the community or traditional political level' (Joseph, 1987:187). Approximately half the Nigerian population are formally Muslim and the other half Christian, but customary tolerance of religious difference is being eroded by deepening economic inequalities shaped by globalising market forces and replaced with fundamentalist identities highlighting the absolute superiority of one faith over the other (Ali, 2002; Tripp, 2006). Absolutist doctrines are attractive to many alienated unemployed youth, some of whom come from areas with an already militant tradition of 'boys' revolts'.[2]

Although many youth are relatively inactive politically, preferring to focus on ingenious strategies of economic survival, others form associations with varying degrees of openness and closure to the wider community. Some engage in 'criminal' organisations with intent to plunder citizens for personal gain whilst others form vigilante youth organisations that empower themselves, or are empowered by local governments, to use strong persuasion or physical force to 'protect' their district, as when they 'take the law into their own hands' and lynch those accused of being armed robbers. Some youth organise in 'ethnic militias' (in government terms, 'saboteurs') who fight against the state for their people's political liberation and territorial sovereignty (Apter, 1997; Buur, 2003; Gore and Pratten, 2003).

Yawning economic disparities between world capitalism's productive, informa-tion-rich affluent areas and socially-excluded, impoverished zones, are particularly exposed in the Niger Delta. Thousands of kilometres of global capitalism's oil technology – pipe lines, flow stations, huge oil terminals and company compounds – sit literally cheek by jowl with fishing communities organised for the most part within non-capitalist relations of production for subsistence and seasonal sale of surplus, eking out a living in the oil-polluted swamps and soils of planet Earth's second largest wetlands. Here, capital-intensive systems of resource extraction and processing that rely on highly skilled labour imported from overseas and elsewhere in Nigeria exist alongside, and in general do not mesh directly with, non-capitalist relations of production between households. Invoking the 1978 Land Use Decree, the Nigerian state asserts its exclusive rights over 'black gold' 'for the use and common benefit of all Nigerians' (Francis, 1984:5). Yet communities insist that, as their founding forefathers' descendants, they are empowered to own and hold in common under ancestral customary law not only oil and gas, but all natural resources including land, creeks, coastal waters and the fish stocks therein (Ifeka, 2000, 2004b).

Ijaw family households in the Niger Delta interact as parts of a moral community respecting norms upheld by clergy of various churches; they may also interact as parts of a covert community respecting the mystical and physical powers of the Ijaw war god (*Egbesu*). *Egbesu's* warrior youth priests are initiated into secret knowledge of 'medicines' conferring immunity to enemy bullets; initiates are supported by 'mothers of the community', by male elders in their customary role of the ancestors' representatives, as well as by priests of shrines to gods of the sea, mangrove swamps

and the fertile soils of drier upland areas (Ifeka, 2005). Militant fishing youth in currently militarised zones of the Niger Delta (e.g. Brass township facing Agip's oil terminal in Bayelsa state, Warri town facing Shell and Chevron-Texaco terminals in Forcados, Delta state) confront the state's security forces protecting oil company installations

The growth of political violence in Niger Delta fishing economies has been paralleled by increasing tension inland between pastoralists and farmer youth – phenomena treated almost invariably as separate and disconnected (Best and Kemedi, 2005). Observers tend to focus on the perceived importance of ethno-religious difference, so they disconnect the violence of youthful warriors fighting for oil – their faces and heads mystically protected from enemy bullets by the war god's leaves and chalked facial designs – from violence far from the world media's cameras in the sub-humid and temperate zones of Cross River and contiguous states on the Nigeria-Cameroon border. There, farmers of various ethnic majority groups pray to the Christian god, whilst also relying on the 'medicines' of indigenous gods to ensure victory in protecting 'their' land from incursions by livestock owned by Muslim pastoralists of the Fulani political and demographic ethnic minority.

It is Islam and Christianity which here mark ethnic and socio-economic boundaries between farmers and Fulani pastoralists. Pentecostalist churches aim to evangelise Muslim communities, and to a lesser extent the reverse. World religions also intersect with customary cosmologies and secret societies possessing secret knowledge of gods which animate objects, fetishes, attributed with killing powers (Lambek, 2002:7-8). In the Delta wetlands, customary worldviews articulate militant youth's ethno-national identity, and protect their bodies against the bullets of a global economic enemy (oil corporations) and an ostensibly secular Nigerian state that Niger Delta people nevertheless identify with the Christian faith. Here youth at times act violently against their 'parent' culture's (Christian) faith, setting fire to churches and burning down priests' houses.

Informing these parallels between militant youth cultures of violence in the wetlands and inland, is the pivotal role of non-capitalist kin-based relations of production wherein people are not yet separated from the means of production – land and water – that reproduce labour (Marx, 1971). Scholars have failed to link the 'institutional endowment' of ethnic and religious divisions (Azam, 2001:3) to the predominance of family labour in production and reproduction for subsistence and survival. In times of crisis (illness, infertility, epidemic diseases, impoverishment) people go to shrines where priests invoke the old gods' customary means of protection against perceived mystical 'enemy' forces (Ifeka and Flower, 1997; Ifeka, 2000, 2004a, 2004b, forthcoming). Arguably, most subalterns' economic dependence on culturally distinctive 'moral economies' of kinship (Hyden, 1980) shapes popular religious practice. Subalterns know that the rich are reluctant to disburse lucrative patronage, so they seek out native doctors, priests and seers of the old gods believed to possess secret knowledge of mystically powerful 'medicines' that can 'command' the patron to release his largesse. Conversely, the wealthy and powerful, whether Muslim or Christian, have less need to seek mystically potent 'medicines' from animist priests. Popular belief however has it that rich Muslim men, socialised into the collective obligations of life lived in the *ummah*, are more likely than their individualistic Christian counterparts to support clients.

Whilst violent youth have recourse to 'traditional' rituals and sacrifice to gods of war to protect secret/quasi-secret militias, field data suggests that youth cultures of

violence also iconise modern war weaponry fabricated in global arms factories (Ifeka, 2004a). As young Ijaw warriors are photographed in speed boats ready to challenge the Nigerian security forces, they wield AK-47s, their torsos wrapped round from shoulder to shoulder in bullet belts. The young men, some apparently teenagers, use white chalk to paint designs on their faces symbolising the warrior's protection by *Egbesu*, the god of war. Some also place medicated plant leaves on their foreheads to signify that their life force is sacralised by the god's protection and secured by rituals and sacrifice at *Egbesu's* shrine. As they deploy capital's advanced weaponry in armed combat, Ijaw youth and oil company/state security forces objectify (fetishize) relations between fishing communities, global capital and the state in terms of relations between commodities of violence (guns) mediated by the 'customary' protective power of medicated leaves.

Thus, youth cultures of resistance employ a 'double' articulation (Hall and Jefferson, 1976:15). On the one hand, youth are socialised in a 'parent' culture embedded largely in non-capitalist systems of power. Here social relations are customarily represented in terms of relations between mystical forces animated in man-made or natural objects, gods (fetishes), which struggle for victory over life and death. Though customary cosmologies are fragmenting, elements reported in ethnographic texts from the late nineteenth century suggest strong continuities in motif and meaning. Militant youth draw upon these traditions and may also participate in mosque and church, where clerics and priests provide channels of communication between kin-based communities and national and international arenas of discourse on issues of faith, the state and injustice. Conversely, militant youth organisations relate to capitalist corporations and the Nigerian state through guns, rockets and grenades bought in exchange for stolen crude oil.

## Fetishism & Fetishization

In West African coastal contexts fetish means *juju*, which is pidgin English for the French *joujou* (doll) known in Portuguese as *fetico* (made) (Kingsley, 1964:96-110). Fetishes are products of human thought, and are maintained for the pragmatic purpose of getting spiritual power over events. As Ellen (1988:213-4) explains, fetishism may commence as people invest perception in a thing, and with subsequent reification and animation, it becomes a fetish, 'an object conceived as a powerful being', or a spirit connected to matter for as long as it receives human attention through prayer, sacrifice and perhaps daily offerings of food. Some marxist scholars, for example Taussig (1980), argue that fetish objects, generated through a group's collective experience, take on fixed qualities that in mirroring a perceived sociality conceal their true economic or political function and so mystify reality.

Among Anyang forest dwelling hunter-gatherers and small farmers living on both sides of the Nigeria-Cameroon border, a male-dominated community of kin groups controls the means of production (land and young men's labour) and reproduction (women). Households are only partially integrated into the market economy and a majority are still unconverted to Christianity. Fetishism here represents relations between women, men and youth in terms of 'natural' relations between powerful spirit beings that are simultaneously desired for their protective functions and feared for their destructive potencies. In the Niger Delta, Ijaw cults of the war god *Egbesu*, ancestral beings and other spirits of the sea and water, represent inequitable relations between people, oil companies and the state in terms of spirit beings' resistance to the violence inflicted by oil spills, gas flaring and security forces' brutal

massacres. At the same time, Ijaw communities may also represent relations between people, the state and oil companies as relations between things – commodities like guns, money, petroleum – objects that are detached from the producer and whose acquisition mystifies relations between people in terms of commodities, things. In such contexts, the Ijaw express their experience of being at the global/local interface simultaneously in terms of commodity *and* ritual fetishism.

Fetishization denotes a shift from what Ellen (1990:5) calls 'balanced simultaneity of the signifier and signified toward the thing in itself'; the concept 'hardens' as it is objectified as a powerful force or being. By the fetishization of political violence I mean groups struggling to access resources perceiving that they relate in no other way than through representations and practices of spiritual and/or physical violence; consequently, youth feel they have no social relations with the hated 'other' than through objects of force (guns, cutlasses, bows and arrows).

Anyang forest communities explain illness, disease and death not in terms of scientific theories of causality but in terms of mystical attack. Typically, one or more members of the village are accused of being witches who destroy life by introducing disease, infertility of women and crops, and unexpected deaths in order to enhance their own reproductive and productive powers. The men's secret society send out youth to mobilise their anti-witchcraft fetish (*Lakumbo* or *Mfam*). At such times relations between human beings are represented in terms of de-centring fetish powers (*juju*) that connect villages over a large area in ongoing spiritual warfare against witches whose reach may extend to Europe and America, centres of modernity and capitalism (De Boeck, 2005; Ifeka, forthcoming). In these forest contexts, political relations between men assume the fantastic form of relations among spiritual agencies, unleashing the destructive and protective powers of the demonic. The gods and their 'medicated' objects supply mystical means – the law sacralised through sacrifice – that enables devotees to protect the moral economy of kinship from attack by external enemies who 'appropriate the scarce reproductive resources of others' (Austen, 1993:104).

When people harden their focus on objects of violence (guns, fetish or *juju* figures), they materialise or embed the concept in commodity (gun) or spirit entities (war god*).* In consequence they experience social relations increasingly in terms of attack and defence, fetishized violence, that articulates major points of conflictual intersection between global and local.

## Violence

Girard (1977) argues for the essential life-giving creativity of violence, arguing that revenge killing cycles can end in one 'final' killing that authorizes new social formations. By contrast, Baudrillard, among others, has maintained that violence destroys lives, social systems and tolerance of different faiths (2002:8, 17-19). Most militant Ijaw youth, however, might well agree with Girard since they believe that decades of relatively peaceful resistance have not persuaded the state to concede resource control to oil-producing communities. ''They have developed a veritable theodicy of suffering to rationalise violence as 'just war'.

Two well-known Ijaw militias – the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Cynthia Whyte Martyrs' Brigade – are aiming to consolidate popular support and seek understanding of their righteous cause in the Nigerian nation, the diaspora, and international human rights organisations. Following a

successful attack in March 2006 on an oil facility, the militants took expatriate oil workers hostage. In a statement to the press regarding possible negotiations, MEND stated:

> As much as our terms are non-negotiable, we want to be understood very clearly … MEND is … [privy] to the politics of such deliberations and finds it futile as it shall amount to avenues to import more economic hostilities to multiply the austerity and servility of the Niger Delta child. The demands of MEND cannot be subsidised as our resolve to rebel to free the Niger Delta child is a discretion greater than self, so no amount of economic, social or political persuasion shall redeem the last three hostages … [who personify] the Anglo-American ring of fire pillaging and ravaging the Niger Delta area with the weapons of mass sustainable under-development … (cited in Udo and Ojogo, 2006).

This statement suggests that MEND youth are developing a political philosophy that positions the dispossessed at the intersection of the global and the local, with highly productive and profitable oil companies blamed for continuing violence against people and the land, while the fate of the kin-based community is identified with that of its children, its reproductive potential. Yet the violence they are committed to undertake is perceived as sacrifice – youth militants are martyrs, killing and being killed. MEND's statement assumes that coercive power, however destructive, is justified when it achieves the goal of an equitable allocation of resources and so paves the way for peace under a new political settlement (see also Ijaw Youths, 1998; Douglas et al. 2003; Okonta and Douglas, 2003; Rowell et al. 2005).

In Simmel's view (1955:13), 'Conflict is … designed to resolve divergent dualisms: it is a way of achieving some kind of unity, even if it be through the annihilation of one of the conflicting parties'; conflict is a pivotal form of sociation. Applying Simmel's argument to militant youth's belief in violent means to secure otherwise unattainable political ends, an eventual political consensus, which allowed for new sovereignties to emerge with independent jurisdiction over their own peoples, terrains and natural resources, would be legitimate and justified even if it were achieved by violent means.

Whatever the outcomes, scholars like Arendt (1970) cleave to Hobbes' position that consensual (pure) power negotiated by citizens is the (true) origin of socio-political organisation (Tuck, 1989). Some, like Weber (Bendix, 1960), theorise power's inherent duality (force versus authority) in response to changing political and economic conditions; only a few writers argue with Girard the case for violence as a socially creative force. However, the latter view is echoed not only in fundamentalist discourses of terrorism but also by multinational corporations, nation-states and ethnic communities that authorise such practices in their own wars (Kemedi, 2003).

## Towards a Conceptual Framework

Resource control struggles are Nigeria's specific terrain of intersection between capital and community. In this section I use case studies from my ongoing fieldwork to help identify factors shaping the emergence of youth cultures of resistance that, drawing on customary and modern faiths, fetishize social relations in terms of commodities of violence (guns) and protecting/attacking spirit beings. Poverty and unemployment may be a necessary but are not in themselves a sufficient cause of the recent growth in youth militancy. Many young men, literate and illiterate, feel that they can never compete in the overcrowded capitalist sector and that they are being

coerced by circumstance to labour as kinsmen within the 'traditional' household division of labour in Nigeria's farming, fishing and pastoralist economies. Positioned at points of intersection between the global and the local, without the skills and resources to support wife/wives, children and hungry 'brothers', many experience shame. Though unable to supply material sustenance at the expected level, they can rely on the customary use of force, both spiritual and physical, to achieve respect and prestige as 'good boys' who protect their families and communities from unwanted external attack. They may form militias dedicated to the use of physical force, strengthened by spirit beings, to secure their goals.

Shame, as Scheff (1994:3-4, 39ff ) demonstrates, leads the individual to feel resentful and then angry. In Nigerian contexts, it is possible that poverty and relative political powerlessness are necessary conditions for youth's increased sensitivity to perceived insults to individual and collective pride. As more young men feel shamed by loss of status and self pride there may emerge a perception of threat to the collective identity and stability of village, ethnic group and religious faith and consequently, the likelihood of a violent response. At this stage, argues Scheff (1994:111-123), the image of the 'other' as enemy and fit object of the self's violent cleansing or extermination is strongly experienced; relations between self and other are re-presented in terms of violence and expressed through religious symbols of righteous force.

## Violence as Creative & Destructive Force

Although at one time or another most youth may feel shame at their predicament, only some of their number became militant activists, and of these only a few become leaders. The latter, often apparently more literate or educated than the membership, turn not to modern scientific knowledge but find in traditional secret societies a political model for handling the challenges of violent resistance (see Honwana and De Boeck, 2005). Though only a minority of youth become militant, most people, whether overtly or covertly, support those militias or vigilante organisations that community members believe use force for the collective good. Militant youth groups that lack community approval may be known as 'area boys', 'armed robbers', 'hoodlums', 'mafia' etc; these terms usually denote criminal groups deemed to be operating in defiance of community norms and the state's police forces.

Niger Delta youth, surviving within primordial ties of kin-based fishing communities situated close to exposed pipelines, siphon off and sell an estimated ten per cent of Nigeria's annual on-shore crude oil production. In this theft they are often backed by powerful patrons in high office at the state and national levels as well as their 'parent' communities. Youth may use part of the proceeds to purchase arms – originally of the small hand gun type but now increasingly sophisticated and lethal (Green, 2001b, 2002; Ifeka, 2001b).

The ensuing violence is both 'constructive' and destructive. In the Niger Delta new ethnic formations are emerging out of the sacrifice of many youth who have died in the cause of resource control and ethnic autonomy, such as Ijaw youth in Bayelsa state, whose perceived martyrdom is recounted below. In the case of the pastoral Fulani (Muslim) who are being persecuted by ethnic farmers (Christian), violence is highly destructive of life, properties and security of another subaltern group. Grazier victims would certainly agree with Baudrillard (2002) that killing is in no way creative.

## Example 1: Violence As Creative

When working in Brass (Bayelsa State) I was told by several young Ijaw informants of a recent tragedy, and saw the terrain on which it unfolded. This event demonstrates some of the factors involved in conflict between oil companies and communities since the early 1970s when commercial production came on stream. It illustrates the experience of militant youth in the Niger Delta struggling against oil companies and the state for a semi-autonomous or independent Ijaw ethnic nation controlling its oil resources.

In 2001 a Twon Brass youth organisation led a peaceful demonstration of over sixty people up the cement path from the town to the Agip oil terminal in the swamp. The youth intended to enter the compound to present a protest to Agip managers to the effect that they were unemployed, lived in poverty, fished waters heavily polluted by crude oil effluents and drank contaminated water. They demanded that the company should 'help our people' who were customary owners of the wetlands. As the youth, followed by men and women, sought to enter the terminal, naval security forces with guns ordered the demonstration to halt. Women at the rear called out to the youth leaders to remain at the gate, and not to enter. Twelve or so youth ignored the warning, climbed over the gate into the compound and began to walk towards the management complex, whereupon naval security men hired by the oil company to 'protect' the installations, opened fire and killed three of the leaders.

The young men are memorialised in the form of a large billboard depicting the three martyrs, with an appropriate legend to their heroic sacrifice (Ifeka, 2001b). Members of the Ijaw Youth Congress subsequently argued that these three young men and many others had sacrificed their lives for the cause of Ijaw resource control and attainment of Isaac Adaka Boro's dream of a sovereign Niger Delta Republic. A supporter of Boro's twelve day rebellion in 1966 wrote recently that Boro died 'an undying hero and martyr in the hearts and minds of angry Ijaw youths' (Ijaw Nation, 2005; Ijaw Youth Council, 2006; also see Eshiet et al. n.d.; Olorode et al. 1999).

In this instance violence resulting in death is perceived as ultimately creative, because first, the action and subsequent public interpretations (such as the above) conjure up an image of the future desired polity; and second, youth's sacrifice of their lives identifies the emerging polity with lawful justice. Similar arguments justifying political violence for a cause larger than the interests of any one individual have already been illustrated from MEND.

## Example 2: Violence As Destructive

This example exposes the experience of victims of inter-communal conflict in Bayelsa State, the Niger Delta. While in Brass in 2001, I met 'refugee' families from fishing community A across the water, whose village a hostile neighbouring settlement (B) had burned down in the late 1990s, despite the fact that both were Ijaw. A good number of former residents of community A were residing 'temporarily' in a Twon fishing port, some had taken refuge with kin in Yenagoa and Port Harcourt. (At that time there were also displaced persons from two other villages residing in Twon.) Former residents of A regarded themselves as the victims of unwarranted attack – though A and B had long been engaged in periodic strife. Families had been dispersed, their means of production (fishing boats, outboard engines, nets) destroyed, their shrines and graves abandoned. As one said, 'our lives are finished' (Ifeka, 2001b).

People I spoke to felt their community had been 'scattered', they had lost their collective identity and means of subsistence. "Refugee" youth were angry and aggrieved and brawled periodically with Twon indigenous youth organisations. Subsequently, in 2004-5, relations degenerated into major outbreaks of violence with a third party, the state's security forces, involved. Youth from village A alleged that some officers had been 'bribed' by Twon indigenous youth groups to participate or at least to turn a blind eye to acts of violence against refugees.

Last year the press carried reports that Agip and government had assisted displaced persons from village A to return and rebuild their lives. This example exposes the relativity of ethnic solidarity, given that hostility here was between Ijaws. More generally, descendants of founding indigenes in Delta settlements claim that their villages are much more ethnically diverse than a generation ago. They told me they are tired of taking in families from non-Ijaw inland ethnic groups who demand to fish largely dead creeks and the few remaining productive fresh water rivers (Ifeka, 2003). Their response is to re-centre community decision making, excluding all but 'indigenes', that is, families claiming descent in the male line from an ancestor who cleared swampland and founded the village. Economic desperation turns indigenes and refugees against each other in conflict which can lead to violence.

## Example 3: Violence As Destructive

This example describes the view of Muslim graziers, victims of attacks by Christian farmer youth organisations in Ogoja and Yala LGAs (Northern Cross River state). Such violence occurs between two communities who, in a formerly less commodified economy, related through symbiotic exchange of mutually useful produce (milk for stubble grazing). In this area privatisation of communal village land is now advanced. A small but growing class of large landowners is appropriating and/or purchasing blocks of communal land as well as plots that the poorest farmers sell out of financial necessity (Peters, 2004). The remaining stock of communal land is insufficient to support the burgeoning majority, who often say that the political class 'nationalised' land in 1978 for its own financial benefit, and not, as was claimed, for the 'use and common benefit of all Nigerians' whatever their ethnicity and religion (Francis, 1984:5).

Inequality in access to, ownership and distribution of land among farmer and grazier units of production is increasing rapidly. Provisional income and house-hold data show that smallholder farming villages are expanding their land reach; they are also becoming more economically differentiated, as a 'comfortable' few buy up common land, engage in cash crop agriculture, and promote privatisation at the expense of the poor (subaltern) majority whose youth face endless toil for others as landless labourers, share croppers and tenant farmers (Ifeka, 1996, 2002; Toulmin et al. 2002). Conversely, graziers who retain livestock are increasing herd size and pressure on grazing land. As with land, so with cattle: people say that fewer Fulani graziers maintain cattle today, those who do have larger herds than was common a generation ago. Herds – and farms – are getting larger as economic differentiation and privatisation progress.

