Post-war Ethiopia: The Trajectories of Crisis

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This article addresses current crises of governance in Ethiopia. Internal conflicts within the ruling coalition arise from its origins in a localised insurgency and its flawed capacity to create a broader political base. In the national context, particularly in the major towns, it rules only by effective force and not through dialogue or negotiation. A policy of ethnic federalism promised devolution of powers to local areas, but founders on the difficulty of reconciling autonomous systems of power and authority within a common political structure. Internationally, Ethiopia has had considerable success, presenting itself as a model of ‘good governance’ with donor approval. Having accepted the basic tenets of neoliberalism, it also backed the ‘global war on terror’, giving it scope to promote its own agenda, with US backing, in Somalia. Its cardinal problem remains the management of diversity and opposition.

Introduction

Crises of governance in Ethiopia are embedded in the long uneven history of the Ethiopian state itself, and its place within a highly conflictual regional political arena, in which Ethiopia holds a central position. The crises that beset the ruling political coalition (the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front, EPRDF) of Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia, after the apparently triumphant conclusion to its border war against Eritrea in May 2000, were only partially of its own making. This is not the place to delve into deeply contested histories, but it is at least necessary to place the developments that led to the impasse so apparent by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century in their broader context. This impasse was not merely the outcome of failed democratisation, or human rights abuse, or even indeed poverty, but was, rather, the latest expression of much deeper problems that derive from the inherent contradictions of state creation and maintenance in a perennially violent corner of Africa.

Most basically, the conflicts that have long structured Ethiopian politics result from the incompatibility between a particular conception of the state – which itself springs from the peculiarly hierarchical and authoritarian notions of governance associated with the cultures and societies of the northern Ethiopian plateau – and the numerous ethnic, cultural, class and economic elements that could scarcely be accommodated within this concept of governance, and the interests that upheld it. Throughout the history of modern Ethiopia, the resulting tensions have had to be managed, through some combination of force (which has always been essential to hold the state together) and political dexterity, in devising formulae through which the underlying divisions...
of an extremely varied society could be held in some kind of check. Ruling Ethiopia
has never been easy.

The EPRDF itself came to power in 1991, in the wake of the collapse of the previous
formula developed by the Derg regime of Mengistu Haile Maryam, a formula which
at the outset in the mid-1970s appeared to offer a solution to the contradictions that
had led inexorably to the failure of its own imperial predecessor. In an analysis
widely shared by the Ethiopian student intellectuals of the 1960s and early 1970s, a
generation of which the future EPRDF leadership itself formed part, the Derg and
its supporters believed that Ethiopia’s problems centrally derived from a history of
economic exploitation that was most clearly expressed in the alienation of land in
large areas of Ethiopia by the members of a ‘feudal’ class, which had profited from
its role in the conquest of much of the country’s current territory during the second
half of the nineteenth century. Once this process was reversed, by nationalising land
and vesting its control in peasants’ associations drawn from the local population,
the central contradictions of Ethiopian statehood would be removed, and it would
be possible for peoples freed from exploitation to build a united Ethiopia under a
socialist and also nationalist government.

This essentially Jacobin project, in which social equality would lead to national unity,
was destroyed most basically by its incapacity to make any concessions to those who,
notably in Eritrea, were already contesting the territorial structure of the state itself.
Add to that its ruthless centralism, the rapid undermining of the local autonomy
that the initial land reform had promised, the inevitable failure of its Soviet-inspired
commitment to centrally planned economic development, and the ever-increasing
burden, human and economic, imposed by never-ending wars, and its eventual col-
lapse was assured. The alternative project embraced by the Tigrayan People’s Liber-
ation Front (TPLF), always the predominant element in the EPRDF which it formed
as victory approached, nonetheless drew on significant elements common to all of
the Marxist revolutionaries of the 1970s, adapted in the light of their own situation,
and of a global constellation of forces dramatically different from that which had
prevailed when the Derg was formed.

Central to the TPLF vision of Ethiopia was Stalin’s theory of ‘nationality’, which
accorded far greater prominence to the ‘national question’ than the Derg had ever
done – appropriately enough for a movement heavily based in Tigray, which
sought to create an alliance with other regional forces that were likewise opposed to
the ruthless centralism of the Derg. Apart from recognising Eritrea’s right to indepen-
dence – the essential requirement for ending the most debilitating of all Ethiopia’s
wars – this also encompassed the right of every ‘nation, nationality, and people’
within Ethiopia to ‘self-determination’, explicitly extending not just to internal self-
government, but to a right of secession from Ethiopia itself. But in making the national
question, rather than the land question, the key to the resolution of Ethiopia’s internal
difficulties, the TPLF/EPRDF regime still shared with its predecessor the conviction
that the problems of nationality in Ethiopia were essentially superstructural, and
that the removal of the basis for discrimination by one group against others would
in turn remove any valid source of separatism, and make possible the maintenance
of a single Ethiopian state, not as rigidly centralised and nationalist as the Derg envis-
saged, but whose peoples were nonetheless capable of living harmoniously together.

Added to this was the recognition of both a capitalist economy and the elements
of global liberalism that were imposed by the need to reposition Ethiopia within a
transformed global order, difficult though these were to combine with an internal political structure that was still conceived by Meles Zenawi and his colleagues in essentially Leninist terms. The intense and peculiar legacy of long guerrilla struggle, guided by a Maoist conception of liberation war, has in practice proved virtually impossible to reconcile with liberal ideologies. That the pretence could be sustained for so long, before the regime’s fundamental illiberalism became all too apparent in the aftermath of the 2005 elections, was due in very large measure to the leadership of Meles Zenawi—a man of extraordinary intellectual ability, great personal charm, tactical astuteness, and a capacity to appeal especially to international constituencies which were themselves looking for African ‘success stories’ to justify their own vision of liberal ‘good governance’. This collection of abilities was rendered all the more striking by the contrast with his opposite number, Isaias Afwerki in Eritrea. The fact that, unlike the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF), the EPRDF took over a sophisticated and well-established state apparatus was also a considerable benefit.

Even though opposition was never absent, the EPRDF regime could plausibly claim, in its early years, to have brought all the disparate elements in Ethiopia’s composition together into some broadly sustainable harmony. For the first time in decades, the country was at peace. The previously alienated peoples of the peripheries were given a level of autonomy that they had never previously possessed, and despite the disgruntlement both of central Ethiopian nationalists on the one hand, and many of Ethiopia’s largest ethnic group, the Oromo, on the other, a reasonably manageable balance between the country’s tradition of centralised statehood and the representation of its disparate peoples was achieved. The abandonment of the Derg’s counterproductive attempt to run a centrally planned economy, and the adoption (to the extent that a movement still deeply imbued with Marxist thinking could do so) of a capitalist economic model, helped to create evident though still modest economic progress. Political space was opened to a dramatically greater extent than ever before in Ethiopia’s history, with the establishment for the first time of an independent press, and other trappings of an expanded civil society. Most strikingly of all, Ethiopia’s international standing was transformed from near pariah status into a favoured position in the new global order, notably among aid donors for whom the new government’s apparent honesty, efficiency and dedication especially to transforming the lives of the rural masses chimed precisely with their own agendas.

The unravelling of this dispensation derives in large measure from the difficulties of controlling, and holding together, the four key arenas within which the regime had to operate. These are (1) the internal arena of the regime itself; (2) the central or national arena represented especially by the major towns, and the adherents of Ethiopian nationalism; (3) the arena of the ‘nationalities’, or of peoples within Ethiopia seeking to exercise both a measure of local autonomy, and a position within the central state commensurate with their importance; and (4) an international arena which – as during the Cold War, but in a rather different way – linked the perennial conflicts of the Horn to global agendas. Although there were evident linkages between these arenas, it is most convenient to examine each in turn.

**Controlling the Regime**

Given the unquestioned brilliance of Ethiopia’s prime minister – a leading British economist described Meles Zenawi to me as having an intellect to match that of
the three Nobel Prize winners whom he knew – it may seem carping to start by identifying problems at the very core of the EPRDF leadership. Yet alongside the extraordinary abilities that Meles has brought to the leadership of Ethiopia, there have also been weaknesses that account at least in some part for the problems of his regime. Chief among these is an exceptional level of isolation, which comes close to matching that of medieval emperors who were ritually secluded, and communicated with their subjects through a curtain. At all events, the openness that Meles shows towards distinguished foreigners, on whom he exercises his abilities at their most dazzling, have never been matched by any communication with Ethiopians, beyond the small group of surviving comrades from the long struggle of the TPLF. Apart from occasional visits to the Tigrayan capital of Mekelle, essential to maintaining his home base, he is very rarely seen in Ethiopia, outside the party and government headquarters at Arat Kilo in Addis Ababa. The headquarters itself is sealed off from ordinary Ethiopians, and even stopping a private car outside it excites the suspicion of its guards. The contrast with emperor Haile Selassie, who was constantly on visits around the country and could often be seen taking an afternoon drive through Addis Ababa, is striking; even Mengistu Haile Maryam, himself generally immured within the fortress of Arat Kilo, took more frequent trips to different parts of the country, and appeared in public on occasions such as the Revolution Day parade.

This isolation was most strikingly illustrated by the Prime Minister’s failure to take any part whatever in the 2005 elections, an occasion which in any normal democracy would see the national leader engaged in non-stop campaigning. At no point does Meles appear to have recognised that elections even at their most artificial provide a mechanism through which to foster and reinforce the linkages between the government and those on whose behalf it claims to govern. Leadership isolation can also plausibly be regarded as lying at the base of other notable examples of political failure: the failure, for example, to anticipate the Eritrean attack on Badme in May 1998 which precipitated the two-year war that followed; the disastrous decision to accept the Algiers accord on December 2000 that committed Ethiopia to honour the demarcation of the frontier with Eritrea arrived at by the Boundary Commission; and indeed the failure to take discreet administrative actions through which it could undoubtedly have ensured that the results of the 2005 election went in its favour, without necessitating the falsification of the results once these had gone against it.1 Skilled political leadership, in short, requires a process of constant interaction with other players, and in this respect the EPRDF leadership has been badly lacking.

The TPLF, based as it was in the small, poor, distant and historically distinctive region of Tigray, always provided an inadequate platform from which to govern a country as large and diverse as Ethiopia, and its difficulties were compounded by sharp divisions even within the central core of the TPLF itself, which became apparent in the split of early 2001. The combination of longstanding personal rivalries, ideological disagreements and different approaches to the 1998–2000 war that eventually brought internal conflict into the open is explored at greater length by Lovise Aalen and Kjetil Tronvoll elsewhere in this issue. Although the Meles faction eventually came out on top, the split revealed the weakness at the heart of the government, and reduced the impression of authority and permanence that is central to maintaining power in Ethiopia. But the deeper lesson is that Ethiopian hierarchies are rarely as solid as they appear to be. They are characteristically held together, not by solid ties of loyalty and belief, but by pragmatic considerations of obedience, within a system in which open disagreement is extremely difficult to distinguish from rebellion, and
in which the external appearance of uniformity can instantly be shattered once circumstances arise that make rebellion seem a practicable option. Even though one group of internal dissidents has now been exposed and suppressed, other factions may well be waiting to declare themselves.

A further weakness of the regime lies in the extreme fragility of its political organisation, beyond the original core in Tigray. The ‘people’s democratic organisations’ or PDOs, established as the TPLF’s alliance partners within the EPRDF, have proved to be no more than a shallow façade, dependent entirely on government patronage, and possessing no indigenous political base. Originally formed in most cases from prisoners of war from the Derg armies captured by the TPLF – and hence drawn from the ranks of generally ill-educated conscripts – they were later reconstituted with a local-level leadership characteristically of secondary school leavers with low-level government jobs, schoolteachers prominent among them. Any opportunity that they might have had to develop into a cadre of local political organisers, capable of generating support within their home communities and linking this to the regional and national governments, was undermined by the broader problems of the EPRDF’s treatment of non-Tigrayan nationalities (and especially the largest of them, the Oromo), its complete inability to develop any ethos of bargaining or negotiation within the governing coalition itself, and the knock-on effects of its own internal divisions. The prominent role of the TPLF leader primarily responsible for developing the PDOs within the Southern region in the dissident group which attempted to oust Meles Zenawi in 2001, for example, meant that all of his appointees came under suspicion and many of them were purged. Throughout the PDOs, constant changes of leadership orchestrated from above prevented any local leader from establishing a position of authority amongst his own people, and in the process deprived the government as a whole of the political organisation that it needed. Although the government has made some attempt to revive the party structure, following the 2005 election debacle, its dependence on state power to maintain an appearance of popular support, rather than on popular support to maintain state power, is now even greater than ever.

Controlling the Political Centre

On coming to power in 1991, the TPLF faced the immediate problem – common to any guerrilla movement that seizes control of a national government – of taking over the state apparatus against which it had been fighting for the previous decade and a half. On the whole, it managed this problem extremely well. It inherited a generally disciplined and efficient government bureaucracy, with an underlying commitment to Ethiopian statehood, which had grown disillusioned with the Derg regime and, despite misgivings about both the TPLF’s apparent ideological leanings and its commitment to a level of autonomy for Ethiopia’s constituent nationalities that the bureaucracy generally did not share, was prepared to work with its successor. The Derg’s army was disbanded (and replaced by that of the TPLF), and the leading members of the old regime were imprisoned and faced trials, which have been endlessly delayed, but most of the administration carried on as before.

The TPLF for its part was generally prepared to make the changes necessary to transform itself from a regional insurgency into the government of a national state. The Tigray region from which it came formed part – albeit an outlying and often dissident part – of ‘historic’ Ethiopia, and its own early toying with a secessionist agenda had
rapidly been abandoned. Meles Zenawi, in this as in other respects, appreciated the changes that this transformation would require, and took steps to implement them. Those leading members of the TPLF who were reluctant to accept either the shift from socialism to economic liberalism or that from regional guerrilla to national government, were for the most part despatched back to Tigray – a decision that was to have counter-productive consequences, both in helping to foment the war with Eritrea (which although precipitated by the Eritrean occupation of Badme, was undoubtedly fomented in some degree by the actions of local TPLF cadres), and in providing TPLF dissidents with a base from which to plot against Meles himself. Despite the continuing sense that this was in essence a Tigrayan regime, it came increasingly to behave like a national government.

The Eritrean war of 1998 should then have provided the regime with an opportunity to marry its regional base to the wider representation of a sense of Ethiopian nationhood and territoriality – the extent of which, in the immediate aftermath of the Eritrean occupation of Badme, seems to have taken it completely by surprise. But although the war was widely supported – not least by those who had been most sceptical about the close relations between the EPRDF Government and its Eritrean counterpart in the years immediately after 1991, and most regretful of the loss of Eritrea – it did not extend the government’s own political base. This was not least because the government itself made no attempt to use it to do so. Its decision-making remained tightly locked within the inner circle of the TPLF, where it only subsequently transpired that intensely contested issues had been fought out between the different factions. The war itself was fought almost entirely in Tigray, and the sense remained that it was in essence a settling of scores between the two insurgent movements – the TPLF and EPLF – which had maintained often fraught relations even during the period when they had both been fighting against the Derg.

In ideological terms, the war demonstrated the continued existence in Ethiopia of a nationalist constituency that had largely been overlooked by a government that itself tended to conceive the country as a loosely linked collection of ‘nationalities’. Despite being routinely disparaged by government supporters as mere ‘Amhara chauvinists’, there are evidently a significant number of Ethiopians, especially, but by no means entirely, Amharas, who view their identity essentially as Ethiopian. As in other African countries, migration and intermarriage have helped to generate interests in the maintenance of a single political structure; and at the same time as ethnic federalism has provided employment and a sense of belonging to educated individuals from previously disadvantaged groups, so it has also disadvantageous people who found themselves outside their ‘own’ ethnic territory, or who had an interest in being able to live and work in different parts of the country.

The control of the centre amounts in physical terms to the control of the towns, and especially Addis Ababa, a problem that has become much more difficult to manage because of the explosion of urban complexity and political space, represented by a more diverse, less state-controlled economy, a reasonably free press, and a deeply alienated intelligentsia. Ultimately, these are forces that need to be managed, and cannot simply be suppressed, and the extraordinary level of urban support for the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) in the 2005 elections strikingly illustrates the regime’s failure to capture this constituency, and its consequent need to use force in order to ensure its acquiescence – a failure that renders it immediately vulnerable to any upsurge of urban violence, of the kind that can easily be triggered by apparently trivial causes, and that a stretched security force is unable to control.
Controlling the Peripheries

The control of the peripheries should have been, and to some extent indeed proved to be, an easier task than controlling the centre. The EPRDF regime itself came from one of Ethiopia’s most distant peripheries, in geographical if not social terms, and its own outlook was heavily influenced by years of resistance to an overbearing central state. Moreover, it had something of great importance to offer peripheries throughout Ethiopia: a level of regional autonomy that these had never previously possessed, and which promised (and again to some extent provided) a sense of regional ownership and representation previously unknown outside the provinces of the central highland core. To have a government in Konso or Welayta that was visibly run by Konsos and Welaytas was a revolutionary change in Ethiopian politics, and one which, like the land reform of 1975, established a new and for many purposes irreversible transformation in the relationship between people and the state. That policies were still to a very large extent made in Addis Ababa for local implementation, and that the constitutional guarantee of a right of secession was more apparent than real, did not at least initially matter anything like so much as the change in the visible appearance of government on the ground.

Just as with the honeymoon period that immediately followed the Derg’s land reform, however, the EPRDF’s programme of ethnic federalism necessarily provided less than it promised, and came up against the contradiction between local autonomy and central power that was inherent in both projects. At one level, this was the same contradiction as that involved in the TPLF’s own transformation from regional insurgency to central government. Things simply looked different from the centre, and in taking over the state apparatus, the new regime likewise took over many of the attitudes that went with it. It soon became clear that regional autonomy was, just as in the Stalinist model that the EPRDF adopted, subordinated to a monolithic party-state. The EPRDF proved entirely incapable of recognising the legitimacy of any regional or ethnic movement that was not under its own control, or of according any such movement an autonomous role in the government even of the most insignificant local arena. Insofar as the idea of federalism necessarily involves the recognition of alternative foci of power and authority, and the development of mechanisms through which to resolve the inevitable differences that arise from diversity, the EPRDF was never at heart a federal regime at all.

There were also, of course, problems inherent in the project of ethnic federalism itself, notably in the creation of internal frontiers separating peoples of different nationalities, which imposed sharp divisions. In turn, they signified the ‘ownership’ of territory by the nationality to which it was ascribed – in place of the fluid boundaries through which different peoples had historically accommodated themselves to one another, for example, along the ecological interface between pastoralists and agriculturalists. When the new regions were themselves multiethnic, most obviously in Gambela with its fraught relations between Anuak and Nuer, the fact that regional government now represented a prize worth winning intensified internal conflicts of a kind that are familiar throughout post-colonial Africa. Equally, however, there were occasions, as with the separation of the Silte people from the Gurages with whom they had initially been associated, where it was possible to manage differences through a process of democratic consultation.

Nonetheless, it was in the Southern Region, which included both Siltes and Gurages, that the political failures of the regime were most apparent. This was a large area that
appeared to present the easiest of constituencies for the EPRDF. Given its history of subjection to heavy-handed and often brutally exploitative central rule, it had everything to gain from local autonomy. At the same time, none of the individual peoples within it had any plausible basis on which to claim independence from Ethiopia. Indeed, they had every reason to make common cause with the ‘historic’ Ethiopian nationalities against the threat presented by Oromo nationalism. The Gurages, who provided a disproportionate share of Ethiopia’s business class, could be expected to promote a nationalist agenda, and mostly supported the CUD. Yet even these relatively small and unthreatening groups soon discovered the limits to the EPRDF promise of autonomy. The fact that one of the first and most persistent opposition politicians, Beyene Petros, hailed from Hadiya, and understandably attracted support from his own home constituency, provided an early example of the regime’s inability to accommodate difference.2 However, the most extreme case was the brutal suppression, by heavy machinegun fire, of a peaceful and unarmed demonstration in May 2002, of Sidaama people protesting against a change – imposed without any consultation – in the status of the city of Awassa, from being within the Sidaama zone to becoming a separate capital city for the Southern Region as a whole. A regime incapable of managing an issue of this type without resorting to violence lacks political skills of the most basic kind.

The programme of ethnic federalism also raised, in a far more acute form than hitherto, the problem of the status of the Oromo, Ethiopia’s largest, most diverse, and most centrally located nationality. It entailed the creation of a single Oromia State, in place of the previous structure under which Oromos had been scattered amongst the great majority of the country’s regions, almost all of which also included substantial populations of other peoples. The greatly enhanced sense of ethnic identity that this promoted could only be intensified by the inevitable denial of the level of autonomy that Oromos were formally guaranteed. The EPRDF satellite party that nominally represented the Oromo, the Oromo People’s Democratic Organisation (OPDO), was even more of a fiction than most of its equivalents elsewhere. The periodic imprisonment of Oromo intellectuals, and violent suppression of anti-regime demonstrations in Oromia, although not approaching the murderous brutality of the Derg, are nonetheless reminiscent of the treatment of dissent under Haile Selassie. Any political movement or faction that sought to represent local Oromo aspirations, including elements in OPDO itself and the two opposition parties that contested Oromo constituencies in the 2005 elections, was instantly suspected of association with the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which after a short period of cohabitation with the EPRDF in the early 1990s had gone into opposition and exile, and which retained the residual loyalty of a high proportion of Oromos. The ineffectiveness of the OLF’s attempts to launch guerrilla warfare against the regime, infiltrating from Sudan into western Oromia with Eritrean support, appears to have done little to undermine this support, even though there is not, so far as it can be judged, any significant Oromo demand – in Oromia itself, rather than among the diaspora community – for secession from Ethiopia, and the problems of running an independent Oromo state would be insuperable.

The central problem in managing diversity, which derives from Ethiopian political culture and is not only a feature of the EPRDF regime, lies in the difficulty of creating the mechanisms through which to reconcile autonomous systems of power and authority within a common political structure. While Ethiopian nationalists decry the balkanisation of Africa’s only surviving historically independent state, and look apprehensively to the fate of the EPRDF’s Soviet model, the representatives of
excluded nationalities (and especially of the Oromo) point to the regime’s failure to implement its own policy.

## Controlling the International Arena

If there is one arena within which the EPRDF regime has been unquestionably brilliant, it has been its management of the international system. It rapidly succeeded in placing Ethiopia in a highly advantageous position within the global and continental networks that emerged in the aftermath of the Cold War, and using this position both to become a favoured recipient of international aid, and to pursue its own regional and domestic political agendas. Some of this reflected the abilities of Meles Zenawi himself: his intelligence, charm, accessibility to influential foreigners, and ability to recognise and respond to developments in the international system. It was also greatly helped by the long-established diplomatic capacities of the Ethiopian state apparatus, and its ability to present its own interests as the answers to other actors’ problems: administratively, it appeared to represent a model of ‘good governance’; its economic policy was geared to rural development and poverty alleviation, in accordance with donor priorities; it sought stability within the region, and placed Ethiopia in its accustomed position at the core of continental diplomacy; and it swiftly signed up to the ‘global war on terror’, which at the same time gave it scope to promote its own agenda, with US backing, in Somalia. The contrast between this success and the churlish unpleasantness of the Isaias Afewerki regime in Asmara, and the total incapacity of Eritrean diplomacy, was simply embarrassing. This in turn enabled it to survive, almost unscathed, the effective rejection of the Boundary Commission’s decision on the frontier between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Although Ethiopia did not quite become a ‘donors’ darling’, such as Ghana, Rwanda or Uganda, it nonetheless received sharply increased levels of foreign aid after the EPRDF came to power, largely because it could make a very convincing case for local ‘ownership’ of policies directed towards rural development, which chimed very closely with donors’ own priorities. Even so, a high proportion of external aid (32 per cent in 2004/05) continued to be directed towards emergency assistance. In this respect as in others, the regime was characteristically adept at pursuing its own interests and ideological commitments, while presenting these in terms that donors could accept. The key limitations on full acceptance of the ‘Washington consensus’ were first the maintenance of state ownership of land, and second the promotion, under the façade of liberalisation, of nominally private corporations that were owned by constituent parties of the governing EPRDF, and especially by the TPLF. These devices obviously helped to maintain state control over the peasantry.