While ethnic and religious communities intensify their competititve pressure on the available stock of productive land and clean water, so does cultural difference come to seem a marker of threat. Fulani become 'strangers' whose God and methods of worship are alien, who are called to prayer in a foreign language (Arabic), and who adhere to a very distinctive code of honour (*pulakau)* and avoidance of shame

(*semtende*). By contrast, farmers' conversion to varieties of Pentecostalism strengthens their identification with the 'true' God and his Son Jesus. Many tell Fulani 'you are strangers and should return to where you came from' (Ifeka, 2006:90-91). Fulani informants told us that landowners think 'we are trouble people, always cause problems, we are difficult people', that farmers 'hate us'. Farmers believe that Fulani send their cattle deliberately to destroy their crops. Since Fulani are excluded from land ownership, conflicts centre on issues of moveable property theft or homicide. For example, in an outbreak of violence over land at Ifiong, in March, 2006, three Fulani were killed, twenty cows slaughtered by farmer youth and many more 'got missing' (i.e. were taken by militant youth).

Fulani say: 'farmers will not summon a meeting to call the Fulanis for negotiation … the courts and police are weak, only the army helps us' and, 'conflict, violence, war and killing is growing all the time' (Ibid. p. 72). Chiefs are powerless, farmer youth 'rule' the villages; it is the youth, not the elders, who decide on the day's target, for example burning a Fulani nomadic school or stealing their cattle for consumption and sale. Some youth organisations allegedly control local government council decisions on security and conflict issues. Farmer youth attend church on Sunday, but also form vigilante organisations, some of which are said to involve secret oaths and blood sharing for 'true brotherhood' unto death at the *juju's* shrine. Eager to be provoked so they can use force against offending graziers and gain prestige as young 'warriors' in their village, most brandish cutlasses and some use hand guns to protect their people from perceived threats of attack by graziers armed with bows and arrows.

Privatisation is shrinking the commons. Afraid of farmer attack, graziers concentrate their cattle in 'safe' areas that are too small to support the volume of livestock, and so the land becomes degraded. As conflict and insecurity levels rise, so do Fulani fears that they can no longer maintain traditional standards of honour, and both men and youth experience shame and anger. The smallholder majority is also stressed because they live on the edge of becoming landless labourers and tenant farmers as richer men buy up land (Ifeka, 1996).

## Example 4: Violence Cleanses & Re-creates the Community

In early January 2006, in the relatively peaceful north-east corner of Cross River State on the border with Cameroon, the 'Obanliku Local Government Area Vigilante Youth' (allegedly approved by the council) took action against an alleged rapist (Ifeka, 2006:72-3). Here, in a farming area, violence is perceived as cleansing and reaffirming community norms around reproductive rights over women, whose fertility is commonly identified with that of the land.

An informant told us that the boy had repeatedly raped a girl all night. Before 'she gave up' (died) the following day, she described her assailant. He had been in jail in 2005 for the same offence against other girls. The dead girl's brother went together with the above youth organisation to 'avenge the girl's death'. Although the rapist fled into the bush the youth found him and allowed the brother to beat him to death. The police took a week or two before they came to investigate; they arrested several youth whom they almost immediately released. The case of the brother, also arrested, is still 'pending'. In the view of the village whose 'daughter' was violated unto death, the community has been cleansed of a public nuisance; men can relax, their wives, daughters and sisters are now safe; small livestock will be healthy and harvests bountiful.

## Militant Youth Cultures & the Gods

I now assess the significance of the above case studies for this analysis of cultures and practices of youth resistance. I have suggested that in these simultaneously differentiating (decentring) and unifying (centring) processes, social relations between disputants over resource ownership are re-presented and intensely focussed in terms of relations between objects (gods, guns) that kill and destroy 'enemy others' identified with the 'wrong' faith and ethnicity. Activist youth in fishing, farming and pastoralist communities detach force from human agency, objectifying violence in the form of spirit things (gods) or commodity things (guns) that articulate group internal and external relations. I seek now to identify core elements – for example spirit and commodity fetishism – of youth cultures of force which would seem to connect manifestations of militancy in Nigeria's transnational petroleum and agro-pastoral economies.

First, there are similar social processes underlying and contradicting observers' failure to note a connection between political violence in the Delta compared to farming/agro-pastoral economies. Resource conflicts within and between Niger Delta communities are fragmenting former relations of symbiosis and reciprocity between kin, affines, 'settlers' and 'indigenes'. Similarly, former ties of symbiosis between pastoralists and farmers – marked, for example, by farmers receiving dairy products in exchange for allowing pastoralists' cattle to graze on stubble and unplanted grassland – have broken down in the past two decades under pressure of population growth, agrarian expansion, and larger herds. Privatisation by absentee landlords further erodes the stock of land and so creates gaps where formerly there were relationships (Blench, 2005). In some localities fundamentalist Pentecostal churches and Islamist clergy are adding fuel to the fire of broken bonds ensuing in resource conflict. As Simmel explained, 'separation does not follow from conflict, but, on the contrary, conflict from separation' (1955:47).

Second, there are the common social psychological factors associated with militant youth organisations seeking strong internal cohesion which enables the groups to dissociate themselves from visible interaction with others, so they become 'invisible', their secrets protected from disclosure. Earlier this year a BBC journalist interviewed Major-General Godswill Tamuno, self-proclaimed military leader of 'Nigeria's shadowy oil rebels', MEND, who was described as strolling anony-mously in the street (BBC News, 20 April 2006). Though the more effective militant youth organisations in the Niger Delta seem to be the most secretive ('faceless'), others are variously open or semi-closed; perhaps the extent to which secrecy is instituted depends on context, purpose of the action, and perception of danger from attack by 'enemy bullets' (mystical or physical). Nevertheless, rituals of secrecy in organised contexts may empower militant youth, however marginalised, to influence their own communities as well as those they attack, for: 'The secret offers, so to speak, the possibility of a second world alongside the manifest world; and the latter is decisively influenced by the former' (Simmel, 1950:330).

Everywhere strong emotions of shame and rage set the scene for an unending spiral of violence (Scheff, 1994:2-3). Vigilante farmer youth told me, 'we deal with trouble well … we have power' (i.e. fetishes, medicines, charms and the like); others said, 'we are one' (Ifeka, 2006:84-6, 91-3). This, and other field data on forest cosmologies, suggests that farmer and fisher youth draw on traditions of warriorhood authorised by the gods in order to maintain self and cultural pride; they also access secret knowledge of mystical means of protection from spiritual and physical 'bullets'

launched by 'enemies' – pastoralists, immigrant fisherfolk, oil companies, government security forces. Consequently, in these agro-pastoral and fishing economies, sociality is defined alike in terms of conflicts that express 'dis-sociating' (hatred, envy, need) rather than 'sociating' processes (Simmel, 1955:13).

Third, there are forms of youth leadership based on prestige in need of shoring up against hostile external influences and heavy state surveillance. As a political class preoccupied with personal accumulation looks on with indifference, fishing, farming and pastoral economies, significantly shaped by kin-based non-capitalist relations of production and framed variably by customary cosmologies, offer youth experiencing the disordering impact of globalisation the option of restoring pride in self and community by accessing the old gods and mystical powers. The Anyang men's society (*Lakumbo*), the Ijaw war *juju Egbesu*, and Cross River's Ekpe society rely on secret knowledge and rituals to uphold the otherwise ephemeral prestige of individual leaders, to instil fear so people think twice before committing theft or engaging in malign gossip of witchcraft, and to maintain respect for the society's god (fetish) and its power to kill witches (Ruel, 1969; Ifeka, forthcoming). The gods' mystical powers, known only to members in possession of its secret, transforms individual leaders' prestige, earned as powerful hunters or warriors in combat against witches and oil company security forces, into something more authoritative and enduring.

Thus, similarities in form between militant youth cultures and practices in Nigeria's transnational petroleum and agro-pastoral economies reflect militants' formation at points of intersection between global capitalism and local economies based on non-capitalist and petty commodity production. Here youth mobilise in opposition to the Nigerian state as it authorises expropriation by oil companies, wealthy notables and local landlords of economically valuable resources from the community's customary commons. Niger Delta and inland farmer youth draw on 'traditional' (reinterpreted) cultural motifs to affirm their dangerous vocation, their simultaneously life-affirming but also life-threatening engagement in the visible and invisible worlds of existence. The interpretative appeal to 'past' motifs of the righteous battle against evil is similar in form, the content is different according to local traditions. Though differences in content are significant in individual construction of meaning and identities, underlying structural processes are shaping the development of regional cultures of youth resistance at points of intersection of the global and the local.

## Conclusion

I have here explored the hypothesis that militant/non-militant youth subcultures engage in a 'double' articulation: to the 'parent' culture in the kin-based community as well as to the political culture of state/capitalist power and beyond, in global shadow networks of world religions of force (Muslim jihad, Christian crusade) whose influence in shaping the growth of youth cultures of resistance needs further investigation.

Political violence in Nigeria pivots on struggles between on the one hand, a hugely rich local capitalist elite allied with transnational corporate partners that dominate global accumulation and, on the other hand, a subaltern impoverished majority living largely within non-capitalist and petty commodity production relations. Militant youth organisations are emerging that articulate intersections between, first, agro-pastoral and fishing kin-based 'moral economies' in which labour still

retains some control over land, the principal means of production, and second, systems of state power supporting international capitalism. The literature largely disconnects Nigeria's transnational petroleum economy, where the most 'advanced' militant youth organisations are at war with oil corporations and the state, from youth-led political violence in kin-based pastoral, agricultural and fishing economies. Yet the growth in subaltern political cultures of force cuts across this top-down disconnection and indicates that the political class does not exercise 'hegemonic' rule in the Gramscian sense of taken for granted 'natural authority' (Hoare and Nowell-Smith, 1971:12-13). Rather, hegemony may reside with youth cultures of resistance that are endorsed by 'parent' communities. Rising youth militancy that draws on customary cosmologies of fetishism has given the old gods a new lease of life, a new found popularity among literate and illiterate sections of Nigeria's transnational petroleum and agro-pastoral economies.

Youth adopting a militant tendency are entering into history/capitalism through political violence. Equally, endemic conflict – a myriad of 'small wars' – fosters 'work of a centrifugal logic, a logic of separation' and decentring processes. These conflicts promote divisions framed in ethnic terms (Clastres, 1989:165), which resist the centripetal logic of unification under civil society's sole external authority, the sovereign state, and its cult of the One God.

The mystification or fetishization of political relations and their appreciation in rituals dedicated to drawing down the divine for empowerment, make meaningful the political system in which people live. Mystification of political relations of control/influence over others' actions is an attribute of people's capacity to perceive the decisions they take as having a life of their own. Matters of life and death evocative of the sacred law and sovereignty appear 'magically' to people in the form of heroic or spiritual beings seemingly disconnected from the social will, personages with a (double) mystical and political Janus face whose mysterious 'double' articulation resonates in the secrecy which seems to uphold the violence of sacrifice amplifying the fetishization of power (Nooter, 1993:33-46).

## Endnotes

1. Since the mid-1990s I have carried out a mix of anthropological field research and community 'development' activities with NGOs in the Niger Delta (Bayelsa and Akwa Ibom states) and inland, mainly with farmers (Boki, Busi, Besenge-Utanga), pastoralists (Fulani), and hunter-gatherers (Anyang, Becheve) of Cross River state (Nigeria) and the Takamanda Forest Reserve (South West Cameroon on the international Nigeria-Cameroon border). I have drawn on this ongoing experience of life lived with rural subalterns of Christian, animist and Muslim faiths in writing this paper. Some of the field material is indicated in the bibliography.

2. I define 'youth' here in the usual Nigerian mode – it refers almost wholly to men, aged between fourteen and about forty years.

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# Briefings

## DARFUR!

*Alex de Waal*

The war and killing in Darfur have created an unusually horrible and complicated crisis. But the conflict is similar to other African civil wars in at least one major respect. Peace and a return to stability are possible only with a political agreement that commands the support of the key players in Darfur: the armed movements and the government. The search for a political agreement is complicated by the persistent perfidy of the government as well as the fragmentation and incapacity of the armed movements, but must be pursued nonetheless.

Khartoum's preferred option for Darfur – a military solution – is not going to work. It can inflict serious damage on the rebels and cause more displacement and suffering among civilians. The holdout rebel movements are in poor shape, and Khartoum's armed forces, with their proxies – the Janjaweed and now also the irregulars of rebel commander Minni Minawi – have been reinforced. But a Carthiginian peace would not create enough popular confidence to enable displaced people to return home, and the depth of resentment in Darfur today is such that the war would surely resume.

Over the last six months, the African Union, the United Nations, and the United States have painfully relearned an old peacemaking lesson: threats, ultimata and deadlines don't work. Throughout the Darfur peace negotiations in Abuja, advisers warned that the process of working through the issues and building confidence, especially on security issues, was highly complex and should not be rushed. The consistent rejoinder from Washington and the UN Security Council was 'your timetable is too slow – we don't have that amount of time.'

Deadlines came and went, but when Deputy Secretary Robert Zoellick received an assurance that Khartoum would allow in UN peacekeepers following an agreement, an inflexible deadline was finally imposed: 30 April. The AU mediation team scrambled to have a text ready, and a week beforehand put a deal on the table. For the most part it was fair – as good a deal as Darfurians are likely to get. But it was a deal crafted by the mediators, not one owned by the Sudanese. Under protest, Minawi, leader of a well-armed and military proficient faction of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA), signed the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) on 5 May. The combined pressure of the assembled international community, however, was not enough to persuade Abdel Wahid al Nur, chairman of the largest SLA faction, to agree. The political distance to be bridged was small and most of Abdel Wahid's lieutenants were in favor of signing. But international disinterest in continuing negotiations, the hostile response of displaced Darfurians to a deal which they mistakenly saw as a sellout, and Abdel Wahid's own erratic leadership, meant that no deal could be concluded. Abdel Wahid's 'no' doomed prospects for an inclusive and workable agreement.

Khartoum knew from the outset that a deal with just Minawi would exacerbate

and not end the conflict. Even as it discreetly maintained contacts with Abdel Wahid, and enticed breakaway SLA elements into the fold, the government managed to have the non-signatories expelled from the AU-chaired Ceasefire Commission and branded as outlaws – a measure that only polarized Darfur and escalated the fighting. And President Bashir went back on his commitment to allow in the UN.

As the violence worsened, the pressure was piled on Khartoum to accept a UN peacekeeping force in Darfur. The AU mission is under-funded, disorganised and poorly-led. Reliant on hand-to-mouth funding, it groped from crisis to crisis, responding to events and never establishing any confidence that it could contribute to a solution. The UN could fix some of these problems, but peacekeepers alone are never a panacea. It needs a strategic vision, and that vision must be political.

From a continent away it might seem feasible for an international force to fight its way into Darfur without Khartoum's agreement, provide physical protection to all Darfur's civilians, disarm the Janjaweed, and impose a political settlement. Let's be clear: that is fantasy. It wouldn't be possible with 200,000 NATO troops, let alone 20,000 blue helmets. Speaking on 5 October, the UN Under-Secretary General for Peacekeeping, Jean-Marie Guehenno, made this point very clearly.

Khartoum sees a UN force as a surrender of sovereignty, and believes it would have the mandate to apprehend individuals indicted by the International Criminal Court and fly them to the Hague. President Bashir worries about a Chapter VII peacekeeping operation with authority to use force being present in northern Sudan should conflict break out in the run up to the 2011 referendum on self determination in southern Sudan. He resents the way in which the push for

UN troops has been conducted through bluster and threat, and he knows the threats are hollow. Bashir's position is stronger now than in the past because he has friendly neighbours. It was the presence of thousands of Eritrean, Ethiopian and Ugandan troops and armor in Sudan, supporting the Sudan People's Liberation Army, that forced Khartoum into making major concessions in the south. Washington's tough stand just provided diplomatic cover for this regional military pressure.

An international force, whether AMIS or a UN operation, can only protect Darfurians as part of a long-term political strategy for stabilizing Darfur. This means working as a partner with Darfurian leaders, including the commanders of the numerous local militia, and proceeding with disarmament by consent. It means obtaining the consent and cooperation of the Sudan government. Workable peacekeeping in Darfur is nine parts civilian relations and civilian policing to one part force. And it will take five to ten years. If consent and confidence is obtained, then the job could be done by a smaller force than the 7,000 AMIS troops present today, let alone the 17,000 UN troops envisioned. The Nuba Mountains Joint Military Commission sustained a precarious ceasefire in neighboring Kordofan for three years with a dozen or two unarmed monitors. The Nuba Mountains situation was on a smaller scale than the Darfur crisis, but it had the same combustible mix of a scattered rebel army, displaced camps, numerous militia, and a government with an uncertain commitment to the ceasefire.

President Bashir has called the bluff of the United States and the United Nations. He has rejected the UN force, demanded that the AU withdraw unless it is prepared to retract its own demand that its mission be handed over to the UN, and has deployed the regular army in Darfur. Is this brinkmanship or a real

red line? The signals indicate the latter – but also that Khartoum recognises that while it can manage Darfur by force, it needs a political settlement if the country is to achieve stability.

The tragedy of the last six months is that the Sudan government and the non-signatory SLA groups have been very close to agreement, and that an inclusive peace deal would transform the prospects for Darfur. Khartoum's perfidy and the SLA's divided and vacillating leadership are the main culprits, but diplomacy conducted by threat and ultimatum have contributed to making the political space too narrow for a real peace agreement to be hammered out. As the fighting escalates and what little confidence was won drains away, that political agreement recedes into the indefinite future. We stand at a precipice: the prospects are for a prolonged and intractable conflict that will take many lives over many years, and which the UN won't solve even if its peacekeepers arrive. That crisis will drag down all of Sudan and unravel the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended the war in the South.

The demonstrators and activists have made their point: the world cares about Darfur and the Sudan government cannot proceed in defiance of the world's conscience. But UN troops are at best a stopgap and at worst a spark for even sharper conflict. What's needed now is dialogue, focused on the long-term aim of a political settlement for Darfur. That political process must be patient, inclusive, and framed by the promise of democracy held out in the North-South Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Step one is to reconstitute the ceasefire commission with all parties represented. Step two is to re-start political negotiations, enhancing the DPA where required. Step three is to launch the promised Darfur-Darfur dialogue, including all communities, and run with sufficient patience and independence to generate real credibility. In this context, peacekeepers can do their job.

Many will condemn such a proposal as too slow, and as supping with the devil with a short spoon. But there is literally no alternative, now or in the future.

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**Editor's Note:** Do you agree with these sentiments? Are we continuing to misunderstand the nature of 'diplomacy' in Sudan? We welcome your comments.

# Leo Igwe: Interview with a Nigerian Humanist

*Interviewed by Janet Bujra*

## What led you to become a humanist?

Like all Nigerians, I was born into the family religion – Christianity – the Catholic faith to be precise. At the age of twelve, l was sent to a Catholic seminary where I spent another twelve years of my life as a student, teacher and in training as a priest. It was in the course of my philosophical studies that I saw the 'light'. When l started questioning and inquiring deeply and critically into the claims of my family religion, and religions in general, I discovered, to my great shock and surprise, that religions thrive on lack of evidence, on supposition, superstition, lies, myths and transcendental illusion.

And the more I inquired and sought evidence, the less religion meant and could hold for me. So I started gravitating towards the humanist life-stance. In 1994, I left the seminary. And in 1996, I went open and public with my humanist standpoint. I started the Nigerian Humanist Movement (NHM) to provide an alternative to religion and a sense of community for the non-religious. I abandoned religion for humanism because I consider most religious claims absurd, false and harmful.

I have occasionally faced personal opposition for my views – even being physically attacked by Islamic fanatics who were demonstrating in support of *Shari'a* in Ibadan. They have booed me at conferences where I was calling for an end to religious indoctrination in schools. I have been self employed since I went open and public with my humanist views, thus avoiding job discrimination which I am advised would be likely.

## Would you describe yourself as a humanist and a secularist?

Yes, I consider myself a humanist because I regard humanity, not divinity, nature not the supernatural, as the centre point of my global outlook. I do not believe in a so-called supreme being. I think God (and all gods) the devil, demons, spirits, etc were created by human beings in their 'own image and likeness'. Gods are imaginary entities, not objective realities. Again I do not believe in an afterlife – in Heaven or in Hell. The whole idea of a paradise in the hereafter is an illusion. This life is once and enough. And human beings must strive to make the best of this, their only opportunity.

Also, I consider myself a secularist. I think that religious beliefs and philosophical convictions should be private affairs. The public sphere should be religiously and philosophically neutral. There should be complete separation of religions and state. Hence, l am against the whole idea of using state money to fund religion – to implement *Shari'a*, build churches and mosques, and sponsor pilgrimages. State resources should be used to promote and defend the common good, not the religious good, human rights not religious rights, democratic state law not *Shari'a* law. It is only when governments are secular that they can be impartial arbiters and guarantors of the human rights and liberties of all individuals – religious and non-religious.

## Can you tell us something about the humanist organisation which you set up?

The Nigerian Humanist Movement was founded in 1996 in Ibadan in South West Nigeria. This was a period of pro-democracy struggles against military rule when there was a clampdown on human rights and free speech: no humanist movement

would have been allowed under the military regime. The restoration of democracy in 1999 has made a considerable difference because it has opened up the political, intellectual and human rights space without which humanism cannot thrive or flourish

NHM was formed to respond to the need for a community for non-religious people who never had a definitive organisation till then. In 1998 NHM started meeting at Nigeria's premier University in Ibadan. In 2001, NHM convened the first African Humanist conference at the University of Ibadan. In 2004, it hosted the Tai Solarin International Humanist conference at the Mayflower School in Ikenne. And in June 2005 Nigerian Humanists held a conference at the University of Benin to mark the movement's 10th anniversary. NHM has organised several seminars, workshops and lectures to promote the humanist outlook. To facilitate socio-cultural reform and national rebirth it has participated in campaigns against landmines, ritual killing, child labour, female genital mutilation and *Shari'a* law. Currently NHM has over 200 members, and hundred of supporters, friends and associates in Nigeria and beyond. Its members are mainly educated people, young and old, some women and from a range of different ethnic backgrounds.

NHM's primary mission is to organize atheists and agnostics, and other non-theistic and non-religious people. At the same time, NHM networks with secular groups and individuals, and all those who think that religious belief or unbelief is and should be a private affair. In a deeply religious society like Nigeria, secular individuals and groups are partners in progress – and in the development and civilization of the country. So whenever NHM organises any event it extends invitations to secular groups and individuals. For instance, in 2005, NHM held a symposium at the University of Calabar on Religion and National

Underdevelopment. And we had liberal religionists and secular intellectuals and scholars as speakers. And in June 2006 when NHM held a conference on Defending Secularism, many secular people and organisations were in attendance.

To realise a secular Nigeria, NHM must reach out not only to atheists and agnostics, but also to theists and religionists especially those who do not think their faith and dogmas should define or direct the public space.

## Does the NHM have links with international or other non-Nigerian humanist organisations?

NHM is affiliated with the International Humanist and Ethical Union in London, and in the US to the Center for Inquiry Transnational, the Atheist Alliance International and Earth's Atheist Resistance to Holy Wars and Religious Devastation.

Humanism is not well established in African countries. Some African humanists are in their closets out of fear for their security. But in 2004 we inaugurated the African Humanist Alliance at the end of a regional conference in Kampala, Uganda (http://iheu.org/node/1065). The Alliance is a loose network of humanist groups and individual activists on the continent. It is still in its early stages of organisation.

## Is secularism under threat in Nigeria?

Nigeria is in religious terms a pluralistic nation. In cognizance of this, Nigeria's founders, in section 10 of the nation's constitution, prohibited state religion. So, in principle, Nigeria has a secular constitution that relegates religious belief to the private domain. And that was a clear demonstration of how concerned

Nigerians were about separating religion and state. There is currently a lot of concern for secularism in Nigeria. Mixing religion and state has caused a lot of trouble and confusion, anarchy, riots, destruction and bloodshed in the country. The dominant religious groups – Islam and Christianity – have been locked in a fierce battle for the political control of Nigeria. We see secularism as an antidote to religious tyranny, divisiveness, hatred, fanaticism and intolerance, and a recipe for national unity, peace, progress and development.

Currently there is every reason to fear for the future and survival of secularism in Nigeria. Despite the constitution, the secular legal structure has been under severe assault. Successive governments in Nigeria have flouted and undermined the secular character of the Nigerian state. Nigeria has more or less been running a theocracy, not a democracy.

Today, the Nigerian government uses state money to sponsor pilgrimages, and to build and maintain state churches and mosques. The Muslim majority states in the North have adopted Islam as state religion. They use state funds to implement *Shari'a* law, finance *Shari'a* courts and *Shari'a* police. Islamic theocrats have reduced non-Muslims in their midst to second class citizens in their own country. These theocratic incursions have not gone without resistance in Nigeria. I can see a future for secularism in Nigeria if Nigerians can checkmate religious extremists and their political cohorts and 'fronters'.

It is obvious that neither of the dominant religions – Islam or Christianity – will ever rule in a united Nigeria. So secularism has become the only option and an imperative for the realisation of a truly united, peaceful, progressive and democratic Nigeria. I am persuaded that the structures and formalities of a secular Nigeria will eventually triumph and survive the ongoing abuse and violations by religious politicians and faith governments in the country.

## Does the NHM have a political voice? Does it speak out about the influence of religion in politics?

Humanists are people of like-minds. But they do not have identical political ideas and opinions. Humanists agree and disagree on how to relate, direct or manage the political sphere and the public good. Our organisation does not endorse any political party or candidate. Humanists are free to support any party or candidate of their choice. But it is unlikely that Humanists would support any religious political party, candidate or agenda. They would not vote for any candidate in Nigeria who promises to Islamize or Christianize the country if elected. Politically, humanists are united in their opposition to mixing religion and politics and in their support for the separation of religion and state. We always use every means at our disposal to bring this stance to the attention of the government

## Do you enter coalitions with believers on some issues of social concern?

My organisation cooperates with believers on issues that affect the entire society, like poverty alleviation or tackling the HIV/AIDS pandemic, promoting family planning and population control, eradicating harmful traditional practices etc. Humanists seek to provide what believers miss, omit or ignore due to blind faith, dogma and superstition

## Do you agree with the following comments by Nigerians?

*Secularism, when not being equated with atheism, tends to be viewed, especially by radical Muslims, as a synonym for Westernism (a foreign ideology). A secularist view of life that does not contain elements of Christi-*

*anity seems, in this view, to be a contradiction in terms. A position of moral equidistance from any religion is thought to be unsustainable by those who are convinced that religiosity is deeply embedded in the African 'constitution'.*

I object to the claim that secularism is synonymous to westernism. And that secularism devoid of Christian elements is a contradiction in terms. The exclusion of religion from the organisation of society is not peculiar to the western world. But it has everything to do with what any society – western or not – can do combat the undue influence of religion on public education and governance. Though secularism appears to be more pronounced in the western world, this does not make secularism synonymous with the western lifestyle Secularism is an outcome of the renaissance, enlightment and then decline in Christian religious devotion. That's why the claim that secularism must necessarily include some elements of Christianity is outrightly implausible.

Those who hold that morality without religion is untenable, and unsustainable because religion is especially deeply embedded in the African constitution are greatly mistaken. Religion prevailed in the human (not only African) constitution at the infancy of the human race. Religion did not create, or constitute the African. It is Africans (like other members of homo sapiens) that created and configured religion. Before Africans are religious – animist, Christian, Muslim – they are human beings. Humanity preceded religiosity in the African constitution. Secularism implies that morality without religion is possible, tenable and sustainable. Secular morality entails that human beings can be good without God.

*The secular state concept, which recognised no state religion or belief system and thus guarantees freedom of belief, is seen as appropriate to efforts to cement cracks in Nigeria's weak federation.*

I agree that the secular state concept must strengthen Nigeria's weak federation. In a multi-religious and multicultural society, it is imperative that the state remains impartial for or against any religious or non-religious group, or it loses its significance and value. One of the reasons why the Nigerian federation is so insecure is that Nigerians are not free to express their religious belief or unbelief, or to live out their religious or non-religious commitments anywhere in the country. In the Muslim majority states non-Muslims are treated as second class citizens. They may be targeted, persecuted and killed. While in the Christian-dominated South, non-Christians do not enjoy the same rights as Christians.

Nigeria is deeply divided along religious lines. And the religious division has made a true and virile federation difficult to achieve. And it is only a secular state that is religiously and philosophically neutral that can guarantee the equal right of every individual to freedom of thought, conscience and belief. True federation will continue to elude Nigeria until all Nigerians can say and sing with one voice:

> *Though tribe, tongue, religion or belief may differ, in humanity, dignity, equality, and fraternity we stand.*

And it is only in a secular Nigeria that this can be said, sung and done.

The NHM can be contacted through the following web-site: http://www.iheu.org/node/1472.

# Egypt: Islamic Sisters Advance

*Wendy Kristianasen*

The novelist Nawal el-Saadawi declared herself a candidate for the 2005 presidential elections, not hoping or intending to win, but to symbolise the new assertiveness of Egyptian women. Others who are active Muslims are determined on greater equality in public and private life.

Change was in the air in Cairo last year. From the start of 2005 people of different backgrounds, from leftist to Islamist, took to the streets to protest against President Hosni Mubarak – in power for a quarter of a century - who was seeking a fifth term of office later that year in the September presidential elections. *Kefaya!* (Enough), people said, and gave that name to the Popular Movement for Change.

Egypt's passionaria, Nawal el-Saadawi, declared herself a candidate for the elections. The 73-year-old feminist, psychiatrist and award-winning novelist knew she had no chance, but her symbolic act reflected a new mood in a country where women are 53% of the population but hold only 2.5% of posts in political life. The desire for change is not confined to politics. Actively engaged Muslim women also assert their right to equality, nowhere more than in the field of religion.

Egypt's women's movement, seen as the forerunner of the Arab women's rights movement, was historically mostly secular. Hala Galal's remarkable film Women's Chitchat (*Dardasha nisaa'iyya*) shows the transition of Cairene women through four generations of one family. The older ones, bareheaded and decidedly modern, recall the feminist movement launched by Hoda Shaarawi in the 1920s, yet come to terms with their granddaughters and great-granddaughters now covered in their *hijabs*. For Cairo's women now overwhelmingly wear the *hijab* (more than 80% of them), not least among the trendy boutiques and cafes with European names in upwardly mobile Mohandesin or leafy, affluent Zamalek.

Not even the most secular challenge the role of religion. Dr Hoda Sophi, the only woman interviewed who did not cover her head, is an economist and specialist in gender planning at the state-run National Council for Women. She says:

'What worries me is the stereotyping of women. It comes from traditional culture. That's the real problem, not the hijab or Islam. We're trying hard to clarify the real essence of Islam, and separate it from tradition.'

Omaima Abou Bakr is an academic and co-founder of the Women and Memory Forum, a non-governmental research centre that focuses on gender issues. As 'a feminist with qualifications, an Arab Muslim feminist', she is able to bridge the divide between secular and Islamist women: 'A divide that still exists even if it has been overshadowed by the current obsession with democratisation.'

## Enter the New Islam

But the greatest changes are happening among Islamist women, now touched by a gentler, more progressive 'new Islam'. Dalia Salaheldin, 35, is a journalist at Islamonline (IOL), a pioneer Arabic/ English website started in Cairo in 1999.[1] She began to cover her head at university, against her family's wishes. She is passionate about the work she does:

> I'm not here just as a job; it's my life choice … IOL is trying to show the reality of Islam, which has been distorted for years. I think that tradition has obscured religion. And I blame Muslims themselves for that.

Samar Dowidar, also 35, runs IOL's social desk. She gets 600 agony aunt letters a week, a third of them on such topics as drugs, adultery, homosexuality, masturbation; some are published with answers. That is part of the new, open Islam. Dalia Yousef, 27, who defines herself as a Muslim activist, says that working at IOL ('her dream') has broadened her outlook 'to forge common ground with the secularists'. She says: 'The women's movement was secular. And the Islamists were reactionary and defensive. I think we Islamists are becoming more broad-minded and more sophisticated. Now we admit there are problems, and we're trying to see how we can solve them. That may bring the two sides closer, at least among the young generation.'

IOL's founders helped bring the new Islam to Egypt: it is a product of globalisation, the internet, video clips, satellite TV, through which its charismatic preachers, such as Amr Khaled, offer the good life, a blend of material comforts and God. The seductive accountant-turned-TV preacher appeals to women, and not just girls but their mothers.

Pop videos, beamed by satellite television, are another matter: hugely popular, they show a virtual and uncensored world of youth, sex and beauty in which women singers, such as the famous Lebanese Nancy Ajram, gyrate in a way that challenges traditional ideas of decency. Strict Islamists may frown, yet the prosperous otherness of the locations and props – western-style urban spaces, convertibles, expensive cameras, trendy clothes – appeals to the yuppies of new Islam. When the Islamic-pop idol Sami Yousef sings semi-love songs, a father or child or even Allah himself suddenly becomes the love object of the song, and rescues it from the Islamically unthinkable.

## Fairer Sex Take Over

This pick'n'mix Islam is about positive thinking and, for women, about self-confidence and empowerment. That particularly applies to religion. Women preachers are in demand: Cairo's al-Azhar University opened a special section to train them in 1999, and the ministry of religious affairs announced in April that it would select 52 trained women, out of about 800 expected candidates, and appoint them as imams, to officiate at women-only prayer meetings. (The tolerance of al-Azhar reached a limit when, on 18 March 2005 in New York, a female professor of Islamic studies, Amina Wadud, led Friday prayers before a mixed congregation.) One of the most popular women preachers in Egypt is Shirin Sathy: her Wednesday prayer meeting in the Sidiqi mosque in the prosperous suburb of Heliopolis draws a crowd of 400. The mosque is packed to capacity, the atmosphere relaxed. Middle-class women of all ages, variously dressed and scarfed, chat, pray and read their text messages. Sathy arrives, in black robe and enormous white *kheima* (head covering) and belts out her message, a direct appeal to the emotions, through the amplifiers. Her devotees are spellbound.

Magda Amer, 54, is a surprise when we meet at her home. Good-looking, lots of lipstick, big smile, bright red curly hair. She wasn't religiously observant in her youth. But now she teaches women's rights, *Shari'a* and *fiqh*,[2] which she studied for four years at al-Azhar. She, too, preaches at the Sidiqi mosque. She takes things from popular western books, such as *Men Are from Mars, Women from Venus*:[3]

> *I take what's positive and Islamically suitable. I concentrate on the art of dealing with men and what happens to Egyptian women if they don't. I tell them not to ask 'Where were you? Why are you late?' She says she saves marriages with all this advice.*

Her books include *Farewell Stress …
Welcome Tranquillity and The Wisdom
Behind Lowering the Gaze*, both part of a
series called 'The miraculous nature of
human creation' (Al-Falah Foundation,
Cairo).

That is not all. Amer is also a biochemist,
a lecturer in immunology at Ain Shams
University and a homoeopath; three years
ago she opened Egypt's only health food
shop, in Heliopolis, selling Egyptian
brown rice, wheat, barley and sesame.
The shop is part of a *waqf*[4] and the profit
goes to the mosque. It is also a place
where she can unofficially treat people.

## Elite Circles

Besides mosques, there is a growing
fashion among middle-class Cairene
women for meetings at private homes in
prosperous parts of town, where they
gather informally to chat, eat sweet-
meats, take part in prayers and listen to
preachers. Invitations are by word of
mouth as the meetings have no official
authorisation. This elite phenomenon is
taking over religion from its institu-
tional, male-directed source of al-Azhar.

> *The Islamic salons or* halaqat *(circles)
> were started by the rich and pious Suzie
> Mazhar in the 1990s, before the era of
> women preachers: a male preacher was
> hidden behind a screen. Mazhar recruited
> to her circle actresses and dancers, known
> as the 'repentant artists', such as the sexy
> Shams al-Baroudi, 'the temptress', who,
> with others, gave up acting, donned a*
> neqab *(face veil) and started studying
> Islam. A step forward or back?*

'Today's new Islamists largely reject the
*neqab*,' says Kemal Masri, an authority
on the salons and a co-founder of IOL.
'Others followed: Hana Tharwat, Kamelia
al-Arabi, belly dancers Hala Safi and
Sahar Hamdi. But by the end of the 1990s
they decided that acting and singing
was all right, provided women wear
*hijab*.'

Women *muftis* (*muftiyya* in Arabic) are
also gaining recognition. Graduates of
al-Azhar, versed in the Qur'an, the
hadith and the sunna,[5] these women
practice ijtihad[6] and pronounce fatwas
that solve people's problems in accord-
ance with Shari'a, but with a real under-
standing of the problems of daily life. In
the past four years there has been a
campaign to have them officially recog-
nised, a position still in the gift of
Mubarak. As a result, women are now
being appointed deans in the faculty of
Islamic studies at al-Azhar. Television
and the state-owned daily *Al Ahram* are
publishing fatwas by women muftis.
Islamonline has its own muftiyyas,
among them Professor Suad Saleh, a
dean of al-Azhar. What is available on
the IOL fatwa section? In answer to a
question on whether a man has the right
to enforce the Islamic dress code:

> *Hijab is a duty Allah, the Almighty,
> prescribed for the Muslim woman, and
> she has to comply with that order and
> show her sincere faith in Allah … How-
> ever, forcing your wife is negative. You
> should be patient and try to appeal to her
> emotions.*

On the Islamic attitude to oral sex:

> *All acts that aim at satisfying and pleasing
> married couples are allowable so long as
> two things are avoided, anal sex and sex
> during menstruation. Thus, it is permis-
> sible for a husband and wife to practise
> cunnilingus and fellatio.*

Women are active in the name of Islam in
surprising domains. Heba Qutb is an
engaged Muslim, with two PhDs, one
from Florida's Maimonedes University
(of which she is very proud). She is also a
licensed sex therapist. In her busy clinic
in Mohandesin she mainly treats men;
wives are present only for physical ex-
aminations. She has written a paper on
sexuality in Islam. 'I'm a pioneer,' she
says. 'To me the challenge lies in chang-
ing the image of Islam. It's my research

among Muslim sources that has shed new light on the subject: for Islam understood marital sexual relations long before the rest of the world.'

These activities are liberating for practitioners and participants – the *hijab* allows them increased freedom of movement. But have fundamental attitudes really changed? At IOL there seems to be a sincere wish to re-examine tradition. At the Islamic salons and mosques the repertoire and mindset so far remain the same, except that now women are in charge. But who knows where new Islam's message of empowerment will lead women next.

**Wendy Kristianasen**, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, London.

## Endnotes

1. http://www.islamonline.com

2. *Shari'a* is (God-given) Islamic law: *fiqh* is Islamic legal theory and may be subject to interpretation.

3. John Gray, *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus: A Practical Guide for Improving Communication and Getting What You Want in Your Relationships*, HarperCollins, 1992.

4. Regulating body for religious properties and bequests.

5. The sayings and deeds of the Prophet and his companions, which together form the sunna.

6. Personal investigation of religious sources based on the Qur'an and sunna.

# China: Africa's New Business Partner
*David Seddon*

Chinese investment in Africa still lags behind that from the US and Britain, but a recent World Bank study records its 'astonishing' growth in the four years to 2002; and more is on its way. 'Within five years', estimates one independent economist, 'China could be one of the top three investors on the continent'. Two-way trade between Africa and China was some $18 billion in 2004, a nine-fold increase on 1999; and Chinese officials expect it to grow to $30 billion within two years.

Oil is the current major attraction. China became a net importer of oil for the first time in 1993. But such has been its amazing growth rate that in little more than a decade it has become dependent on imports for more than half its oil needs. By 2020, its domestic production will account for less than 30% of its oil consumption. During 2003-04, a surge in economic activity, stimulated by government policy, drove up the demand for oil in China by 25%, while domestic output rose by just over 3%. Over this period, China accounted for 30% of the incremental global demand for oil imports.

Most of the Chinese refineries, however, cannot cope with the 'sour' crude oils produced in the Middle East, and China prefers to import the higher-quality, 'sweet' oils from West Africa, putting extra price pressure on this type of oil, which is preferred by many refiners. Indeed a recent analysis in *World Business*, April 2006 suggests that it is likely that China's growing demand for oil will lead to rising international tension and continue to be a major determinant of oil price inflation.

But this is good news for African producers. In 2004, 45% of all China's imported

oil (2.45 mbd) came from the Middle East, with 29% from Africa, 14% from Europe and the Western hemisphere, and 12 % from the Asia-Pacific region. The African share of the market looks set to increase.

China is likely to come increasingly into competition, if not into conflict, with its rivals for access to these African markets, and to the sources of production. Unlike their increasingly publicity-sensitive Western rivals, the Chinese have no qualms about making deals with oil-rich dictators, however corrupt or nasty. As *World Business* puts it, more diplomatically, Chinese 'willingness to do business with 'states of concern' has led to disquiet in governments and oil companies around the world'.

State-owned China National Petroleum Corporation, eager for secure long-term supplies, has bought 40% of a large project in Sudan. Chinese workers there recently built a 1,600 km pipeline in just 11 months. Chinese firms moved into Sudan after US investors left – the US now applies sanctions to Sudan, which it accuses of genocide. Talisman, a Canadian oil firm, also left a few years ago. But a Chinese trade spokesman said in September, of Sudan: 'we import from every source we can get oil from'.

That includes Angola, where the Chinese government concluded a deal in March 2004 providing a soft loan of $2 billion in exchange for 10,000 barrels a day of oil. Over the last year, senior Chinese officials have toured other oil-rich countries, such as Gabon and Nigeria, developing closer relations and seeking similar arrangements.

But it is not only oil that attracts attention. In the past two years, Chinese firms have spent some $100 million in Zambia's once-decrepit copper industry. South Africa's exports to China have more than doubled in five years and increasingly they include raw materials such as coal and gold, as well as manufactures. Minerals also probably drive China's relationship with Zimbabwe. If western mining companies are eventually squeezed out, the Chinese will be well placed to move in. Already several state contacts have been struck recently with Chinese firms. Much of Zimbabwe's shrinking tobacco crop is also now sold to China. And a $200 million deal to supply fighter jets and other military goods was approved last year (2004). Zimbabwe now promotes tourism from China and regular direct flights between Beijing and Harare are now a reality.

Trade deals have been concluded with around forty African countries in all. Construction and telecommunications are among the other leading sectors – Huawei, a Chinese telecommunications company, has recently won contracts worth $400 million to service mobile phone networks in Zimbabwe, Kenya and Nigeria. Chinese contractors are said to be ready to work on a $600 million hydroelectric plant at Kafue Gorge in southern Zambia. Chinese agricultural firms are also operating in Zambia; with road construction and hotel infrastructure development attracting interest in Botswana and South Africa. Chinese firms now use factories in Africa to stitch garments that can enter the US duty-free; and Africa's imports of Chinese manufactured goods are rising fast. South African trades unions complained recently that domestic industry was being overwhelmed by cheap imports of hi-tech goods, computers, telecoms equipment and the like.

Though energy security concerns are the main reason for the high level of government involvement in this new search for African partners, other considerations – including foreign, industrial, trade and social policy – are also involved. The full impact of dealing with China is likely to be considerable, as a complete package – including oil companies, oil service companies, construction companies, manu-

facturers and traders, often accompanied by a Chinese labour force – is often the basis of the deal.

This combined public/private sector intervention is often associated with aid instruments provided to the host government, such as debt cancellation, low-interest loans and even grants, underpinned by the intensification of diplomatic activity and, in some cases, military cooperation. Many fear that investment in the oil sector will prove a Trojan Horse, enabling China Inc to gain a number of bridgeheads in the African sub-continent, often in regions that area sensitive in terms of global geo-politics – in West Africa, the Sahel, Sudan and the Horn of Africa, for example.

Africa's new business partner looks set to increase its share of investment, exports and imports significantly over the coming years. China certainly is already making profitable inroads in the sub-continent. One can only hope that Africa's own development potential is not simply swept aside in the process as the Asian giant reaches out for new opportunities with positively imperialist ambition.

# A World of Conflict Since 9/11: The CIA Coup in Somalia

## *Gerard Prunier*

The US intelligence service, which remains obsessed with the risk of Taliban infiltration in Somalia, inadvertently helped the Union of Islamic Courts seize power this June.

Somalia suddenly hit the headlines this spring when its capital, Mogadishu, was captured by the forces of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC). After 1995 the world had mostly forgotten the country because of the failure of the United Nations' humanitarian and military efforts there in 1992-95.

Somalia has in principle had a government since October 2004: the transitional federal government (TFG). It was internationally recognised but could not sit in Mogadishu, which was still in the hands of the warlords, so it was based initially at Nairobi in Kenya and later returned to Baidoa in Somalia.