However, even in this sphere the regime has lost a great deal of its leverage, largely as a result of its own mistakes, rather than of any deeper causes arising from the international system. Its acceptance of the Algiers Agreement, which placed in jeopardy the gains from victory in the bitter war against Eritrea, was a remarkable piece of diplomatic ineptitude that could only have resulted from overweening self-confidence. Still more damaging was the failure to ‘manage’ the 2005 elections, in ways that would undoubtedly have enabled it to win them, while appearing to respect the norms of multiparty democracy to which the donor community was committed. Once it became clear that the EPRDF was in imminent danger of losing, the falsification of the election results and the brutal suppression of dissent that followed, had a
hugely damaging effect on perceptions of the regime in the donor community, quite apart from the actual loss of aid that followed.

The Somali imbroglio similarly illustrated both the strengths and weaknesses of the regime’s diplomacy, and demonstrated the close linkages between its domestic, regional and global policies. The situation in which the EPRDF came to power in 1991, just a few months after the flight of Siyad Barre and the total collapse of the Somali state, had been uniquely favourable to the management of Ethiopia’s perennial problems with its south-eastern periphery. Ethiopia tacitly supported the breakaway of former British Somaliland to form the Republic of Somaliland (although formal recognition was diplomatically out of the question), while the creation of a Somali region within Ethiopia itself provided ample opportunities for manipulating the divisions between local clans. Although the region could never be entirely pacified, its internal politics prompted conflict between the Ogaden clan, substantially the largest in the region, and all of the smaller clans which could be mobilised against it. In southern Somalia, the Ethiopian Government established its usefulness to the United States during the ill-fated ‘Operation Restore Hope’, and thereafter pursued classically manipulative policies designed both to neutralise the Islamist elements within Somalia, and to protect its own territory.

The advent of the ‘global war on terror’ dramatically raised the stakes. Al-Qaeda attacks on the United States in the region, notably the Nairobi and Dar es Salaam embassy bombings and the attack on the USS Cole at Aden, preceded the events of 11 September 2001, and – together with the absence of government in Somalia, which thus appeared as an ungoverned space analogous to Afghanistan – turned the Horn into an arena secondary only to west/central Asia as a potential source of Islamist militancy. Initially, this could only be beneficial to the Ethiopian regime, which could present itself as a force for stability in the region. It was particularly valuable in insulating Ethiopia, especially against the possible loss of US support, in the aftermath of the refusal to implement the Boundary Commission findings, and the 2005 election.

However, in the longer term the impact has been much more problematic, especially with the emergence of a credible Islamist movement, the Organisation of Islamic Courts (OIC), in southern Somalia. This rapidly gained support in the latter half of 2006, taking over control of most of the country, and in the process creating a level of domestic order that Somalis had not enjoyed for decades. The problem was that such a movement could only maintain its momentum, in gathering support from a deeply fractured Somali society, by combining its Islamist appeal (necessarily the source of deep suspicions, globally as well as regionally) with the revival of Somali nationalist claims on south-east Ethiopia. No way could such a movement have stopped at the frontier, and its brutal and initially effective suppression by the Ethiopian army late in 2006 was prompted every bit as much by Ethiopian state interests as by tacit US support. Having intervened, however, the Ethiopian army then found itself (like Western militaries in Iraq and Afghanistan) in the classic tar-baby dilemma, where every attempt to attack the problem led to its being still more firmly stuck to it. While the Ethiopian military presence in Somalia is clearly unsustainable, and its costs in terms of human welfare have been appalling, the alternatives are fraught with danger for the Ethiopian state.

Indeed, the regime’s international standing has been less badly affected than its domestic position. It retains its status as a key regional ally of the United States, although
this will certainly be endangered by the advent of a Democratic administration in the US, with a reduced emphasis on security considerations, and a potentially less sympathetic Africa policy team in the Department of State. Its reputation in Africa has been largely unaffected, not least because of the loathing that Eritrea attracts elsewhere on the continent, as a result of its own diplomatic ineptitude and the stigma (in African eyes) of having broken the taboo on breaching the territorial integrity of existing African states by which AU members hold such store. Ethiopia, like other African states, can also to some extent look to China to offset the loss of Western support, and Chinese-Ethiopian trade is burgeoning. Nonetheless, it has suffered needless damage.

Conclusion

As a result of the failure of its political management skills, the EPRDF regime has been obliged to depend ever more heavily on its control of the armed forces, the reliability of which I am in no position to assess. Although it faces no immediate threat of overthrow by rurally-based guerrillas, and has so far been able to cope with the rather ineffectual insurgencies that have been launched against it, it is extremely vulnerable to the difficulty of maintaining control over the towns. It is there, like the Haile Selassie regime, rather than in the countryside, like the Mengistu one, that it is most endangered – especially if, as happened in 1974, any significant section of the security apparatus sides with the opposition. Like those two regimes during the period immediately preceding their own collapse, it is in danger of losing its status as mengist, or the automatic obedience that governments habitually receive in Ethiopia from large parts of the population, simply because they are perceived as having power. Once this happens, then people have to consider other potential outcomes, and are correspondingly encouraged to set about trying to create them.

Similarly, it is clear that the solution to the complex problems of governing Ethiopia that the EPRDF regime sought to implement has now failed to establish itself. Although the system of ethnic federalism, like the party-state established by the Derg, has made important changes to Ethiopian governance that will survive the regime itself, the present political framework is so dependent on the regime that created it that its survival is unlikely. This, in turn, is partly for structural reasons – because these are inherently difficult problems, aggravated by deeply entrenched elements in Ethiopian mentalities – but also partly because the regime itself has manifestly failed to create the political mechanisms that were essential to assure the success of its own programme.

The deeper problem facing Ethiopia is that it is now too complex and diverse a society to be managed without the extremely adept deployment of the political skills – of discussion, bargaining, compromise and simultaneous recognition of alternative sources of authority – that are needed to create some kind of workable synthesis of the different elements of which it is composed. Regardless of the immediate ability of the government to maintain itself in power by force, this is not a viable option for long-term governance. However, such political management is something at which Ethiopians have historically been very bad indeed. The country is certainly changing, and important and unprecedented developments, including the development of civil society organisations and the creation of effective opposition political parties, have taken place in recent years. Whether these can in turn promote the changes in habits of governance that are needed for the management of diversity remains uncertain.
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Endnotes

1. A fascinating case study of the elections in two rural communities in northern Shoa, René Lefort, The May 2005 elections in rural Ethiopia, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 45 (2), June 2007, shows clearly how the election at least in this area was lost as a result of government neglect.

The End of Democracy? Curtailing Political and Civil Rights in Ethiopia

Lovise Aalen & Kjetil Tronvoll

This article assesses political developments in Ethiopia after its 2005 federal and regional watershed elections. Although an unprecedented liberalisation took place ahead of the contested and controversial 2005 polls, a crack-down occurred in the wake of the elections, when the opposition was neutralised. Subsequently, the government rolled out a deliberate plan to prevent any future large-scale protest against their grip on power by establishing an elaborate administrative structure of control, developing new legislative instruments of suppression and, finally, curbing any electoral opposition as seen in the conduct of the 2008 local elections. As a result, Ethiopia has by 2008 returned firmly into the camp of authoritarian regimes.

Introduction

In which direction is Ethiopia moving: towards more democracy or more authoritarianism? This article analyses political development in Ethiopia in the aftermath of the 2005 elections. Drawing on certain key political events, with emphasis on the process of democratisation and liberalisation, the article casts light on the dismal return of authoritarianism.

Between 2000 and 2008, regular elections were conducted in Ethiopia, but the hegemony of the ruling Ethiopian People’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) has not been fundamentally challenged. Throughout this period, the human rights situation has remained fragile, and an increase of reported violations has been observed (Tronvoll 2008). Supported by a growing body of literature on electoral authoritarian regimes (Diamond 2002, Lindberg 2006, Ottaway 2003, Schedler 2006) Ethiopia is seen as a case which demonstrates how elections can be instruments of political control rather than devices of liberalisation. As pointed out by Snyder (2006), elections in authoritarian states must be analysed within a broader conceptual framework: the political consequences of elections is not a given (i.e. support to long-term democratisation), but depend on the interaction with a range of extra-electoral factors, which in the end determine whether elections are supportive of democracy or authoritarianism.

The elections taking place immediately after the Ethiopian-Eritrean war (the general elections of 2000 and the local elections of 2001) followed essentially the same pattern as previous polls under the EPRDF since 1991. The ruling party won a large majority of the vote by using oppressive means to control the electorate and the prevention of the opposition taking part on a level playing field (Pausewang et al.
However, in the 2005 general election, the positive conduct of campaigns and polling initially indicated that a fundamental change was taking place in Ethiopian political culture, because apparently there was a new acceptance for displaying public political dissent – an observation that led some scholars to label the elections as ‘founding’, ‘formative’ and ‘genuine’ for true democracy in Ethiopia (Clapham 2005, Harbeson 2005, Lyons 2006). However, the aftermath of the elections, with the excessive clampdown on the political opposition and civil society, coupled with the launch of new and repressive laws and the expansion of local structures of control and coercion, all demonstrated that the outcome of the 2005 elections was not more democracy, but more authoritarianism. In all aspects, the opening up in 2005 was just a liberalisation intermezzo in EPRDF’s continuous efforts to stay in power. The conduct of the process of democratisation mirrors the internal crackdown on dissent in the aftermath of the Eritrean war within the government party (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003). As such, the elimination of dissenters from TPLF/EPRDF in 2001 can be seen as a precursor to what took place at a national level after the 2005 elections.

This article, presents the step-by-step closing of political space since 2005: the immediate clampdown on opposition and civil society after the 2005 elections; the continuous structural suppression through the maintenance and development of local administrative structures of control; and the legalistic restraints through the drafting and ratification of new restrictive laws. Finally, the manner in which opposition was stifled in the April 2008 local elections is a strong indicator of an incumbent whose objective is to sustain full control. Another opposition party that played a role in the campaign and in the polls was the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM), with a constituency in Western part of Oromia, the largest region of the country.

The closing of political space since 2005 is likely to increase the potential for violent conflicts in the future, particularly in the run up to the general elections of 2010. As options for a peaceful political struggle are undermined, the opposition may look for alternative strategies to articulate their political platforms; one such avenue may be violent resistance. The current closure of space in the country may thus have a severely destabilising effect in the long run, and may ultimately challenge EPRDF’s ability to remain in power.

The 2005 Post-election Clampdown

In the run-up to the 2005 elections to the national and regional parliaments, the electorate saw the emergence of two party coalitions that tried to mobilise the voters against the ruling party coalition, the EPRDF. These two coalitions, the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) and the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), were established on the foundations of political parties that had participated in the previous elections, but appeared also to represent new trends and alignments. The CUD, in particular, tried to present itself as the first real non-ethnic, national alternative in Ethiopian politics since EPRDF came to power in 1991. However, one of the four parties in the coalition, the All Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP, previously known as AAPO), is the direct successor of the first Amhara party in the country, and carries with it the heritage of the Amhara-based opposition. The UEDF was established at a conference in Washington DC in 2003 with the aim of creating a common front against the ruling party for the upcoming elections. It included the majority of the larger ethnic based parties within Ethiopia, but also included pan-Ethiopian opposition parties in the diaspora. The All Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP) and United
Ethiopian Democratic Party-Medhin (UEDP-Medhin) withdrew from the front due to disagreements, and later joined the CUD.

In many ways, the campaign for the 2005 elections differed from previous campaigns, and this gave reason for optimism in what transition theorists see as the steady move towards democracy. For the first time all the contending parties were able to campaign and disseminate their programmes through government-owned national media and public campaign rallies. In the last weekend before the elections, the capital hosted large mass rallies in favour of the two major competitors, the CUD and the EPRDF. This opportunity led to an unprecedented level of openness and had a big impact on people’s consciousness about the elections. It showed the voters that it was possible to talk against the ruling party without being imprisoned, and that the EPRDF leaders were not invincible in discussions with their counterparts.

Approximately one month prior to election day, however, a shift in the political atmosphere had occurred. It seems that EPRDF intelligence reported that the party was starting to lose support in the rural areas, which necessitated a change of campaign strategy (TPLF Interview). The campaigns and debates in the last weeks before the polls were thus marked by aggressive propaganda and hate-speeches, particularly on the issue of the rights of nationalities (ethnic groups) in Ethiopia (Aalen 2006). For example, in a debate on ‘federalism, good governance and group rights’ organised by the Inter Africa Group and transmitted on Ethiopian TV and radio, Deputy Prime Minister Adissu Legesse claimed that the opposition parties wanted to abolish the federal system and establish an authoritarian state. He argued that this, by implication, meant that they wanted to initiate a Rwandan *Interahamwe* in Ethiopia, carrying out ethnic cleansing and genocide. After this seemingly ‘accidental’ utterance, *Interahamwe* language became a deliberate rhetoric used by the Prime Minister and EPRDF leaders down to local level in the last weeks of the campaign. Ruling party officials consistently claimed that opposition parties were sowing seeds of ethnic hatred by questioning the rights of nationalities to self-determination. In retrospect, this attack on the opposition was a way of preparing the ground for the government’s massive clampdown that was to come after the elections.

On election day, 15 May 2005, voter turnout was reported to be 90 per cent of the registered voters nationwide (NEB press release, 16 May 2005), and no major incidents of violence were reported. However, the image of a successful election did not linger. On the eve of election day, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi partly suspended the count and declared a month-long ban on demonstrations and outdoor meetings. Concomitantly, the police and security forces in the capital were put directly under his command. From the first day after the elections, the opposition started accusing the electoral authorities of deliberate delays in counting to give room for manipulation of results in favour of the government (CUD press release, 19 May 2005). The opposition’s fundamental distrust in the National Electoral Board (NEB) as an independent body, the delays in the counting process and the announcements of controversial constituency results in favour of the ruling party created a tense situation. Three weeks after the election, students staged peaceful protests against the delay in announcing the results. These ended with bloody street fights in the capital’s central business districts of Mercato and Piazza, where security forces and police killed at least 36 people. The ruling party blamed the protest on the CUD and justified the use of force by the need to contain ‘anti-peace and anti-democratic elements’. Nevertheless, this was condemned by domestic and international human rights organisations as ‘excessive
use of force’. In the aftermath of the protests, up to 5,000 people were arrested and detained, many of them supporters or members of the CUD.

The final election results, which were released in September 2005, made it clear that the opposition had done better than at any time in Ethiopian history. While the National Election Board confirmed a country-wide victory for the EPRDF after a highly dubious re-election and re-count process in disputed constituencies (EU-EOM 2005), the CUD won a large majority in Addis Ababa (all the seats) and in other major towns, in Amhara region (East Gojam and North Wollo) and in parts of Southern region (the Gurage areas). The UEDF captured many votes in Hadiya (Southern region) and in West Shoa, East Wollega, and Arsi (Oromia region). The Oromo Federal Democratic Movement also won 11 seats in the party leader’s home areas of West Wollega in Oromia.

Despite intense disappointment over what many in the opposition perceived as a stolen election, with almost one-third of the seats in parliament the opposition block was expected to make a difference in national politics. However, the potential influence of parliamentary opposition had already been curbed by the outgoing parliament in July 2005. After EPRDF became aware of the great electoral advances made by the opposition, they passed a new parliamentary code of conduct, and a new set of regulations which restricted minority parties from speaking and tabling proposals in the House of People’s Representatives. The amendment implied that an absolute majority was required to put forward an agenda, and the opposition parties were thereby deprived of their right to submit a bill or proposal.4

As a consequence of the unfair conduct of the elections and of these new amendments, the CUD announced that it would boycott the HPR, while the domestic wing of UEDF decided to join, despite the fact that the majority of the diaspora members of the party were against it. With the CUD boycott, EPRDF’s major opponent was effectively sidelined, pushed out of conventional circles of politics, and became an easy prey for further state offensives. For example, after the inauguration of the HPR on 10 October, one of the first enactments the new parliament made was to revoke the immunity of the MPs that did not take their seats. The Prime Minister proposed the motion, arguing that the CUD MPs that did not take their seats in parliament ‘would openly try to change the constitutional order by using their parliamentary immunity as a cover to topple the constitution itself’ (The Capital, 16 October 2005).

In retrospect, it is apparent that the EPRDF had not expected that the liberalisation ahead of the 2005 elections would entail any real challenge to its position, but instead had calculated that it could keep control in its own hands at the same time as profiting from an enhanced democratic image.5 The elections were thus seen as tools not for enhancing democracy in Ethiopia, but for consolidating EPRDF’s power. Nevertheless, the opposition managed to exploit the space that was created ahead of the polls and mobilised voters in an unexpectedly efficient way. The reason for their success was probably not their organisational strength (their organisational weaknesses have been exposed in the post-election period), but rather an outcome of a widespread wish for change and the appeal of the non-ethnic policy of the CUD in urban areas.

EPRDF’s actions in the immediate post-election period were all marked by the party’s desperate desire to prevent a further undermining of its base. When protests against the election results again erupted in Addis Ababa and other towns at the beginning of November, the government was quick to blame CUD leaders. On 1 November 2005,
members of the CUD Central Committee were arrested. In order to contain the protests, federal police and armed forces arrested tens of thousands of youngsters in the neighbourhoods of Addis Ababa and regional cities and shipped them to short-term detention camps without any charges or sentences. The police fired live ammunition into the crowds, leaving 193 civilians and nine politicians dead (The Reporter 2006). Some days later, leaders of civil society organisations and journalists from the private press were also detained (Amnesty 11 November 2005, HRW 13 January 2006). In December 2005, these individuals, together with the CUD leaders (131 altogether), were charged with treason, inciting violence and planning to commit genocide, all in line with the EPRDF’s earlier accusations of the opposition as protagonists of a Rwandese Interhamwe policy in Ethiopia. Although the genocide charges were later rejected by the court, the CUD leadership was sentenced to lengthy terms of imprisonment. However, in July 2007 they were released on a presidential pardon, which seems to have been triggered both by a letter the group submitted acknowledging ‘mistakes committed both individually and collectively’ in the 2005 elections, and in response to massive international pressure, in particular from the US (Amnesty 23 July 2007).

The detention of the CUD leadership and thousands of party members in November 2005 had a detrimental effect on the unity of the coalition and prevented the party from developing and consolidating its organisation. Since their release, most of the CUD leaders have spent time abroad, thus restricting contact with and mobilisation of their home constituencies. Concomitantly, conflicts between the leaders have erupted and the original four-party coalition has collapsed.

Controlling the grassroots: the kebele & sub-kebele system

Why did the EPRDF still manage to come out as the official winner of the 2005 elections, despite the success of the opposition parties in mobilising voters? The violent aftermath of the elections and the failure of the counting and complaint investigation process certainly are reasons to suspect the ruling party’s victory to have been caused by rigging or fraud. Reports from international observer teams confirm that the elections did not meet international standards, and suggest that irregularities took place on a massive scale in the re-election and counting process (EU-EOM 2005). However, the argument here is that the possible rigging of the count is not the major reason for the maintenance of EPRDF hegemony. The ruling party’s network of control through local administrative structures enabled it to pressurise many rural voters who make up 85 per cent of the Ethiopian population, to vote for it. Although some fraud most probably would have taken place, the existence of a local administration in the hands of the EPRDF would have made rigging superfluous in many places around the country. This, together with the well-established perceptions of the state and the ruler, mengist in Amharic, as mighty authorities which cannot be challenged (Lefort 2007), constitute the Ethiopian Government’s structural weapons in suppressing dissent. With these structures in place, it appeared to be relatively safe to liberalise the media and open up space for urban opposition ahead of the 2005 polls (since the urban constituency only comprises about 20 per cent of the population).

Even in reports on the 2000 election, the kebele (neighbourhood administration) was viewed as the main instrument for the ruling party to control voters in local communities (Pausewang et al. 2002). This structure was utilised by the ruling party to control the population, to punish opposition supporters and to award loyalty. Due to a general lack of distinction between the party and the state administration, voters
understood that if they did not vote for the ruling party they would lose access to social services and other benefits provided by the kebele. Furthermore, since the elections in 2000, a new system of sub-kebele structures had been evolving throughout the country. In the 2005 elections, research shows that new structures established under the kebele, the so-called got, mengistawi budin and lemmat-budin\(^7\) assumed some of the controlling functions of the kebele. The establishment of these structures entailed a dramatic increase in the presence of administrative officials at the local level (who predominantly are ruling party cadres), a presence that is perceived by most people as promoting the interests of the EPRDF and not the public in general.

During field visits to Southern region, people in both rural and urban areas consistently confirmed that the sub-kebele structures had been established during the year of the 2005 elections.\(^8\) In interviews with party officials at regional and local level in Southern region in May 2005, it was apparent that they had been established by initiative from the upper party structures. The official aim was ‘to make service delivery at local level more efficient and to mobilise people for development work’. In areas where the population relies on relief, the got was responsible for distributing aid through the UNDP and World Bank-funded ‘safety net’ programmes, which in some areas included the distribution of funds to purchase fertiliser, seeds or oxen, while in other areas it was payment in cash for community work or food for work.

Although the ruling party presented these structures as purely public administrative organs, it is apparent that the sub-kebele was used for election purposes in an attempt to secure its victory. Apart from local development work and relief, the sub-kebele structures are also responsible for calling meetings planned by the administration of the ruling party and for passing messages about new policies and laws, as well as party propaganda from higher levels down to the households. They are also responsible for gathering information and intelligence about households and passing it on to higher levels.

The Human Rights Watch (HRW 2005) report on the situation in Oromia before the elections in 2005 also suggests that the establishment of sub-kebele structures had a drastic impact on peoples’ basic rights and liberties in the region. In the areas visited by HRW, the structures had been in place since around September 2004. Furthermore in Oromia, government officials presented the got as a voluntary grassroots organisation for development of local communities, while ordinary people and even members of the got councils were unequivocal about the fact that these structures were imposed from above by force. Every household was obliged to take part in unpaid community work at least once a week and to attend meetings called by the sub-kebele. People claimed to be monitored by got council members even in personal conversations, and were restricted in their ability to move and travel outside their own village without permission from the sub-kebele structures. If peasants refused to take part in the community work or attend meetings or failed to get permission for travel, they would be punished with monetary fines or with imprisonment in the kebele prison. According to HRW, since early 2005 compulsory meetings had been used at OPDO rallies where people were forced to listen to propaganda in favour of the ruling party.

The situation in Oromia region led the HRW to conclude that the 2005 elections should be considered as a ‘hollow exercise’ because of the sub-kebele’s intimidation of the voters in advance of the elections (Lyons 2006). Although the situation may not have been as serious in other parts of the country, it is probable that the emergence of this
local structure of surveillance and control had a tremendous effect on the voters’ ability to choose freely among the parties in the 2005 polls. Furthermore, where a large majority live under the UN poverty level, people will not jeopardise their access to relief aid or public social services by voting for an opposition party. However, there were exceptions, for example, in Hadiya zone in Southern region where, after more than 10 years of mobilisation the Beyene Petros led party of the UEDF managed to get a mass base that the EPRDF found difficult to neutralise, even with the new coercive actions (Tronvoll 2001). Impoverished peasants on the outskirts of Hossaina reported that they had chosen not to take the ox and fertiliser from the World Bank’s safety net programme that year: ‘We wanted to escape being forced to vote for the party that we did not want’, they explained (interview May 2005, Lemo woreda, Hadiya).

**Legislative Restraints: Curbing the Press, the Parties and Civil Society**

In order to maintain the effects of the ad hoc measures taken against the opposition and civil society in the aftermath of the 2005 elections, the EPRDF initiated a range of institutional regulations and legislation geared at restricting democratic space in the country and undermining the Constitutional protection of human rights on a long term basis. Immediately after EPRDF acknowledged that they lost Addis Ababa City Council to the opposition CUD, several legislative changes in the status and authority of the city were passed by the EPRDF-controlled House of Representatives. These changes restricted the autonomous power of the City Council, and drained its direct financial income in order to make the City dependent upon Federal revenue transfers. The government also amended the status of the City Police Force and the authority over the city police was transferred from the City Council to the federal level.

The government also changed its position on the overall status of Addis Ababa, the capital. A protracted and heated debate within the country has long centred on the status of Finfine (Addis Ababa) as the capital of Oromia, in addition to being the federal capital. In 2000 the government decreed that Adama (Nazareth) would be the Oromia capital. This decision led to massive protests by large segments of the Oromo community, and dozens of people were imprisoned. However, after the May 2005 elections, the Oromia regional state council decided that Finfine should remain as the capital of Oromia. One can only speculate as to why the OPDO/EPRDF suddenly changed their position on the Oromia capital, although the implications are clear. Once again when Addis Ababa was both the federal and regional capital, the formal powers of the Addis Ababa City Council became diffuse and contested since both federal and regional Oromia authorities – both of whom are controlled by EPRDF – will have formal powers and authority, which will probably circumscribe and contest the authority of the City Council within different policy sectors. These changes were all implemented before it became clear that the CUD had not managed to take over the city administration of Addis Ababa because of the post-election arrests, together with the fact that most of the electives did not take their seats in the city council or in the national parliament. A federal appointed caretaker city government (loyal to the EPRDF) took over until the local polls in April 2008, when the EPRDF was formally voted back into power again.