The TFG, established with difficulty after years of negotiations, was intended to fill the political gap created when civil war broke out after the fall of the dictator, Siad Barre, in 1991. Although the TFG is recognised abroad, it has never had any authority at home and is riven by personal differences between the president, Colonel Abdullahi Yussuf Ahmed, the prime minister, Ali Mohamed Gedi, and the speaker of the Somali parliament, Sharif Hassan Sheikh Adan.

The transitional government has no armed forces at its disposal, apart from the Majertine tribal militia based in Puntland.[1] After the state collapsed in 1991, the warlords, who are leaders of armed tribal bands, took over and ruled the country until this June. That a number

of them were appointed to ministerial posts in the new government did not change the situation.

With the help of mooryan (street urchins), many of them on drugs, they reduced Mogadishu and whole tracts of the country to terror-stricken anarchy. Their troops, on little or no pay, financed themselves through crime: theft, kidnapping, rape, armed robbery and murder. The warlords did very well out of drugs (especially the powerful euphoric *qat*), piracy, cattle rustling and the mobile phone business.

In these conditions of anarchy a number of political groups with Islamic links established the first Islamic courts in 1996. They combined in 2002 to form the UIC, chaired by Sheikh Sharif Ahmed. Analysis of the tribal structure, an essential feature in Somalia, shows that members of the Hawiye and Habr Gidir tribes dominate most of the courts. This will probably create problems for the Islamic movement in the future because the Hawiye, although numerous, are divided and confined to central Somalia. Prime minister Gedi is a member of this tribe.

Until a couple of months ago the UIC was a politically disparate body in which moderate Muslims rubbed shoulders with both radical supporters of al-Qaida and ordinary businessmen worrying about their contracts.

Then a major policy blunder by the United States opened the way for the UIC to seize power. The CIA saw Somalia as a potential Afghanistan. It had picked up a number of al-Qaida agents, including the Comorian, Fazul Abdallah Mohamed (who was the brains behind the 1998 attacks on the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam), Yemen-born Kenyan Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan and Sudanese Abu Talha al-Sudani, who were the joint organisers of the 2002 attacks on a

Malindi hotel and on an Israeli charter aircraft off the coast of Kenya.

Early this year a US official announced that Washington was prepared to work with anyone who was willing to cooperate with it against al-Qaida. For the warlords, hungry for funds and keen to weaken the growing authority of the TFG and the UIC, this was a golden opportunity: they would do anything to prevent the restoration of order, whether Islamic or secular, which would end their extortion activities.

In February, with the help of secret CIA funds, they established the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counterterrorism (ARPCT). In theory, the ARPCT was supposed to pursue al-Qaida terrorists. In reality, it had its sights on the UIC.[2] The militant Islamists were under no illusions and struck first, on 20 February. This was the start of a period of bloody strife in Mogadishu that lasted for three and a half months until the ARPCT warlords were finally defeated on 16 June.

There were warnings voiced within the US about this strategy. David Shinn, who is a former US ambassador to Ethiopia and expert on the region, called for a broad approach, not focused exclusively on counter-terrorism, and Michael Zorick, a senior diplomat attached to the US embassy in Kenya, protested in vain against payments to the warlords, which he judged counter-productive.

In a desperate attempt to put things right, on 13 June Washington set up an ad hoc emergency body, the Somali Contact Group. Members of the group included, besides the US, the Arab League, the African Union, the United Nations, the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD)[3] Norway, the European Union and, independently, Britain, Sweden, Italy and, oddly enough, Tanzania.

But the contact group came too late, it was ill informed and it had no real decision-making powers. It looked more like an apology for previous absence than any practical instrument of policy. The situation was further complicated by the fact that the Somali conflict had taken on an international dimension: two neighbouring states, Ethiopia and Eritrea, had become involved. They were already locked in their own long-standing struggle. The war of 1998-2000 had ended in an uncertain ceasefire, Addis Ababa and Asmara found it impossible to resume normal relations, and the conflict was still pursued in complex ways.

Asmara, aware that Ethiopia supported Abdullahi, did its best to obstruct the TFG's activities: Eritrea supplied the UIC with weapons at least five times, not out of ideological sympathy (since the Asmara government has been resolutely secular) but on the principle that my enemy's enemy is my friend. Addis Ababa supported its champion, Abdullahi, from the outset.

Both naturally deny they are involved in the conflict in any way. Any such involvement is in breach of international law, since UN Security Council resolution 733 of 23 January 1992 imposed an embargo on deliveries of arms to Somalia, described as a 'stateless country'. The crisis spread beyond Africa: Saudi Arabia sent weapons to some warlords and the UIC, while Yemen and Egypt supplied the TFG with weaponry.

In an effort to keep going and assert its authority, the TFG played the international card for all it was worth. President Abdullahi had most to fear from his own 'armed ministers'[4] and he repeatedly called for armed intervention by Igad or the African Union, to restore peace and uphold the rule of law.

He was right in principle, but in practice no one had the resources or the political will to tackle the situation in Somalia. Except for Ethiopia, which was keen to forestall moves by Eritrea and stifle any subversive intentions the UIC might harbour.

The slightest mention of troops from Somalia's traditional enemy, Ethiopia, was enough to spark violent political battles in the TFG. Also the African Union could not really call on Addis Ababa to help provide an intervention force, since Ethiopia was both judge and party in the dispute. It feared that any Somali government other than the government of its ally, Abdullahi, might renew Somalia's irredentist claims to the Ethiopian province of Ogaden, with its 4 million Somali inhabitants, which had already been the subject of a war between the two countries in 1977-78.

Faced with the UIC, the warlords collapsed within a few days in June. They were fiercely hated for their extortion and there was a sense of relief in the capital, although ordinary people wondered what to expect from their unusual liberators, the UIC militants.

The international community, anxious to preserve the marginal prospect of a return to normality offered by the TFG, immediately called for bilateral talks between the UIC and the TFG. This afforded another opportunity for internal conflict in the TFG, with Abdullahi seeking to avoid any accommodation with his enemies,[5] and the speaker of the parliament, Sheikh Adan, insisting on a dialogue. The agreement finally signed at Khartoum in Sudan on 22 June was immediately broken by both parties.

The international press had erroneously reported that Taliban infiltration was rife in Somalia. These fears were based on such token gestures by the Islamic movement as a prohibition on watching any of the World Cup matches or an official order to cut the hair of any young

people who wore punk, afro or rasta hair-dos.

The UIC was transformed into a Supreme Council of Islamic Courts and its moderate chairman, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, was replaced by an old militant fundamentalist, Hassan Dahir Aweys. The two camps are still in conflict and it seems unlikely that they will agree to share power. But the Islamic movement, in the full flood of its success, has not yet faced up to the worst problem that bedevils Somali society: the tribal system, which had undermined Siad Barre's 'socialism' and represents the major difference between Somalia and Afghanistan under the Taliban.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban enjoyed the strong support of its neighbour Pakistan and the Pashtun ethnic majority within the country. The UIC has no real friends outside the country, since Eritrea's support is opportunist, and the Hawiye are not Somalia's Pashtun. They represent barely 20% of the population and are subdivided into a number of tribes and sub-tribes. And the UIC, unlike the Taliban, is subject to many tribal and ideological influences; there is no real indication that it is completely controlled by extremists close to al-Qaida.

So a subtle diplomatic approach is likely to have more success in preventing the crisis from escalating than are the projects for armed intervention currently under discussion in the IGAD and elsewhere.

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### Endnotes

1. Before he became head of the UIC, Colonel Abdullahi Yussuf was the leader of the semi-independent state of Puntland in northeast Somalia, which is home to the Majertine tribe.

2. Hostility to the Islamic courts did not prevent the warlords from also seeking to undermine the authority of the TFG. The government was forced, belatedly, to expel ministers who belonged to the ARPCT, which was threatening to take military action.

3. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development is an African regional organisation established in 1992 and its members are Eritrea, Ethiopia, Uganda, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya and Djibouti.

4. This is the term for warlords who are members of the government.

5. In the early 1990s, when he was still only the leader of Puntland, Abdullahi broke the power of the Islamic movement there.

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# Can the Somali Crisis be Contained?

*International Crisis Group*

*Editor's Note: Events can change rapidly in Somalia. The following extracts from an ICG Report published in August 2006 were considered to have continuing relevance as we go to press.*

## The Courts as Political Movement

Politically, the Islamic Courts remain an enigma. Statements about their political aims made by Chairman Sheikh Sharif in recent months have often been contradictory; the actions and declarations of some elements have been denied or denounced by others; their decision-making system is anything but transparent, and key policy decisions that will shed light on the political agenda have yet to be taken. Still, a few observations can be made with reasonable confidence.

The Islamic Courts are a very loose coalition of individuals and groups whose views on political Islam span a wide spectrum. This is evident in the positions of the top two leaders. Sheikh Sherif's Islamic pedigree as a member of a traditional sufi order is far different from the Salafist worldview articulated by Hassan Dahir Aweys. But the differences in Islamist ideology within the Islamic Courts are much more complex than a crude moderate versus hardline dichotomy. Mogadishu's galaxy of Islamists includes progressives who embrace democratic values; opportunists using the Courts' power for personal advancement; socially conservative salafis whose agenda is focused on public morality (leading to the periodic efforts to close cinemas); hard-line Islamists who want an Islamic state but do not advocate political violence; and jihadis whose use of assassination as a tactic of choice has led to dozens of deaths in what amounts to a silent war in the streets of Mogadishu. Which strain emerges as dominant remains a major question mark.

But the Islamic Courts include other tension-ridden coalitions as well. One is cross-clan. They offer roughly two dozen *Shari'a* courts, each representing a different Mogadishu sub-clan, a shared political platform. Clan tensions and fissures are endemic and easily manipulated by spoilers; that will be a major challenge as the Islamic Courts try to stay unified.

The partnership between the Islamist leaders and Mogadishu business leaders is also uneasy. The victory over the ARPCT means that the two largest militia forces in the city are those of the Islamic Courts and the business community. Some business leaders who tactically have backed the Islamic Courts may now see them as a threat.

Finally, the Islamic Courts have brought the Islamist leadership together with an array of civic movements who share a common interest with them for improved rule of law in Mogadishu and little else. This may be the most fragile part of the coalition. Collectively, the multiple fault lines make the Courts prone to fissures, internal feuds and defections unless they can exploit – and perhaps provoke – an existential threat.

The decision to make Chairman Sheikh Sharif the visible face of the Islamic Courts is an attempt to present the movement as moderate, conciliatory and acceptable to most Somalis and external actors. But the emergence of Awey's as head of the Shura and a high profile public figure raises the troubling question of whether the Islamic Courts could be used as a Trojan horse by radicals and jihadis operating under cover of a moderate Islamist movement either unwilling or unable to restrain its most dangerous wing.

This latter concern is critical, because the leadership has gone to great lengths to portray the movement as moderate and a 'popular uprising' against warlordism but has been casually dismissive about credible allegations of jihadi violence and the presence of foreign al-Qaeda operatives in Mogadishu safe houses reportedly operated by some of its top figures.[1] Sheikh Sherif has repeatedly portrayed these concerns as 'propaganda' and claimed the US has been misled by warlords exploiting the war on terror. He is correct that the ARPCT militia leaders sought to portray all Islamists as terrorists and use American counter-terrorism for parochial aims. But the question about a small number of Somali jihadis and foreign al-Qaeda suspects cannot be waved away; it is an enduring concern for the US and its allies.

There is compelling evidence of jihadi violence emanating from within at least three of the hardline Courts in Mogadishu, and the US insists that at least three foreign al-Qaeda operatives

are in Mogadishu. If Sheikh Sharif is unwilling to acknowledge even the possibility of a problem, he risks being accused of complicity. If he cannot acknowledge the threat posed by radicals in his coalition, troubling questions arise about the ability of such radicals to coerce and intimidate erstwhile allies. For moderates in the Courts, the dilemma is that the jihadis' tactic of assassination, which helped eliminate their potential opposition in Mogadishu, could be used against them. This puts them in a difficult situation, especially when faced with international demands to 'marginalise the radicals'. Concern that hardliners in the Courts are driving policy was heightened following the decision to capture Jowhar, despite earlier assurances they would not resort to force. The decision immediately thereafter to move militias up the Shabelle valley as far as Jalaalaqsi and then to orchestrate an Islamist take-over of the strategic town of Beled Weyn near the Ethiopian border seemed intended to provoke Ethiopia to send troops into Somalia.

Much has been made of Sheikh Sherif's contradictory statements. In a letter to selected states and international organisations, he committed the Islamic Courts to good relations and the democratic process: 'We want the Somali people to decide which form of governance [they] want and [to] choose their leader for the first time in decades'.[2] But in other settings rhetoric has been more radical. In a Mogadishu rally on 2 June, he called the US 'an enemy of Islam',[3] and in another public address told supporters the fight would continue until the entire country was under the Courts' authority.[4] While inconsistencies can be explained as reflecting political inexperience or need to placate both hardliners and the international community, a clearer line is needed. More importantly, rhetoric must be consistent with actions. If the Courts continue to articulate conciliatory policies while tak-

ing expansive action which provoke both the TFG and Ethiopia, they will quickly lose the benefit of the doubt. The Islamic Courts' withdrawal from talks with the TFG in response to parliament's discussions of authorising an IGAD stabilisation force (to be known as IGASOM) was predictable but unfortunate. Opposition to foreign peacekeepers has been a central part of the platform over the past year and cannot now be given up easily. The issue has worked well. It taps into xenophobic sentiments which resonate with part of the population; the Courts' core Mogadishu constituency fought against the UN force in 1993 and deeply distrusts such peacekeepers. Despite their essentially clannish composition, the Islamic Courts are the only credible movement articulating strong Somali nationalist rhetoric, conflating Islamism with pan-Somalism, seasoned with anti-Ethiopian (and occasionally anti-Christian) rhetoric. Despite rejecting the TFG, the Islamist movement has successfully portrayed itself as the main hope for state revival. And despite its diplomatic overtures to the West, the leadership frequently condemns the US, tapping into growing Somali resentment and anger. But if the Islamic Courts form a government of national unity with the TFG, these positions will need to be revised.

The Islamic Courts' greatest political success has been their ability to merge their agenda with other agendas in the Mogadishu populace. They have conflated Islamism with a strong public desire for law and order and opposition to warlordism. The romanticised view of the war which defeated the ARPCT as a popular uprising has tremendous appeal to Somalis and foreigners who want to believe that the changes in Mogadishu represent a grassroots movement. The record indicates otherwise. The battles against the ARPCT were waged by *Shari'a* militias, not people's defence forces. The strong support the Courts enjoy for providing security and defeating some un-

popular militia leaders does not equate to a popular uprising. In fact, some hard-line Islamist leaders in Mogadishu view civil society and civic leaders as rivals to be contained and if necessary intimidated. (Section III D 2,  pp.15-16, 'The Courts as Political Movement').

## Regional Dynamics: Spheres of Influence & Proxy War

The conflict between the TFG and the Courts is also shaping up as a proxy confrontation between regional powers and other international actors. Some of these are deliberately exploiting the situation; others are largely unwitting accessories to an internal Somali conflict.

### Ethiopia

The single most important foreign actor in Somali affairs, Ethiopia, is the TFG's patron and principal advocate in the international community. It has legitimate security interests in Somalia and has in the past intervened constructively to support reconciliation and state-building, notably in Somaliland and Puntland. But its current engagement has been deeply divisive and has undermined its own security objectives. Ethiopia considers the Islamic Courts to have been infiltrated by al-Itihaad, and a potential entry point to the region for al-Qaeda. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi explained in a recent press conference:

> … *the Islamic Courts Union is not a homogeneous entity. Our beef is with Al-Itihaad, the internationally recognised terrorist organisation. It so happens that at the moment the new leadership of the Union of the Courts is dominated by this particular group. Indeed, the chairman of the new council that they have established is a certain colonel who also happens to be the head of Al-Itihaad. Now, the threat posed to Ethiopia by the dominance of the Islamic Courts by Al-Itihaad is obvious. Many of you would remember that Al-Itihaad had been involved in terrorist*

> *outrages here in our capital.*

And so, it is absolutely prudent and proper for us to take the right precautionary measures.[5] Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, press conference, Addis Ababa, 27 June 2006, at http://www.ethio embassy.org.uk/ Archive/.

Despite official denials, persistent and credible reports, confirmed by diplomats and UN sources, continue from much of south-western Somalia concerning the presence of Ethiopian forces.[6] For now, the deployments appear to be intended to protect the TFG base in Baidoa and to establish a buffer zone between Dolo, on the Kenyan border, and Galdogob in central Somalia. Military and diplomatic observers in Nairobi, however, believe Ethiopia is preparing to carry out a short, sharp strike deep into southern Somalia if it deems the Courts a sufficient threat.[7] Ethiopia's security concerns relate not only to the Courts' Islamist character but also to Eritrea's role as their backer. During their 1998-2000 border war, Ethiopia and Eritrea opened a second front in Somalia by proxy, each backing client factions. Since the TFG's inception in 2004, Ethiopia has provided military materiel and training, while Eritrea has more recently begun to assist the Courts. If the TFG and the Islamic Courts fight, Addis Ababa and Asmara will again sponsor rival proxies.

Ethiopia is deeply unpopular with many Somalis, who believe it fears the re-emergence of a strong, united Somalia and so seeks to perpetuate instability and division. Ethiopian support of the TFG has already sapped the interim government of credibility in the eyes of many, who consider its leadership to be more responsive to foreign priorities than their own. Leading parliamentarians in Baidoa express deep disquiet over the presence of Ethiopian forces around the town.[8] As Crisis Group has warned, the prospect of Ethiopian military intervention would rally a broad

cross section of Somalis and serve as a foil against which hard liners within the Courts could mobilise for defensive jihad.[9] Jihadi propaganda already seems crafted to portray Somalia as part of a cosmic conflict between Muslims and infidels and to engage the support of foreign jihadis.

## Eritrea

Eritrea's involvement over the past decade has been intermittent, driven almost entirely by desire to frustrate Ethiopian ambitions. During the 1998-2000 border war, it provided arms, training and transport for Ethiopian Oromo insurgents operating from Somalia, as well as their Somali allies – Hussein Aideed's militia. After the war, support diminished, although Asmara maintained relations with the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and other Ethiopian rebel groups. ONLF fighters routinely transited Somalia and obtained weapons from Somalia's arms markets. Eritrea has been passive in IGAD, allowing Ethiopia and Kenya to drive the Somali agenda.

Over the past year, however, Eritrea appears to have dramatically augmented its engagement. UN monitors allege that between May 2005 and May 2006, it delivered at least ten arms shipments to Somalia, mainly to leaders aligned with the Islamic Courts (including Aweys and Indha'adde) and to the ONLF. Two unidentified aircraft that landed at Mogadishu's international airport in the last week of July 2006 were reportedly carrying arms for the Courts from Eritrea. An editorial on the Eritrean ministry of information website denounced the Ethiopian 'invasion' and called for the withdrawal of its forces.[10] 'The Somali Issue: In Demand of a Quick Remedy!', 26 July 2006, at http://www.shabait.com/staging/publish/ article_005277.html.

## Acronyms

**ARPCT**: Alliance for Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism (US backed counter-terror coalition defeated in Mogadishu in June 2006 by the Union of Islamic Courts);

**IGAD**: Intergovernmental Authority on Development;

**ISCG**: International Somalia Contact Group;

**TFG**: Transitional Federal Government;

**TFI**: Transitional Federal Institutions.

The reawakening of Asmara's interest comes at a time when demarcation of the Ethio-Eritrean border has stalled and tensions are high, as both sides prepare for a reduction of the UN peacekeeping forces along the frontier.

## Arab League

The Arab League had been mostly peripheral in Somalia since formation of the TFG but has also re-emerged as a major player. Yemen took the lead in brokering the January 2006 Sana'a talks that temporarily healed the rift between the TFG president and parliament speaker. Sudan, as the Arab League chair, has also stepped forward to broker negotiations between the TFG and the Courts. Although the international community has broadly welcomed this initiative, some observers believe Khartoum is fronting for Egypt, which has historically competed with Ethiopia for influence over the Somali peninsula. In July 2006, TFG Prime Minister Geedi lashed out at Egypt, Libya and Iran, accusing them of supporting 'terrorists' in Somalia. [Section IV B pp.19-20. Regional Dynamics: Spheres of Influence and Proxy War].

## Conclusion: Toward a Negotiated Settlement

The prospects for a peaceful resolution of the present crisis are poor. The positions of the TFG and the Islamic Courts remain far apart, and it will be difficult for them to find middle ground, let alone share power. Every effort must be made, however, to reverse the slide toward war. Initiatives are needed to jump-start direct talks between the TFG, the Islamic Courts and other important Mogadishu-based groups, with the aim of producing a government of national unity. Representatives of both the TFG and the Islamic Courts must come under sustained pressure from citizens and international actors alike. As a first step, the TFG and the Islamic Courts should be urged to send signals to one another aimed at reducing hostilities and gradually building confidence. For the TFG, this could include a statement acknowledging that foreign peacekeepers should not be introduced in current circumstances. For the Islamic Courts, it could mean a moratorium on establishing courts where they do not yet exist.

Ethiopia and Eritrea should be pressed to cease their military involvement and refrain from inflammatory behaviour or rhetoric that could complicate the search for solutions. Donors should refrain from giving assistance to either side which could be construed as strengthening its military capacity and should also develop contingency plans for the full range of possible scenarios.

Diplomatic leadership in the search for a settlement must be augmented in response to the growing internationalisation of the crisis. How to operationalise that principle, however, presents real problems.

IGAD is too narrow a forum and too internally conflicted to provide the kind of direction needed. While Ethiopia and Kenya continue to tout the legitimacy of the TFIs and the need for an IGAD military intervention, Djibouti, Eritrea and Sudan have all indicated a preference for engagement with the Courts and have expressed doubts about the wisdom of dispatching a regional military force to Somalia. Likewise, the African Union has lent its support to IGAD's deployment plans, and is therefore no longer seen as an honest broker by the Courts.

The Arab League currently has the diplomatic lead, having hosted the first round of talks in Khartoum and secured agreement in principle from both the TFG and the Courts to return for a second round. Sudan's success in this regard is commendable and deserves international support. But an Arab League initiative excludes, virtually by definition, certain key actors, including most of the IGAD countries and particularly Ethiopia. Some within the TFG (and Addis Ababa) suspect the Arab League of being overly sympathetic to the Courts.

The ISCG cannot take over leadership. It provides a forum for primarily the main Western countries engaged in Somalia to contribute, helping in particular to place US engagement in Somali more firmly within a multilateral context, and relegates to observer status those international organisations most closely involved diplomatically and politically. It should, however, become more involved, including by working more in country, not merely in New York. The US in particular needs to signal intention to become more active by appointing a senior diplomat and giving him appropriate negotiating authority.