Since the polls of 2005, the government has taken measures against other independent forces in Ethiopian civil society. The first victim of this offensive was the press.
After coming to power in 1991, the EPRDF liberalised the media sector and allowed a broad range of independent, privately-owned newspapers and magazines to be published. However, most of the media, both government and private, were subsequently accused of lacking professionalism and adequate ethical principles. As such, the relationship between government and the private media has been one of tension, with journalists and editors working for privately owned newspapers regularly fined and jailed. The power of the media – particularly in the 2005 pre-election phase – appeared to have come as a surprise to EPRDF. The TV/radio broadcasts of political debates prior to the elections were probably the factor which made the population aware of possible alternatives to EPRDF in government. Thus, in the post-election crackdown, the private media was also targeted and – as the International Press Institute (IPI) concludes – since then ‘there has been a steadily deteriorating relationship between the private media and the government leading to a complete breakdown in relations’ (IPI 2008).

The post-election media restrictions commenced in June 2005, when the Ministry of Information revoked the accreditation of five Ethiopian journalists working for foreign media, accusing them of unbalanced election reporting. Four editors of private newspapers were arrested after reporting a story ‘embarrassing’ the government, and the editor of Satanaw newspaper was sentenced to one month in prison for articles covering the courts’ handling of the election results. In the autumn of that year the space for the private press became more restricted. On the 2 November 2005, the Ministry of Information issued a statement accusing the private media of being mouthpieces of the opposition in protesting the election results and threatened them with arrest. The foreign media was also accused of acting in the same manner and many journalists left the country in fear of attacks. During the first two weeks of November several journalists and two editors were arrested. The majority of the private newspapers that were published in Addis Ababa before the 2005 elections were still suspended in December 2008, although some of them have been published under new names.9

The ‘Mass Media and Freedom of Information Proclamation’ law, ratified on 1 July 2008, further legalised the restrictive policies that the government had been practising since 2005. Repressive elements of the previous proclamation were maintained, while new articles allowed prosecutors to summarily stop any publication deemed a threat to public order or national security, and the punishment for defamation was increased (CPJ 2008). The new press law also restricts media ownership by preventing non-Ethiopian citizens from owning a media outlet.

The restrictions on foreign media ownership can be seen as part of a general trend of limiting foreign impact on domestic politics and society by preventing Ethiopian civil society and opposition from gaining financial support from abroad. The new party formation law, which was ratified in the spring of 2008, is another important piece of legalisation. This law stipulates that no party shall accept donations from abroad, and the parties are obliged to keep records of all donors for the National Electoral Board. In a context of minimal public funding for political parties, and where people risk retaliation from the ruling party if their donations to the opposition become known, this has a detrimental effect on the ability of opposition parties to run their organisations and campaign efficiently ahead of elections.

Another victim in EPRDF’s damage control campaign after 2005 was civil society. Like independent journalists, civil society organisations were opinion makers who, to the
discomfort of the ruling party, pointed to the oppressive nature of government policies. Therefore, EPRDF’s concern was to limit the ability of civil society to operate as a watchdog. Two illustrative examples are the government’s reaction towards the NGO-umbrella organisation, the Christian Relief and Development Association (CRDA) which organises over 250 national and international NGOS operating throughout Ethiopia and the Ethiopian Bar Association/Ethiopian Legal Professional Association. The CRDA case has its origin in the deployment of domestic observers to the elections, and its publicly communicated view on the post-election process. The CRDA had responded to the government call to civil society to engage in the democratisation process in accordance with the laws of the country. It thus applied to observe the conduct of the May elections, capitalising on its vast local network through its 250 member associations throughout Ethiopia. Through the ‘coalition for civil society organisations to engage in elections’ it was prepared to deploy 3,000 domestic observers to the polls. However, just prior to the elections, the National Electoral Board (NEB) redefined its procedures for domestic observers in such a way that it excluded all organisations with constitutions which did not explicitly state that their mandate was to observe elections (NEB 2005). This decision was immediately challenged in the courts, which ruled in favour of the civil society organisations, a decision then appealed by NEB to the High Court. The High Court also ruled in favour of the rights of civil society organisations to observe elections; however, the ruling came too late for the network to deploy the planned number of observers, and a smaller group were organised as a substitute.

During the post-election crisis, the CRDA issued statements of concern in which they appealed to all parties to adhere to the ideals of democracy and the rule of law and asked for an independent enquiry into the killing of demonstrators (CRDA 2005). The Ministry of Justice immediately issued a statement of reply to CRDA, where they accused CRDA of acting as a political party and of not obeying their mandate and constitution. It issued a warning to the CRDA in October 2005, which stated that CRDA must make further amendments to its mandate in order to sustain its licence. The CRDA case illustrates that even though an organisation is properly registered and licensed, its mandate and operations can be questioned at all times by the authorities if they are found to be critical of government positions. Or, as CRDA (2005) concludes on its own experiences with this case in its newsletter:

it has taken [us] a serious lesson that the teachings and understandings of advocacy and related activities are yet to be understood thoroughly by all actors in Ethiopia.

The second case which illustrates the challenges of civil society in Ethiopia in the aftermath of the elections relates to one of the oldest civil society organisations in the country: the Ethiopian Legal Professional Association (also called Ethiopian Bar Association, with 502 members, out of a total of 736 fully licensed lawyers in Ethiopia) has been the organisation for practising lawyers/attorneys since the time of Haile Selassie. In Ethiopia, the Ministry of Justice issues advocates’ licences and commands disciplinary sanctions over the conduct of the profession (not the Bar association as is the practice in most Western countries). However, two representatives of the Bar Association are members of the Ministry’s licensing and disciplinary committees. This status was suddenly changed in January 2006, when the Bar Association’s representatives received letters from the Ministry stating that a legally organised Bar Association did not exist in Ethiopia and therefore they were dismissed from the committees. No further reason was given on the status of the Ethiopian Legal Professionals Association/Bar Association, which is legally licensed with the Ministry. The letters further
stated that the representatives from the Advocates Association in the committees will be vacant, ‘until such time that an Advocate Association is legally established’.

Representatives from the Association believe that the Ministry’s reaction is a retaliation to the volunteer/pro bono work members of the association gave to CUD during the complaints process in the summer of 2005, and filing habeas corpus cases to the court during the arrests in November the same year. The Association later asked for an audience with the Minister of Justice in order to address the case directly with him, and by May 2006 the association was allowed to return to the committees (see Temuagach 2006). The temporary obstruction was a strong reminder of the intrusive capacities of the government, a capacity that was to be reconfirmed later by the drafting of new legislation on the activities of civil society organisations.

As a follow-up on the attacks against CRDA and the Bar Association, the final and most comprehensive step in the crack down on Ethiopian civil society is the draft legislation on Ethiopian NGOs: the Charities and Societies Proclamation.11 This proclamation is described by international human rights organisations as a violation of both the Ethiopian Constitution and international human rights conventions (Amnesty International 2008, HRW 2008). The draft undermines the right to association as a result of the fact that a government appointed Charities and Societies Agency would have the right to interfere in the internal affairs of organisations, and that this agency is free to deny any organisation a licence if the agency so wishes. Similar to the press law and the party formation law, this draft also restricts Ethiopian civil society’s access to funds from abroad, thereby undermining their ability to work effectively. The draft differentiates between ‘foreign’ and ‘Ethiopian’ organisations, the former having more than 10 per cent of their funds from abroad, while the latter has more than 90 per cent of their funds from domestic sources. Organisations with funds predominantly from abroad are prohibited from working in a range of what is normally defined as fundamental civil society issues such as human rights, conflict resolution and reconciliation, citizenship and community development, and justice and law enforcement services. In effect, the regulation affects almost all NGOs in the country, as most organisations rely on donations and support from abroad. It particularly targets domestic human rights organisations which will not be allowed to do their work unless they redefine themselves as ‘Ethiopian’ NGOs, obtaining 90 per cent of their funds from inside the country. As this is hardly possible in a country as poor as Ethiopia, it is probable that affected NGOs will have to close down entirely. Furthermore, the proclamation stipulates that individuals who participate in any ‘unlawful’ or unregistered NGO will face up to five years imprisonment. The Societies and Charities Proclamation will thus provide the Ethiopian Government with an efficient tool in curbing both organisational and individual capacity to carry out work of which the government does not approve.

The 2008 Local Elections Curtained

Local government elections (kebele and woreda) were supposed to take place at the end of 2005, but were postponed indefinitely due to the post election crisis. When they finally occurred in April 2008 they were conducted alongside by-elections to vacant posts in Addis Ababa City Council and to a number of seats in the national and regional parliaments that had remained vacant after the CUD boycott and imprisonment of its leaders in 2005. The 2008 results showed that the EPRDF had won all but a handful of seats in the local councils. They also regained control of Addis Ababa and won all
but one of the 39 parliamentary by-elections; the one seat lost was due to a registration error where the EPRDF candidacy was cancelled, thus opening up for the opposition candidate to win the seat. These results were the reverse of those in 2005 when the opposition won all seats but one in Addis Ababa. The 2008 result was the product of the combined effects of oppressive ruling party intervention, internal divisions and pullout of opposition parties, and a range of legal and institutional reforms to restrict the political space for independent voices (Aalen and Tronvoll 2009).

An important part of the ruling party’s offensive to regain the control of the electorate ahead of the 2008 elections was their campaign to recruit new party members. Through the use of force and incentives, the EPRDF increased its membership from 760,000 in 2005 to 4 million in 2008. In addition, the government enhanced its power base by drastically increasing the number of candidates for the kebele and woreda councils. In the kebele council, for example, the numbers were increased from 15 to a maximum of 300, making up approximately 3.4 to 4 million candidates for kebele elections across the country (sources differ on the exact numbers). Thus, it was only the EPRDF that was able to field candidates in all constituencies, while the opposition parties were unable to enter candidates for the great majority of posts. Similarly, with regard to the sub-kebele system as outlined above and a high percentage of EPRDF members in local communities, perhaps as many as one-third of kebele inhabitants will now be members of local government councils controlled by the EPRDF. Consequently, the ruling party has more or less a totalitarian control of the rural majority of the Ethiopian population.

The journey from instrumentalised liberalisation ahead of the 2005 election to outright repression and legalisation of restrictive policies after the contested polls of that year show that Ethiopia is not on its way towards democracy; but is confirming its place among authoritarian regimes. It has attempted to ascribe the events following the 2005 elections to the ‘infancy of the democratic system of the country’ (Ethiopia Herald, 21 March 2007), indicating that massive human rights violations should be considered as a natural part of the development towards a more democratic society. This is based on a linear understanding of political development, where the ultimate end is democratisation. However, this paper has demonstrated that such an approach may lead to under-estimation of the suppressive capacities and objectives of an authoritarian regime. Ethiopia is not an incomplete democracy; it is rather an authoritarian state draped in democratic window-dressing in which manipulated multiparty elections are a means to sustain power.

**Conclusions: The Return of Authoritarianism as a Source of Future Conflicts**

Since the 1998–2000 Eritrean-Ethiopian war, Ethiopia has experienced a step-by-step return to authoritarianism. Immediately after the war an internal process of dissent within the governing party was brutally crushed, and thousands of party cadres were cleansed from their positions. The 2005 elections may be seen as a nation-wide dissent process against the government, which once again used ad hoc measures to hit back on and neutralise protests. Subsequently, the government has rolled out a deliberate plan in order to prevent any future large-scale protest against their grip on power, by establishing an elaborate administrative structure of control; developing new legislative instruments of suppression; and finally curbing any electoral opposition as seen in the conduct of the 2008 local elections.
The only constituency left in Ethiopia which may have political leeway to work as checks-and-balances towards the government’s unaccountable exercise of power is the international donor assistance group (DAG), which actively engaged in the 2005 electoral process. Before the election its members put pressure on the government to open up space for opposition activities and for it to accept the deployment of international observers from the European Union. In the process of the elections, the EU Commission attempted negotiation between the EPRDF and the opposition after the polls, and in the post-election phase, the Donor Assistance Group condemned the excessive use of force by security forces. As a reaction to the crack down on the opposition and civil society in November 2005, the donor group tried to play tough with Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, and jointly decided to suspend all direct budget support to the government. Meles did not bend, however, and calmly told the DAG representatives to pack up and go home if they were not interested in supporting the development of the country. After a few weeks the international donors caved in and resumed full development assistance to Ethiopia.

In the following year, 2007, the Ethiopian Government expelled six Norwegian development diplomats following accusations that Norway was undermining ‘the national security interests of Ethiopia’. They said that, by pursuing development policies of supporting human rights and democracy in the country, Norway was actually conducting ‘clandestine and underground activities contravening international laws governing inter-state relations’.

These incidents imparted a strong message to the donor group in Addis Ababa, which could either stay quiescent on internal human rights violations and lack of democracy or face the consequences. Thus, when opposition leaders pleaded for support for election observation in the 2008 local elections, foreign embassies generally washed their hands of the whole exercise for fear of provoking the government. Furthermore, by not supporting or deploying observers, the donor community could justifiably keep quiet in the aftermath of the elections as they supposedly did not have any ‘substantial’ and ‘independent’ observations to pass judgement. The US State Department, for example, were ‘troubled’ by claims of irregularities in the elections but declared:

*We did not have observers out for local elections. So it’s very difficult to make a judgment about the claims of irregularities in these local elections.* (AFP 2008)

By suppressing criticism from the donor assistance group, the Ethiopian Government has managed to silence or contain all opposition. The only opposition avenue remaining open appears to be that of armed struggle. Developments in 2008 seemed to indicate that this is a possibility that may be pursued through new organisational frameworks and platforms. For example, the scholar cum politician, Berhanu Nega (instrumental in the CUD top leadership in the 2005 elections), allegedly expressed that he does not believe that political change will come in Ethiopia by peaceful means:

*We have seen the extreme savagery and lawlessness of the Woyanne [TPLF] regime and that the people of Ethiopia have the right to use any means necessary and available to them to protect themselves from the regime’s atrocities.* (Press conference, Alexandria, Virginia, 14 May 2008)

Interviews conducted outside Ethiopia with other opposition leaders during 2008 corroborate the impression that initiatives to coordinate a broader armed struggle against the EPRDF regime may be under way. Viewing the internal political dynamics in tandem with the fragile regional geo-political order, including a latent war with Eritrea, Ethiopia until recently trapped in conflict in Somalia, and increased tension...
along the Sudanese-Ethiopian border, may all be interpreted by some opposition groups as providing an opportunity to launch a broader mobilisation against the Ethiopian Government.

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Endnotes

1. A parallel process of dissent against President Issaias Afwerki from within the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front also came to the fore after the war (Plaut 2002).

2. AEUP was the largest party in the CUD, and the AEUP leader Hailu Shawel was also the chairman of the entire coalition. The AEUP party programme stated that: ‘It is the conspiracy between our foreign enemies and the banda [Ethiopian collaborator who allied with the enemies] to divide the country by highlighting differences. In this instance of ‘divide and rule’ the Amhara became the target of the blame. Thus, in order to struggle against these anti-unity and anti-democracy elements AAPO was established in 1984 Ethiopian calendar and later, in 1994, it became AEUP’. All Ethiopian Unity Party: Party Program, Unofficial English version, Addis Ababa, July 1995 Ethiopian calendar (2003).

3. An underlying factor which contributed to EPRDF’s accusation against the opposition for sowing ethnic hatred is the existence of popular sentiments against the dominant ethnic group of the ruling party, the Tigrayans of the TPLF. The origin of such sentiments comes from the fact that the top Ethiopian political leadership is widely considered as representing only a small minority of the country’s population, the Tigray people. Through the dominant position of the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) in the EPRDF-coalition, the Tigray region is perceived as privileged in the current federal system (notwithstanding the reality on the ground of extreme poverty and agricultural soil deprivation) and Tigrayans are alleged to have many of the most central positions in the country’s political and economic life.

4. In contrast, the previous rules of the parliament required signatures from only 20 MPs to propose an agenda (Reporter, Amharic version, 30 October 30). The Speaker of the House was also empowered with the right to order MPs to keep quiet or leave the parliament if ‘dishonest’ comments were made, and to impose punishment for improper conduct by barring the MP’s salary payment (The House of Peoples’ Representatives Regulation No. 2/2005 The House of Peoples’ Representatives of the FDRE Working Procedures and Code of Conduct (Amendment)).

5. The belief in the incumbent’s victory in the upcoming elections was confirmed by EPRDF members at various levels of the party ahead of the polls (interviews in Addis Ababa and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples regional State, February and March 2005). Prime Minister Meles Zenawi was quoting an Amharic proverb to illustrate the ruling party’s calculation with the 2005 polls: ‘If you tie a hen with a long rope, she may think that she is released’. This demonstrates that the ruling party was enlarging the space of action for the opposition, but was still intending to keep them within the line of control.

6. No exact numbers of detainees were made available by the government. Some sources have reported that more than 20,000 were detained in one camp only (Dedesa in Oromia, cf. Sub-Saharan Informer, 18 November 2005). It is estimated that between 20–40,000 people were detained for shorter or longer periods.

7. These are Amharic words. In Afaan Oromo, the equivalent words are goks, gare and shanee. Every got includes around 90 households, compared to the kebele which includes around 500 to 2,000, while the mengistawi budin includes 30 to 40 households and the lemmat-budin controls from five to 10 households.
8. The sub-kebele structures were reportedly invented by the TPLF and established in Tigray during the struggle against the Derg (Young 1997). Since the fall of the Derg, the system has evolved gradually throughout the country, first to Amhara region and then to Oromia and Southern Region (SNNPRS). Some reports indicate that it was established in Amhara region as early as the mid-1990s while others claim that the system is only five years old there. In Oromia and SNNPRS, the system is claimed to be from one to three years old.

9. In the aftermath of the 2005 elections, nine papers have been officially suspended (Asqual, Menilk, Satenaw, Ethiopi, Abay, Addis Zena, Nesanet, Hadar, and Tsegereda); seven papers have been forced to close down operations due to the rise of printing/paper costs (Mezenagna, Dageme Wonchief, Mechaahale, Tomar, Tukusat, Seyefenebelbal, Mogede). The board of the private paper Tobya decided to close down production themselves, due to the ‘unhealthy working environment of journalists’. Moreover, the foreign media was also under scrutiny by the government, and in the third week of January 2006, the Associated Press/IRIN news correspondent to Ethiopia was expelled with 24 hours notice, accused of being biased in his reporting.


11. The draft was launched in May 2008, but has not yet been ratified. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi invited major Ethiopian NGOs to a hearing on the draft, but explicitly said that the main content of the law would not be changed, despite domestic and international opposition to it (interview with representative of Ethiopian NGOs, taking part in the meeting with the PM, Addis Ababa, June 2008).

12. This number was given by Haile Mariam Dessalegn, advisor to the Premier and chair of the committee on the local elections in the EPRDF (interviewed by Lovise Aalen, Addis Ababa February 2008).

13. Press statement by the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Addis Ababa, 28 August 2007. Ethiopia and Norway came to an agreement to normalise relations in October 2008. Apparently, in order to gain Ethiopia’s acceptance, Norway had to give up on its three former priority sectors in its work towards Ethiopia – human rights, peace and reconciliation, and democracy/good governance – and focus on more conventional development aid instead (agricultural development, electricity/power supplies).

14. See the letter sent to the DAG by the three party leaders Beyene Petros (UEDF), Temesken Zewdie (CUDP) and Bulcha Demeksa (OFDM), 26 December 2007.

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The Politics of Silence: Interpreting Stasis in Contemporary Eritrea

Richard Reid

This article examines the current stand-off between the Eritrean government and the broader population, with an appreciation of the historical dynamics that have influenced the contemporary situation. It is argued here that although little appears to be changing in Eritrea on the surface, subtle but important shifts in attitude are taking place, both within government and among the broader populace. The article explores contemporary political culture in Eritrea, including the system which has developed around the position of the President Isaias Afwerki, and in particular focuses on the marked degree of militarisation which now characterises Eritrean society. Specifically, education has now become highly militarised, while the issue of the ‘demarcation’ of the border with Ethiopia – a key issue since the ceasefire in 2000 – has wider implications for future relations between government and people.

Background and Some Methodological Issues

An eerie silence has descended on Eritrea, a silence on the part of both governed and governing. Interpreting this silence is no easy matter. The apparent lack of a narrative – the ‘stasis’ of the title – tempts the observer to insert his/her own, to ‘fill in the blanks’. Certainly, it has sometimes been assumed that such silence indicates almost an absence of politics, and demonstrates political ossification. Five years after Independence, a piece in The Economist (21 August 2001) described Eritreans as having been ‘politically passive’,1 an extraordinary claim considering the country’s history. But it has sometimes been the last resort of analysts who ultimately seek solace in the comfortable and distinctly African stereotype of brutal dictatorship with its boot on the neck of a cowed, long-suffering populace. Scholars seem to go round in circles, projecting negative imagery about the place. Before our very eyes, Eritrea has made the transition from potential Shangri-la in the mid-1990s to resource-starved amalgam of North Korea and Cuba by 2009. This article represents an attempt to explore other ways of seeing the current situation, and to highlight the various dynamics and processes at work in the very recent past.

In 2005, I argued that the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) – known as the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) since 1994 – had become obsessed with its own history, and that a gulf had opened up between the liberation struggle generation and the country’s youth, particularly after 2001 (Reid 2005). My argument was that recent disciplinarian tendencies, and the shift toward more overt repression, needed to be understood in the context of the historical landscape in which
the EPLF had situated itself. I stand by most of the interpretations put forward in that essay. Nonetheless, situations mutate, and new (or previously unseen) processes come to light.

In this article, I wish both to build upon some of the arguments put forward in my 2005 article, and to modify others, a perpetual process of revision necessitated by the findings of further research in Eritrea itself, as well as by further thought on the nature of contemporary Eritrean state and society. In very general terms, visits to Eritrea made since 2006, most recently in mid-2008, have reminded me that while it is relatively easy to demonise the EPLF, it is also important to understand what it is the government is attempting to achieve, and how Eritreans have responded to this. The relationship is complex and characterised by ambiguity. Theory is at present a poor substitute for the empirically-based critique, particularly in the attempt to understand a society that is normally (and to some degree fairly) described as closed, reserved and unwilling to discuss its business with foreign researchers. Being there does not, perhaps, lead to any great flashes of comprehension – sometimes quite the opposite – but it does at the very least allow one to garner a wide range of opinion, and facilitates the entry of Eritrean voices into the analysis.

A considerable gulf has opened up between the government and the broader population. However, both parties make regular forays into the curious no-man's-land that lies between them. The government talks of ‘revolutionary values’ and the ongoing ‘national struggle’, and worries about what ‘the people’ (especially young people) are thinking. The country’s youth in particular, according to some in the government, seem not to truly appreciate the enormity of the task before them, and have failed to fully absorb the values of the liberation struggle. Ordinary people, meanwhile, despair at the collapsed economy and the lack of socio-political development. But they also fear the alternatives; President Isaias Afwerki continues to command a certain degree of grudging, fearful respect and the population are loath to contemplate serious internal opposition. Instead, young people flee the country, accepting enormous risks in doing so; and thus are sovereignty and legitimacy haemorrhaging.

Nonetheless, it remains the case that Eritrea is not the easiest place in which to do research. There are travel restrictions on foreigners outside Asmara, making meaningful rural fieldwork all but impossible. The Research and Documentation Centre in Asmara has the potential to become an excellent national archive, with an energetic director, but an ethos of service for academics does not yet exist. In terms of current politics or the socio-economic situation, there are few publications, official or otherwise, of any real significance. This article, then, is based on numerous conversations and informal ‘interviews’ with Eritreans from many walks of life – from ex-fighters and party officials, to university graduates, to teachers, to those in military service – who must necessarily remain anonymous.