In order to succeed, international diplomacy must accommodate and, within realistic limits, unite these disparate interests and forces – especially Ethiopia, Egypt, the EU and the US – behind a coherent mediation initiative. The truth of the matter is that there is no clearly appropriate single institution much less

country with the necessary standing, credibility and acceptability to both parties – the TFG and the Islamic Courts – to take on this task. (Section VI pp. 24-25 first seven paragraphs only of Conclusion: Towards a Negotiated Settlement.)

## Endnotes

1. See especially the lengthy interview with Sheikh Sherif by Awdalnews Network, 9 June 2006, htpp://www.awdalnews.com.

2. Sheikh Sherif Sheikh Ahmed, letter to UN Political Office in Somalia and others, 5 June 2006.

3. 'Somalis protest at US backing', BBC World Service, 2 June 2006.

4. Chris Tomlinson, 'Somalia's Islamic extremists set US back', Associated Press, 6 June 2006.

6. Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, June 2006; 'Ethiopian troops are in Somalia', BBC, 26 July 2006.

7. Crisis Group interviews, Nairobi, June/July 2006.

8. Crisis Group, electronic communication, June 2006.

9. See, for example, Crisis Group Report, Counter-Terrorism in Somalia (note 6 above) and Crisis Group media release, 'Don't Cross the Mogadishu Line' (note 6 above). Selected extracts from Africa Report No 116, International Crisis Group, 10 August 2006.

10. 10 August 2006)

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# Liberation Theology in Nigeria?

*Sylvester Odion-Akhaine*

*Editor's Note: Liberation Theology is a social campaigning phenomenon that originated in Latin America in the 1970s. Parallels in the political histories and contemporary socio-economic status of Brazil and Nigeria raise the question of whether there has been any discussion within Christian circles in Nigeria of this radical perspective and its political implications. The following extracts from a paper by Sylvester Odion-Akhaine, delivered at a seminar at Benson Idahosa University in Nigeria in May 2006, is evidence of such a debate. It usefully summarises the theoretical roots of the Liberation Theology movement, while concluding with some examples from Nigeria illustrating the response that has been received from politicians to protests by individual clerics in the recent past.*

## The Nigerian Context

Let us observe that Nigeria's political economy is in no fundamental way different from that of Latin American countries – authoritarianism, a backward economy and a vast army of the poor and exploited. These are common features of peripheral social formations in the global capitalist context. Nigeria is a primary commodity producer and exporter and a receiver of capital goods and other sundry finished products, and services from the West and the newly industrializing countries of South East Asia. In this sense we are incorporated into the global political economy.

## Perspectives on Liberation Theology

Although the foundational roots of liberation theology can be attributed to Jesus Christ as can be glimpsed from the synoptic gospels, its articulation as a concept, an ideology and popularisation may be attributed to Latin American clerics and scholars such as Gustavo Gutierrez, Bishop Borge, Camillos Torres and the martyred, El-Salvadoran Bishop Romero. It is a preoccupation with the human species and its world beyond theology as wisdom and rational knowledge. It demonstrates transcendence over otherworldly spiritual engagement estranged from worldly perturbation as well as mere intellectual discipline in which reason converges with faith. It is a progression, not a repudiation of spirituality and rational knowledge, to critical

reflection on the internal logic of human transformation (Gutierrez, 1974:9).

The progression reached its zenith in marxism with its historical materialism, that is, its preoccupation with the role of social forces in societal transformation. Thus, liberation theology represents a shift from orthodoxy to ortho-praxis, i.e., unity of revelation and transformational actions in the real world of men and women. Therefore, in the words of Gutierrez, 'Theology as a critical reflection on historical praxis is liberating theology, a theology of the liberating transformation of the history of mankind and also therefore that part of ecclesia – which openly confesses Christ. This is a theology which does not stop with reflecting on the world, but rather tries to be part of the process through which the world is transformed. It is a theology which is open – in the protest against trampled human dignity, in the struggle against the plunder of vast majority of the people, in liberating love, and in the building of a new, just, and fraternal society – to the gift of the kingdom of God' (Guiterrez, 1974:15). Essentially, it is about engendering social justice and respect for human dignity through resistance to exploitation and oppression in society.

It is to be noted that liberation theology is by no means marxism despite the inspiration it derives from marxist philosophy. Marxism does not share in the unity between the word and action; rather it is concerned with the objective world, the revolutionary unity of the oppressed class for the creation of paradise on earth is of greater moment than the unity of their opinion on paradise in heaven above. It sees the struggle for liberation from economic slavery also as a means of extirpating (as Lenin put it) 'the true source of the religious humbugging of mankind'. In the precise words of Marx, 'religion as the opium of the people' the abolition of which will end 'the illusory happiness of men, is a demand for their

real happiness. The call to abandon their illusions about their condition is call to abandon a condition which requires illusions'. Theoretically therefore, liberation theology remains a dialogue between theology and the social science endeavour.

Nevertheless, liberation theology sprouted from the authoritarian complex in Latin America. To be sure, the contradictory dynamics of bureaucratic authoritarianism and later right wing dictatorship that were anchored in the modernisation paradigm in that subcontinent, engendered rural poverty, and the consequence was the emergence of popular movements seeking the transformation of oppressive economic structures. Its nature being repressive and impoverishing, it was a wake up call for the Catholic priests. Provoked by the intensity of repression and poverty among the Latinos, they took concrete steps to resist the repressive status quo. On the part of the church, there was a commitment to social mission, and thus evolved ecclesial communities involved in social dialogue with the poor, constantly reflecting on the dialectics of faith and poverty, the gospel and social justice. Theology in this context is a fundamental reflection with praxis (Gutierrez, 1974:11) As we have observed elsewhere, in the real world of men and women, religion has really been a veritable tool for fighting oppression (Odion-Akhaine, 2005:12). By its preoccupation with oppression and as a member of what Herbert Blumer (1974:60) has called 'collective enterprise to establish a new order of life,' religion or the church becomes a social movement.

It is important to note that though Christian communities in Nigeria are under the umbrella of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), a great deal of difference exists between the Pentecostal (an extreme form of Protestantism) and Catholic in speaking truth to power. In our humble opinion, the Pentecostalists

are less forthcoming and more obsessed with miracle-induced prosperity than interrogation of the structures of society that create condition of poverty. In ways that lend credence to the point being made, Rev. Father Kukah (1998:232-233) observed that instead of a critical examination of the contradiction of military rule (and perhaps civilian misrule) Nigerians blame themselves for their woes. As an audience for emergency preachers, they are being told the cause of their problems is that the nation has sinned. For forgiveness, we must do penance, sin no more and turn to God. Indeed, 'Pentecostal Christianity has become a popular option in a failed economy.' He further noted its counterproductive essence to the evolution of a politically-conscious civil society by the maneuvering of the message of salvation – 'if God is going to do it for me, why should I do something for myself?' Pentecostalism viewed in this light belongs to global Christendom, i.e., spiritual neocolonialism, an extension of Western Christianity; while liberation theology by its sheer deviation from orthodoxy belongs to World Christendom, being part of the total Christian heritage (Ranger, 2002:265).

Nevertheless, as a result of the active engagement with political events the Church drew vitriolic reactions from the wielders of secular authorities. Under General Babangida regime, Ukaegbu was accused of being a cultist in order to sully his integrity. While under General Abacha's regime, military administrators engaged with the church to cast aspersion on the holy temple of God. It would be recalled that Army Colonel Ogar, who was military administrator of Kwara State under General Abacha's junta, warned Catholic clerics 'to stop paying lip service by annoying Christ' and also to stop quoting the bible to suit their purpose, due to their criticism of Abacha's self-transmutation scheme. In 1996, General Useni also took a swipe at religious leaders. He told them not to condemn what God had not condemned

but that they should focus on leading their flocks on the path of righteousness, patriotism and obedience to constituted authorities. During the same period, in Akure, Navy Commander Onyerugbulem also tongue-lashed Rev. Father Patrick Eyinla of Mary the Queen Catholic Parish for not eulogizing Abacha's son who died in a plane crash. The brazenness of the military administrator forced the priest out of the pulpit. Under the prevailing civilian administration of retired General Olusegun Obasanjo, the president himself has labelled men of God prophets of doom for throwing prophetic barbs at his administration. Pastor Bakare of the Latter Rain Assembly was even arrested over his unrelenting criticisms of the Obasanjo administration.

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# Turning the Sahel on its Head: the 'Truth' Behind the Headlines

*Jeremy Keenan*

The Sahel has received more than its usually fairly small share of the world's news coverage over the last few months. Three 'news stories' in particular have made the headlines: the Tuareg 'rebellion' at Kidal in Mali on 23 May 2006; the hostage-taking of Italian tourists around the Niger-Chad border area on 21 August and a gun battle between Malian Tuareg rebels and GSPC *(Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat)* 'terrorists' in northern Mali on 27 September. Some reports claim this battle to have been a fight between GSPC factions for control of the GSPC in the Sahara, following the reported capture and incarceration of the alleged GSPC leader, *El Para*, in June 2005.[1]

The reporting of these stories, by normally reliable agencies such as Reuters, BBC, AFP, etc., has merely reinforced the impression that the Sahel has become an increasingly dangerous 'terrorist' zone. That is because the most politically significant story of the last few months, namely that the region has in fact remained relatively calm both during and since the Kidal 'rebellion' of 23 May,[2] in spite of considerable provocation of the local Tuareg by the US-supported governments of the region, has received no mention at all. Contrary to the impression given by the above-mentioned and other news agencies that the Sahel has become an increasingly dangerous and lawless 'terrorist zone', there have in fact been no GSPC or other 'terrorist' actions against foreign troops, installations or interests, or civilian populations, save for the above-mentioned kidnap of Italian tourists, during this period, or for that matter, and with the exception of a few local bandit (i.e. criminal, not 'terror-

ist') activities, at any other time. Indeed, the actual strength and perhaps even the presence of the GSPC in the Sahara-Sahel regions is highly questionable, bearing in mind that the original GSPC leader in the Sahel, *El Para*, was an agent of Algeria's counter-terrorist organisation, the *Direction des Renseignements et de la Sécurité (DRS)* and that much reported GSPC activity in the Sahara has been fabricated by the DRS and grossly over-hyped by US agencies.[3] If there have been such incidents, our ongoing research and monitoring of the region indicates that they are unknown to the responsible local Tuareg leadership across the whole of northern Mali and Niger as well as southern Algeria and that, like the continuous reports of the deaths and subsequent re-emergence of certain 'terrorists' (such as Mokhtar ben Mokhtar and *El Para*, to name the two best known) they belong to the realm of the 'phantasmatic'.[4]

So, what does lie behind these three stories? And why is the 'official truth' almost always the exact opposite of 'reality'? The answer, as previous articles in *ROAPE* and elsewhere have explained,[5] is because the launch of a 'second' or Saharan front in the 'war on terror' in 2002/03 has been fabricated largely by US-Algerian military intelligence interests. The events mentioned above, and which are explained in this Briefing, can only be understood within that context. Like most reported 'terrorist' incidents and activity in the Sahara-Sahel region since early 2003, they are part of the disinformation propagated very successfully by US and Algerian intelligence services.[6]

What has been going on in the Sahel in the last few months? I will pick up the 'story' of the Sahel from the penultimate issue of *ROAPE*, which went to press a day or so after the Tuareg 'rebellion' at Kidal in Mali on 23 May.[7] In that Briefing, written as news of the uprising was coming through, I questioned whether the rebels were incited, as Algeria imme-

diately claimed, by Libya's growing presence in northern Mali and the recent pronouncements of Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi about a 'Great Sahara' state.

## The Qadhafi Factor

To understand the forces at play and underlying the Kidal revolt of 23 May, we need to understand something of Libya's current interest in the Sahel. For much of his 36 years in power, Qadhafi has dabbled in Sahelian affairs, with the outcome, as in the case of his humiliating expulsion from Chad in 1987, usually ending in spectacular failure.

Qadhafi's latest sortie into the Sahel is perhaps best understood in terms of the competing sub-imperialisms between Algeria and Libya, which have been exacerbated by the new US alliance with Algeria and the more or less simultaneous readmission of Libya into the world system.

Qadhafi's designs on the Sahel began to take shape in April 2005 when he addressed a delegation of Libyan and Malian Tuareg at the Libyan town of Oubari in the Fezzan. The thrust of his speech was that Libya regarded itself as the protector of the Tuareg; that Libya had been their ancestral home before they spread out into what is now Algeria, Mali, Niger, Mauritania and Burkina Faso and was therefore their 'base and support', and that they therefore constituted what could be construed as 'an extension of Libya'.

The speech was a warning shot to the Algerians and their new ally, America, signalling that Libya was not going to stand by and let its more powerful neighbour establish a sub-imperial hegemony over the region – especially the Sahel – without competition. Qadhafi's concern for the Tuareg was not therefore entirely altruistic. On the contrary, he was aware that the US-Algerian fabrica-

tion of a new front in the 'War on Terror' across the Sahara-Sahel had caused loss of livelihood to many Tuareg, exacerbated their marginalisation and aroused anti-government sentiment across much of the region. Acting as 'godfather' to the Tuareg, as one local journalist described it, would enable him to further Libyan interests across the region.

However, little attention seems to have been paid to either Qadhafi's Oubari speech or his intervention a couple of months later in helping to negotiate an amnesty for the former Tuareg rebels of Aïr who had been provoked by the Niger government into taking up arms the previous year and capturing a handful of US-trained Niger soldiers. Further meetings between Qadhafi and Tuareg leaders took place in Libya on July 15 and 31 (2005) at which it was strongly rumoured that Qadhafi was planning to expand his armed forces to create employment for some 3,000 Tuareg and other Saharan peoples. There were also reports of numerous offers of Libyan development aid for projects in both Niger and Mali.

The reaction of most Sahelian Tuareg to Qadhafi's overtures was threefold. First, there was considerable and genuine gratitude for his intervention on their behalf in negotiating the amnesty from the Niger government. Second, and as might be expected, Tuareg were not going to look a gift-horse in the mouth. Third, there was wariness about becoming overly reliant and dependent on Qadhafi's largesse. Tuareg leaders have been keeping themselves very attuned as to how Qadhafi's neighbours and the world powers react to his interventions in the Sahel.

Qadhafi's various pronouncements during 2005 and early 2006 suggested that he was planning the creation of something ranging from a 'Great Saharan State' stretching from Senegal to the borders of Iraq and incorporating the

desert populations of Tuareg, Arabs, Toubous, Songhai and Bambara, as well as the peoples of the Nile Valley, Sinai, Jordan and the Arabian Peninsula, to something far more tangible and potentially threatening to Algeria and the Sahelian states concerned in the form of a Libyan-backed Tuareg federation that would extend across northern Mali and northern Niger, southern Mauritania, northern Burkina Faso and, of course, southern Algeria.

Algeria was quick to realise that such an entity would provide Libya with a zone of influence (and some control) that would encircle Algeria's south and enable it to challenge and compete with Algeria's own sub-imperial incursions into the Sahel and sub-Sahelian Africa.

The final straw for Algeria was the launch of Qadhafi's 'Great Saharan' project at the larger-than-usual celebration of the *Mawlid* – the anniversary of the prophet Mohammed – on the night of 10 April 2006 at the symbolic and theatrically chosen venue of Timbuktu.

The event, which was initiated and partly financed by Qadhafi, who himself led the prayers, was attended by the Presidents of Mali, the host country, Senegal, Niger, Mauritania and Sierra Leone, along with many former Tuareg rebel leaders, traditional chiefs, other dignitaries and some 30,000 Malians.

The focal point of the occasion was Qadhafi's launch of his idea for a 'Greater Saharan' state, in which he envisaged a day when the Tuareg of Mali, Niger, Mauritania and Algeria would form a federation with Libya as its base. Taken to its logical conclusion, such a 'state' would necessitate the breakaway of much of northern Mali and northern Niger, parts of Mauritania and – as evidenced by Algeria's reactions – a large part of southern Algeria.

The question, which most foreign delegates and analysts were asking themselves, was how much of Qadhafi's Timbuktu pronouncements should be taken seriously. Or, could they be written off as what many commentators ridiculed as the blustering, delusion and crazy dream of empire by 'the muddle-headed colonel'?

By early 2006, Qadhafi's overtures to the Tuareg were being noted by the governments of the region, France and the US with increasing concern. The prospect of disaffected ex-rebel Tuareg joining up in some sort of Qadhafi-inspired and – financed Libyan foreign legion, and perhaps returning home with Libyan citizenship, was not a comforting prospect.[8] Then, in February 2006, Libya opened a consulate in the remote northern Malian town of Kidal. The stated aim was to support economic development and thereby combat insecurity in the north of Mali. However, the establishment of a Libyan consulate in this politically and strategically sensitive Tuareg stronghold was guaranteed to raise the suspicions of neighbouring states, especially Algeria, which has long regarded the northern zones of Mali and Niger, with whom it shares common borders, as part of its and not Libya's immediate sphere of influence.[9] Apart from historical-ethnic reasons, the northern frontier zones of both Niger and Mali are very much within Algeria's domain of security activities. Not only has Algeria regarded both regions as zones of hot pursuit, but they are the key security zones in America's Pan-Sahel and Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Initiatives (PSI & TSCTI).

Although formally denied, the US has established military bases in northern Mali and is behind the construction of Algeria's huge new military base at Tamanrasset. The US is also reported to have a GIS satellite located above the triangle formed by Mali's three northern

towns of Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal., thus enabling it to monitor the sensitive Saharan border zones that are now heavily infiltrated by Algeria's own secret counter-intelligence services. Not surprisingly, neither the US nor Algeria wants Libyan agents poking their noses into what has become the focal region of their highly suspect security operations in the Sahara. So, while the establishment of a Libyan consulate in Kidal, as far as Algiers was concerned, was red rag to a bull, Qadhafi's announcement of his 'Great Sahara' project at Timbuktu was the final straw.

Libya's meddling in the Western Sahara, Mauritania and now Mali, has been described by some Algerian journalists as placing a 'belt' around the country. However, it is in its own extreme south that Algeria feels most threatened by Qadhafi's 'Great Sahara' project. Although Algeria's Tuareg population do not number much more than 30-40,000, their traditional territory covers some 20% of Algeria's national territory. Thus, although the Algerian government has nothing to fear from its Tuareg population in a numerical sense, it has never fully comprehended the nature – socially, politically and ethnically – of its 'Great South'.

Indeed, a series of provocative and repressive actions by the Algerian government against its Tuareg population over the last few years, largely, it seems, to impress its new US allies, and culminating in the July 2005 Tamanrasset riots, has resulted in a fairly 'pro-Algerian' outlook by most Algerian Tuareg becoming much more equivocal in the last few years. One reason for this is the US presence and the loss of livelihood caused by the US-Algerian fabrication of a Saharan front in the 'war on terror'.

Qadhafi is aware of both these and other strands of resentment amongst the various Tuareg populations towards both national and external forces, as well as the precarious and marginalised position of the Tuareg in Mali, Niger and Algeria. His pronouncement on a Grand Saharan state, or at least a Tuareg federation, could not have been better timed to cause maximum ructions in the Algerian government.

In Algeria's popular media, as also in Niger, Qadhafi received a blast of opprobrious ridicule, while at a more formal level, his 'Great Sahara' plan was castigated on TV by Algeria's Prime Minister, Ahmed Ouyahia. On the diplomatic front, there was a flurry of activity on the Algiers-Niamey and Algiers-Bamako and Algiers-Nouakchott axes as Algiers shored up relations with Niger, Mali and Mauritania, while at the same time advising Libya to take a more considered and respectful attitude towards such a strategic neighbour.

However, we now have very good reason to believe that Algeria saw the solution to its 'Libya problem' in engineering a rebellion of the Tuareg around Kidal on the premise that such a rebellion would almost certainly be widely perceived as having been incited by Qadhafi's Timbuktu pronouncements. Hard evidence of Algeria's involvement in the rebellion will probably never be forthcoming. However, having been able to discuss the Kidal rebellion and its aftermath with key Tuareg leaders in Mali, Niger and Algeria, it is apparent that many, if not most, Tuareg, and certainly their key leaders, believe that this was the case. This goes some way to explaining much about the nature of the actual rebellion itself, such as why the rebels withdrew from Kidal and Menaka after only a few hours, thus avoiding military engagements with the Malian army, why only a handful (4-6) people were killed, why the Malian army was restrained from launching an assault on the rebel positions in the mountains of Tighar Ghar, some 120 kms north of Kidal, and why the Algerian government put itself forward with such alacrity to act as the peacemaker.

More significantly, it explains the major question of why the rebellion received absolutely no support from any other Tuareg in Mali and, perhaps more significantly, in Niger. This was not because the Tuareg did not have grievances against their governments in all three countries (Algeria, Mali and Niger). In fact, and for a complex combination of reasons, anti-government feelings and causes of grievance were probably higher at this time than at any time since the rebellions of the 1990s.

A rebellion by the Algerian Tuareg, especially the Kel Ahaggar (centred on Tamanrasset), was never likely, largely because of the degree of infiltration by the intelligence services and the co-option of what is left of the Kel Ahaggar leadership. Also, southern Algeria is very heavily garrisoned by several thousand relatively well equipped troops, along with some 400 US 'Special Forces' which are known to be in the region, although this is denied by both Algeria and the Pentagon. Algerian Tuareg know that any rebellion would be crushed easily with heavy loss of life. Such a strategy is simply not on the cards. In both Mali and Niger, however, the situation is very different.

Grievances against both governments were far greater than in Algeria, the Tuareg are massively more numerous in both countries (est. 1 million in Niger and 800,000 in Mali) than in Algeria, and the defence forces of both countries, especially Niger, bear no comparison with those of Algeria. Indeed, the Niger Tuareg had already severely embarrassed Niger's frail army some 18 months earlier in the Aïr Mountains. However, the main reason why other Tuareg in Mali and Niger did not join the Kidal rebels was because their leaders knew that the Kidal rebel leader, Iyad ag Agali, had close associations with Algeria's secret military intelligence service (the DRS) and was almost certainly being 'used' by the Algerians for the purpose outlined

above. Consequently, rather than supporting him in such a rebellion, they isolated him. That is why the rebellion was effectively over within 24 hours and why it did not spread.

To reinforce the above point, it should be pointed out that Iyad ag Agali's relationship with Algeria's security services goes back to at least the time when the DRS arranged for the second group of hostages taken capture in Algeria in 2003 to be taken to that part of Mali. One reason for choosing that area was because Iyad ag Agali could 'clear' it and effectively manage the negotiations. Although recognised as the traditional chief in that area and still respected for his leadership of the 1990s rebellion of Malian Tuareg, most other prominent Tuareg leaders, especially those of the more numerous Niger Tuareg, who have the potential to seriously destabilise the entire region, now keep him out of the political loop because of his known association with Algeria's DRS.

One reason why the peace agreement brokered by the Algerian government and effectively agreed by both the Mali government and the Tuareg has not yet been signed is because at least one, and possibly more, of Iyad's followers are known to be unhappy with his relationship with the Algerians and the way in which the Algerians have conducted the negotiations. For example, some of the Niger Tuareg's political leaders have been denied visas by the Algerian government to attend the peace talks being held in Algiers. This is almost certainly because the leaders concerned know of the Algerian involvement in the Kidal rebellion and have played a major part in ensuring that the rebellion did not spread. If this sounds a little odd, it is because the Algerian authorities have been actively promoting unrest throughout the region in order to impress on their US allies the extent of 'putative' terrorism in the region and also to justify their own expanded military presence in the region.

Indeed, many Algerian Tuareg believe that the long-term design of the Algerian authorities is to turn the extreme south of the country, and its border zones, into an exclusive 'military region'. Whether they are right is something that only time will tell. In short, the Kidal rebellion was very different from how it appeared and was reported in the media.

## Why Were Italian Tourists Taken Hostage in Chad-Niger?

I will return to Mali shortly. But first, let me quickly explain what lay behind the capture of 23 tourists, comprising 21 Italians, 1 German and 1 Brazilian, who were seized at gun point on 21 August 2006 in the region to the north of Lake Chad. Nearly all press reports stated that the incident took place in south-east Niger, but close to Chad; 21 of the tourists were released on the first day with two being held hostage. All reports, including those from the released tourists, state that their attackers belonged to the *FARS (Front des forces armées révolutionnaires du Sahara),* a former Toubou rebel group of NE Niger.

The 21 released tourists soon made their way back to Europe via Djanet and across Algeria to Tunis. The two Italians held hostage were finally released on 13 October. Before media interest in the story dwindled, press reports tended to take two lines. One was to focus on the comical and child-like dispute that broke out between the Niger and Italian governments over the handling of the 'crisis'. The other was to follow the Algerian line, which, as might be expected, was to point out how dangerous it is to travel in the Sahara, especially the Sahel, as (to quote former US EUCOM commanders) it is 'swarming' with terrorists, etc.

The spat between the Niger and Italian governments was farcical. The hostages, who were at first allowed to use their mobile phones, persuaded the Italian authorities to post their captors' state-

ment on the internet. The gist of it was to accuse the Niger government of not being democratic and of having no security. In addition they demanded the release of one of their leaders from gaol and an explanation for the mysterious death of their former leader, Chakaï Barkaï, in 2001. Many analysts would regard the hostage-takers' statement as an entirely accurate description of Niger, which is why the Niger government took such exception to it and refused to have anything more to do with the incident! The Italian response was equally childish. The Niger government added further to the spat by accusing the Italians of entering the country on false visas, which appears not to have been the case but on which there is still no absolute clarity.

In the meantime, journalists and the usual crop of 'terrorist analysts' wrote a lot of rather muddled copy about the FARS and their intentions, with many of them, including the BBC, demonstrating their grasp of the situation by muddling Toubou with Tuareg.

What none of these reports mentioned was something far more serious. Shortly after the hold-up, we were able to make indirect contact with both the FARS and members of what is becoming loosely known in Chad as the 'New Resistance Group'. This later 'group' comprises a number of groups and organisations in Chad, many of which have little in common than their opposition to President Déby, but which are nevertheless becoming increasingly more organised around a growing sense and awareness of political opposition and purpose. The information they provided was that the tourists had indeed been held up by Toubous, but in Chad, not Niger. However, those that took the tourists captive were not members of the FARS but members of a group belonging to Chad's 'New Resistance Group'. Their purpose for attacking the tourists was because they thought they were French; their intention being to take French hostages

in retaliation for the French military support which saved Déby's regime in April, and also as a warning to other French interests, such as oil companies, that might be thinking of coming in to the country or in other ways supporting Déby.

There were two reasons for letting the main party of tourists go free. The first was because they realised they were Italians, not French. The second was because the group acted on its own initiative without discussing the plan with their 'central organisation' leadership. When the latter heard what had happened, they ordered the group to free the tourists and hand over the two Italian tour organisers who had offered themselves as hostage to the nearby FARS Toubou, thus shifting the blame from themselves to the Toubou of Niger who they thought might be able to use the opportunity to draw their marginalised situation to global attention (and perhaps even earn some ransom money in the process). Also, the leadership did not want to give Déby the opportunity of labeling them as 'terrorists' and playing into the hands of the US Administration, which has been trying to label all forms of banditry and rebellion in the Sahel as 'terrorism'. It is perhaps a little ironic that this is one of the few incidents in the Sahel in the last few years which has had absolutely nothing to do with the Americans.

The two freed Italians, Claudio Chiodi and Ivano de Capitani, have now been able to confirm what the FARS told us,[11] namely that their original captors were initially intending to capture French tourists because of France's support for the Déby regime in Chad.

## GSPC Gunfight in Northen Mali

The third Sahelian news story on which I should comment concerns the reported gunfight between Malian Tuareg rebels, belonging to Iyad ag Agali's Kidal rebels,

now calling themselves 'The Democratic Alliance for Change', and GSPC *(Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat)* 'terrorists' in northern Mali on 27 September.[12]

A spokesman for the Alliance, Eglasse ag Idar, told Reuters in Dakar by telephone on 1 October that there had been a gun battle between Tuareg fighters of the Democratic Alliance for Change and militants of the GSPC terrorists some 400 kms north-west of Kidal and that at least one GSPC had been killed and possibly others injured.[13] Most press reports increased the number of dead terrorists to either 3 or 4, describing them variously as three chiefs who had replaced *El Para* as head of the GSPC in the Sahara,[14] or as 'the new GSPC chief for the Sahara', giving rise to widespread speculation that Mokhtar ben Mokhtar had once again been eliminated. (This would be the seventh time!!).

Most press reports, especially in Algeria and Mali, have put a particular spin on the incident.[15] This has been to give the impression, fostered by the Alliance's own 'blog', that Iyad ag Agali's 'Democratic Alliance for Change' has thrown itself actively into 'the international war on terror'.[16] Ag Idar told Reuters that 'Our Democratic Alliance handles security in the region and we chase out those who are not from there, that's the position we've taken to control the zone.'[17] These are precisely the sort of statement that we might expect to come from Iyad ag Agali and his Democratic Alliance, given his close association with Algeria's DRS. It is also just what the US wants to hear. However, it is not quite what my own network of informants in the region have reported.

Their version of events is substantially the same, but within a rather different context. It is that there was a gunfight between a number of Malian Tuareg belonging to the Democratic Alliance and a group of smugglers/traffickers

who may or may not have been members of the GSPC. One Tuareg and one supposed GSPC were killed and a second GSPC was wounded. However, the circumstances were not quite as described above. My informants have insisted that the incident was an accident and not a question of the Alliance joining in the 'war on terror' or 'chasing people out of their region'. Rather, the two groups bumped into each other by accident, not knowing the other group was in the vicinity. The Tuareg presumed the other group to be of hostile intent; they, in turn, presumably assumed the Tuareg were an army patrol that would attack them.

However, the most interesting information is that the Tuareg group actually believe that the group they ran into was that of Mokhtar ben Mokhtar, or at least someone claiming to be Mokhtar ben Mokhtar. The dead 'terrorist' was identified (as in the press) as a 'GSPC chief' known as 'Abdelhamid', 'Abohola' and a number of other aliases.[18] What gives possible credence to this actually being an encounter with Mokhtar ben Mokhtar (who has been reported killed on 6 previous occasions!) is that it apparently took place in daylight. This is possibly significant in that most *trabendistes* (traffickers, smugglers) prefer to travel at night. And it is then when most such 'accidents', which are commonplace, occur. Mokhtar, however, having the right sort of vehicles, arms, experience and knowledge of the region, including the knowledge that military patrols were not in that vicinity, might well have chanced travelling in daylight. My informants are convinced that it was Mokhtar who was wounded and that he headed into Mauritania, where he is known to have had domestic support facilities for several years.

All three of these 'news stories' gives us a glimpse of the complexity of the Sahelian situation and that almost nothing is quite as it appears. Whether the 'original' Mokhtar ben Mokhtar is still alive and was indeed the person involved in this 'accident' will probably never be known. However, having been on his tracks when he was alive and well, in the years before the US launched its 'war on terror' in the Sahara-Sahel, there is a certain sentiment in knowing that he might still be alive. However, whether he really is a member of the GSPC, or merely one of the two great 'phantoms' (the other being *El Para*) that support Algeria's panoply of disinformation is debatable.

The term GSPC, like 'terrorist', has now come to be used for almost anyone in the Sahara-Sahel (and the rest of the Maghreb, for that matter) who operates 'outside of the law'. With the 'war on terror' having destroyed the Sahara's tourism industry and forced hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of young men into the various trafficking businesses in search of alternative livelihoods, the number of 'terrorists' has consequently risen enormously! Indeed, when we talk about the trans-Saharan trafficking businesses, we are talking about a $billion industry, with a whole raft of state official having a finger in the pie somewhere along the line. The whole notion of 'terrorism' in the Sahara-Sahel has become a political absurdity. As my informants stress, there is no 'real' GSPC terrorism, in the conventional sense of the term, in the Sahara-Sahel. In spite of more than three years of the US-Algerian 'war on terror' across this vast region of Africa, there have still been no 'terrorist' attacks on foreign troops, individuals or interests, or on civilian populations.

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## Endnotes

1. See J. Keenan (2006), 'Security and Insecurity in North Africa', *ROAPE* Vol. 33, No. 108, pp.

269-296; J. Keenan (2005), 'Waging war on terror: the implications of America's 'New Imperialism2 for Saharan peoples', *Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 10, Nos. 3-4, pp. 610-638.

2. J. Keenan, 'Tuareg Take Up Arms', *ROAPE*, No. 108, 2006, pp. 367-8.

3. This is explained in Notes 1 and 5.

4. The research information contained in this Briefing comes mostly from a network of established and reliable field informants in the Tuareg regions of Niger, Mali and southern Algeria, with whom the last detailed interviews were undertaken by satellite phone in mid-October, a day or so before this Issue went to press.

5. See notes 1, 2 and M. Barth, 'Sandcastles in the Sahara: US military basing in Algeria', *ROAPE,* Vol. 30, No. 98, 2003, pp. 679-685. J. Keenan, 'Americans & 'Bad People' in the Sahara-Sahel', *ROAPE*. Vol. 31, No. 99, 2004, pp. 130-139; 'Terror in the Sahara: the implications of US imperialism for North and West Africa'. *ROAPE*. Vol. 31, No 101, 2004, pp. 475-496; 'Political Destabilisation and 'Blowback' in the Sahel', *ROAPE*, Vol. 31, No. 102, December 2004, pp. 691-698; 'The banana theory of terrorism: alternative truths and the collapse of the 'second' (Saharan) front in the War on Terror,' *Journal of Contemporary Africa Studies* (Special Issue on 'The Sahara') (forthcoming 2007).

6. The reason why this disinformation strategy has been so successful is because the line agencies, such as those mentioned above, rely on the media's prevailing 'cut and paste' culture and have insufficient resources to check and research for themselves the stories fed to them by the intelligence services.

7. Ibid.

8. For example, the Niger government and the UN moved quickly to counter such a prospect, and in October (2005) announced a €1.2 million development programme for Niger's Tuareg, financed by the UNDP, France, US and significantly Libya.

9. Algeria's reaction was to introduce a commercial blockade of the Kidal region which gets many of its commercial supplies from Algeria.

10. Approximately 0.1% of the country's total population.

11. 'Kidnapped tourists freed in Niger', BBC News 14 October 2006; online at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6051320.stm).

12. According to a Tuareg spokesman for the Alliance quoted by Reuters ('Mali Tuaregs say Algerian militant killed in clash', *Reuters* 1 October 2006), the clash took place on 19 September. Almost all other reports put the date as 27 September.

13. Ibid.

14. For example: 'Trois terroristes Salafistes auraient été abattus. Violent accrochage entre les Touaregs Maliens et le GSPC', *Liberté – Actualité*, 1 October 2006.

15. I have read some two dozen press articles in the 2-week period between the date of the incident on 27 September and writing this briefing on 14 October.

16. See almost any Malian or Algerian newspaper between 27 September and 14 October, such as, for example, *Liberté – Actualité* 1 October 2006.

17. Note 12.

18. See, for example, 'Un des chefs GSPC tué au Mali', *El Watan*, 9 October 2006.

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# Samora Machel, 1986-2006

*Phyllis Johnson*

President Samora's death on 19 October 1986 cast a long shadow over southern Africa at a time when the region was locked in combat with the apartheid system of racial oppression in South Africa. Suddenly, overnight, the inspirational energy that he generated was gone, replaced by a sense of shock and deprivation. Deprived not only of President Samora's person and leadership, but that of others who had accompanied him to the Front Line States meeting in northern Zambia.

These included Fernando Honwana, an influential advisor and activist in the president's office; Muradali Mamad-hussein, the president's press secretary and communications advisor; Ambassador Lobo, Mozambique's articulate representative at the United Nations in New

York; Aquino de Braganza (and one of *ROAPE's* earliest editors), revered historian from the Centre for African Studies at Eduardo Mondlane University; the official photographer, Maquinesse, and others.

Travelling south-east, their plane passed safely through the Curla beacon from Zimbabwe into South Africa, and was gone. First reports said the plane was missing. Another report said there was wreckage of a plane in South Africa near the Mozambican border. It was not difficult to put the two reports together, but impossible to believe the result.

Samora Moises Machel had walked large on the southern African stage since the 1960s. Taking up the leadership of the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (Frelimo) from the first president, Eduardo Chivambo Mondlane, who was assassinated by Portuguese security agents in 1969, and leading the liberation struggle from the battlefront, Samora Machel defeated Portuguese colonialism (which saw Mozambique as an 'overseas territory') to became the first President of Mozambique at independence on 25 June 1975.

A few months later, in March 1976, he closed Mozambique's 1,200-km border with Rhodesia, in line with United Nations sanctions, and cut off the lucrative transport of goods from the interior to his country's railways and ports.

Frelimo was already accommodating the liberation fighters from Zimbabwe in its bases in the liberated zones of Mozambique since 1972, especially in Tete province where they had ready access to the border crossing. The firm and active support from President Samora, Frelimo and Mozambique continued until Rhodesia again become Zimbabwe at independence on 18 April 1980. That support included the provision of rear bases and camps in Mozambique, and providing materials including those from the Or-

ganisation of African Unity (OAU) Liberation Committee, which was based in Tanzania. When the war in Rhodesia escalated to the extent of several rounds of negotiations, Mozambican officials were present on the sidelines. At the Lancaster House talks in London in 1979, Mozambique played an active role in encouraging a settlement.

President Samora did this because he knew that the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) would win the proposed transitional elections, and he believed the British government would deliver on their commitment on the land issue, to provide significant resources for purchase and resettlement. This belief is at the root of the firm support of Mozambique and Tanzania for the Zimbabwe land issue. They were at Lancaster House, they were part of the decision to settle, and they believed that resources would be forthcoming.

President Samora was eloquent and outspoken on the subject of liberation in southern Africa (he called Ian Smith a *tabaqueiro*, a tobacco seller), and especially against apartheid in South Africa. Having won Mozambique, he believed that anything was possible, including a victory over apartheid in South Africa. His high profile stance against colonialism and white minority rule, however, made him a threat to those in power in South Africa.

October 1986 was at the height of new activity by the African National Congress (ANC) in the townships of South Africa, with cadres moving in and out of Mozambique; and at the height of Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo) activities in Mozambique, moving in from Kamuzu Banda's Malawi.

Renamo, formed and trained at Odzi in Rhodesia, near the Mozambique border, was moved, complete with weapons, supplies and training officers, to South Africa during the transition to Zimba-

bwe's independence and continued its activities from new bases at Phalaborwa. The then South African president, P.W. Botha, was often called the 'great crocodile' but he may not have been aware that Samora Machel was experienced at dealing with crocodiles.

Born on 29 September 1933 in the village of Chilembene, in what is now Chokwe district of Gaza province, Samora herded cattle like the other young boys. But one day, according to a story told by his cousin Paulo and quoted in Iain Christie's biography, *Machel of Mozambique*, he lost a calf that was attacked by a crocodile. When he found the calf with its leg in the crocodile's mouth, he 'jumped into the river, shouting and screaming and hitting the water with his stick.' Fortunately, says the author, 'the crocodile did not call his bluff, but let go of the calf and made off down the river.' He rescued the terrified calf, treated its wounds with medicinal herbs, and returned home in triumph, to be praised for his courage.

Later, in a political encounter with the 'great crocodile', President Samora signed a high-profile agreement with South African president Botha at Nkomati in 1984, which in typical fashion he made into a theatrical occasion, and drew praise from the British prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, for his courage. He had predicted in May 1979 that she would win the British election, and (to the astonishment of his Cabinet colleagues) that there would be 'a settlement in Rhodesia by the end of the year'. He drew on historical references to explain his prediction: US president Richard Nixon and China; and French president Charles de Gaulle and Algeria.

So, President Samora Machel and others died in the plane crash after dedicating their lives to liberation, Namibia continued on to independence in 1990, and the apartheid system was officially ended and majority rule came to South Africa in 1994. Despite official inquiries in Mozambique, South Africa and the Soviet Union (the countries of ownership of the plane, venue of the crash, and nationality of the pilots), the full details have not yet emerged. Even now, 20 years later, the full evidence is not available.

But there is an echo across the Mozambique-South Africa border, where both presidents Armando Emilio Guebuza and Thabo Mbeki have pledged to 'leave no stone unturned' until they find out what happened on 19 October 1986.

And at Mbuzini, where the plane crashed, you can hear the echo, whispering through the 35 vertical steel pillars of the monument designed by Mozambique's leading architect, José Forjaz.

# Conference

## Leeds University Centre for African Studies and
### *Review of African Political Economy*

## The State, Mining & Development in Africa

### 13-14 September 2007

This conference brings together pressure groups and academics to explore three key themes: what lessons have been learnt from the resource curse days of the 70s, 80s and 90s; what opportunities for resource led growth have emerged in the 21st century; and what resistance exists within the continent to the continued politics of dispossession and primitive accumulation that has characterised much resource extraction?  The focus of the meeting will be analysis of case studies from Ghana, Sudan, Zambia and South Africa.  This will not exclude other country cases or comparative contributions.

More detailed issues relate to what opportunities exist for the state in Africa to benefit from the promotion of mining and resource led development?  Has Africa's incorporation into the world economy created conditions within which African states can benefit or not from increased interest by MNCs in the continents resources?  To what extent are local dominant classes and political elites in Africa continuing to benefit from resource led growth while labouring classes of peasants and workers remain or become poorer from state involvement with mining companies? What resistance has there been in Africa to the new rush for the continent's resources? Here focus can lie with organised labour, trade unions and political parties and it can also lie with the need to explore micro, village and household consequences for communities that border, for example, open cast mining.  To what extent is small-scale or artisanal mining a competitor with large-scale national or international mining operations?  Analysis here may focus too on the role of women-headed households.  This remains a still under-researched yet increasingly evident phenomenon, especially where mining is a dominant feature of employment as men migrate to work and women remain in rural areas sustaining their families and communities.

**Abstracts by 31 January 2007 to Saeed Talajooy: african-studies@leeds.ac.uk**

# Book Reviews

*Good Orientalist, Bad Orientalist: Islam, Sectarianism and Politics in Sudan since the Mahdiyyai* by Gabriel Warburg, London: Hurst & Co. (2003). Reviewed by Abdelwahab El-Affendi, Centre for the Study of Democracy, University of Westminster, London.

Reading books on Sudan has all but caused me to lose faith in scholarship. Recently, I began the review of such a book by writing 'I saw my name misspelt on the first page of this book, and it was all downhill from there.' What was most disturbing was that one of the two authors of that book was a respected scholar whose work I used to trust, probably because I was completely ignorant about the issues he wrote about. I had then to ask myself: How can I ever again trust writings on unfamiliar topics if what is written about subjects I know about is so unreliable?

Luckily, there are other instances which tend to restore, partially at least, one's faith in scholarship. Gabriel Warburg's *Islam, Sectarianism and Politics in Sudan* is one such work, professionally done and conscientiously researched. Warburg is an example of what the late Edward Said would call a 'good Orientalist', someone who is not tainted with the ethnocentric prejudices usually decried in Orientalist scholarship. This is no mean feat given the particular situation in Israel and the pressures to put scholarship in the service of policy.

The stated aim of this book is to summarise and distil a lifetime of scholarship on Sudanese history, as well as addressing the typical Orientalist trope about the impossibility of both secularisation and western-style democracy in Muslim countries. Thus the work can be seen as performing three different tasks: offering the reader a concise and authoritative narrative of modern Sudanese history; demonstrating that there is a thread which runs throughout this history, namely the central role of Islam in general and the *sufi* sects in particular; and, finally, using this data to address the issue of the compatibility of Islam and democracy.

The historical narrative exhibits the same quality of scholarship we have come to expect from Warburg. He has tried to update the work by incorporating some recent debates and controversies (for example, over the nature of Turko-Egyptian rule, the causes which provoked the Mahdist revolt and led to its success), which adds value to his contribution. The attempt to discern a constant thread linking past to present (a typical Orientalist theme) also offers some interesting insights.

An example is the way he highlights the successive attempts since the Egyptian conquest to suppress or tame the *sufi* orders (or, later, the 'sectarian' political parties which were based on them), showing how such attempts had been as constant under both foreign occupation and military regimes as they have been futile. He is a bit equivocal about whether former President Nimeiri's conversion to Islamisation was the result of his own *sufi* conversion and thus another proof of the enduring influence of Sufism, or whether it was a mere Machavellian ploy, even though he apparently favours the latter characterisation.

Where Warburg is at his least convincing is when he addresses the political implications of his historical scholarship, if only because he devotes only a few pages to this endeavour, which is certainly outside his competence, and ends by quoting 'bad' Orientalists, namely Elie Kedourie and Bernard Lewis on the problematic question of the incompatibility of Islam and democracy, not to mention making the sweeping (and totally inaccurate) generalisation that 'democracy has so far failed throughout the Islamic world' (p.226).