Defining Silence

The EPLF has been such a constant in Eritrean life for such a long time that it is easy for those uninitiated into the nuances of Eritrean political culture to ask exasperatedly, ‘but when will change come?’ In fact, change is taking place continually. The EPLF’s great success in the past was rooted in its ability to launch sustained attacks on a sequence of single (albeit massively important) issues, and to bring to bear its not
inconsiderable moral as well as material firepower on those ‘fronts’ (I1). ‘Independence’, ‘referendum’, ‘constitution’, ‘woyane’ (the Ethiopian regime), ‘demarcation’ – the movement addressed itself to these issues with famous vigour, while the issues themselves provided legitimacy to the movement itself. What is less clear is the EPLF’s ability to multi-task. The issues themselves were so important that everything else was considered irrelevant until they were resolved. The question, as ever, is how long resolution? While the politics of silence are characterised by a remarkable degree of patience on the part of the population upon which the government can continue to depend, the latter has rooted its legitimacy in a flame-keeper role, positing itself as the sole interpreter of national destiny, which is obviously unsustainable in the longer term. Legitimacy, in this sense, must be negotiated, not simply assumed.

There is a sense in government circles that some groups in society – especially in and around Asmara – have become selfish, demanding, unconscious of the real dangers confronting the nation, whether wilfully or otherwise. Their commitment to the national cause is suspect. In fact, there is little need for the paranoia evident in government attitudes: in 2008, despite deep bitterness regarding the government’s perceived failings, there was still a widely held conviction that there was as yet no real alternative to the EPLF, and to Isaias himself. One of the more worrying developments has been a disengagement of people from the state and what the state purports to represent. Individualism is increasingly replacing the wider sense of ‘national community’, which was discernible (if at times a little contrived) prior to and during the 1998–2000 war. People now care for little beyond their own circumstances and those of their immediate families. The need to open dialogue between governed and governing is ever more urgent, especially when citizens feel that they have sacrificed considerably for the unlistening state, and that the ‘social contract’ – albeit the unspoken contract implicit in the independence referendum of 1993, the results of which the EPLF took to indicate an endorsement of itself – is seen to have been broken.

A key problem, then, is misunderstanding and a failure of communication. Widespread silence has enormous power. It is a political weapon that has been very effectively employed by Eritreans in the past, notably against the regimes of Haile Selassie and the Dergue. It is an insidious, invisible, communal weapon that suggests latent potency as much as it does fear or defeat, and the Eritrean Government is now evidently concerned about the silent disengagement of people from politics and the national struggle. To this end, in 2005 the government organised a series of public ‘seminars’ during which a degree of critical questioning was invited (I1, I4, I9, I10). What took place in these meetings amounts to something of a jumble. A great many people continually asked about salaries and economic conditions more broadly, much to the evident exasperation of the panellists (I9). Yet, political criticism did indeed follow, prompting Yemane Gebreab, presidential advisor and head of political affairs at the PFDJ, to proclaim: ‘If you want power, then take it! Be manly about it and take control!’ Or, according to another account: ‘If the door is closed, then break a window’ (I2, I9). In fact, the EPLF does not believe that anyone else is in a position to do a better job; and most people, however reluctantly, would have to agree. The opposition abroad appears in disarray, and few of its leaders, with the possible exception of Mesfin Hagos, command any respect in Asmara, where they are regarded as something of a joke (I2, I15). Many also made the fatal (and incredibly crass) error of congregating in Addis Ababa. Even outside Eritrea, it is the PFDJ, often through branches of the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students (NUEYS), which appears rather more energetic and better organised than any opposition equivalent in holding meetings and hosting events. The counterpart abroad to the recent
consultations within Eritrea has been a series of visits by Yemane Gebreab to the Eritrean diaspora in the United States and elsewhere, and renewed vigour on the part of NUEYS (I16). All of this may call to mind a certain desperation, and NUEYS – while full of talented, if not exactly worldly, youngsters – is largely mute on anything approaching controversy. Yet this type of activity nonetheless clearly represents an attempt by the government to re-engage, to re-open dialogue.

The sacrifices made by the ‘struggle generation’ are well-known, and widely acknowledged. Yet there is now a new generation in Eritrea that has also sacrificed considerably. Several hundred thousand young men and women between their early twenties and mid-thirties have dedicated their lives – or had their lives dedicated for them – to the survival of a state which is still younger than they are. Indeed, they have had diverse experiences. Some are now low-level cadres within the PFDJ, and many of these might be counted among what we can call the ‘loyal critics’ of their generation, wishing to see a more systematic transition from the older generation to their own. In one of the consultation exercises noted above, one young man pointed out, using the metaphor of the lit torch (*kendel* or *fana*) carried on evenings of celebration, that ‘the fire is burning down the torch. When you eventually pass the torch on to us, the flames will burn our fingers’ (I9). Others of that generation have toiled in ministries for many years; and of course others again are *warsai*, young veterans of the recent war, many of whom have been in service for what seems, to them, an interminable length of time. Some of these have been promoted from the ranks, although the perception is that it is usually those from rural areas, with a comparatively low level of education, who are so favoured, rather than those from Asmara (I3). What all these young Eritreans have in common is a remarkable reserve of patience, and their capacity to silently absorb hardship. Eritrea owes much to them, and many of them know it. A sensible government would do well to move toward promoting or otherwise rewarding them more systematically than it has to date (I9).

Many have exhibited rather less in the way of patience, and have fled the country, sometimes into Ethiopia, but more commonly into Sudan, from where they attempt to reach the West. This haemorrhage since 2001 is conservatively estimated at tens of thousands. Few, if any, of these youngsters would describe themselves as anything other than proud to be Eritrean, but their desperation to live ‘freely’ – however ill-founded the notion is – and to fulfil their potential abroad motivates them to undertake the hazardous journey across borders. It is not a decision they take lightly. They know that they are leaving behind home and family, and will be unable to return for many years; they are throwing themselves into a harsh, humiliating world of asylum applications, dependency on friends and distant relatives, and new beginnings in strange and hostile environments. It is, ultimately, a form of indirect protest – discernible at various junctures in Eritrea’s twentieth-century history – which the government ignores or dismisses at its peril. In recent years, a system has sprung up, within which agents – some of them within the Eritrean army itself – will take money to arrange passage across the Sudanese border. Forty thousand Nakfa will buy a person the safest and most comfortable passage, in a landcruiser (I3). These refugees are living by the old Tigrinya proverb, ‘Either do what they want you to do, or leave the country’, which is as applicable in the first decade of the twenty-first century as it was, say, in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Flight from Eritrea is another manifestation of the politics of silence. Relatively few refugees appear to become involved in opposition politics not least because they are too busy trying to survive. Although the government might discount them as an
inevitable disenchanted minority, it is a tragedy indeed that any young and talented Eritreans regard the situation in their own country as so intolerable as to make years of asylum-seeking a decent alternative. As long as the government is determined to pursue its current ‘national security’ agenda, it is difficult to know what it can possibly do about the haemorrhage, or the disillusionment that has prompted it. But a major step forward would be to regularise the duration of service, and return to the situation as it was before 1998, perhaps creating a revolving door system for military service which would at least facilitate the release of those who have spent their youth in uniform. Above all, the fear which the young have of Sawa ‘national service camp’ must be addressed, and they need to know – as those involved in the early rounds of service did in the early and mid-1990s – that they are not going to be in the army indefinitely, which is unfortunately the current popular perception (I15). The government’s position that Sawa was originally designed to promote nation-building, and was thus an explicitly political rather than a military project, is in theory sound (I14); and it worked for several years. At this time, however, it is unsustainable, and a more temperate approach would pay very real dividends.

Silence has long played a prominent part in Eritrean politics. Abroad, much of the liberation struggle was greeted by silence, or so it seemed in the isolation of EPLF’s base areas in the mountains of the Sahel. It might be argued that the silence that is the analytical focus of this article signifies the damaging of bonds between generations. Not only is there limited faith in the future, but there is no trust in the past, either, which is in some ways more important. One informant lamented the fact that in Eritrea there has been a markedly disjointed approach to the past, with each generation rejecting the values and goals of the one before. This was the case at the outset of the liberation struggle, with the demonisation of the men of the 1940s and 1950s, and now the fear is that the same thing is happening today, as a new generation finds it increasingly difficult to relate to the tegadelay (ex-fighter) age group (I1). Much needs to be done in the cause of furthering the ‘revolution’, the future of which lies in the hands of a generation which identifies less and less with the one that started it; for that reason alone, Eritrea’s need to embrace its own past was never more urgent than it is now.

Interpreting the System

The decade and a half since the EPLF swept into Asmara, rendering Eritrea de facto an independent nation, can be divided into three distinct phases, namely the immediate post-liberation period of 1991–98, the war itself and its immediate aftermath of 1998–2001, and the period since 2001, which can be considered one of transition for the nascent state. The system is still evolving, quietly, in some ways almost invisibly, and at times apparently chaotically. For some, there actually appears to be no system, as such, but rather simply the belief that a system exists. For others, however, the system is at the very least ‘under construction’, and thus extremely fluid. In effect, the government has been the Office of the President, since 2001 and the arrests of the ‘G15’ group of former leaders who made a public criticism. The President has periodically switched power between the Party and the army, in some ways playing one off against the other, creating a situation which we might describe as functioning confusion which has effectively rendered the various ministries marginal to policy making (I2, I7, I9, I15). No doubt this situation stems from Isaias’ sense of insecurity immediately following the arrest of his most prominent critics in September 2001, when he relied on the army – and in particular such key commanders as Wuchu
and Filipos – to help stabilise a potentially dangerous situation. As his position became a little more secure, he was able to incrementally switch power back to the Party, and has now achieved something of a balance between these two pillars of the Eritrean state. The army, obviously, remains essential to national security, both internal and external, despite reported tensions between the President on the one hand, and generals Wuchu and Filipos on the other (I3, I7). The Party is responsible for making policy, which is then passed on to the ministries for implementation, although ministers themselves frequently have no real authority (I9).

In the meantime, the imprisoned former ministers and EPLF founders constitute a problem. While some people might praise the ‘G15’ for briefly publicising emerging problems within the movement in late 2000 and early 2001, others curse them for moving at the wrong time, and playing an undoubtedly strong hand badly (I1, I18). Indeed, the timing of the attempt by several key figures to move against the President at the height of the third Ethiopian offensive in May 2000 appears wholly wrong-headed. They were, of course, unsuccessful at that time, owing to their own diffidence and the fact that Isaias had the support of the army. A showdown was inevitable from that point, and by incarcerating them just over a year later, Isaias has turned them into living martyrs. To some, at least, they have become heroes, and Isaias has undermined his own legitimacy (I1, I2, I18). Yet this is tempered by the fact that there is a general sense – as with prominent opposition leaders abroad – that ultimately they are cut from the same cloth as Isaias, and are hardly any more ‘democratic’ than those currently in power. This reflects a wider disengagement from politics, and a creeping popular scepticism about whether the leadership of the EPLF – past or present – can offer solutions to some of the problems, both political and economic, currently facing Eritrea.

As for the President himself, he is now in a rather odd position, and opinion of him is markedly ambiguous. His periodic and increasing absence from Asmara – he has spent large amounts of time in Massawa at the coast – is the cause for much speculation, irreverent and otherwise, regardless of the official line that he is there to oversee the creation of a free trade zone. On the one hand, he has become something of a semi-mythical figure, and his character and psychological makeup has become a favourite topic of awed conversation (necessarily subdued) in the bars and cafes of Asmara. At the same time, he has become the butt of so many jokes, particularly among the warsai. Many resent the power he has accumulated; yet he is also grudgingly admired as the only one capable of providing some measure of direction and leadership. Urban highlanders quietly grumble about him, yet he is supposedly regarded in some rural areas, particularly in the western lowlands, as the only leader they can trust (I15). Overall, few can imagine Eritrea without him; he has no obvious replacement, either inside the movement or outside the country. As one informant laughingly put it, he is the leader of the opposition as well as the country, for the former simply watch what he does and react accordingly (I1, I2, I9, I15). He has become the system, and sometimes the same people who criticise him for this also quietly wonder at his apparently immense reserves of strength and patience. This situation may have come about, at least in part, by default; but one cannot doubt his cleverness in manoeuvring himself into such a position. Yet it is something of a cliché to suggest that his strengths are also potentially dangerous flaws. His single-mindedness involves an unwillingness to consult and an intolerance of healthy dissent. His belief in the principles of the struggle has reached the point at which he believes that he alone can interpret and defend these. Recent policy, moreover, is suggestive of a deep mistrust of the urban environment of Asmara – many believe
that this explains his periodic relocation to Massawa – and a corresponding contempt toward the educated, urban middle classes which arguably dates to the early years of the EPLF. He has also expressed his distaste for the so-called ameches, those Eritreans deported from Ethiopia between 1998 and 2000. His personal prejudices are often reflected in public policy, and have an alienating effect (I2, I15). Nonetheless, among those who remain doggedly loyal – and there are still quite a few – there is no other option. As one informant asserted, there should be a free, critical press, and there should be an alternative to the PFDJ; but not now. There is too much instability, and Eritrea still needs Isaias Afwerki and the EPLF at this time (I11).

The President’s Office, the army and the Party will comprise the body politic for the foreseeable future; but within the system itself, increasingly, it is personalities, not institutions, around which the state functions. Isaias Afwerki is the clearest example of the powerful personality, famously able to impose his will on others, but across public life, very often, policies rise and fall, action or inaction predominates, depending on the strength or weakness of the personality in charge. Informants involved in education, for example, cite examples of qualified, enthusiastic individuals who have returned to Eritrea from exile to participate in the ‘nation-building project’, but who are frequently driven away, exasperated. In the meantime, pliable, uneducated people with no relevant experience are placed in positions of ‘authority’. This is clearly a matter of trust, as much as anything else. Moreover, a tactic is employed of ‘freezing out’ individuals for periods at a time, promoting others and, according to some sources this has created tension and mistrust within the ranks of the movement. Those who are frozen continue to collect their salaries, but basically do little else (I1, I2, I7, I15, I17). Therefore, there is a widening (and constantly shifting) gulf between those who are doing comparatively well within the system, and those who consider themselves victims of it. Crucially, the same people were in Sahel together in the 1980s.

The future of the system itself is uncertain, and prognoses depend on who one talks to. Many assert categorically that there will be no change in the near future, but this has become something of a stock response. However, the cautiously optimistic forecast is that transition is coming, and while things may be a little uncertain for a while, they will nonetheless remain relatively stable, and will not involve a sweeping away of the ‘old guard’ – no-one wants that, one informant told me (I10). However, it will involve a gradual diffusion of power to the next generation, and to some extent this analysis appears to be borne out by the concerns of government noted above. There can be little doubt, again, that the government is indeed worried. The very fact that it has felt the need to try to justify itself, however limited the exercise may have been, is at least suggestive of the potential for transition. Almost certainly, however, any transition and reform of the existing system will take place within and under the auspices of the Party, not from outside it. In some ways the potential for intergenerational bonding was demonstrated during the 1998–2000 war itself, in terms of relations between tegadelti and warsai. For every story about how the latter were appalled by their treatment at the hands of the former, there is another which tells of the creation of deep respect between the two, forged in combat (I10). One of the greatest mistakes made by the EPLF since 2001 has been its failure to capitalise on the enthusiasm of the young for their new nation, a zeal evident up to and during the war, and giving that generation a sense of stake in the system (I15). However, although the intergenerational bond is still there for the making, as well as the breaking, and any damage that has been done is not, it seems, yet undoable, the government will need to move soon to make sure of this.
Educating Eritrea

The lack of communication from the top downwards, and the unease which characterises the relationship between the government and the younger sector of the population, is perhaps most clearly manifest in the field of education policy. The de facto closure of the University of Asmara, and its replacement by a series of colleges located in villages and towns around the country, is a project which dates back several years, although only recently has it begun – note only begun – to be implemented. President Isaias may have lost faith in the idea that the university was serving the nation’s interests – on a final symbolic visit to an increasingly deserted campus he declared that the institution had produced little of value over the past decade, except ‘self-possessed and unpatriotic’ students – but government hostility toward the university can be understood on several levels. Isaias’ mistrust of the university reflects, in many respects, a more general unease within the movement about the aspirations of a younger generation which it suspects of being less concerned with the ‘revolution’ and more with individual achievement. To some extent it is also symptomatic of a troubled relationship with the educated, urban middle class, centred – as we have seen – in Asmara itself.

Many, if not most, academic staff are angry and bewildered by an education policy which, like most other policies, has been imposed from above with no consultation and, apparently, remarkably little forethought. Even senior figures at the Ministry of Education quietly claimed ignorance about the President’s long-term plans for education in Eritrea. However, at the same time it must be acknowledged that in principle the idea of decentralising and dispersing higher education is a sound one. To have marine biology and some business studies at Massawa, or agriculture at Hamelmalo near Keren, for example, makes a great deal of sense. Indeed, there is no reason why Asmara should have been host to these types of disciplines, and if the President was concerned that too much might be centred in the capital, then that concern is understandable and might even be applauded. After all, it can be argued that the creation of institutions of higher or further education through Eritrea is only part of a larger project aimed at rural development. It is less clear why natural sciences needed to be moved to the technical college at Mai Nefhi, a short distance from Asmara, or indeed social sciences to an institution at Adi Keyih, which is further away. But more importantly, the implementation of the policy itself has left much to be desired.

The college at Mai Nefhi serves to highlight the issues. One of the problems for observers and teaching staff alike is that the college appears to be run more along the lines of a military camp than an institution for further education. Students cannot move freely in and out, and are closely guarded; parents cannot visit the students, nor can outsiders enter. An army officer is the de facto principal of the college, which lacks books and other essential equipment. In addition to a small but significant arsenal of automatic weapons on the site – presumably in anticipation of trouble – there is a jail for students who fail to attend classes. On a visit in 2006, I was told that this jail was also home to a number of students who had recently been caught ‘cheating’ in exams (I2). Despite the fact that NUEYS claims, among other things, to be involved in ‘students’ welfare’, the organiser I spoke to was taken aback when told about this incident. Students also undertake physical exercise, in the form of digging trenches, for example, which they wryly and rather wonderfully refer to as ‘digology’. One army officer was using this student labour to build his house in nearby Mai Nefhi village (I2). While there are some Eritrean teachers there, moved from the university
as well as brought in from elsewhere, a great many are Indians whose own level of both education and commitment is in many cases questionable. The morale among local staff is extremely low, although nowadays if is more likely that a sense of melancholic resignation will be encountered, rather than the angry frustration that was apparent among university staff some months ago (I8).

The government’s approach is in many ways inexplicable. The frustration experienced by most teachers is borne of the fact that no one knows where the policy is headed, and that they are never consulted but simply ‘ordered’. They are ultimately made to feel worthless and dispensable within a system created by a movement famous for its excellent use of scarce human resources. This was wholly avoidable, and it is to be hoped that it will be addressed, and soon. For many quiet critics of the government, Mai Nefhi College and education policy more broadly are symptomatic of the government’s insensitivity and anti-intellectualism, its suspicious nature and tendency toward militaristic solutions to complex problems. Above all, the implementation of policy has been characterised by incompetence, although perhaps the appearance of incompetence is what results from the application of principles learned in Sahel in the 1980s to problems peculiar to the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Nonetheless, the official position is that – as with most issues in Eritrea at the moment – these things take time, and that only after two or three years will the fruits of current education policy become clear. There are teething problems, and wholly unavoidable logistical challenges, but in time the University of Asmara will have been successfully replaced by a system of higher education colleges that will serve the nation’s need much more effectively. When it is suggested to those involved that, whatever happens, these colleges have little chance of being recognised internationally – thus potentially crippling a generation of graduates in terms of further study – the reply is that this is missing the point. These colleges are designed to equip students with the skills necessary to address peculiarly ‘Eritrean’ problems, nothing more and nothing less. The extent to which this might be achieved remains very much an open question.

The government may be concerned, as described above, that it is ‘losing touch’ with youth; but current practice in the field of education may well negate any progress made on that front through public consultations. I have yet to meet any student there – or indeed any member of staff – who has any faith in the system, and it would be foolhardy of the government to dismiss all of these as merely symbolising the tendency of highlanders (and especially ‘Asmarinos’) to complain about everything, all the time. Criticism and disillusionment cannot solely be put down to some kind of pessimistic national personality; pessimism is not disloyalty. However, at the same time the government has another plan aimed at addressing youthful disengagement, namely the expansion of the school of social science at Nakfa in the remote Sahel region. Several thousand young people have already passed through the cadre school there, having taken short courses on politics, and Eritrean history and culture. The belief is that young people have become too apolitical, and need to be made to ‘re-engage’ with politics and become reacquainted with the patterns of Eritrean history (I14). Therefore, many have become ‘cadres’ through their attendance at Nakfa, including – strangely, perhaps – university graduates, products of the same institution charged with producing little of use in the last decade. These new cadres may be less reliable than the government might have hoped: one told this author that there was no room for discussion during these training courses, and that projects and other work is undertaken within clearly understood parameters. The only reason
to be happy about being a cadre was that his salary had increased a little (I4). Another, who has spent years muttering darkly about the shortcomings of the sha'abiya, was shocked when he was told to go to Nakfa. He has not changed his mind since his ‘training’ (I13). Again, the location of this school in Nakfa, rather than Asmara, has a symbolic significance which is too obvious to require further elaboration; and it is clear that the government hopes to bring young people back into the system, by ‘educating’ them about the principles of the struggle – which it is believed they are losing – rather than allowing them to open up the system or fundamentally rethinking it.

Nonetheless, one might have some sympathy with the government in this respect. While there may be grounds for suspicion that an unsettled external environment suits the government’s purposes very well, it remains the case that the external environment is indeed unsettled, and thus the government’s strong desire to run the proverbial tight ship is understandable in many respects. According to one participant, certain senior figures did indeed invite critical questioning on a range of issues; the answer – whether to questions about the lack of a free press, the imprisoned former ministers, or the holy grail of demobilisation – was invariably that everything was subordinate to national security. Until Eritrea’s interests were secure beyond (or indeed on) its borders, then there would be no room to discuss these issues. Nothing would be entertained that might, in one way or another, threaten internal stability or unity (I13). Eritrea is certainly not unique in the world at present in pursuing that particular line, and it is disingenuous and hypocritical of certain Western governments to criticise Eritrea’s for doing so. Whether or not the strategy is sustainable, of course, is another question, as is that concerning the degree to which the strategy itself may be encouraging the instability and disunity the government so evidently fears.

Border Demarcation, Home and Away

It is a common refrain that once demarcation of the border with Ethiopia takes place, then political change will follow. However, hopes that demarcation will indeed happen rise and fall on a regular basis, depending on statements from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or from the Ethiopian Government, or the latest interpretation of the stance of the ‘international community’. The best that can be said at present is that demarcation would probably involve some form of demobilisation, and possibly a relative relaxation of the grip of the state, although there would inevitably be caution, and it could be expected that the official line would be that Ethiopia cannot yet be trusted, and that time is needed to see if the peace will indeed hold. But demarcation would remove a key obstacle to political reform, and would certainly heighten demand for it, at home and abroad. Popular patience might well wear thin if no concessions were forthcoming, and again this is less about ‘democracy’ than it is about demobilisation and the economic opportunity which many believe is now their right. Some might privately believe that the President is content to leave the issue of demarcation simmering in the background, as the maintenance of the external threat is the best means of maintaining (and justifying) internal control. However, if the reform which has already been suggested proceeds, it is presumably the President who will want to direct it and take advantage of it, in effect leading Eritrea into the ‘fourth phase’ of its young history, a phase which would almost certainly culminate – one way or another – in the withdrawal of Isaias’ own generation from the centre of the political arena.
Approaches to the Ethiopian ‘problem’ have diversified. Frequent meetings with the Southern Sudanese, and in particular visits to Asmara and Massawa by President Salva Kiir, as well as improving relations with Khartoum – Isaias’ support for Omar Bashir’s position on a UN force for Darfur, and an agreement on the rebel Eastern Front – suggest a regional jostling on the part of the Eritrean Government which may well strengthen its position in the medium term, at least. It also demonstrates a pragmatism in foreign affairs, which is perhaps all too easily overlooked. Pragmatism is also evident in Eritrean policy in Somalia, where political and material support for the Union of Islamic Courts, and now the insurgency, is a continuation of a rather older policy of attacking Ethiopia on its southern flank (see Gilkes, 2002, and contributions from Lyons and Menkhaus in this issue). Critics might point to the EPLF’s inherent expansionism, yet at the same time this is no more or no less than Eritrean realpolitik.

The government now seems more determined than ever to secure Eritrean interests beyond its borders, and to stabilise its position in the region. Yet the implications of this for change within Eritrea remain unclear.