It is also not surprising that his discussion of the most recent history is the section of his book that gets contaminated with a number of minor and a few more glaring inaccuracies. These range from giving the wrong dates (al-Hindi died in 1982 not 1984), to some major inaccuracies, such as the claim (p. 184) that the Muslim Brothers became Nimeiri's 'natural allies' after he fell out with the Communists in 1971 (the truth is that the Brotherhood led the struggle against Nimeiri in the universities and trade unions and joined the coup against him in 1976; he never trusted them even after they had joined his regime in 1977).

In between, a number of other inaccuracies dot the work, including the claim (p.200) that the government of Sadiq al-Mahdi was planning to abrogate Islamic legislation when the June 1989 occurred (not true, the agreement with the SPLA only stipulated a temporary freeze on Islamic punishments), or that (p.184) Hasan Turabi had travelled to London in early 1977 to inform his allies in the National Front that he was pulling out of the anti-Nimeiri alliance (incorrect, for Turabi was in prison at the time, and it was Sadiq al-Mahdi who made the deal with Nimeiri in a secret meeting in the summer of 1977 without consultation with his other opposition partner). Also the claim (p.203) that it was students from the Omdurman Islamic University who led the 1964 uprising against the military regime (the university did not exist at the time). More far fetched is the claim (p.206), admittedly ascribed to a partisan source, that the Islamists had set up military training camps in Sudan in the 1970s manned by fighters who trained in Libya, Iran, Afghanistan and Lebanon, which would have been impossible under the Nimeiri regime.

These surprising inaccuracies are indicative of the contested nature of the more recent sections of Sudanese history, and the proliferation of many sources prepared to make very wild and unsubstantiated claims and, more worrying, the readiness of many to believe them without checking against more credible sources.

With regard to Warburg's main claim of continuity, this also needs to be qualified. Were the Mahdi to rise from his grave today, he would not at all recognise the 'Islamist' rhetoric of his Oxford-educated great grandson, Sadiq al-Mahdi, and would certainly brand it as outrageous heresy. Neo-Mahdism is more neo than it is Mahdism. Similarly, although *sufi* groups still maintain a significant influence, the modern Islamist discourse and activism is not what most *sufi* groups would identify with. Even going back to the Mahdist movement itself, the suggestion that it had swept to success because of its affinity with Sufism neglects the fact that it had faced a lot of resistance on religious and ethnic grounds throughout its career.

As mentioned earlier, the rather sketchy treatment of the issue of Islam and democracy leaves a lot of gaps. Central to it is the claim that secularism does not have a chance in Sudan, which only leaves the option of seeking some accommodation between Islam and democracy, a difficult proposition given the demands of the non-Muslim southern minority. Warburg's book was written long before the current peace deal was signed in 2005, and thus does not factor

in the complex formula it had worked out to accommodate the demands of Islamism and southern nationalism. It is still tentative and there are no guarantees it will work. But it is a significant attempt at accommodation. It is also important to distinguish between the role of 'sectarianism' in national politics and the increasing drift towards Islamisation, since the sectarian parties have actually been secularly inclined when not pressurised by modern Islamists.

Warburg's book remains, nevertheless, a characteristically positive contribution to scholarship on modern Sudanese history, reflecting its author's compassion, erudition and familiarity with his subject, and a fitting crowning for an illustrious career.

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*Religion and African Civil Wars* by Niels Kastfelt (ed.), London: Hurst & Co. (2005). Reviewed by Nathalie Wlodarczyk, Kings College, London.

This edited collection contributes to an area of study that is increasingly gaining ground, both for Africa and the wider world. Although the role of religion in violent conflict has been a subject for academic study for centuries, recent resurgence of violent religious movements in Asia and the Middle East as well as the continuing persistence and growth of religious communities in Africa and Latin America has brought on a new wave of research. Africa, often a particular victim of ethnocentric analysis has been the focus of studies both seeking to reinforce and counter such prejudice. Although the bulk of the research presented in this volume was written almost six years ago, and lacks more recent developments, it throws up some important insight and considerations for both practical and conceptual engagement

with contemporary African civil wars. The most important of these insights is the need for more in-depth analysis of religious and political contexts to appreciate the ways in which these interact and create or impact on patterns of behaviour in wartime.

The volume highlights a number of themes through its diverse case studies, all linked to the nexus of religion and war on the continent: the rationality of religion in war, exploring the logic of the adoption or adaptation of religious beliefs and practices to wartime needs; religion and meaning, looking at religion as a source of inspiration and explanation both in and after war; and tied to this, religion as a resource for peace and reconciliation in a post-conflict setting. The themes are by necessity interconnected, especially as religious belief and practice is closely tied both to existential questioning and legitimacy. As a result it lends itself both to explaining phenomena such as war and offering guidance for engagement or redress. In their respective considerations of the civil war in Sudan between the government and the southern based rebel movement the SPLA, Sharon Hutchinson and Andrew Wheeler show how both traditional religious beliefs and Christianity came to shape the way in which southern rebels conceived of the war and their own roles in it, despite the overtly secular ideology of the leadership. Because of the cultural context most of the fighters were drawn from, as well as their encounters with Christian missionaries both in refugee camps and aid delivery capacities, religious interpretation of events became widespread. But at the same time, the experience of war forced spiritual ideas to evolve to accommodate the necessities of war – such as killing – and incorporate the experience of violence.

In a similar appreciation of the logic of evolving conceptual frameworks employed by armed groups, Paul Richards suggests that the organisational struc-

ture of the RUF in Sierra Leone took on a sect like form because ritualistic behaviour is a functional and therefore natural reference point for a group removed from their normal context. In this sense, child soldiers recruited often coercively by the rebels came to shape their own group dynamic, in part inspired by some of the ideological convictions of the leadership, but equally by the circumstance of secluded bush life with little adult supervision. Richards focuses on the functional sociology of the RUF, and the 'non-spiritual' side to religious organisation. While his observations are undoubtedly penetrating, he avoids questions about the role played by actual spiritual beliefs and practices in reinforcing or complicating that organisation. In a setting where spiritual belief is practically universal and spiritual practitioners can be found both amongst civilians and fighters, it would perhaps have been helpful to consider this dimension as well – especially as the spiritual imagery is what has led to much of the 'new barbarism' commentary this research intends to counter.

The considerations of the role of the Church and religious communities in Rwanda and Burundi by Timothy Longman and in the DRC by Rene Devisch provide some valuable insight into the historical and spiritual developments of religious institutions and their impact on local communities. Longman situates the passive and active participation of the Catholic Church in Rwanda in the 1994 genocide within a longer tradition of close collaboration with the state, and Devisch shows how the challenges of urbanisation and failing development has refocused attention on spiritual resources that can reconnect people with more communal traditions. In both cases, the analysis throws light on events and developments that can only be effectively understood in a historical context.

But what is perhaps missing from this compilation are some more daring conclusions from the insights presented by the studies. For a continent where religion is a natural part of everyday life – and in extension politics and war as much as cultural practice, as perhaps best illustrated by Ellis and Ter Haar in their 2004 study – some more specific guidance for the implications of this reality on war and the way we engage with it would have been helpful.[1] A few such conclusions can, however, perhaps be drawn from the implicit assumptions presented in the volume: firstly, the religious dimension to behaviour, also in conflict, needs to be better appreciated and understood to make sense of activity that may at first seem alien or irrational to an external (and particularly Western) observer. Secondly, conceptual frames of reference will always be sought by individuals and groups to explain and give meaning to the activity they are engaging in. In a context where religious belief is widely shared, it will be a natural reference point for such explanation and meaning.

Finally, behaviour will always result from an interplay between the cultural context, practical challenges and material and conceptual resources. The combination of these will no doubt differ depending on the particular case, which is why a grounded understanding of the context is so important. All the contributions to this volume display an acute awareness of the central importance of context and as such should be instructive for any other research undertaken to deepen our understanding of the role of religion in war, be it in Africa or beyond.

**Endnote**

**Ellis, S. & G. Ter Haar** (2004), *Worlds of Power: Religious thought and political practice in Africa*, London: Hurst & Co.

*Symbolic Confrontations: Muslims Imagining the State in Africa* by Donal B. Cruise O'Brien, London: Hurst & Co. (2003). Reviewed by Janet Bujra.

Donal Cruise O'Brien's book is a timely antidote to fevered equations of Islam with terrorism and to notions of a clash of civilisations with fault lines running so deep that no dialogue is possible. Though *Symbolic Confrontations* takes Africa as its case study it has much to say that is relevant to the understanding of Islam in the global setting, particularly in the way it addresses the novel and challenging topic of how Muslims relate to the secular state.

The strengths of this work are twofold. On the one hand, whilst focussing on religion as a set of beliefs and potent symbols, it insists on embedding these within an exploration of social relationships and politico-economic realities. Its key example is Sufi brotherhoods in Senegal and how religious organisations relate to the state and to the project of state control and governance. It explores these relations in historical depth so that the continuities extending through colonial rule to post-colonialism are critically exposed. This example is then taken as a stimulus to further questioning of comparative examples, from Nigeria to Mali and from Kenya and Ruanda to South Africa. If religion is the major variable in this account, considerable attention is given to cross-cutting identities around which confrontation may be organised, such as ethnicity, linguistic groupings or generational difference. We are offered thought-provoking examples where ethnicity is not the sine qua non of explanation and where solidarities around religion incorporate people of different ethnic backgrounds at the same time as religion borrows ethnic languages and styles to promote its cause. Conversely, the world of religion which is presented here is a world of men relating to other men, with barely any reference to how gender inequity (or

solidarity) is elaborated in religious symbolism and practice.

A second major contribution of this work is the way that it underlines the social diversity of Islam whilst illustrating its symbolic unity. Not only is Islam in Africa seen to be its own creature, creatively adapted over more than two hundred years to African conditions and in no sense a passive proxy for more affluent and powerful agencies of religion operating from the Middle East; it is also shown to have its own divergences and differences, strikingly illustrated with the example of competing Islamic brotherhoods in Senegal, where 90% of the population is Muslim.

The book argues an intriguing thesis regarding the relation of secular state to institutionalised religion: 'Islam has ... helped to give substance to institutions of Western importation, in the institutions of the colonial and post-colonial state: less a clash of civilisations, pitting Islam against the West or the rest, than a negotiation of civilisations, Islam coming to the rescue of the Western institutional legacy in Africa' (p.178). Religious pluralism in Africa has called for a state which stands above potentially divisive differences, but also paradoxically the existence of the state as a secular institution has not threatened the potent hold of religion: the relationship can be one of synergy rather than threat. This may go beyond religious support for state institutions – Cruise O'Brien is arguing that Islam has also provided a symbolic vocabulary for political communication and democratic accountability.

In the colonial period the brotherhoods in Senegal played a crucial role as intermediaries in a process of indirect French rule; they also promoted the creation of a cash crop economy by setting up groundnut estates and organising peasant production. In the post-colonial phase they were for a long period central to the delivery of electoral

support to the ruling party of Leopold Senghor (himself a Catholic), as well as sustaining the export-oriented economy on which Senegal depended.

Cruise O'Brien demonstrates that this was no one-way process. Brotherhood support for the state has always come at a price, with the main centres of brotherhood activity being able to demand and get infrastructural investment to secure their local economic activity and political sway. Conversely these benefits have not simply underpinned local religious leaders (the 'saints'), who are also able to collect religious tithes – they have also been redistributed to their disciples, originally largely of peasant origin. The local Sufi lodges operate as a 'Muslim welfare state, organising not only devotional activity, but also agricultural production and marketing, distribution of charity and hospitality and representations to state authority' (58). This last aspect is a significant one, with Cruise O'Brien arguing that the Mouride order in particular was able to press the postcolonial state to improve producer prices, and, as economic crises and drought led peasant producers into debt and migration, it swung into confrontation with the government, threatening both peanut production and the hold of the state over its populace. The order was at one point 'well on its way to become Africa's first independent peasant trade union' (p.38), and thereafter, Sufi support for the ruling party was more conditional. Cruise O'Brien's argument is not that this signified the end of the symbiotic relation between state and Islam but that it is part of a long political process in which each side learns to live with and negotiate productively with the other.

The parallels between the Senegalese example and other comparative cases show that Islam has engaged the secular state in a variety of ways, often to mutual advantage. Its apparently authoritarian role as deliverer of the faithful and of a localised social order is being trans-formed as both states and religious institutions wrestle with globalisation, economic crises and political challenge. Here Cruise O'Brien has some useful things to say about democratisation as it takes hold in Africa and is translated into local terms. In the postcolonial era, democratic arithmetic has had religious pay-offs in some instances. In Nigeria for example, Islam was boosted by its electoral majority in the North. Valued not as multi-party competition or the promotion of liberal values or even accountability, democracy is seen as a process by which political consensus or even-handed coalition politics may be achieved and conflict avoided. Here Islam can offer precedents. Cruise O'Brien describes the way in which Sufi orders, based as they are on the charisma of saintly leaders, depend more on the assent of disciples than on genealogical authority. As peasants were driven into towns by economic hardships, the Mouride came to be the backbone of a class of traders whose relations of religious trust contributed to economic success. Establishing urban religious associations, they asserted some democratic autonomy of saintly control, whilst remaining within the symbolic consensus. And as Sufi leaders became more discriminating in their support of politicians they were more effectively able to demand benefits for their followers and thus boost their popular power whilst at the same time protecting themselves from the insistence of younger followers that religious leaders should keep out of politics.

Cruise O'Brien's conclusions, especially in the case of Senegal, are clearly based on extensive first hand investigation and his persuasive argument is grounded in rich ethnographic detail. He is on less sure ground in the chapter on Kenya which focuses on the emergence of a very short-lived Islamic political party in the early 1990s. Largely formed by dissident youth from a minority community, this was unable to find purchase amongst

Kenyan Muslims, mainly because they are in no sense a social or political bloc. Nor is the state generally seen as embodying 'Christian' hegemony in the way that Cruise O'Brien implies.

This book is made up of a set of previously published pieces, with some revision and up-dating. It has all the flaws of such a compilation, with chapters seemingly addressed to a variety of audiences, a fair bit of repetition and some of the vital foundational information not appearing until the third chapter. It needs close reading for its detailed and far-reaching argument, but it also rewards such attention, reminding us of an already extensive literature in this field (to which Cruise O'Brien's own contributions are substantial) and of the critical need for a more nuanced and problematised understanding of the diversity of ways in which Islam relates to the state in Africa. That the capacity of the state to play a secular role is not necessarily diminished by the existence of thriving religious communities is reassurance we all need in troubling times, even though 'secular' here is taken to mean impartiality in relation to religious divisions, rather than a challenge to faith-based ways of thought.

What this book illustrates is that culturalist explanations of religion are insufficient to understand the success of religious movements such as the brotherhoods in Senegal (and in other examples like Hizbollah in Lebanon or Hamas in Palestine or the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, even perhaps the Islamic Courts in Somalia). In situations of state incapacity or inadequacy, it is not the detail of belief or faith that counts as much as the capacity of religious movements to mobilise organisational activity around social welfare for their followers and/or to deliver the peace and security which most people crave and without which normal life and especially economic activity is impossible. Religious movements may do this with or against the state (the

role of Christian missionaries in establishing educational and health facilities under colonial rule is one example of the former; the LRA in Uganda is a failed example of the latter). Symbolic confrontations (in Cruise O'Brien's terms) are the language in which such power politics are played out.

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*Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa* by Stephen Ellis and Gerrie Ter Haar, London: Hurst & Co. (2004). Reviewed by Maia Green, University of Manchester.

*Worlds of Power* aims to explain the links between religion and politics in Africa and, by extension, the specific attributes of political practice on the continent. Religion holds a special place in African cultures and worldviews. It is the association of power with spiritual forces and with spirits which ensures the ongoing imbrication of the political and the religious. It is not possible to understand politics and political transition without grasping the salience of religion for many African citizens, from peasants to presidents, who are daily engaged with a range of mystical powers. The powers with which people are engaged range from the monotheistic Gods of world religions to possessing sprits and witchcraft.

Powers from spirits and the more ambivalent powers associated with witchcraft provide a rationale for events and happenings in the world, situating political action within a religious universe. According to Ellis and Ter Haar, this universe has consequences for the ways in which African people interpret their position within the global relations of injustice through which their marginality is consolidated . This marginality and the political and economic uncertainty it

generates fosters what might be termed spiritual demand, reinforcing the hold of religious ideas and cosmologies as they are invoked to interpret the exigencies of experienced political and social worlds and, in particular, creating space in the spiritual marketplace for the personification of evil to become more prominent in discourses of witchcraft, possession, vampirism and zombification. Religion here is not simply interpretive practice, through which people apprehend the world. African conceptual and social worlds are constituted religiously, hence the book's overarching contention that 'it is largely through religious ideas that Africans think about the world today, and that religious ideas provide them with a means of becoming social and political actors' (2004:2).

The centrality of the religious has far reaching implications both for political action on the continent, which can only be grasped in terms of its relation to religion, and for political analysis. A new approach to political science in Africa is called for, one which begins from the premise that there are no clear boundaries, conceptual or institutional, between domains of religious and political action. Given the narrowness of much political analysis of Africa and the increasing importance of new forms of religious participation on the continent this call is timely. It is not particularly new. Other disciplines, notably anthropology, have long recognised the simultaneity of political and religious modes of organisation. Indeed, Ellis and Ter Haar make extensive use of ethnographic sources to support their argument, along with evidence culled from religious tracts and popular media. However, whereas an ethnographic approach would situate local manifestations of cultural expression within historically determined institutional contexts the macro-continental scope of *World of Power* leads perhaps inevitably to macro-claims regarding African propensities to construct the world religiously, claims running perilously close to a cultural essentialism reinforcing the tendency to view politics and the problems in many African countries as further indication of African exceptionalism.

Although the arguments presented in the book seem comfortably convincing, from the account of witchcraft allegations as a search for justice in an unjust world to the moral concerns of the new Christianities, they do not confront the accepted truisms expressed in scholarly and popular representations of core African values of kinship, patrimonialism and community. Fundamental questions are left unanswered, most importantly the material and institutional conditions which create the possibilities for these emerging hegemonies of the sprit . Why is the religious imaginary the felt response to questions of morality in the world rather than, for example, a politics of justice? How and why do such moral concerns legitimate injustice, exclusion and victimisation, as in the case of practices against those alleged to be witches?

The book's overwhelming answer is that because there is a legacy of ancestral practices around sprits that people have a propensity to experience and construct the word religiously. After the politics of the belly, the politics of the spirit? Is it an intellectual injustice not to accord to Africa a politics of social action, that does not demand explanation in other terms?

*Witchcraft, Violence and Democracy in South Africa* by Adam Ashforth (2005), University of Chicago Press; *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities: Modernity, Witchcraft and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa* by Henrietta L. Moore and Todd Sanders (eds.) (2001), Routledge; *Witchcraft, Power and Politics: Exploring the Occult in the South African Lowveld* by Isak Niehaus (2001), David Philip, Cape Town and Pluto Press, London. Reviewed by Roy Love, Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield.

These books are about what is frequently referred to as 'the occult' in African society, where this term has a dictionary definition of 'transcending the bounds of natural knowledge, mysterious, magical, supernatural'. Religion on the other hand is 'belief in a higher unseen controlling power or powers with the emotion and morality connected therewith' (*Chambers 20th Century Dictionary*). The boundary between the two, if there is one, may appear to be unclear to an external observer but for adherents of the principal sects of mainstream religions the small scale, local activities of practitioners of the occult such as soothsayers, magical healers, spirit mediums, witchdoctors and witches are often condemned as dangerous and potentially evil. Yet throughout Africa, as in much of the rest of the world, both spheres of activity coexist, often depending on the support of the same individuals. The three books reviewed here provide an invaluable summary of the range and ubiquity of occult belief to be found across the African continent as well as exploring its rationale by relating it to forms of modernity reacting to change in the wider social and economic environment. Although two of the books were published in 2001, when taken together with Ashforth (2005), they form a trio which usefully brings together a number of common features, and patterns of reaction to social and economic change, which tend to prevail across borders and over time.

In brief, Moore and Sanders have edited a fascinating collection of papers on witchcraft, fetishism, cannibal transformation and its variants, commodification and trade in body parts in countries as ostensibly diverse as Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Malawi, Ghana, Niger, Tanzania and South Africa. The book by Niehaus is an ethnographic study of the recent history of witch-hunting in the small community of Bushbuckridge in Northern Province of South Africa, while Ashforth offers a more personal ethnographic account of the widespread prevalence of belief in witchcraft in Soweto. The similar strengths of belief in occult powers in urban as much as in rural South Africa are echoed in the continent wide review of Moore and Sanders which ranges from rural, small town Tanzania and the pastoralist Tuareg in Niger to the highly urbanised environment of Lagos in Nigeria and urban Malawi. It is in part a tendency for occult belief to persist amongst city dwellers that prompts all authors in their assertion that it is a phenomenon of modernity rather than an atavistic legacy of 'traditional' pre-modern village life.

In Tanzania, for instance, Todd Sanders shows how the demand for the services and products of occult practitioners (such as 'medicines' to provide good fortune or to undermine another's prosperity) generated by structural adjustment, has been met by providers travelling from marketplace to marketplace in a more openly and mobile commercial way than hitherto (and reportedly incorporating such bizarre commodities as human skin). Similarly, in southern Nigeria, Misty Bastion suggests that the anonymity of mass urban life lends itself to suspicion and fear of neighbours, which encourages pre-existing beliefs in human-animal hybrids sent by witches to abduct, possess, rape and rob the innocent and unaware.

Given the continued prevalence of belief in witchcraft throughout South Africa,

Niehaus explores the related phenomenon of community inspired witchhunts, which in their civil repercussions inevitably draw in the state (producing in South Africa, for example, the Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1957 and the 1996 Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Witchcraft Violence and Ritual Murders in Northern Province). In this case he also analyses the critical role of the ANC Youth League, marginalised in many other respects after the 1994 election. Fisy & Geschiere (in Moore & Sanders) also discuss the role of both colonial and post-colonial state in Cameroon in its use of legal statute to control local communities, of which witchcraft served as an example. Interestingly, in the North East province of South Africa, amongst the socio-economic changes in the community, particularly during the later apartheid years, was an expansion in the number of churches especially of the Zionist and Apostolic variety, a change which Niehaus associates with an escalation in witchcraft beliefs because (a) of the more sharply divided concepts of good and evil in these churches and (b) the population influx caused by apartheid relocation which considerably weakened existing community relations. The latter effectively destroyed traditional mechanisms for limiting the impact of witchcraft accusations, leaving a gap to be readily filled by uncontrolled, vigilante type witch hunting scares.