The Ethiopian factor in Eritrean politics, the concept of the ‘enemy at the gates’, is clearly crucial, even though it is perhaps less overt – in terms of media coverage, especially – than it once was. It is also inextricably bound up with the fundamental belief in the treachery and perfidiousness of the ‘international community’, which is seen to have failed to enforce the findings of the Boundary Commission, gone to great lengths to accommodate Ethiopia, and generally lived up to its reputation – in place since the 1950s – that it hates Eritrea. National neurosis, perhaps; but it unfortunately is grounded in historical reality, and needs to be taken rather more seriously by foreign representatives charged with dealing with the Eritrean Government. This said, it may be possible to suggest that anger vented at the ‘international community’ among ordinary Eritreans is displaced emotion, representing a type of criticism by proxy of their own government’s failure to see an end to the issue – the border with Ethiopia – that so blights their lives. This is indelibly intertwined with domestic politics because, ultimately, it is now clear that demarcation of the border with Ethiopia should also mean demarcation of the boundaries between government and state, state and Party, and between all three and ‘the people’. As we have seen, the ‘national security’ agenda currently pursued by the government has involved the subordination of all other issues to the question of Ethiopia. But sovereignty, like charity, begins at home, and ultimately the question of demarcation will become one of legitimacy for the government itself.

**Tentative Conclusions**

The ‘national security’ agenda will continue to define government policy for the immediate future, and all other issues will be subordinate to that agenda. However, there are indications that the first movements toward transition and reform may be closer to hand than might first appear to the casual observer. Change, if and when it comes, will be internal, characterised by attempts on the part of the Party to ‘pass the torch’ to selected members of the next generation. It seems unlikely that change will come about through ‘external’ pressure, whether from the opposition abroad or from the ‘international community’. The overriding popular desire is for relative peace and some form of economic development, and not for anything approaching a wholesale dismantling of the current regime. ‘Resistance’ to the current government is likely to be confined to attempts by the young to flee the country, and not in any form of violent demonstration, of which, in any case, there are remarkably few examples in
modern Eritrean history. The government will continue to urge patience with what it
defines as temporary problems, and it is likely that it will be both greeted by silence,
and granted the patience it requests. The former is a matter of concern for the govern-
ment, because ultimately it represents a form of disengagement from the state, but the
latter will continue to be the defining feature of Eritrean political culture for some time
to come.

The government will continue to involve itself in regional affairs and conduct proxy
confrontations with Ethiopia. However, it is highly unlikely that it will risk initiating
another round of fighting with Ethiopia, directly at least. Another war is completely
inimical to Eritrea’s political development and will destroy any prospect of economic
recovery. Nonetheless, normalised relations with Addis Ababa are also improbable at
the present time, and there is a growing confidence in PFDJ circles that it will outlive
Meles’ government by some way, given the domestic troubles faced by the latter
(see articles by Clapham, and by Aalen and Tronvoll in this issue), which Eritreans
consider to be much more acute than their own. That this situation has come about
is certainly noteworthy, given the crises confronting Isaias and the Party in 2000–01.
No doubt it reflects the capacity for survival of both.

There are many who have been disappointed by the fruits of independence – from
older ex-fighters who find themselves on the wrong side of the President’s Office, or
who had hoped for greater professional and material advancement, to the youngsters
described above who feel themselves downtrodden and denied the opportunities
normally associated with their age group. No doubt disappointment was inevitable.
There have been some small indications that the government recognises the very
real mistakes that have been made. It may yet attempt to address these, cognisant as
it is of the dangerous space that is opening up between it and the population. However, a bombastic inflexibility remains at the heart of the Eritrean state, which
has proved itself to have no faith in ‘the people’. As for the latter, a situation in
which there are no alternatives will not persist indefinitely. In the meantime, the
desire to make modern Eritrean society in the image of the liberation war in the
Sahel remains powerful, although the status of Asmara as well as significant sections
of the Eritrean population in this ongoing project is uncertain. Regardless of the appro-
piateness or otherwise of the project itself, flexibility and selectivity at this time would
ensure that the gains of the ‘revolution’, such as they are, are not irretrievably lost in
the long term.

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Select List of Informants

I1. Former senior figure in the EPLF, c.60 years old. April and September 2006.
I2. Teacher, c.40 years old; member of the ELF in his youth. March–April and
          2006.
I7. National service, c.35 years old. Was imprisoned in Ethiopia before being
I15. Former EPLF fighter, officer, formerly involved in the organisation of military service, c.60 years old. August–September 2006.
I17. Former member of the ELF, journalist, c.45 years old. September 2006.

Endnotes

2. See also Connell, forthcoming.
3. This may be disingenuous, but it was strongly emphasised to me by a source close to the Minister himself.
4. Arabic, meaning ‘popular’: a common nickname for the EPLF.
5. These must necessarily remain anonymous. All are Eritreans, and all interviews and conversations took place in Asmara. Other sections of the analysis and some other interpretations contained in this essay are derived from a range of informal conversations.

References


How Liberal Peacebuilding May Be Failing Sierra Leone

Carla Castañeda

The concept of security is the driver for peacebuilding and development, as well as social and political change in post-conflict countries. A review and analysis of three key government documents indicates that, in Sierra Leone, securitisation discourse is embedded in both the political economy discourse of the state and in the popular imagination. The Security Sector Review equates security and peace while the country’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper sees security as a driver for change. The 2006 Work Plan of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security illustrates the extent to which the work of ministries is security-based. Sierra Leone’s political economy of post-conflict peacebuilding favours macro-economic security that is to trickle down into social and political peace. Discourse analysis shows that, framed within security parameters, post-conflict peacebuilding is meant to have an effect of ‘trickle-down peace’ that in effect constrains transformation with the potential for facilitating conditions for a return to conflict.

Introduction

The centrality of security in peacebuilding is evident in the path taken by Sierra Leone, a country reeling from the legacy of the 1991–2002 conflict. The effects of the conflict are visible in the government’s securitised political economy discourse. Although such overwhelming concern for security appears to be an adequate context-specific approach, the security focus is more a product of the powerful dynamic of liberalism that drives the contemporary development and peacebuilding discourse of international post-conflict assistance. This peacebuilding discourse is problematic. This article will examine the effect that the liberal peacebuilding security agenda has on the political economy of Sierra Leone, and thus on the government’s articulation of the intersection of economic, development and security priorities. To that end, the article will analyse three key documents of the Government of Sierra Leone: the Security Sector Review, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and the 2006 Workplan of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security. The research draws on interviews with, and personal communications from, respondents in civil society and donor organisations, national government and the UN system in 2005 and 2006.

Analysis of the documents shows that government discourse assumes that security at the macro-economic level will bring peace to the community and social level, a process which can be called ‘trickle-down peace’. Trickle-down peace is a discourse which may already be failing Sierra Leone. The liberal peacebuilding strategies that focus
on creating an international player out of Sierra Leone continue to feed the unresolved roots of the conflict, hinder security and keep the Sierra Leonean state fragile. Sierra Leone may no longer be a failed state in the midst of conflict, but by waiting for peace to trickle down from the macro-economic to the social realm, the country will remain a fragile state on the brink of failing again. Trickle-down peace will make peacebuilding difficult.

This analysis of the three documents reviewed in this article is performed from a political economy perspective of ‘who gets what in the international economic and political system’ (Jackson and Sorensen 2003, p. 175). As the focus of the analysis is on language and discourse, an assessment of the effectiveness and quality of, or need for, the strategies themselves is beyond the scope of the article, as is a full examination of the concept of the marketisation of security, important though it undoubtedly is.

**Trickle-Down Peace: Discourse Analysis and Political Economy**

This article will explore, through discourse analysis of narratives of political economy, what the Government of Sierra Leone’s strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding say about security and fragility. Discourse analysis helps us to consider how language is used to conceive of, and build security in, Sierra Leone within the global liberal environment. The focus on three selected documents follows the definition of discourse as ‘an interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception that brings an object into being’ and the practice of discourse analysis to explore ‘how texts are made meaningful through these processes and also how they contribute to the constitution of social reality by making meaning’ (Phillips and Hardy 2002, pp. 3–4, emphasis in the original). Language, writes Gee (2005, p. 10), has ‘a magical property’ as it adapts to fit the situation in which it is used while ‘how we speak or write creates that very situation’.

Applying discourse analysis to the political economy of post-conflict Sierra Leone opens a window into how a transformation to peace is being conceived and the kind of political economy that is being created. There is an important synergy between discourse analysis and political economy: political economy is itself a tool to understand change arising from the manner in which political institutions and the political environment interact with policies and behaviours of economic exchanges. Analysis will reveal a discourse that economic security, interpreted as peace, is intended to trickle down as social, political and cultural security.

Trickle-down peace is a variant of trickle-down economics for post-conflict states. Trickle-down economics assumes that economic growth flows from top to bottom, and that economic incentives and advantages at the macro level will have a positive effect at the micro level. That is, that the benefits of growth will eventually ‘trickle down even to the poor’ (Stiglitz 2007, p. 582, emphasis in the original). Although the model is no longer central to contemporary policy debates, the ideas and policies persist in what Stiglitz (2007, p. 583) calls ‘“trickle-down plus” where growth is necessary and almost sufficient for reducing poverty – implying that the best strategy is simply to focus on growth’.

Trickle-down peace is the assumption that a lack of violence (negative peace), an improved macro-economic framework (‘economic peace’), and large-scale goals
such as increased food production will flow down to the community and individual level as increased personal physical, economic, and even food, security. Trickle-down peace discourse presents macro-economic security as the means to create a broad peace in the same manner in which structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s identified benefits to supply-side macro-economic indicators as the mechanism to create broad well-being (jobs, wealth and health) for populations. However, just as the benefits of the 1980s structural adjustment programmes did not flow downward, but rather trickled down few benefits – if at all – to the population as a whole, so the liberal peacebuilding strategies of openness to private investment (foreign or not), securitising social, economic and political problems, and self-sufficient food production will not automatically lead to reduced poverty, durable peace and food security for all. Peace is not a linear process nor does it follow economic logic.

In the liberal peace context, increased security and economic growth can, and do, improve the lives of populations that have lived with years of conflict and poverty. Even Aghio and Bolton’s economic modelling of trickle-down growth finds that ‘the trickle-down mechanism is not sufficient to reach an efficient distribution of resources, even in the best possible scenario’ (Aghio and Bolton 1997, p. 152). Instead, permanent redistributions must be set up for any benefits to reach the poor (Aghio and Bolton 1997, p. 152). However, the prioritisation of development as a macro-economic improvement dependent on foreign direct investment and increased donor funds minimises efforts for redistribution and for social and political peace.

The situation of Sierra Leone shows that there is no true direct link between the macro-economic improvements (economic peace) and social and political stability (social and political peace), exposing the intended impact as a sham in the same vein as trickle-down economics. Stiglitz (2007, p. 582) argues that it ‘is not true that “a rising tide lifts all boats”. Sometimes, a quickly rising tide, especially when accompanied by a storm, dashes weaker boats against the shore, smashing them to smithereens’. The rising tide of increased GDP does not lift all boats, whether it is in economics or peacebuilding.

This article will show that emphasis on security is being used as a tool to establish an environment where investor and business interests are safe to create a market that may not benefit the people it is meant to assist. Pugh (2006, p. 149) argues that foreign direct investment ‘appears to make little impact on growth varying accordingly to the level of repatriated profits’. Economic growth through direct investment is a questionable direct goal for security sector reform, yet it has become one. As a result, not only has peacebuilding been securitised, but the concept of security has been marketised. Security can be ‘bought’: if the gains of increased macroeconomic growth are to roll into social and political peace that will create security, then economic actions can effectively create, or buy, security. The concept of trickle-down peace brings these two assumptions together.

An Analysis of Security and Peace

This article’s approach to security and peace is informed by analyses of the political economy of conflict, and the political economy of post-conflict and peacebuilding. It draws on, and is supported by, three perspectives on the mechanisms of the fluidity between conflict and post-conflict (the securitisation of development; the liberal
peace project; and security sector reform as a tool of securitisation), which are useful tools in the study of conflict and post-conflict states.

Analyses of the political economy of conflict put forth by Collier, Reno and Kaldor argue that profit-making from a position of access and control of resources endangers the well-being of the state, particularly when transactions take place outside the state’s regulatory framework (Reno 1998, Kaldor 1999, Collier 2000, Collier et al. 2003). Economic gains and resources are identified as incentives for conflict, and as disincentives for peace, while success in current wars is deemed to be founded on establishing a positive political economy of war as the best available option (Richani 2002, pp. 3–4). Economic mismanagement, weak governance and external condition- alities are identified as causes of conflict and the frailty of states (Williams 2004, Pugh 2006).

For their part, analyses of the political economy of post-conflict are largely conceptualised ‘in terms of radical socio-economic change – away from pre-capitalist, statist or command economies and toward free markets open to penetration by the global capitalist system’ (Pugh et al. 2004, p. 2). However, the recipe contained in the current liberal approach to economic growth, and the emphasis on it, ‘may itself contain the seeds of continuing insecurity’ (Duffield 1998, p. 10). The liberal market-led system is said to promote peace; yet, with its message to ‘participate or perish’, it may fall just short of blackmail in ensuring compliance with an international system of global inequity.

This article analyses three core assumptions of the standard peacebuilding approach to post-conflict, especially developing, states. The article considers securitisation as the

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\text{discursive process through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a}
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\text{political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object,}
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\text{and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat.}
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(Buzan and Wæver 2003, p. 491)

Applied to development, securitisation is the cooptation of social, economic and political development concerns into security prerogatives in a manner that echoes the ‘developmentalisation’ of social and political problems in lower-income countries (Escobar 1995). This core assumption of peacebuilding discourse, that underdevelopment and a high risk of conflict go hand-in-hand (Duffield 2001, p. 115), has led to tight collaboration between development and security actors in post-conflict developing countries.

Duffield (2001, pp. 10–11) identifies the liberal peace project as a polyarchical, non-territorial networked governance that uses a market democracy and economic self-management approach to seeking peace. With an increasingly expansive approach that includes community security, justice and even hunger (as will be shown later), security sector reform in Sierra Leone bridges development and post-conflict assistance by re-imagining violence, politics and social relationships using the security sector as a departure point.

Security sector reform as a tool of securitisation is distilled from what appears to be a conflict prevention strategy to provide investors and donors with security for their funds. The UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the UK’s Security Sector Development Advisory Team (SSDAT) share the view that security
sector reform acts as a stimulus for economic growth-based development (DFID 2005); (SSDAT. Personal communication from Evaluator (assessment of security sector), 29 July 2005). Thus, the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) enshrines the goal to ‘deliver economic growth’ in its Policing Charter, and sees its contribution to stability as protecting revenue and creating an investment-friendly (especially for foreign investors) atmosphere (GoSL no date, SLP 2006).

With an emphasis on foreign investment, the idea that security is a pre-requisite for development brings together widely held views on the links between security, development and peace in Sierra Leone. Field research for the analysis contained in this article shows that definitions of security and insecurity link security and peace with economic development to create beliefs that ‘with increased liberal security, economic growth will increase’; or, more succinctly, that ‘conflict prevention attracts foreign investment’, thus creating the first part of the trickle-down peace equation.

Sierra Leone: A Legacy of Conflict

The years of conflict from 1991 to 2002 brought international infamy to Sierra Leone for the brutality of violence against civilians and for the use of natural resources, mostly diamonds, by all parties to fund the conflict (Hanlon 2005, p. 460). Sierra Leone’s prior history was no easier for its people. The country had endured 153 years of harsh British colonial administration, 24 post-independence years of brutal one-party rule, and at least eight coups, counter-coups and attempted coups since 1967. Given this history, it is no surprise that the security sector ended up playing a major role in the weak governance that came to plague Sierra Leone and make the country easy prey to the spiral of conflict, violence and insecurity in which it found itself again in the 1990s.

Unquestionably, when Sierra Leone embarked, with substantial British support, on a broad-based transition effort toward peace, it had a long way to go to break free from the legacy of instability and violence that plagued national and individual security. The conflict had left borders breached by armed activity and smuggling, and Sierra Leoneans mutilated, raped and killed, often publicly, to intimidate individuals and communities. At the same time, the population struggled with increased poverty, social disintegration and government impotence, thus associating fear and personal insecurity with social, economic and political instability. Not surprisingly, fear of insecurity, and all that came to be associated with it, was a key element of the 2007 presidential elections.

In 2007, five years of post-conflict peacebuilding later, Sierra Leone could no longer justifiably be called a failed state. However, ‘economic reforms have fallen short’ (Sierra Leone: the election issue 2007). The prosperity promised by liberal peacebuilding is nowhere in sight; Sierra Leone remains largely poor, with low life expectancy, few basic services and widespread corruption. With the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 looking unlikely, and, given its persistent poverty, vulnerability to shocks and weak rule-of-law, Sierra Leone remains a fragile state (UNDP 2007). This fragile stability is certainly a legacy of the conflict; but, as this article will show, it is also a product of the emphasis on trickle-down peace, which is at the centre of the country’s post-conflict drive.

The three documents chosen in this article present a rounded sample of the government’s discourse on strategies for security, poverty reduction, and food security. For example,
with 22 different security threats and accompanying strategies for increasing security, the Security Sector Review concretises the abstract concepts of peacebuilding. With a focus on specific terminology and the assumptions inherent in the language used, this article uses discourse analysis to consider how language, both spoken and written, enacts social and cultural perspectives and identities for a post-conflict Sierra Leone.

The Security Sector Review

In March 2005, the Government of Sierra Leone published the Security Sector Review (hereafter the Review) ‘to assess the security requirements for an envisioned national vision of a safe and enabling environment for the next five to ten years’ (GoSL-SSRS 2005, p. x). The Review examines the state of security in the country, identifies causes of internal and external insecurity, points to necessary actions to create a secure Sierra Leone, and links security to economic growth, poverty reduction and development. This government strategy for the reorganisation of the Sierra Leonean state demonstrates the economic understanding and application of security that the Government of Sierra Leone has adopted (GoSL-SSRS 2005, p. x).

According to the Review, Sierra Leoneans perceive 22 generic threats to national security: corruption, lack of political will, fear of change/culture of silence/political apathy, lack of monitoring and effective implementation of government policies, an over-centralised political and administrative system, existence of a weak and uncoordinated security system, indiscipline and lawlessness, ill-equipped and poorly paid security forces and institutions, porous borders, regional instability, subversion/military coup, uncontrolled immigration, poor economy and lack of vibrant economic policies, environmental degradation, poverty, poor social services, poor conditions of services, social injustice, donor fatigue, smuggling, unemployment and the marginalisation of youth and women (GoSL-SSRS 2005, p. 14). Clustering these into internal and external threats, the Review calls for capacity building of security sector institutions, the institutionalisation of effective partnerships and mechanisms to integrate non-security state actors, as well as for enhanced coordination and oversight of the security sector (GoSL-SSRS 2005, p. xi).

Despite its broadened understanding of security, the Review maintains a focus on what the security sector has been receiving in national budgets – although the opposite perception dominates outside of the sector (GoSL-SSRS 2005, p. 47). The Review proposes that the national security apparatus (the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces, the SLP, the Prisons Department, the National Fire Authority, the Immigration Department, the Central Intelligence and Security Unit, the Office of National Security (ONS), the National Security Council Coordinating Group and the National Security Council, in cooperation with line ministries, departments and agencies, build and maintain security, otherwise ‘the nation’s high drive to achieve the vision of a peaceful, prosperous and progressive society will fail’ (GoSL-SSRS 2005, pp. 11–21).

Significantly, the Review is ‘the first ever platform for the consideration of security as a related development matter’ (GoSL-SSRS 2005, p. 68). Each threat is used to develop a corresponding ‘national vision’ advanced by a government department. The Ministry of Development and Economic Planning (MODEP) works ‘to avert the threat of poverty’ (GoSL-SSRS 2005, p. 40). The Ministry of Education Science and Technology is to lead against the ‘threat’ of high illiteracy (GoSL-SSRS 2005, p. 43). The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs has the task to ‘pursue the threat of
social injustice’ (GoSL-SSRS 2005, p. 42). The Ministry of Finance is to ‘mitigate the threat of donor fatigue’ (GoSL-SSRS 2005, p. 38). Moreover, the Review expects the government to do a joint assessment of the implementation of the Security Sector Reform and the Poverty Reduction Strategy (GoSL-SSRS 2005, p. 70). Each ministry works thus to minimise a threat rather than for a social or common good.

The goals of poverty reduction, increased literacy, social justice and donor aid sustainability are, without doubt, important for Sierra Leone’s peacebuilding. However, when social and political issues are framed in security terms, strategies will be born out of a concern for security rather than for social justice, human rights and equality, leaving aside the moral and governance responsibilities of the state. For example, by categorising poverty as a threat, people living in poverty become a menace to national integrity, further marginalising people leading an already precarious existence.

This conceptualisation of security traps the country in a conflict mindset, and limits its ability to build peace. If the country sees itself as constantly under threat, it lives in a pseudo-siege mentality that may make it difficult to create a peace-time identity or identify creative third-way methods for resolving current and potential conflicts. Furthermore, classifying the social, political and economic problems that the country has battled with since before independence as security problems, removes the distributive responsibilities of the government. Thus, the role of the state is limited to ensuring security, while, by default, letting others, such as the private sector, direct Sierra Leone’s recovery and reconstruction in their image and interests. This laissez-faire approach, consistent with the laissez-faire of market-led development, is expected to bring about macro-economic improvement that will trickle down as peace.

The link between security and poverty is now deeply embedded in the popular imagination. Research found that a cross-section of Sierra Leoneans ‘strongly reiterated the aphorism “no sustainable development without security”’, and thus called for a ‘development’ approach to security directly linked with the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) (GoSL-SSRS 2005, p. 11). For its part, the Review sees the PRSP as ‘an instrument for accessing donor funding and resources to support (a) peace, security and good governance, (b) revival of the economy, and (c) social and private sector development’ (GoSL-SSRS 2005, p. 40). The Review makes four significant links between security and development:

(1) Development is ‘integrally linked’ with security (GoSL-SSRS 2005, p. xi). This means that security is the ground on which peace and development can thrive; meanwhile, development is a process that ‘cannot be achieved without a safe, secure and enabling environment’ (GoSL-SSRS 2005, p. viii–xi);

(2) A solid economic and security base enables development. Such a base provides business confidence, leading to self-generating job creation in line with sustained economic growth (GoSL-SSRS 2005, p. viii);

(3) Increased security decreases poverty. Former President Kabbah saw that the transformation of the security sector is to ‘provide an enabling environment for poverty reduction’ (GoSL-SSRS 2005, p. viii);

(4) Donor support is both an input and a threat. Donor funds which are crucial for increased security can become a threat if donors pull out due to donor fatigue (GoSL-SSRS 2005, pp. 14, 63).

These links reflect two underlying assumptions, which guide Sierra Leone’s post-conflict political economy. First, the Review appears to assume that development is
Linear progression of economic to human well-being. In the current global capitalist system, where most goods and services can be bought with economic resources, the equation appears to make sense. However, without a purposeful allocation of funds at the national and community levels, there will be no concurrent progress on social, cultural or political issues, all necessary for sustainable development.

Second, the Review assumes that increased security improves the economy at all levels. However, such an assumption can make security improvements of physical and social infrastructure shorthand for improving the economy. Operational and effective security forces and justice systems, as well as an increased personal sense of safety, give a population the confidence to resume activities, including economic ones. At the same time, such a strategy sidelines the nature of development as a means and not as an end: most individuals seek to improve their economic position, not for the sake of idle profit, but to improve their housing, health, schooling; in short, their social well-being.

These two assumptions both tie poverty with economic issues and divorce them from political decisions. From a political economy perspective, where the economy is guided by political choices, this division is disingenuous. Relying mainly on economic solutions to what is the political and economic problem of poverty removes the burden from the power relations of capitalism. When economic reforms focus on short-term needs as technical rather than political solutions, economic reforms can minimise political participation for change (Pugh 2006, p. 14; Zaum 2006, p. 53). The language itself does not allow for alternative paths since ‘the concepts of planning and management embody the belief that social change can be engineered and directed, produced at will’ (Escobar 1995, p. 194).

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)

Launched in February 2005, Sierra Leone’s three-year Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper aims to reduce the poverty created and exacerbated by the 11-year conflict. Indeed, the proposed strategies for government, non-government and private sector action are framed in a post-conflict context and a peacebuilding discourse. The PRSP has also made a direct link between the security sector and poverty, in saying that ‘almost all sectors and sub-sectors in the budget are poverty-focused including the security sector’ (GoSL 2005, p. 108).

With a rolling three-year medium-term framework for ‘bold and appropriate sectoral policies, measures and institutional reforms that achieve economic growth, increase food security, increase job opportunities and provide better basic social services, as well as effective social safety nets for the poor and vulnerable’ (GoSL 2005, p. 75), the PRSP aimed ‘to reduce poverty to at least the 1990 level by 2007’ by increasing real GDP as a result of a 6 to 9 per cent growth rate from 2005 to 2007 (GoSL 2005, p. 78). Its strategy rests on three pillars.

- **Pillar 1:** ‘Promoting good governance, security and peace’, makes a security agenda, without specific mention of security sector reform, central to creating an ‘enabling environment for effective and efficient delivery of essential services that the poor rely on for reducing poverty’ (GoSL 2005, p. 75). Security ‘had to be’ explicitly included as it is a central element of the Sierra Leonean, political, social and economic context (GoSL 2005, p. 75).
Pillar 2: ‘Promoting pro-poor sustainable growth for food security and job creation’, puts forward food security and job creation as the two major challenges for poverty reduction (GoSL 2005, p. 6). The focus on food security is to contribute to ‘other important poverty reduction goals, especially the reduction of child malnutrition and mortality and improvement in maternal health on a sustainable basis’ (GoSL 2005, p. 88).

Pillar 3: ‘Promoting human development’, promotes improved education, health and water and sanitation infrastructures and a host of other concerns such as gender equality, environmental sustainability, HIV/AIDS, housing and vulnerable groups (GoSL 2005, p. 95). Through this pillar only, the government ‘may pursue policies of redistributing wealth and income’ (GoSL 2005, p. 95).

The PRSP reflects the national preoccupation, following an intense conflict, and an international desire to integrate Sierra Leone into the international political and economic arenas, to keep the country from failing again. On the one hand, although security issues are not part of the PRSP’s definition, conflict ‘is the most widespread perceived cause of poverty throughout the country’ (GoSL 2005, p. 27). On the other hand, ‘the protracted civil war and the general insecurity associated with it resulted in loss of confidence, a sustained contraction in output and substantial increase in poverty’ (GoSL 2005, p. 46). In short, poverty equals insecurity and lack of income, while security equals poverty reduction. Four significant conclusions on poverty arise from the PRSP:

1. The incidence of poverty in a particular area is directly linked to the level of economic activity, principally agriculture. For example, high poverty in Kailahun District is said to be a result of decreased cocoa and coffee production as a result of war-related destruction of plantations (GoSL 2005, p. 26).
2. Despite being the engine of economic activity and security, agriculture also equals poverty. While the agricultural sector is the ‘highest employer in the country (75 per cent of the population) and the largest contributor to GDP (45 per cent on average) survey results and sector reviews show that farmers, especially subsistence food crop farmers, are among the poorest in the country’ (GoSL 2005, p. 33).
3. Those living in urban areas are better off than rural dwellers. However, the situation in Freetown, the country’s capital and urban hub, is rapidly deteriorating due to the high ratio of dependent household members to income-earning household members and the concentration of poor people in low-paid and low-valued work.
4. Poverty is differentiated – and is more prevalent in female-headed households. However, poverty is still ‘deeper and more severe’ in male-headed households (GoSL 2005, p. 33).

The PRSP finds that the main causes of poverty are bad governance, conflict, unemployment, inadequate social services, the debt burden and the vulnerability to external risks and shocks affecting national income. It has received national and international acclaim for explicitly acknowledging and incorporating insecurity as a cause of the following: poverty; the -4.5 per cent per annum growth rate between 1990 and 2000; the destruction of social, economic and physical infrastructure; and an ‘almost complete breakdown of civil and political authority’ (GoSL 2005, pp. 1–2).

Making security central to poverty reduction is not new in Sierra Leone. The National Recovery Strategy (NRS) and the interim-PRSP (i-PRSP) that preceded the PRSP both placed restoring national security and good governance as the first of three phases, followed by re-launching the economy and providing basic social services to the most
vulnerable groups. The PRSP makes a distinctly economic case for poverty reduction, perhaps due to the assessment that the ‘i-PRSP and the NRS also resulted in sustained recovery of the economy’ (GoSL 2005, p. 4). The equation between poverty reduction and economic growth is easy for the PRSP’s main backer, the World Bank (2006), since it considers poverty reduction ‘the same as economic development’.

As a result, the PRSP has infused economic planning and is reconfiguring the articulation of Sierra Leone’s public finances. The national budget is a ‘PRSP budget’ – where only PRSP-related items are coded with all other issues considered additions (MoF-SL 2006a). Each Ministry, Department or Agency (collectively known as MDAs) prepares a PRSP-consistent Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF), a financial information system with a three-year rolling strategic plan and budget that sets out the yearly work plan and updates previous plans for the following two years (World Bank 2006, MoF-SL 2006b). The MTEF is designed to ‘enhance transparency and accountability in the use of public funds and the development of participatory monitoring systems’ (GoSL 2002, p. 11). Yet, in practice the MTEF is not a planning tool, but rather a re-packaging tool for local councils and ministries to declare that their activities, even those pre-dating the MTEF, as PRSP-related in order to access central funds (MAFFS-SL, personal communications from Senior Official (food security, securitisation, the PRSP and peacebuilding), 12, 16, 18 January 2006); (MoF-SL 2006b). The work of the government is being re-conceptualised along the security and market-led development lines of the PRSP framework.

To assess how the PRSP’s vision is being translated into the work of line ministries, the article focuses on the 2006–2008 Medium Term Expenditure Framework and 2006 Outline Workplan of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security (‘MAFFS Workplan’). The emphasis on food follows the view ‘from all socio-economic groups [that poverty] is the lack of food’ (GoSL 2005, pp. 21–23).

With the food security goal front and centre to address a key concern for the population, this Work Plan presents essential elements of the government’s discourse of post-conflict peacebuilding.

The 2006 Work Plan of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry & Food Security (MAFFS)

Anchored in the PRSP maxim that ‘food security is at the heart of Sierra Leone’s poverty reduction strategy’, the MAFFS Work Plan links food security directly with the government’s strategy for peace (GoSL, 2005:87). In doing so, food and nutrition become tools for economic growth. The Work Plan tightly links its definition of security to the PRSP, and illustrates the implementation strategies flowing from the discourse of the Government of Sierra Leone.

The food security goal is directly traced to then-President Kabbah’s 2002 pledge to ‘work even harder, and with greater resolve, to do everything in my power to ensure that within the next five years no Sierra Leonean should go to bed hungry’ (Address, 2002). The MAFFS Work Plan (2006, p. 4) vision is: ‘No Sierra Leonean should go to bed hungry by the year 2007’. Its Mission is:

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry & Food Security (MAFFS) seeks to improve agricultural production and productivity in order to achieve food security by providing the enabling
Although the plan makes overtures to distributive strategies, the focus to increase production lacks a concurrent focus on improved nutrition. Of the six long-term objectives prepared ‘in accordance’ with Pillar II of the PRSP, which promotes pro-poor sustainable growth, only one refers to equitable distribution and balanced growth (GoSL-MAFFS 2006, p. 24). The Workplan defines food security as ‘a function of a stable, healthy, macro-economic society’, while ‘farm production is, therefore, a function of Food Security, but not the entire equation’ (GoSL-MAFFS 2006, p. 7). The Workplan’s focus is on ‘economic and social sectors for production, income generation and on creating job opportunities’ as part of establishing the ‘virtuous circle of peace, stability and wealth creation’ that is part of Vision 2025 and the PRSP (GoSL-MAFFS 2006, pp. 5–6).

The MAFFS Workplan itself identifies the achievements of the previous three-year period (2003–2005) as increased farm production, increased rice production and increased private investment. With increased farm production (the 2005–2006 harvest was expected to be a ‘bumper harvest’), food security in a number of crops was expected in 2007. Thus, production could then be geared to cash crops and added-value produce that would earn the country foreign exchange. With increased rice production, even if still representing only two-thirds of national requirements, food sufficiency was considered attainable by 2007 if donor supported programmes delivered as planned and if average farm-size and average yield was increased (GoSL-MAFFS 2006, pp. 7–9).

The MAFFS Workplan sees its role in long-term development of the agricultural sector as ‘supporting private investment and development’ with the support of donors. The government hopes to rely on ‘international investment for commercial tree crop plantations and the processing industry’ rather than on donors. It has been argued that the PRSP is a document that equates economic growth and macro-economic stabilisation with poverty reduction. What appears is a chain where economic growth is the catalyst that is to turn food insecurity into food security, in other words, to turn an internal security threat into a base element for peace (GoSL-MAFFS 2006, p. 15).

The MAFFS Workplan conflates the availability of food with the population’s nourishment from food. Although related, production cannot be equated with consumption – availability of food does not mean access to food. Increased consumption necessitates access that may need to be facilitated by political processes and distributive action. Although the Review identified maldistribution and inequity as key causes of insecurity to be addressed by sector Departments, these issues are not part of the MAFFS Workplan. Their absence points to a deep rift between the causes and the solutions, between analysis and action, and between the responsibility to protect the population and Sierra Leone’s desire to integrate internationally.

The MAFFS Workplan focus on improving agricultural productivity brings the goal of hunger eradication to its lowest common denominator and equates economic growth with poverty reduction. Rather than distilling its essence, reducing food security to the strictest economic definition cuts the social element attached to food, such as improving access to food, including by the poor, or support for small and subsistence farmers.
This faith in the market to bring about, or trickle down, peace is the Achilles heel of Sierra Leone’s discourse on peace, security and development.

The MAFFS approach provides an apt example of the securitisation of peacebuilding illustrated in Figure 1.

Moreover, the MAFFS approach has translated the idea of peacebuilding as a step to transform insecurity into security using the agriculture and food security lenses. The hunger and poverty identified as threats to security are to be addressed with increased average farm area and increased average farm yield as a result of (foreign) investment. The resulting agricultural production and productivity will create economic growth – a clever, yet worrisome, logical chain. Assisting communities to meet their basic needs does go a long way towards creating a stable environment. However, not adequately addressing equitable distribution of the ‘peace dividend’ will marginalise populations that do not have the economic means to access that so-called security or development. Yet, these populations are ironically the very ones whose poverty, unemployment and hunger are considered a threat to national security.

That food security, an important element of national security according to the Sierra Leonean government, is measured by production – not consumption – is indicative of the power of the liberal peace agenda. Former President Kabbah (personal communication – food security, the economy and peace – 17 July 2006) proclaimed that distribution was an unnecessary concern since Sierra Leone ‘will have a free market’, where rice produced will be bought by people who, as a result of government intervention, will have an ‘income to buy’. Yet, recent proxy data to judge the possibility of meeting the goal of food security for all by 2007 is not encouraging. As of 2005, 27 per cent of children under the age of five were underweight for their age (UNDP 2007, p. 269). Between 2002 and 2004, over half the population (51 per cent) was undernourished (UNDP 2007, p. 269). At the same time, less than 10 per cent of land for growing rice, the country’s staple food, was cultivated as of 2007 (Sierra Leone 2007). In addition, the World Food Programme calculated that in 2008 it would distribute over 16,000 tonnes of food to projects, relief and other operations (WFP Facts 2007).

By attaching an economic growth objective to the goal of increased national and individual security, and specifically to food security, it is easy to conceive other elements of peacebuilding within a market focus, even referring to peace as a ‘commodity’ that is ‘very expensive’ (MMCET, personal communication from a lecturer (peacebuilding in Sierra Leone), 22 June 2005); (MMCET 2005). The drive to increase output has a clear

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Figure 1. The securitisation of food security in the MAFFS 2006 Work Plan.
and appealing urgency. The promise of more food easily mobilises people who do not have enough and appears to provide an answer to the problem of poverty. That the answer is economic is not a mistake, as ‘in a poor society, economics is not all of life, but as a practical matter it is most of it’ (Galbraith 1972, p. 398). The problem faced by people living in poverty is essentially an economic problem and ‘higher income is the basic remedy’ (Galbraith 1972, p. 397). The market is expected to provide, and it will, but at a price out of reach of many thus making the market ‘a disguise for injustice’ (Galbraith and Salinger 1978, p. 166).

The Sierra Leone Government’s articulation of its post-conflict strategies in the three documents analysed, elevates the goal of increased economic growth to the status of the driver of peacebuilding efforts. Indeed, the specific actions proposed could potentially increase agricultural production and productivity, but at the cost of planting the seeds of further insecurity. These assumptions make the equation of development and peace seem less like a straightforward step and more like what can be called ‘trickle-down peace’.

The face of insecurity and the new security

The views of insecurity explored above are not restricted to government discourse; they have become part of the popular imagination in Sierra Leone. Field research led to the identification of six specific understandings that insecurity has acquired in Sierra Leone:

(1) Insecurity is bad governance. Bad governance does not protect people nor does it provide freedom from fear. A badly run government disempowers: excluded populations are easy prey to a mentality of violence (Action Aid, Program Officer 2006, ENCISS Prog. Adv. 1 2006, ENCISS Prog. Adv. 2 2006).

(2) Insecurity is poverty. In unpredictable conditions, poor people have no power to alter their life conditions (Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, personal communication from a Senior Academic (political economy of post-conflict Sierra Leone), 17 January 2006). Unless basic needs are fulfilled, an insecure environment is guaranteed: ‘a hungry man is an angry man’ (Action Aid, Program Officer 2006).

(3) Insecurity is anti-business. An insecure environment increases the cost of business, if business takes place at all (World Bank 2006).

(4) Insecurity is stalled development. Insecure conditions threaten and stop the progress of nationally and internationally funded development projects.

(5) Insecurity is economic stagnation. A volatile context tends to be conducive to no or low economic growth, which further undermines security (DFID 2006). The Review identified the malfunctioning justice system and lack of political will as inhibiting growth (ONS, personal communication from Senior Officer (security, implementation of the PRSP and the Security Sector Review), 19 January 2006).

(6) Insecurity is vulnerability. Lacking solidity, an insecure society is easy prey to external forces and to economic, political and social shocks. Instability in Liberia and Guinea has, and could again, destabilise Sierra Leone politically and economically (MFAIC-SL 2006).

This spectrum of opinions about the nature of insecurity illustrates the extent to which security has come to dominate the popular imagination of government, non-government and individual actors. Through the six definitions, there is a continuity: the condition of insecurity as a negative economic fate.
Interviews also pointed to six context-specific definitions of security as follows:

1. Security is poverty reduction. The implementation of the Review helps to create an enabling environment for the implementation of the PRSP (SLP 2006). With the macroeconomic focus of PRSP strategies for poverty reduction, security is an enabling factor for macroeconomic stability and the promise of decreased poverty and development.

2. Security is protection. As part of increased confidence and trust in the police, the population expects security forces to provide protection from threats and violence (Action Aid, Program Officer 2006, ENCISS 2006).

3. Security is freedom from fear. A low level of open conflict increases feelings of safety and freedom from fear among the population at large (SLP 2006). Eradicating open violence is both a symbolic and real assurance that peace is possible for a population terrorised by a brutally physical conflict.


5. Security is economic growth. The Review identifies economic, socio-political, good governance and human security as the basis for economic security (ONS 2006). The economic development thrust of the ‘post-conflict PRSP’ shows the government’s emphasis on economic growth, and thus economic security, as the key to long-term security and peace for the country.

6. Security is investment. The security forces protect investment, with the SLP taking on covert maritime policing and mineral policing (SLP 2006). Yet, the premise that increased security will attract foreign investors is appealing but not fully credible in a country with a thin foreign investment history.

If increased security is considered the enabling environment for an improved economy, then the national and individual security agenda has become a tool to create an enabling environment for economic development. For many, the proof that Sierra Leone was becoming more secure was that ‘investors are coming’ (SLP 2006). In effect, ‘security leads to development’ was a mantra-like statement across government and non-government circles and cutting across political lines.

The two sets of six definitions each point to three significant conclusions. First, the concept of security has been democratised to encompass, and hence has securitised, economic, social and political concerns (Former Senior Official – ONS, 2006). Second, making security synonymous with economic activity re-engineers the fear of a return to conflict into a motivating factor for the country to integrate the liberal peace project. Third, the liberal peace discourse makes market-led development prescriptions the mainstay of post-conflict and peacebuilding efforts. In doing so, they enshrine faith in the economy as a source of security and peace; faith, that is, in trickle-down peace.

**Conclusion**

Security is a requirement for peace, poverty reduction and food security. However, analysis of both the development and implementation of these strategies that the Sierra Leone Government has adopted points to a potential for decreased quick-impact insecurity and increased long-term incremental insecurity. The liberal peace project has allowed the space for peacebuilding operations to contribute to negative peace to halt open violence but is hindering the construction of long-term peace. The resulting approach is one of ‘trickle-down peace’ where peace in the form of
Economic growth is expected to somehow become peace in the form of improved social and political relationships. The logic that there is a ‘positive correlation between integration into a liberal world economy and the reduction of conflict’ assumes that integration increases economic growth and thus social services, and that integration encourages privatisation and thus strengthens civil society (Williams 2004, p. 107). In effect, security has become shorthand for technical or technical-sounding market-based solutions to address social, political and economic problems.

The problem with liberal peacebuilding is that it does not build peace in the long-term. Rather, peacebuilding is based on a counterproductive ‘commitment to market democracy’ that is necessarily short-term due to the market’s cannibalistic nature (Williams 2004, p. 104). However, the current of thought that sees failing and fragile states as a ‘problem for the entire international system’ favours action to resolve the problem these states pose for the international system and not for the populations that live within them (Holm 2002, p. 467). For this reason, a liberal peace approach is the perfect solution for the international system: liberal peace stabilises the state, introduces it to the international market system and encourages mechanisms that entrench the state in the international system. Trickle-down peace favours international actors over those who survived the conflict.

While it is easy to think that economic growth leads to peace or that economic growth leads to development, recent research suggests that the market liberalisation prescription for economic growth may instead deepen divisions (Zaum 2006, p. 52). That is, research suggests that trickle-down peace does not work. Even if only economic development is measured, its emergence is not guaranteed by conflict prevention or stability. Ultimately, in the quest for long-lasting peace, economic growth can only bring short-term gains, not long-term transformation, and it is here that the equation breaks down.

Rather than privileging more security or security-centric policies, Sierra Leone should free itself from myopic securitisation frameworks that prevent it from considering the full range of social, economic and political actions necessary to improve well-being and build long-term peace. To do so, Sierra Leone should remove itself from the security-insecurity debate that straightjackets discussions on peace – the focus on security limits the political imagination and discussions for alternatives. Were there real security, the issue would not be under discussion (Wæver 1995, p. 56). Such a change could move Sierra Leone from minimising insecurity, and waiting for peace to trickle down, to working towards peace. However, Sierra Leone is not in sole control of its own discourse and a significant change in discourse would require a change in international discourse – a much larger task.

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Endnote

1. The objectives are: (1) Enhance the capacity of MAFFS through institutional strengthening and policy development to support the agricultural sector; (2) Achieve long-term national and household Food Security by 2007 by increasing domestic agricultural production; (3) Increase rural incomes and employment; (4) Conserve for the environment for future generations; (5) Promote exports to ensure balanced regional agricultural growth and equitable distribution of income, and to maximise foreign exchange earnings from the agricultural sector; and (6) Contribute to establishing a sound macro-economic environment by promoting pro-poor sustainable growth.

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The Ethiopia–Eritrea Conflict and the Search for Peace in the Horn of Africa

Terrence Lyons

The Ethiopia-Eritrea border dispute is embedded within a set of domestic political conflicts in each state, is linked further through proxy conflicts to instability in Somalia and the Ogaden, and is skewed additionally by the application of Washington’s global counter-terrorism policies to the region. Each of these arenas of contention has its own history, issues, actors and dynamic; however, each is also distorted by processes of conflict escalation and de-escalation in the other arenas. The intermeshing of domestic insecurities, interstate antagonisms, and global policies create regional ‘security complexes’ in which the security of each actor is intrinsically linked to the others and cannot realistically be considered apart from one another. Prospects for both the escalation and resolution of the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict are linked to domestic political processes (such as increasing authoritarianism), regional dynamics (such as local rivalries played out in Somalia) and international policies (such as US counter-terrorism policies).

Ethiopia-Eritrea Conflict

In late 2008, tensions on the Ethiopia-Eritrea border were as taut as they have been since the parties signed the ceasefire that ended their 1998–2000 war. The peace process launched by the Algiers Agreement has failed, yet there is no clear replacement or even framework for talks in sight. The Eritrea Ethiopia Border Commission (EEBC) closed its doors without having delimited the border on the ground in November 2007; the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) terminated its mandate in August 2008; Eritrean troops re-occupied the Temporary Security Zone. Ethiopia remains in control of areas that the EEBC’s demarcation placed on the Eritrean side of the border, notably the symbolically important town of Badme and Ethiopian and Eritrean troops are face-to-face along their highly militarised border. Eritrea is steadfast in its position that the EEBC decision is final and has the backing of international law. Ethiopia, in turn, clings to the leverage it has by virtue of the de facto situation on the ground and its strong relationship with the United States. The stalemate is both durable and costly.

The Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), led by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, and the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF), led by President Isaias Afwerki, cooperated closely to overthrow the brutal Mengistu Haile Mariam regime in...
1991. While the EPRDF joined with other parties to form the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, the EPLF assumed control of Eritrea and established a provisional government. In April 1993, Eritreans voted overwhelmingly for independence in a UN-monitored referendum. The EPRDF welcomed Eritrean independence and for the next several years the two states and leaders seemed to be prepared to put past conflicts behind them and cooperate on a broad range of economic and diplomatic issues.

However, by 1998 relations between the two countries had degenerated. Disputes between Addis Ababa and Asmara arose over land-locked Ethiopia’s access to Eritrean ports of Massawa and Asab, questions of how the new Eritrean currency related to the existing Ethiopian currency, and disagreements over the precise location of their poorly demarcated border, among other things. The classic imperatives of state- and nation-building drove both regimes to set forth unconditional goals and refuse compromise on the vital issues of territoriality, legitimacy and identity.

In May 1998, Eritrean armed forces attacked the disputed border town of Badme, a use of military force that quickly escalated into full-scale war. The historical links and rivalries between the two peoples, ruling parties and leaders made the violence particularly bitter. Meles and Isaias characterise each other’s behaviour as a betrayal, and both countries share a political culture that values absolute victory and zero-sum calculations over compromise and joint gains. This led both to be obdurate and made de-escalation difficult. The violence generated considerable casualties and huge costs on both sides. An estimated 70,000 to 100,000 people were killed, 1 million were displaced, and a generation of development opportunities was squandered.

After a period of military stalemate and unproductive negotiations, Ethiopia launched a major offensive in May 2000, broke through defences, and forced Eritrea to pull its troops back to pre-May 1998 positions. Following a June 2000 ceasefire agreement, the warring parties signed an internationally brokered agreement in Algiers in December 2000. An ad hoc group of states served as Witnesses to the agreements, including the Organization of African Unity (now Africa Union), Algeria, the European Union, and the United States.

The Algiers Agreement established a ceasefire, created a 25-kilometre temporary security zone (TSZ) to be patrolled by UNMEE and the EEBC to delimit the border, and a claims commission to assess liability for war damages. On the issue of the border, the agreement followed African practice and confirmed colonial borders. Under Article Four of the agreement, the EEBC was charged to ‘delimit and demarcate the colonial treaty border based on pertinent colonial treaties (1900, 1902, and 1908) and applicable international law’ and this determination was final and binding. The commission explicitly was not empowered to make decisions *ex aequo et bono*, that is, on the basis of equity considerations.

Although the ceasefire has held, the other core provisions of the Algiers Agreement have not been implemented and the overall framework has failed. In April 2002, the EEBC issued its determination and ruled that the town of Badme was on the Eritrean side of the border while other, less symbolically important areas claimed by Eritrea were on the Ethiopian side. The town of Badme was not the underlying cause of the conflict, but both regimes used it as the marker of whether it had ‘won’ or ‘lost’ the war, and hence whether the terrible sacrifices each made in the conflict were justified or in vain. Therefore, the control of this small desolate town became linked directly to the political fortunes – even survival – of both regimes. Isaias, for example, said that
‘pulling out of Badme may be likened to insisting that the sun will not rise in the morning . . . it is unthinkable’ (Tronvoll 1999, p. 1048).