Adam Ashforth's book is based on a period living with a family in Soweto with which he developed close personal relationships. This has lead to a book that is no less scholarly than the others but which uses numerous examples and anecdotes drawn from family friends, neighbours and other rapporteurs from the local community. He very effectively paints a vivid picture of a dense and established urban society in which belief in witchcraft is extensive and pervasive. In this he confirms, and repeats, the argument in the Introduction to Moore &

Sanders that witchcraft today is a phenomenon of modernity, even of many modernities. As in the other examples reviewed here he also places it centrally in the social milieu of struggle and competition for limited resources in the form of employment, access to education, and material advance through trading and dealing, where it is driven by motives of envy, protection, and propitiousness.

All three books have comprehensive introductory sections, the most perceptive and analytical being by Moore and Sanders; all place the phenomenon of witchcraft and similar occult practices in the contemporary arena of social and economic change, frequently as a result of structural adjustment. Ashforth is somewhat more discursive than the others and his methodology perhaps less rigorous, with phrases like 'Nobody doubts that …' (p.224) or 'Many African Christians … consider …' (p.207) or 'Most people profess …' (p.206) though, having said this, he does set his findings in the wider theoretical context, with a chapter, for instance, on 'Believing and Not Believing in Witchcraft' in which he critically assesses the rationality and modernity aspects. The title of his book is somewhat misleading, however, as there is less on 'violence and democracy' than some readers might be expecting.

The significance of these books for political economists lies partly in their exposure of what is sometimes referred to as the 'occult economy', partly in their frequent reference to socio-economic change associated with 'development' and its global imperatives as key factors in the perpetuation of belief in the supernatural, partly in the interactions between occult practices and the state at local and even national level (both in attempts at civic control in one direction and in influencing political leaders in the other), and partly because of an often seamless overlap with religion which is at times denied and rejected and other

times assimilated and adapted. To the degree that religion in Africa has a political economy dimension, then the amorphous body of belief that comprises traditional religion, magic and witchcraft, cannot be divorced from that discourse. Nor is a discourse of the occult restricted to contemporary Africa. It is apposite to conclude this review with a reminder of the universality of the human propensity to cope with uncertainty via paranormal means, even at the highest political levels, for instance in the regular reference by former US President Reagan and his wife to astrologers to guide their daily actions. Many would say that George Bush's apparent dependence on a literal biblical form of Christianity, and his daily group prayers in the White House, are no more rational, and not so far removed from the world of spirits and mediums studied in the books reviewed here.

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*The Roots of the War on Terrorism and Implications for Both Sides: On Reading Mahmood Mamdani's Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, Cold War and the Roots of Terrorism*, Fountain Publishers, Kampala & E & D Ltd., Dar es Salaam (2004). Reviewed by Tunde Zack-Williams

In this theoretically sound and empirically well-crafted book, Mamdani seeks to address one important question: How did 9/11 happen? His answer is organised into an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion. In the introduction Mamdani analyses the relationship between modernity and violence as well as providing a chronology of the Cold War from an era of proxy war and containment to rollback, in Reagan's war against the 'evil empire'.

In a critique of 'cultural interpretations of politics' or 'Culture Talk', Mamdani

dismisses the dichotomy of 'good' and 'bad' Muslims: the former being secular and westernised and the latter fanatical and pre-modern. In his view, this Manicheanism refers to political rather than cultural or religious identities and is the consequence of a poverty of analysis. In this regard, Mamdani strikes an accord with orthodox Islamists, who reject any notion of 'political Islam', seeing it as a Western construct and a mis-reading of the colonial situation, particularly the events stemming from the emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. For them, Islam and the state are one and the same thing; consequently, there can be no discourse on the separation of state and society.

In order to understand the rise of 'the war against terrorism', Mamdani seeks to explain what he calls 'Islamic terror', which he claims was a marginal phenomenon prior to 9/11, but which has now come to occupy the centre of Islamist politics and Western foreign policies. In rejecting the claims of Cold War triumphalists such as Fukuyama (end of history) and Huntington (clash of civilisations), Mamdani argues that this great shift, which led to 9/11, came out of recent history, particularly the late Cold War (p. 11). For Mamdani, 9/11 was the result of an alliance that turned sour, and which should be understood as the unfinished business of the Cold War. Terrorism as understood here is born out of a political encounter.

Mamdani dates the late-Cold War era to the period from America's humiliating withdrawal from Vietnam in 1974 to the demise of the Soviet Union in 1990. In his view this period was characterised by the following features, which together helped to strengthen political Islam and stimulate the shift towards Islamic terror:

- Proxy low intensity conflicts led by the US, on the one hand, and the

USSR, on the other;

- The overthrow of pro-American dictators in Iran and Nicaragua which the Reagan administration interpreted as a reversal in the wake of the evacuation of Vietnam – and which led to a change of tactics away from super power troop confrontation to proxy wars (e.g. in Mozambique, Angola, the Belgian Congo) embedded in the policy of 'containment';

- The emergence of 'low intensity conflict', which Mamdani identifies as the CIA's euphemism for terrorism. The shift from 'containment' to 'rollback', which demanded the total subordination of all rogue regimes and the declaration of total war against the 'evil empire'.

In Africa this policy of 'roll back' involved:

- Support for corrupt dictators such as Sese Seku Mobutu, and covert support for RENAMO (Africa's first terrorist movement) and the reactionary wings of the Angolan liberation movement, the FLNA and UNITA;

- Stronger collaboration with apartheid South Africa, including the latter's invasion of Angola, and the policy of 'constructive engagement';

- Formal and informal region alliances such as the Safari Club during the Kissinger era, which brought together Egypt, the Shah's Iran, Morocco and Saudi Arabia, facilitating interventions in the Congo, and Somalia.

Mamdani points to how the US embraced terror as it prepared to wage the

Cold War to the finish. But this process was not confined to Africa alone. In his view, there were nine countries earmarked for roll back: Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Iran, Laos, Libya, Nicaragua and Vietnam. He observes that through covert and overt methods the CIA recruited thousands of fighters including Mujahedeen from the countries where 9/11 terrorists came from. In the context of the anti-Soviet campaign in Afghanistan, this meant recruitment from all the four corners of the Muslim world. Furthermore,

> [T]his is the setting in which the United States organised the Afghan jihad and that informed its central objective: to unite a billion Muslims worldwide in a holy war, a crusade, against the Soviet Union, on the soil of Afghanistan (p.128).

For Mamdani, '… the Afghan jihad was in reality an American jihad' (Ibid.).

Mamdani then addresses the big question: How did right-wing Islamism, an ideological tendency with small and scattered numbers before the Afghan war, come to occupy the global centre after 9/11? He points to the Afghan jihad, which provided it with the skills, organisation, confidence and a coherent objective, noting that previously right-wing Islamists never had the aspiration for drawing strength from popular organisation. Above all, the Afghan jihad was funded through Islamic charities. Indeed, this was how al-Qaeda ('The Base'), and its leader Osama bin Laden, got drawn into the movement.

In Mamdani's work we can identify three potential routes to terrorism, which appears likely to occur where there has been:

1) A determined quest to undermine leftist, nationalist projects such as in Mozambique & Nicaragua;

2) The internal degeneration of guerrilla movements such as in Sierra Leone & Liberia;

3) The use of political violence by non-ideological groups, such as by Uganda's Lords Resistance Army.

Not surprisingly, he sees the antidote to the pain of late-Cold-War-triggered-terrorism in a global peace movement consisting of people of all faiths, which could act as a real global civil society, to monitor some of the excesses of the state. Mamdani's global peace movement suggests a way forward for peace, not only in Africa, but also in the Middle East.

However, in my view, a mono-causal explanation is simply an attempt to explain away international terrorism, a phenomenon of global importance. Mamdani's 'Afghan origin of the war against terrorism' thesis ignores important antecedents, namely, the Iranian Islamic Revolution. Indeed, the Soviet debacle in Afghanistan aside, it could be argued that confrontation was inevitable between the two ideological Titans, namely Islamic fundamentalism, on the one hand, and Western Neo-Conservatism laced with Christian fundamentalist dogmas, on the other. The rise of Islamic challenges makes nonsense of the triumphalism of the 'end of history' and 'end of ideology', since the victory seems to have been over Fascism and Soviet state-capitalism.

The end of the Cold War and the need to bolster the military industrial complex necessitates the rallying of citizens in the process of social catharsis and new collective consciousness in a fast moving technologically driven world. The global economic Manicheanism: that of the 'developed land', where Christianity has been appropriated as the official ideology, and the periphery where the vast majority of believers are Muslims, has raised major problems of ideological cohabitation, which some have called a 'clash of civilisations'. Can the war on terrorism be won in a milieu of gross economic, social and political inequalities? This vexatious question has major implications for global security and in particular for law and order, in the periphery. Thus, Danish cartoons and inopportune Papal asides easily triggered inter-faith violence in the periphery, as in Nigeria and Egypt, among others. Whilst Mamdani's 'global peace movement' may help to raise political awareness at the centre, issues such as global poverty, political and social humiliation, must be central to any agenda to end global terrorism.

In conclusion, Mamdani has managed to produce a thought-provoking book, pointing to how foreign intervention can easily produce a monster threatening even the most powerful nation on earth. At a time when debate on the rationale for military intervention in Iraq, and the consequences of such an intervention is so fractious, Mamdani has added a brief but very persuasive angle, which should not be easily dismissed.

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*Civil War is Not a Stupid Thing: Accounting for Violence in Developing Countries* by Christopher Cramer, London: Hurst & Co. (2006). Reviewed by Graham Harrison, University of Sheffield.

In this book, Chris Cramer does more than the title claims. Currently, the main intellectual focus on civil war has been shaped by the research question: 'is civil war caused by greed or grievance?' Driven by the aggregation of proxy indicators of inequality, political struggle, and resource availability, this research is necessarily highly ahistorical, generic, and abstract. In theoretical and case study chapters (on Angola), Cramer both refutes this approach empirically and in

terms of its assumptions about the nature of societies.

So far, so good. Certainly for *ROAPE*'s readership, the ability of orthodox economists to understand civil war in any specific country should appear absurd. But, this is a starting point for some more global arguments about the nature of the relationship violence and capitalism.

Violence is the 'original sin' of the emergence and consolidation of capital's power within societies. The consolidation of property rights, the radical shifting in class relations, the establishing of modern states, and the insertion of societies into global capitalist relations are all processes that involve violence. This violence, Cramer argues, is best understood not as an event but as a spectrum which stretches from low intensity armed criminality to nationally-defined territorial schisms and warlordism. By rejecting the 'civil war-as-an event' perspective, Cramer moves our view of (perhaps protracted) episodes of violence from exceptional to tendential. That is, to say, violence is not an aberration of capitalism; it is one of its constitutive properties.

Cramer is, I think, absolutely right. The country whose history I know best, Mozambique, offers a litany of violent dispossession, coerced taxation and labour, resettlement, and rebellion which are all part of any representative narrative of the emergence of capitalism in that space. Paul Richards' recent work on Sierra Leone/Liberia provides a detailed account which shows how violence is interlinked with development failures and the ideologies that they have generated.

But, the conclusion that Cramer draws from this perspective is an unsettling one. If capitalist development is intrinsically violent, we have to entertain the possibility that violence might be 'progressive', in the sense that it offers a

technique to further a process of accumulation, class formation, the establishing of new forms of market activity, and so on. Violence is not straightforwardly 'development in reverse'; rather it is part of the 'tragic' historical narrative that is most associated with Marxist theories of history. In other words, capitalist development is both about progress and substantial hardship, alienation, and oppression. If this is the case, then conflict resolution becomes a far more complicated process to understand or evaluate. Peace becomes 'war by other means' in which war marketeers, the elites of warring states and warlords, soldier-entrepreneurs, militias and mafias, each are compelled to defend their 'passionate interests' in a context where, formally, war is over.

Here, Cramer highlights how poorly the liberal vision of society and violence make sense of this disposition, played out in so many contexts through sub-Saharan Africa. The highly ideological imagining of conflict resolution as a return to a 'proper' state of affairs in which civic individuals or family farmers return to a market-based and harmonious order does not speak to any of the issues Cramer raises. Rather, for Cramer, the challenge is to recognise that expanding accumulation is necessarily a disruptive and potentially violent process, to map the patterns of accumulation that are being prosecuted in a society, and for states to try to innovate policies which will ensure a peaceabilty – or at least order – to capital formation and then to maximise the social returns from the creation of surplus. This set of challenges represents, in effect, a political economy of the developmental state. If we are to borrow the concept of the developmental state to understand African political economies, it would be better to take these signals about the necessarily unpleasant nature of capitalist development and the importance of an innovative political intervention in processes of accumulation (which might

involve support for a nationally-oriented capitalist class), rather than try to imagine schemes of institutionalist state modelling to be transposed from one world-region to another.

In sum, *Civil War is not a Stupid Thing* effectively makes a substantial argument about violence and capitalism that de-exoticises and historicizes Africa's long and difficult engagement with capitalist social relations. This rigorous and highly readable book tells us that capitalist development in Africa is not best understood as an aberration from a model of 'proper' development (a premise that has sustained a modern history of development aid); rather, Africa's history of development tells us something important about the nature of capitalism itself.

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*Liberal Democracy and its Critics in Africa: Political Dysfunction and the Struggle for Social Progress* by Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo (ed.), London: Zed Books/ Codesria (2005). Reviewed by Rita Abrahamsen, University of Wales, Aberystwyth.

This is a deeply pessimistic book, and its conclusions about democracy's fate in Africa are as disquieting as they are despairing. While acknowledging that democratic institutions and procedures are increasingly becoming the norm on the continent, this group of African scholars paint a picture of continual oppression, blatant vote rigging, pervasive corruption, and general political decline. Indeed, the volume's editor concludes that 'current democratic practice and process have been dysfunctional in Africa' and that liberal democracy has been hijacked by self-interested political elites (p.201). In short, according to these writers, little, if anything, has been gained in terms of freedom and prosperity from

the overthrow of dictatorial regimes. The book consists of nine chapters, including a general introduction and conclusion by the editor. The remaining chapters are single-country case studies, reflecting on various aspects of the democratic process in Algeria, Cameroon, Kenya, the Republic of Congo, Ghana, Nigeria, and the Central African Republic.

Overall, the image that emerges is one of despair and decline. In the case of Algeria, Rachid Tlemcani describes a 'police state', where the 'army remains the only authentic party' in the country (p.35). The transition to democracy, he shows, has meant more security personnel, oppression and social conflict. Joseph-Marie Zambo Belinga's chapter usefully illustrates how political elites in Cameroon have manipulated and instrumentalised ethnicity in order to win or retain power. In the case of both the Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic, democratic liberalisation is also found to have led to a revival of ethnic sentiments and violence, spearheaded by political parties competing for power.

In the CAR, democratisation is described as 'the trigger of implosive, social tensions and the key opening of a Pandora's box of old African evil practices, real or mythical: tribal/regional/ethnic and political conflicts' (p.185). The portrayal of Nigeria is equally bleak, and democracy here is described as 'a mere charade' (p.150). In the case of Ghana's elections in 2000, extensive unfair practices are revealed, despite international observers' declaring them generally 'free and fair'. On the issue of women's participation, Beatrice Onsarigo shows not only the serious lack of women's involvement in decision making, but also the active strategies of male Kenyan politicians to obstruct their empowerment and political awakening, for example by branding the International Federation of Women Lawyers Kenya a campaign to legalise lesbianism and abortion.

Many interesting insights emerge from the case studies. In particular, the three chapters highlighting the revival of ethnic identities can be seen to provide a useful rebuttal to arguments that democracy cannot work in Africa *because* of ethnicity; 'tribalism', as Belinga reminds us, 'is always the sign of something else, the mask of social, political and economic conflicts' (p.47). In other words, the fact that democratic politics has often intensified ethnic rivalries does not mean that it need always be so, as ethnic hatred is frequently the result of irresponsible political action. On the more critical side, many of the case studies are already somewhat dated, relying primarily on material from the 1990s, and given that they do not provide much by way of theoretical contributions, this distracts from the overall value of the volume. There is also at times a dangerous tendency to generalise from one single case study to 'Africa', as when Tlemcani uses Algeria to describe African states as 'police states' and maintains that African democracies are 'karaoke' democracies, where the actors may come and go, but the songs remain the same. Surely, greater attention to specificity and difference is merited. There is also a sense that in their eagerness to critique liberal democracy, any benefit that may have accrued (however small and imperfect) in terms greater accountability and freedom of speech and association have been passed over in silence by the authors. Liberal democracy may not be the panacea for all Africa's ills, but neither is it necessarily their root cause. Finally, the overwhelmingly pessimistic appraisal of democracy of this volume is often couched in the familiar idiom of 'the unsuitability of Western models', calling instead for 'social democracy that genuinely suits our ancestral values, cultures and traditions' (p.42). Disappointingly, the authors have worryingly little to tell us about what such a democracy might look like, and how it might come about.

*Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* by James Ferguson, Durham and London: Duke University Press (2006). Reviewed by Graham Harrison, University of Sheffield.

*Global shadows* is a compelling read. It presents a reflective analysis of the normative and theoretical premises that have arisen in studies of African sociopolitical change over the last twenty years. As such, Ferguson has two positions which he wishes to argue against, one vigorously and the other more moderately. The former is neoliberalism, the latter – less easily delineated – is a melange of post-structuralism and cultural relativism. This is not a book of new anthropological material; rather, Ferguson writes as series of essays which are explicitly ambitious, perhaps employing some writer's license, in order to frame some profound points about the nature of Africa's current 'place-in-the-world' (in Ferguson's phrase) and the ways in which we understand that placing. By-and-large, Ferguson's arguments are refreshing, incisive, and (for this reader) persuasive.

What is Ferguson arguing? Fundamentally, that Africa is neither insufficiently connected to capitalist globalisation, nor that it is traditional or in modern parlance intrinsically different/specific in its socio-cultural foundations. Theories of (neoliberal) convergence and cultural relativism fail to understand the full import of these points because the seminal political question regarding Africa and the political economy of globalisation is the historic failure of modernisation as an international project that shaped all aspects of international involvement in Africa throughout the post Second World War period (with the usual caveats about the hidden agendas that 'development' aid obscured and the self-seeking nature of many Western states which reminded many nationalist and left-wing intellectuals of colonialism). It might seem odd to evoke the idea of modernisa-

tion as a reference which is positively couched. Ferguson's secular work, *The Anti-Politics Machine*, is often referenced alongside the work of James Scott and 'post-development' writers who provide critical renditions of modernisation. Ferguson does not contest this, but salvages something from modernisation which is extremely important. Its importance is most evident in the fact that stating it baldly seems almost embarrassingly obvious: two key components of modernisation are the desirability of a general material improvement in social well-being, and progression towards a more equitable international polity or society of states. As guilty as modernisation perspectives are of ethnocentrism, teleology, and paternalism, it seems equally convincing that the two components mentioned above are immanent to the modernisation tradition and that there are no arguments against the desirability of both of these.

There is a need to be clear here: Ferguson has no need to evoke benevolent external agencies, or a need for more 'education' for Africans, and he certainly has no truck with the World Bank and its intellectual pilot fish. What he does argue in regards to modernisation is that it draws our attention to something historic, material, and of great importance: 'Africans who lament that their life circumstances are not modern enough are not talking about cultural practices. They are speaking instead about what they view as shamefully inadequate socio-economic conditions and their low rank in relation to other places' (p. 186).

This understanding of modernisation is not amenable to the current global project of 'poverty reduction'. The book rails against neoliberalism as a project which has accelerated processes of social decline. Furthermore, the most virile forms of globalisation that have engaged Africa have been socially 'thin', hopping from locale to locale (p. 41), connecting strictly delineated spaces to broader cir-

cuits of investment and trade, the epitome of which is oil extraction investment. Thus, neoliberalism as a development doctrine and more concrete forms of global capital actively produce – in Ferguson's definition – anti-modern and exclusionary social relations: enclaves, militarised boundaries, transnational patrimonialism, and buccaneer investment.

His second adversary, a genre of post-structural anthropology and politics, is engaged with rather than attacked. Here, Ferguson argues that the normatively attractive premise that Africa deserves to be understood with an awareness of the enduring and patronising nature of thinking about Africa which derives from the age of European empire contains within it a liability. This is that a respect for alterity, difference, and relativism draws focus away from the material, and more specifically the massive inequalities between Africa and the West. Ferguson uses two short texts (written by African authors in extremely different circumstances) to make the point that we should both avoid 'victimology' but also recognise that is it not necessarily retrogressive to speak about Africa as victimised. Africa has problems; it is ill-advised to say 'Africa works' and that any identified problems are a result of Western epistemologies that start with eschatology and 'absence'. But, 'Pay attention! Our [Africa's] problems are not ours alone. You [the West] have responsibilities which you must not ignore'. This represents a *claim* on the West, formulated in terms of social justice, not charity, for 'graciousness and solidarity that are, in the West as presently constituted, chillingly absent' (pp. 174-5).

In essence, then, Ferguson's formulation of a failed modernity in Africa is one of a failed globalisation which requires us to think not about 'better aid' or 'debt forgiveness' (both inescapably imperial norms) but of global social justice in a way that has been set out meticulously, and in a sense quite moderately, by

Thomas Pogge (2005). This line of argument is developed eloquently and in a readable fashion. There are a few minor shortcomings that are worth noting if only because they are conspicuous. First – and as the author notes – much of the narrative is quite sweeping. As a reader who 'knows' East Africa, I found the general narrative convincing, but I couldn't help but feel that quite a lot of importance was missing. Indeed, much of the book is focused on Zambia which explains to some extent Ferguson's arguments more generally, bearing in mind Zambia's quite unique and spectacular rise-and-fall of the copper extraction industry. Far less is said about the complex hybridised agrarian social relations that still constitute sub-Saharan Africa's 'masses'. And, it is very much a collection of essays, some of which have been published in modified form elsewhere – which does detract focus on the important points the book develops (I found this especially in regards to the chapter on the short life of a Zambian political magazine).

Finally, there is no conclusion. Instead, each essay has a short conclusion of its own and there is no drawing together and reflecting on the important points made throughout. The provisional comments on Iraq seemed rather awkwardly placed at the end of the final essay.

James Ferguson should be congratulated for bring material issues of social well-being to the fore, premised on norms of universality and justice. Judicious, authoritative, and committed, it should be read by all.

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### Endnote

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