Once the border ruling was clear, Ethiopian leaders strongly objected to it and did everything short of resumption of hostilities to delay compliance. In a September 2003 letter to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Prime Minister Meles dug in his heels and characterised the EEBC decision as ‘totally illegal, unjust, and irresponsible’ and called for an ‘alternative mechanism’ to demarcate the boundary.¹ This public repudiation of the EEBC represented a fundamental challenge to the Algiers peace process and the principle of a final and binding agreement. Meles later issued a five-point peace initiative in November 2004 that declared acceptance of the border ruling in principle while simultaneously calling for peace-building dialogue. More recently, Addis Ababa has stated its unconditional acceptance of the decision but its initial rejection gives it little credibility on the issue.²

Eritrea, frustrated both by Ethiopia and by what it considered international appeasement of Addis Ababa, took measures to force the border demarcation issue in October 2005. Eritrea banned UNMEE helicopter flights, which led the UN to withdraw its forces from nearly half of its deployment sites. In November 2005, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1640, demanding that Eritrea lift its restrictions, Ethiopia accept the EEBC’s border demarcation decisions, and both states reverse recent troop mobilisation. The Resolution threatened to impose sanctions against Eritrea if it did not remove the UNMEE restrictions. Tensions in late 2005 were high and an International Crisis Group report argued there were ‘worrying signs that the countdown to renewed conflict may have begun’ (International Crisis Group 2005, p. i).

The initial US response to the crisis over UNMEE and the non-implementation of Resolution 1640 was an improvised unilateral initiative to break the impasse. Washington sent the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Jendayi Frazer, to the region where she met with Ethiopian officials, but was denied meetings in Asmara. A flurry of international meetings ensued: Representatives of the Witnesses to the Algiers Agreement convened in New York in February 2006, and the EEBC met in London with officials from Addis Ababa and Asmara in March and May 2006; these meetings did not break the stalemate. In May 2006 the UN Security Council reduced the size of UNMEE’s force from 3,300 to 2,300.

After failing to bring Ethiopia and Eritrea together for talks in June 2006, the EEBC concluded that: ‘The situation is one which is beyond the Commission’s powers to remedy on the grounds of manifest implacability’ (Plaut 2006). Ethiopia had moved from adamant refusal to accept the agreement to agreeing ‘in principle’ and then to accepting without qualification (while asking for further talks). Eritrea refused to accept the need for additional negotiations and would not meet with UN representatives. As one observer commented, Ethiopia ‘is guilty of throwing a tantrum’ but Eritrea’s ‘passive-aggressive’ response has not helped (Pratt 2006, p. 339). The EEBC disbanded in November 2007, leaving the two parties maps with virtual demarcation, but without boundary pillars on the ground as called for in the Algiers Agreements. While the underlying conflict was not limited to the border issue, demarcating the border was a necessary prerequisite for progress on other issues.

Despite these tensions, the stalemate remained stable because neither Asmara nor Addis Ababa had compelling incentives to break the ceasefire. Because international law supports its position, Eritrea believes that the international community should
force Ethiopia to comply with the final and binding EEBC decision. Ethiopia feels no need to alter the status quo since the agreement left it in control of Badme and the international community has not applied any significant pressure. Both regimes anticipate the imminent collapse of the other and believe that time is on its side. Tensions between the two states have been displaced from the frozen border conflict into support for each other’s opposition movements and proxy conflicts in Somalia. When tensions increase, they tend to be displaced into surrogate conflicts rather than direct military confrontation on the border (Lyons 2006b).

Troubled Transitions, Regional Instability

The stalled Ethiopia-Eritrea peace process is intertwined with troubled political transitions and growing authoritarianism in both Addis Ababa and Asmara. Following the signing of the Algiers Agreement, and in part as a consequence of the war, the ruling parties in both states faced serious internal opposition. In both cases, the respective leaders effectively crushed challengers and arrested or expelled dissidents. In the ensuing years, neither has established the foundation for peaceful political competition and both rely upon force to stay in power. Eritrea and Ethiopia both have grown increasingly authoritarian since the ceasefire in 2000. The border issue and threats to the homeland have been used to justify restrictions on political activity, and the lack of democratic accountability in turn has allowed both regimes to maintain highly militarised and destructive policies. If the border issue is removed, then there might be new opportunities to promote political reform in both states.

Eritrea

Political change and the most basic respect for political and civil rights are desperately needed in Eritrea. In March 2001, shortly after the Algiers Agreement was signed, a group of 15 senior Eritrean officials signed a letter that criticised President Isaias and called for greater democracy. The letter was leaked and 11 of those who signed it, and many other supporters, were arrested in September 2001 and have been held without charge since then. Three were abroad at the time, including former Minister of Defence Mesfin Hagos, who has helped organise the Eritrean Democratic Party (EDP), an opposition group operating from exile.

The September 2001 crack-down was followed by the closing of private press, the arrests of students and others who offered critical voices, and the indefinite postponement of elections. The Eritrean Government became highly repressive and isolationist, arresting two Eritreans working for the US embassy in 2001, throwing out the United States Agency for International Development in 2005, and expelling nearly all international humanitarian organisations by 2006. International human rights groups, monitors of religious persecution, and media watchdogs all place Eritrea among the most repressive regimes in the world. Today, a very small leadership circle dominates all aspects of political, economic and social life. While the government is obviously fragile, it is less clear what might replace it. Past experience in both Eritrea and Ethiopia suggests that what appears to be a cohesive hierarchy from the outside is held together by accommodation. If the dominant institutions and leaders stumble, acquiescence can transform into violent dissent quickly (Reid 2005).

The Eritrean diaspora plays a critical role in supporting the current regime. Approximately one-quarter of the Eritrean population lives outside Eritrea, and Asmara is
highly dependent on diaspora remittances. Given the history of the costly, prolonged war of national liberation and the legitimacy earned by the EPLF in leading this struggle, the diaspora has been reluctant to criticise Isaias. The 1998–2000 war mobilised the diaspora to increase their support in order to counter what was perceived to be another threat to their liberated homeland. However, during the last few years, diaspora support and the essential remittances have declined (Styan 2007).

Eritrean opposition movements have been plagued by factionalism, weakened by the vagaries of diaspora politics, and have had their commitment to national interests questioned by their association with Ethiopia. In January 2002, the EDP was born in exile, led by the former Minister of Defence, Mesfin Hagos, and some of the dissidents purged from the ruling party in September 2001. However, this party remained rooted in the diaspora and distant from developments within Eritrea. In February 2005 an opposition grouping called the Eritrean Democratic Alliance (EDA) was formed in Khartoum (Plaut 2005). The EDA held a series of meetings in Addis Ababa (February 2007, May 2008) to overcome its fractious nature, but its close association with the Ethiopian regime leads many to regard it as a tool of the neighbouring enemy.

However, the current authoritarian order in Eritrea can be sustained only at tremendous cost, and it inherently creates opposition and anger, even if underground and silent for now. Given the pervasive political repression, many Eritreans have withdrawn from political life. Resentment is reportedly high, particularly among families with children in military camps on the harsh border year after year (Gettleman 2007). The October 2007 attempted assassination of Simon Gebredingil, a senior internal security service official, raised additional questions about the coherence of the ruling party. Isaias has made Ethiopia’s refusal to honour the Algiers Agreement and international collusion in that betrayal the principal theme of his public speeches for several years. If the border demarcation process can commence, as Asmara has demanded, Isaias will get a short-term boost in his popularity, but will inevitably face difficult internal political issues in the longer term.

**Ethiopia**

In Ethiopia, the ruling EPRDF party went through its own challenges following the signing of the Algiers Agreement, as the Central Committee of the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (historically Meles’ support base) split into two rival factions. With his base in the Tigray heartland at risk, Meles took advantage of his central position within the broader EPRDF coalition to outmanoeuvre his rivals, sack and arrest a number of senior officials, and successfully weather the storm.

The next serious domestic challenge to the EPRDF took place in the 2005 parliamentary elections. These elections presented the Ethiopian people with a remarkable opportunity to express their political views by participating in a poll that for the first time in history offered them a meaningful choice. In contrast to earlier elections in 1995 and 2000, opposition parties did not boycott the poll, but instead competed vigorously across the most populous regions. Live televised debates on matters of public policy, opposition party access to state-owned media, and massive peaceful rallies in the final week of campaigning made it clear that these elections would represent a decisive moment in Ethiopia’s political development. The Ethiopian people seized this opportunity with great hope and turned out in overwhelming numbers to express their choices.
However, a very chaotic vote counting process generated controversy and violent protests. According to official results, the EPRDF and allied parties won 367 (67 per cent) parliamentary seats, while the opposition took 172 seats (31 per cent), with 109 going to the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD). The chief of the European Union election monitoring group concluded that the process ‘did not live up to international standards and to the aspirations of Ethiopians for democracy’ and many rejected the results as fraudulent (European Union Election Observation Mission Ethiopia 2005). Despite increasing its share of seats in the parliament from 12 to 172, important leaders within the opposition refused to accept this outcome, claiming they had irrefutable evidence that massive fraud had taken place. When the new parliament met in October 2005, some opposition leaders took their seats, but others, particularly leading members of the CUD, boycotted the assembly. Violence erupted in the first week of November and most top CUD officials were arrested. Ethiopian prosecutors formally charged some 131 opposition politicians, journalists and civil society leaders with crimes, including genocide and treason. A number of leading Ethiopians in the diaspora, including reporters working for the Voice of America as well as opposition party fund-raisers and managers of critical websites, were also indicted. By bringing these charges against its leading critics, the EPRDF effectively criminalised dissent and sent an unmistakable message that effective opposition would not be tolerated. The opening of 2005 had closed (Lyons 2006a).

While the opposition both inside and outside parliament has been marginalised, the EPRDF still faced fundamental challenges relating to two large constituencies that are essential for any Ethiopian regime to govern successfully. First, the EPRDF’s Oromo wing, the Oromo People’s Democratic Organization, has failed and remains in power through intimidation and ever more pervasive systems to monitor the population (Human Rights Watch 2005). Second, the May 2005 elections saw an almost complete sweep by the CUD in Addis Ababa and the other main cities. According to a 2007 poll conducted by Gallup, only 17 per cent of Ethiopians had confidence in the honesty of their elections, suggesting that the outcome of the 2005 election is regarded as legitimate by a very small number of Ethiopians (Rheault 2008). In July 2007, most of the major opposition political leaders arrested following the electoral crisis of 2005 were pardoned after they signed documents admitting responsibility for the violence. However, the damage had already been done and the CUD fractured into several bickering factions.

Despite the weakness of the opposition, the April 2008 local elections suggest that the EPRDF plans to restrict political and civil liberties further. The opposition only managed to register some 16,000 candidates for the nearly 4 million posts up for election (Deibert 2008). Even parties that participate in the national parliament found it impossible to identify candidates or to campaign, particularly in the Oromo region. In addition to restricting political space, the ruling party deepened its control over the smallest, sub-community level of administration, the kebelle councils. While kebelles are quite small, some of the councils have up to 300 members. As a result, some 4 million Ethiopians in a country of 75 million are now part of an EPRDF-controlled council.

The EPRDF reacted to the 2005 electoral scare by tightening restrictions and by deepening its penetration to the most local levels of administration.

The 2008 humanitarian emergency is another source of pressure on Meles Zenawi’s government. In July 2008, the United Nations estimated that 10 million people – some 12 per cent of the population – were in need of food assistance (Benequista 2008). There are many reasons for the humanitarian emergency of 2008: poor rains; high food and fuel prices; multiple inter-linked conflicts; animal disease; and general inflation. Overall inflation reached 40 per cent in May 2008, driven in part by a surge in money growth and public sector borrowing since 2005 (IMF 2008). Food prices have also risen rapidly. An increasing number of Ethiopians are dependent upon the market to meet their basic needs, and inflation has left the very poor unable to turn to the market to feed their families. The EPRDF has not faced the types of food riots sparked by high prices that have occurred in many countries as a result of the global good crisis. However, Ethiopian cities – centres of political opposition – are growing rapidly. It is likely that the government will face increased pressures from urban dwellers for relief.

After 17 years in power, the EPRDF is in decline. The 2005 elections demonstrated high levels of opposition, but failed to usher in an orderly transition based on peaceful multiparty competition. The 2008 elections suggest that the EPRDF intends to retain power by further restricting opportunities for peaceful political competition and reducing space for independent civil society to operate. In the lead up to the critical national elections in 2010, the electoral process has been largely discredited by many in the international community, and more importantly by most Ethiopians. While repression and limitations on opposition have silenced political speech for the moment, it leaves the regime fragile and without the support of key constituencies.

**War by Proxy**

The border stalemate and the underlying problems of authoritarian political processes and fragile governments in Ethiopia and Eritrea are intrinsically linked to conflicts in the Horn of Africa and global policies focused on the region. Both Ethiopia and Eritrea have demonstrated the capacity and willingness to use proxy forces to undermine the other. Armed Ethiopian insurgent groups such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), and the Ethiopian People’s Patriotic Front (EPPF) have received support from Asmara. Eritrea also has close relationships with Sudanese groups in Darfur and in particular with factions operating in eastern Sudan (Young 2006). By the same token, Ethiopia has supported Eritrean opposition movements.

In addition to supporting each other’s insurgents and opposition movements, both Ethiopia and Eritrea compete against each other by supporting rival parties in neighbouring states. Addis Ababa is the major supporter of Abdullahi Yusuf and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Somalia. Consistent with a deeply ingrained pattern of giving support to the enemy of one’s enemy, Eritrea has provided assistance to the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC, now re-grouped as the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia based in Asmara) and Ethiopian opposition groups based in Somalia such as the ONLF and OLF, hoping to tie Ethiopian forces down in the East. While UN reports in late 2006 suggested thousands of Eritrean troops were in Somalia, very few were captured in the subsequent intervention by Ethiopia, suggesting that this
number was substantially wide of its mark (Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1676; Tomlinson 2006).

This proxy conflict in Somalia escalated dramatically in December 2006. Key leaders within the UIC such as Hassan Dahir Aweys, former leader of the anti-Ethiopian al-Itihaad al-Islamiya, sought to provoke Ethiopia into war in late 2006 by making irredentist claims on the Ogaden. However, these threats were rhetorical rather than real since the UIC lacked the means to force Ethiopia out of the region. From the perspective of Addis Ababa, the dangers emanating from the UIC and the urgency for acting were due to threats from Eritrea and internal Ethiopian insurgent groups such as the OLF and ONLF. These regional and domestic adversaries had increased their military presence in areas controlled by the UIC. To Ethiopia, the potential that these threats would increase over time – rather than the ideology of the Islamic Courts, their irredentist claims, or their ties to al-Qaeda – compelled a response. Ethiopia acted pre-emptively by providing the military might to drive the UIC out of Mogadishu, to end the safe havens offered Ethiopia’s enemies, and to bring the TFG to power in the Somali capital.

After a rapid and surprising advance the TFG, supported by Ethiopian troops, ousted the UIC and its affiliated militias that had controlled Mogadishu since June 2006. The TFG continued to rely upon Ethiopian military support to retain power and struggled to bring in key constituencies, most notably the powerful Hawiye clan leaders entrenched in Mogadishu as well as many of the moderate leaders within the diverse Islamic Courts movement. Many Somalis regard Ethiopian troops as foreign occupiers, and the extreme levels of violence have alienated important constituencies (Human Rights Watch 2007). Hopes that an effective Africa Union or United Nations force would be deployed to allow Ethiopian troops to withdraw never materialised (and were never realistic). Eritrea has continued to support factions of the Islamic Courts and helped create the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS) in Asmara in September 2007.

In part, as a consequence of the escalation of conflict within Somalia, violence within the Somali region of eastern Ethiopia (the Ogaden) exploded in 2007. The ONLF, part of the original transitional government in Ethiopia, attacked an oil exploration camp in April 2007, killing civilians as well as Chinese workers. The Ethiopian Government responded with a fierce counter-insurgency campaign that depopulated large swathes of the region, disrupted markets, and resulted in a humanitarian emergency. Human rights monitoring groups report extremely high levels of abuse in the region.

The ONLF is seen by Addis Ababa as a particular threat for two reasons. First, it is perceived as part of a network of threats that link Eritrea, the Islamic Courts in Somalia, and the OLF with the ONLF. Firm control of the region is necessary to prevent this set of enemies from using the Ogaden as the weak frontier across which to attack the regime. Second, commercial interests in international oil and gas exploration in the region have risen lately. Ethiopia has signed deals with a number of international companies to explore for oil and gas in the Ogaden. The ONLF directly threatens the EPRDF’s interest in protecting these contracts when it warns against pursuing exploration of ‘our people’s natural resources’.

In June 2008 the TFG and one faction of the ARS signed a UN-brokered ceasefire agreement in Djibouti, but this had little effect on the violence in southern Somalia. The Shabaab militias and the more militant faction of the ARS based in Asmara rejected the agreement and continued to target TFG and Ethiopian officials. In August, splits
within the TFG became more public as the President and the Prime Minister fought over the sacking of the mayor of Mogadishu. In addition, humanitarian workers were targeted for assassination, making it extremely dangerous to continue to provide food to the millions in need. There are few signs that the Djibouti agreement will succeed in bringing stability where so many earlier agreements have failed. Furthermore, there are indications that conflict is increasing in the Puntland and Somaliland to the north.

As is the case with domestic politics in both Asmara and Addis Ababa, conflict in Somalia has its own dynamics and is not predominantly a sideshow in the Ethiopia-Eritrea rivalry. Ending the Ethiopia-Eritrea proxy war is not sufficient to resolve the challenges of stability within Somalia. However, the larger regional insecurities are complicated and made more difficult to settle by the support by Asmara and Addis Ababa for various factions, motivated in part by the dynamics of their proxy war.

International Policy and the US Global ‘War on Terrorism’

Periodic humanitarian emergencies, the need to end the 1998–2000 border war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, the political crisis following the 2005 elections in Ethiopia, and the links between the Horn and terrorism in the Middle East have all generated periodic interest in the United States and the international community. However, what has been lacking is sustained attention and coherent diplomatic strategies that recognise the links among domestic, bilateral and regional dynamics. The United States, Organization of African Unity/Africa Union, and the UN played critical roles in the Algiers talks and worked together closely to coordinate policy, prevent alternative processes from developing, and apply concentrated pressure on both parties to accept the agreement. However, after this high level involvement to get the agreement signed, the international community paid little attention to the challenges of implementation. UNMEE was deployed along the border, the ceasefire held, and the EEBC proceeded with its hearings and made its demarcation decision in 2002. Little was done to push Ethiopia to accept demarcation or to advance the larger tasks of addressing the underlying causes of the conflict and building a framework for normal regional relations and more democratic domestic regimes.

The international community’s response to the 2005 election crisis illustrates the limits to external leverage over a regime such as the EPRDF. In the immediate aftermath of the post-election violence and crackdown, major donors responded with both clear statements criticising the government and with the suspension of significant levels of assistance. In November 2005, for example, the United States and the European Union issued a joint statement calling for release of all ‘political detainees’, thereby challenging the government’s contention that the leaders had been arrested on criminal grounds. The Development Assistance Group (DAG) for Ethiopia, which includes the United States and other major bilateral and multilateral donors, also adopted a tough posture and stated:

*These disturbances weaken the environment for aid effectiveness and poverty reduction . . . As a result of the situation, the DAG is collectively reviewing development cooperation modalities to Ethiopia.*

In December 2005, international donors put US$375 million in budget support on hold, sending another clear message that business as usual would not be possible in the
context of this political crisis. In January 2006, a US Department of State press release stated that, ‘Steps that appear to criminalise dissent impede progress on democratisation’. These statements and concrete actions represented the most significant pressure on the EPRDF since 1991.4

However, the ruling party remained unmoved. Addis Ababa repeatedly stated that the elections were free and fair, the response of security forces to demonstrations appropriate, and that charges against opposition politicians, journalists and civil society leaders were based on solid evidence and long-standing Ethiopian law. Over the course of the next year, the international community softened its criticisms and shifted its focus to other issues. Washington in particular became increasingly concerned about threats from radical Islamic groups operating in the Horn and looked to Addis Ababa for cooperation and intelligence. Ethiopian intransigence and US concerns about terrorism in Somalia led diplomats to accept a status quo they concluded would not change and to get on with other business.

The United States has played a particularly important role with regard to conflicts in the Horn of Africa. Washington had close ties to both Meles Zenawi and Isaias Afwerki who were characterised by the Clinton administration as part of a ‘new generation of African leaders’. These links led the United States to play a major part in the Algiers talks. Asmara and Addis Ababa both criticised Washington for its attempts to remain neutral during the process. Ethiopia and Eritrea were both included in Washington’s initial conception of a global alliance against terrorism in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks and US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld visited both Asmara and Addis Ababa in December 2002. However, the US-Eritrean relationship quickly soured and Washington developed a very close strategic partnership on counter-terrorism with Ethiopia.

In 2006 Washington and Addis Ababa both opposed the Islamic Courts in Somalia, but for different reasons. Washington had concerns regarding links to al-Qaeda and other alleged extremist groups, and claimed that certain ‘high value’ targets (notably individuals Washington linked to the bombings of the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam) were in Mogadishu. The United States provided support for something called ‘The Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism’, but this assortment of warlords soon came into conflict with elements of the Islamic Courts and was quickly pushed out of Mogadishu. From June to December 2006, Washington publicly supported the Khartoum talks between the TFG and the UIC.

However, in late November 2006 John Bolton, the US Ambassador to the United Nations, circulated a draft resolution authorising Ethiopia to send troops into Somalia in support of the TFG. The final resolution (UN Resolution 1725) authorised non-neighbouring states to intervene, but the message from the United States was clear from the first draft: Washington had no objections to Ethiopia intervening in Somalia (International Crisis Group 2006). In December 2006, Assistant Secretary Frazer ratcheted up the rhetoric and characterised the Islamist leadership as ‘extremist to the core’ and ‘controlled by al-Qaeda cell individuals’ (Gollust 2006). While many have seen the subsequent intervention by Ethiopia into Somalia as an example of the United States ‘subcontracting’ the war on terror to a regional ally, Addis Ababa probably would have acted with or without Washington’s tacit approval. However, the United States promoted the impression that it was working hand-in-hand with Ethiopia when the United States military command used its aircraft and high tech capacities to target what Washington regarded as al-Qaeda leaders in Somalia (Menkhaus 2007).
The close relationship between Washington and Addis Ababa associates the United States with the EPRDF regime in ways that distort other US policies. Washington’s calls for democratisation and human rights in Ethiopia, for example, are not convincing when high-level officials simultaneously praise the regime’s cooperation in the ‘global war on terrorism’. The two states have different interests in the Horn of Africa. Addis Ababa and Washington share concerns regarding extremist Islamic groups in Somalia, for example, but for different reasons. Ethiopia worries about the assistance these groups provide to the regime’s enemies in Eritrea and among Oromo and Somali insurgent groups, while the United States is concerned with links to al-Qaeda. The challenges relating to growing authoritarianism, escalating tensions along the border with Eritrea, and the quagmire in Somalia are complicated further by the overlay of Washington’s global war on terrorism. Washington feels it needs a close relationship with Ethiopia in order to pursue its strategic interests in the Horn of Africa. However, this relationship comes at a price. As with other pivotal states in difficult regions such as Pakistan and Egypt, these sometimes awkward bedfellows receive US support for security reasons but then pursue their own, sometimes brutal, agendas regardless of pressure from Washington.

While relations between Washington and Addis Ababa strengthened in 2006–2008, relations between Washington and Asmara plummeted to new lows. Eritrea was characterised by State Department officials as a state that ‘openly abuses its population and serves as a destabilising force in the region’. In August, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Jendayi Frazer, suggested that Washington was ‘looking into’ whether Eritrea should be added to the state sponsor of terrorist list. This designation triggers certain economic sanctions, but would be largely symbolic in the case of Eritrea where Washington already has cut most non-humanitarian economic ties. Whether the actual sanctions would have any effect of not, the designation would be profoundly offensive to Eritrea. Asmara regards itself as the first country to engage in the war against al-Qaeda sponsored terrorism when it fought the Eritrean Islamic Jihad in the early 1990s and therefore deeply resents Washington’s lectures on the subject.

While Eritrea is characterised as ‘playing a very negative role,’ its support for the OLF, ONLF and the broad UIC has not been defined by Washington as support of terrorism. During US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s December 2007 trip to Addis Ababa, she emphasised her humanitarian rather than counter-terrorism concerns in the Ogaden, and publicly urged Ethiopian leaders to pay more attention to humanitarian issues. In 2008 Washington urged talks between the UIC and the TFG and between the Ethiopian Government and the OLF and ONLF. While Addis Ababa regularly labels both movements as ‘terrorist,’ Washington has not. The State Department did not place Eritrea on the state sponsor of terrorism list, but did designate it ‘not an active partner on counter-terrorism programs’ (US Department of State 2008). As relations with the United States have become hostile, Eritrea has actively constructed an alternative set of relations. Asmara re-established diplomatic relations with Khartoum and sought to improve its relationship with Yemen and Djibouti in 2007 in order to undermine the Sanaa Pact that linked Yemen, Ethiopia and Sudan in an effort to contain Eritrea. However, in June 2008 a border skirmish between Eritrea and Djibouti resulted in several casualties and Yemen began to complain that Eritrea was seizing Yemeni fishing boats and arresting their crews. In January 2003 Eritrea attempted to join the Arab League as an observer, although the Charter of the Arab League does not allow for an observer member and Eritrea’s request remains pending. There are reports of close links between Libya and Eritrea. In 2006
The Ethiopia-Eritrea border conflict and the failed Algiers peace process are part of a regional security complex that links the border issue with conflicts at the domestic, regional and international levels. International policies toward Eritrea and Ethiopia are part of this system of relationships and conflicts. The impasse over implementation of the Algiers Agreements distorts US policy toward counter-terrorism in the region, for example, because Asmara emphasises the border issue in its dealings with Washington while the United States focuses on counter-terrorism. By the same token, the strategic partnership with Ethiopia, motivated by key US interests in counter-terrorism, links Washington to Addis Ababa’s recalcitrance in the implementation of the Algiers Agreement as well as its policies in Somalia and the restrictions on domestic political and civil rights. By prioritising the ‘war on terror’ the United States provides a ready rationale for regimes in the region to label and target their political opponents as terrorists. As Washington and other actors have sought to shape developments in the Horn of Africa, the primacy of local dynamics and the limits to external leverage over matters of fundamental importance to regional actors is apparent. Actors in the region respond to the incentives created at the global level to characterise their pursuit of their regionally focused interests in terms that elicit international support. However, in the end local dynamics rooted in protracted conflicts and authoritarian political systems dominate developments on the ground.

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Endnotes
3. The Committee to Protect Journalists labelled Eritrea ‘one of the world’s worst jailers of journalists’. Reporters Without Borders ranked Eritrea 166 out of 168 counties in its 2006 Worldwide Press Freedom Index, Freedom House ranked the state as ‘not free’ in its 2007 report. The US Department of State’s ‘International Religious Freedom Report 2007’ says that the Eritrean Government ‘continued to harass, arrest, and detain members of independent evangelical groups, Pentecostals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and a reform movement within the Eritrean Orthodox Church’.
5. James Swan, Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, ‘US Policy in the Horn of Africa’, address to the 4th International Conference on Ethiopian Development Studies, Kalamazoo, Michigan, 4 August 2007. The statement goes on to characterise President Isaias as ‘increasingly tyrannical and megalomaniacal’ and states that: ‘The Eritrean Government has fabricated a national mythology by demonising neighbouring Ethiopia, for the central purpose of garnering
complete compliance with his autocratic domestic policies. By channelling Eritrean patriotism into hostility toward Ethiopia, the government ensures that [it] can rule as it likes, without public opposition.’


8. Rice said in an Ethiopian TV interview: ‘We’ve worked very, very diligently to try and help relief agencies, non-governmental agencies to be able to deal with the humanitarian situation there and we need the cooperation of the Ethiopian Government.’ Secretary Condoleezza Rice, interview with Tefera Ghedamu of Ethiopia TV, 5 December 2007.

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Somalia: ‘They Created a Desert and Called it Peace(building)’

Ken Menkhaus

This article documents the humanitarian, political and security dimensions of the current Somali crisis and assesses the external policies that are playing an increasingly central role in the conflict. It advances the thesis that in 2007 and 2008 external Western and UN actors treated Somalia as a post-conflict setting when in fact their own policies helped to inflame armed conflict and insecurity there. As a result there was no peace for peacekeepers to keep, no state to which state-building projects could contribute, and increasingly little humanitarian space in which aid agencies could reach over 3 million Somalis in need of emergency relief. The gap between Somali realities on the ground and the set of assumptions on which aid and diplomatic policies toward Somalia have been constructed is wide and deep.

Introduction

Explanations of Somalia’s extraordinary 20-year crisis – featuring civil war, state collapse, failed peace talks, violent lawlessness and warlordism, internal displacement and refugee flows, chronic food insecurity, piracy, regional proxy wars and Islamic extremism – have tended to fall in one of two camps. One assigns blame primarily on internal factors perpetuating the country’s crisis; the other emphasises the role of external drivers. Both have ample evidence on which to draw. Accurate analysis of the Somali crisis must account for both internal and external conflict drivers and the mutually reinforcing dynamics that have developed between them.

A case can also be made that the relative salience of these conflict drivers has changed over time. In the early years of the Somali disaster, internal factors – warlordism, clannism, poor leadership, economic constraints and others – were decisive in perpetuating the civil war and undermining external peacebuilding efforts. External policies in the 1990s at times made things worse – by failing to provide timely diplomatic mediation when it was most needed in 1991, and intervening clumsily in the UN Operation in Somalia in 1993–94 – but were not a root cause of the crisis. However, in recent years external actors have come to play an increasingly central role in perpetuating or exacerbating the Somali crisis. In some instances, external actors have intentionally set out to cultivate divisions and lawlessness in Somalia, or to use the country to play out proxy wars against regional rivals. In other cases, external interventions have been well intentioned but ill-advised, falling victim to the law of unintended consequences and in the process making things worse.
Things are certainly worse in Somalia. The two-year period of 2007–08 was a calamity of enormous proportions for the country, arguably as bad as the disastrous civil war and famine of 1991–92. A fierce insurgency and counter-insurgency pitting Ethiopian occupying forces against armed resistance led by the radical Islamist group shabaab devastated the country and polarised politics in Somalia still further. Somalia staggered into the year 2009 as the world’s worst humanitarian crisis, with 1.3 million internally displaced persons and 3.5 million people in need of emergency aid. Some positive developments in early 2009 offered hope – Ethiopian forces withdrew, and a power-sharing accord between the weak Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and moderate elements of the opposition led to a new, more broad-based government. But in its first months in power the new TFG showed little capacity to extend its authority, and several radical Islamist insurgency groups, one with links to al-Qaeda, gained control over most of southern Somalia and pushed into parts of the capital Mogadishu.

This is the exact opposite of what the US and its allies sought to promote when they supported the December 2006 Ethiopian military intervention in Somalia to oust the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) in Mogadishu. Most Somalis are bewildered by external policies that have laid waste to their already desperately poor country while simultaneously promising to support peacebuilding efforts there.

This article documents the humanitarian, political and security dimensions of the current Somali crisis and assesses the policies of one set of external actors – the loose coalition of Western governments and the UN which have sought to support the TFG, moderate Islamism, African peacekeeping and power-sharing in Somalia. It advances the thesis that Western and UN actors treated Somalia in 2007 and 2008 as a post-conflict setting when in fact it remained in a state of open and heavy armed conflict. In some cases, Western and UN polices inadvertently helped to inflame armed conflict and insecurity there. As a result, there was no peace for peacekeepers to keep, no state to which state-building projects could contribute, and increasingly little humanitarian space in which aid agencies could reach over 3 million Somalis in need of emergency relief. The gap between Somali realities on the ground and the set of assumptions on which aid and diplomatic policies toward Somalia have been constructed is wide and deep.

The Path to Catastrophe

The current crisis in Somalia is the culmination of a series of developments since 2004, when national reconciliation talks produced an agreement on a Transitional Federal Government, or TFG. The TFG, led by President Abdullahi Yusuf, was intended to be a government of national unity, tasked with administering a five-year political transition. But the TFG was viewed by many Somalis, especially some clans in and around the capital Mogadishu, as a narrow coalition dominated by the clans of the president and his Prime Minister, Mohamed Ghedi (ICG 2004, p. 1). It was also derided by its critics as being a puppet of neighbouring Ethiopia. Yusuf’s deep animosity toward any and all forms of political Islam alarmed the increasingly powerful network of Islamists operating schools, hospitals, businesses and local sharia courts in Mogadishu. By early 2005, serious splits emerged within the TFG between what became known as the ‘Mogadishu Group’ and Yusuf’s supporters. Facing deep opposition in Mogadishu, the TFG was unable to establish itself in the capital, taking up residence instead in two small provincial towns. Weak and dysfunctional, the TFG appeared
destined to become yet another stillborn government in Somalia, which has not had an operational central government since 1990 (Menkhaus 2007).

However, the coalition of clans, militia leaders, civic groups and Islamists which formed the Mogadishu Group were themselves divided, and war erupted between two wings of the group in early 2006. This war was precipitated by a US-backed effort to create an alliance of clan militia leaders to capture a small number of foreign al-Qaeda operatives believed to be enjoying safe haven in Mogadishu as guests of the hardline Somalia Islamists, especially the jihadi militia known as the shabaab. The Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism, or ARPCT, as the US-backed group was called, clashed with local Islamists in a war that originally began over real estate and business disputes between two rival businessmen (Barnes and Hassan 2007, p. 4). Within months the Alliance was decisively defeated, paving the way for the rise of the Islamic Courts Union, or ICU, which for seven months in 2006 came to control and govern all of Mogadishu and most of south-central Somalia.

The ICU was a broad umbrella group of Islamists, and for a brief period was poised to end Somalia’s 16 years of state collapse. The ICU quickly delivered impressive levels of street security and law and order to Mogadishu and south-central Somalia. It reopened the seaport and international airport and began providing basic government services (Barnes and Hassan 2007, p. 4). In the process, the ICU won widespread support from war-weary Somalis, even those who did not embrace the idea of Islamic rule. To its credit, the US government made a good faith effort to support negotiations between the ICU and the TFG, with the aim of creating a power-sharing government.

But then things went wrong. A complex power struggle emerged within the ICU, pitting Hawiye clan interests, Islamic moderates, hardline but cautious Islamists, and confrontational jihadists in the shabaab militia (ICG 2007, pp. 5–9). The hardliners began pushing the ICU into increasingly bellicose and radical positions that alarmed neighbouring Ethiopia and the United States. The ICU declared jihad on Ethiopia, hosted two armed insurgencies opposed to the Ethiopian government, made irredentist claims on Ethiopian territory, and enjoyed extensive support from Ethiopia’s enemy, Eritrea, which was eager to use the ICU to wage a proxy war against Ethiopia. In short, the hardliners in the ICU did everything they could to provoke a war with Ethiopia, and in late December 2006 they got their wish (Prendergast 2008). For its part, the United States understandably grew increasingly frustrated with the ICU’s dismissive non-cooperation regarding foreign al-Qaeda operatives in Mogadishu, and as a result became more receptive to, and supportive of, an Ethiopian military solution.

Ethiopia’s US-backed military offensive against the ICU was a rout. The ICU militias took heavy losses in the first engagements, and when they fell back to Mogadishu angry clan and business leaders forced the ICU to disband and return weapons and militiaen to the clans (Barnes and Hassan 2007). While core ICU supporters fled toward the Kenyan border, the Ethiopian military, marched into Mogadishu unopposed. Within days the TFG relocated to the capital to govern over a shocked and sullen population. It was a scenario no one had foreseen, and set the stage for the current catastrophe.

Enmity between Ethiopian highlanders and Somalis is deep, rooted in centuries of conflict. The Ethiopian government, its allies and its enemies all understood that a prolonged Ethiopian military occupation of the Somali capital would be resented
by Somalis and was certain to trigger armed resistance. The proposed solution was rapid deployment of an African Union peacekeeping force to replace the Ethiopians. But African leaders, not unlike their European and North American counterparts, were reluctant to commit troops into such a dangerous environment, and after long delays were only able to muster a force of 2,000. So Ethiopian forces stayed, joined in their efforts by TFG security forces which Ethiopia trained.

Within weeks, a complex insurgency – composed of a regrouped shabaab, ex-ICU sharia court militias, clan militias and other armed groups – began a campaign of armed resistance. Attacks on the TFG and the Ethiopian military occurred each day, involving mortars, roadside bombs, ambushes and even suicide bombings. The Ethiopian and TFG response was extremely heavy-handed, involving attacks on whole neighbourhoods, indiscriminate violence targeting civilians and widespread arrest and detention. TFG security forces were especially predatory toward civilians, engaging in looting, assault and rape. The insurgency and counter-insurgency produced a massive wave of displacement in 2007: 700,000 of Mogadishu’s population of 1.3 million were forced to flee from their homes.

This disastrous level of violence and destruction had other costs as well. The already fragile economy of south-central Somalia collapsed; the TFG was unable to establish even a token civil service or advance the political transition; Ethiopia took heavy losses and, as predicted, became trapped in a quagmire in Mogadishu; and thousands of Somalis became radicalised by their treatment at the hands of the TFG and Ethiopian forces, and, despite deep misgivings about the insurgents’ indiscriminate use of violence, became either active or passive supporters of the increasingly violent shabaab and other armed groups.

By late 2007, open splits occurred in both the opposition and the TFG. These splits had the potential to be negative – leading to uncontrolled splintering of Somali political actors – or positive – providing a new opportunity for the creation of a centrist coalition in Somalia and marginalise hardliners on both sides. In the opposition, exiled ICU leaders established an umbrella group with non-Islamist Somalis, called the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia, or ARS. This alliance prompted the shabaab to publicly break with the ‘apostate’ ARS. In the TFG, the corrupt and deeply divisive Prime Minister Ghedi was finally forced to resign, and a new Prime Minister, Hassan Hussein Nur ‘Adde’, came to lead a promising moderate wing of the TFG. He formed a new cabinet that included many technocrats from the Somali diaspora, and reached out to the opposition, pledging himself to unconditional peace talks. His efforts were viewed with deep hostility by the hardliners in the Yusuf camp.

The international community, led by UN Special Representative for the Secretary-General Ould Abdullah, sought to forge a centrist coalition of TFG and opposition figures. In June 2008, a UN-brokered peace accord was reached in Djibouti between moderate elements in the TFG and moderate leaders in the ARS, the latter led by Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed and Sharif Hassan (known locally as the ‘two Sharifs’). The Djibouti Agreement was finally signed on 18 August and in November a follow-up agreement was reached. The Djibouti agreement and the follow-up accord called for a cessation of hostilities, a joint security force, deployment of a UN peacekeeping force, withdrawal of Ethiopian forces, a two-year extension of the TFG mandate, and an additional 275 Parliamentary seats created for the opposition, so that the parliament would constitute a unity government.
Supporters of the agreement saw it as a major breakthrough and called for strong international support for implementation of the agreement. In mid-2008 their initial hope was that any agreement that facilitated the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces would open the door for an end to the insurgency. They pointed to the fact that most of the war-weary Somali public wanted to see the agreement implemented as well. By late 2008 the logic in support of the accord had changed. With Ethiopia threatening to pull out unilaterally by the end of the year, and with shabaab consolidating control over most of southern Somalia, proponents of the accord argued that the moderate coalition formed by the agreement was the only hope to stave off a take-over of the capital by shabaab. Critics of the deal argued that the moderates on both sides exercised little control over the armed groups engaged in fighting, that UN peacekeepers would take too long to effectively deploy and would only energise the shabaab, and that the accord ran the risk of further fragmenting both the ARS and the TFG in ways that could marginalise the very moderates the international community was trying to support.

By early 2009, Somalia appeared to have weathered the worst of its crisis. Ethiopian forces withdrew as promised, while the Djibouti agreement produced a new, more broad-based government featuring moderate Islamist leadership of Sheikh Sharif, leader of the old ICU. Shabaab was in short order deprived of its main nemeses, and faced growing resistance from clan militias that were allied with the new TFG and which had no interest in seeing a radical jihadist group with al-Qaeda links take power. Shabaab was unable to exploit the so-called strategic vacuum created by the Ethiopian withdrawal. But, as argued below, hopes that 2009 would witness the expansion of the TFG’s authority and the marginalisation of radical insurgents in Somalia did not materialise in the first half of the year.

**Humanitarian Catastrophe**

The humanitarian nightmare in Somalia is the result of a lethal cocktail of factors. The large-scale displacement caused by the fighting in Mogadishu is the most important driver. The displaced have fled mainly into the interior of the country, where they lack access to food, clean water, basic health care, livelihoods and support networks. Internally displaced persons, or IDPs, are among the most vulnerable populations in any humanitarian emergency. With 700,000 people out of a population of perhaps 6 million in south-central Somalia forced to flee their homes, the enormity of the emergency is obvious.6

Second, food prices have skyrocketed, eroding the ability of both IDPs and other households to feed themselves. Food prices have gone up due to a global spike in the cost of grains and fuel; chronic insecurity and crime, which has badly disrupted the flow of commercial food into the country; and an epidemic of counterfeiting of the Somali shilling by politicians and businesspeople, which has created hyperinflation and has robbed poorer Somalis of purchasing power. Mother Nature is not cooperating either: a severe drought is gripping much of central Somalia, increasing displacement, killing off much of the livestock, and reducing harvests in farming areas.

Third, humanitarian agencies in Somalia are facing daunting obstacles to delivery of food aid. There is now very little ‘humanitarian space’ in which aid can safely be delivered to populations in need.7 Until recently, the TFG and its uncontrolled security
forces were mainly responsible for most obstacles to delivery of food aid. TFG hardliners viewed the movement of food aid to IDPs as support to an enemy population – terrorists and terrorist sympathisers in their view – and sought to impede the flow of aid convoys through a combination of bureaucratic and security impediments. They also harassed and detained staff of local and international non-governmental organisations, or NGOs and UN agencies, accusing them of supporting the insurgency. Uncontrolled and predatory TFG security forces, together with opportunistic criminal gangs, erected over 400 militia roadblocks (each of which demanded as much as US$500 per truck to pass) and kidnapped local aid workers for ransom.

However, since May 2008 an additional threat to humanitarian actors are jihadist cells in Mogadishu linked to the 
shabaab. They are engaged in a campaign of threats and alleged assassinations against any and all Somalis working for Western aid agencies or collaborating the UN and Western NGOs. Not all 
shabaab members embrace this policy – indeed, some 
shabaab cells provide protection for aid convoys while nearby 
shabaab groups actively target aid workers – but jihadist cells in southern Somalia are now increasingly fragmented.

To summarise, Somali aid workers and other civic leaders have faced a terrifying combination of threats from hardline elements in the TFG, criminal gangs and 
shabaab cells. This has infused political violence with a high level of unpredictability and randomness in Mogadishu that has eroded the ability of astute Somali aid workers, businesspeople and civic figures to make calculated risks in their movements and work. When threats and attacks occur, aid workers are never sure whether they were targeted by the TFG or the 
shabaab. ‘We used to know where the threat was and how to deal with it’, said one. ‘Now we have no idea who is shooting us’. Attacks initially believed to be the handiwork of a 
shabaab cell are latterly suspected of being ordered by one of the TFG hardliners; in the swirl of rumors and accusations, uncertainty reigns.

However, the one thing that is certain are the casualty rates among aid workers, which currently earn Somalia a ranking as the most dangerous place in the world for humanitarian workers. In the period from 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008, 20 aid workers were killed in Somalia – nearly a third of the 65 humanitarian casualties worldwide during that period, and two more humanitarian deaths than occurred in Afghanistan, which is widely considered the most dangerous place for aid workers.8

These attacks have put thousands of Somali professionals, aid workers, moderate Islamic clerics, businesspeople and civil society leaders at immediate risk, and have prompted a flight of aid workers and civil society figures to the relative safety of Nairobi or Hargeisa, the capital of the self-declared independent republic of Somaliland. The July 2008 assassination of the top national officer for the UN Development Programme in Somalia was especially jarring, prompting relocation of most UN local staff and suspension of UNDP activities. But the most devastating attack was the 29 October 2008 synchronised suicide bombing attacks by 
shabaab which struck five targets in Somaliland and Puntland, which left over 20 Somalis dead, including several UN staff members who were killed when one car bomb completely destroyed the UNDP compound in Hargeisa (CNN 2008). Both local and international aid agencies are now either not able to conduct operations at all or are operating at extremely limited capacity. This severe restriction on humanitarian access is occurring at precisely the point when local coping mechanisms are breaking down and that 3.2 million Somalis are at immediate risk. The country is on the cusp of a humanitarian disaster at a time when aid agencies are severely stretched in their ability to
respond and admit that Somalia is an ‘accountability free-zone’ in terms of their ability to monitor shipments of food aid.\textsuperscript{9}

A critical dimension of this reduction of humanitarian space is the role that Western foreign policies have inadvertently played in creating it.\textit{Shabaab} threats aimed at aid workers are in direct response to the US designation of \textit{shabaab} as a terrorist organisation in March 2008, and the May 2008 US missile strike on a safe house in central Somalia that killed the \textit{shabaab}’s leader, Aden Hashi Ayro. Prior to those policies, the \textit{shabaab} was directing its attacks against the TFG and the Ethiopian military. After the missile attack on Ayro, the \textit{shabaab} declared its intent to widen the war to any and all Western targets inside and outside the country, including Somalis working in any way with the West. Threats and violence by hardliners in the TFG against civil society figures and aid workers also can be traced back to Western policies, inasmuch as the TFG police force, which is implicated in attacks on and abuse of Somali civilians, have been provided training and even salaries by Western donors.

The new TFG government has promised to work to improve security and access for aid agencies but currently lacks the ability to deliver on that promise. Aid agencies which have pragmatically worked with \textit{shabaab} groups to deliver food aid into areas controlled by that group have come under fire from UN and donor state diplomats upset that \textit{shabaab} may be using its control over the distribution of food relief to shore up its power base, and to profit from possible diversion of food aid. For their part, humanitarian aid organisations have resented efforts to politicise their work by diplomats instructing them on who they may and may not work through on the ground.

\textbf{Political Paralysis}

The assassination campaign by TFG hardliners and fragments of the \textit{shabaab} movement is the latest attack on Somalia’s once vibrant civil society and has the potential to develop into a violent purge of all professionals and civic figures. Somali civic figures are in shock at this latest threat, and are either fleeing the capital or keeping a very low profile. This is an enormous setback for hopes to consolidate peace in the country, as civil society leaders are essential supporters of the centrist coalition of the new TFG. The group of people most needed to support peace and co-existence are being silenced or driven out, clearing the playing field for extremists.

The Djibouti agreement and the new TFG coalition produced a sense of cautious optimism among Somalis. However, any initiative openly designed to marginalise hardliners and build a centrist coalition faces immediate dangers, and Sheikh Sharif’s TFG is no exception. Open rejection of the Djibouti agreement by the \textit{shabaab} leadership and hardline elements within the ARS itself highlighted the fact that the former ARS leadership has no control over a principal source of the insurgency.\textsuperscript{10}

Internal fragmentation of the \textit{shabaab} and other Islamist insurgencies makes the challenge of implementation even greater, since any understanding reached with \textit{shabaab} leaders may or may not influence the behaviour of individual cells. Indeed, growing evidence suggests that at least some militias now calling themselves \textit{shabaab} are just sub-clan militias ‘rehattting’ themselves for reasons of political expediency; some have no discernible Islamist ideological agenda, and do not answer to \textit{shabaab} leadership. ‘The militia who call themselves \textit{shabaab} are just the same Haber Gedir gunmen
who have occupied us for years’, observed a Somali resident from the Jubba Valley. ‘They just put a turban on their heads and gave themselves the new name, but their treatment of us is the same’. 

While implementation of the Djibouti agreement has been the current preoccupation of the diplomatic corps, other political problems loom large. The first is the TFG’s virtual collapse as a government. The TFG has never been functional, despite the best efforts of the international community to pretend otherwise. After almost four years of existence, the TFG still has almost no capacity to govern and almost no functional civil service. Cabinet ministers have no ministries to oversee, and no budget. Armed groups fighting against the shabaab are doing so as allies of the TFG in negotiated arrangements with the government, not under its command and control. No progress has been made on key transitional tasks. The TFG has lost control over most of the countryside and the capital.

Military advances by shabaab and Hisbul Islamiyya, a rejectionist militia headed up by ex-ICU leader Hassan Dahir Aweys, have pushed the TFG into a few neighbourhoods of the capital. This has not been so much a reflection of the strength of shabaab and Hisbul Islamiyya as it has been a function of the utter lack of capacity of the TFG to sustain a fighting force. The possibility that the TFG could be defeated entirely is real, and a recipe for trouble. Shabaab’s links to al-Qaeda are likely to prompt Ethiopia to move its military back into Somalia. Shabaab has every reason to draw Ethiopia back into Somalia, as that would allow it to once again cast its role as that of a Somali resistance movement to Ethiopian imperialism, rather than being viewed by Somalis as a tool of al-Qaeda and Eritrea, the latter of which is using Somali Islamist groups in a proxy war against Ethiopia.

Even in the event of an insurgent victory over the TFG, fighting is unlikely to end. Instead, most Somali observers expect shabaab and Hisbul Islamiyya to fight one another. Whatever the outcome, two significant interpretations of the current battle are emerging from Somali political discussions. The first is the observation that the current battle is a war of Islamists. All three of the main protagonists in the battles in 2009 – the TFG, shabaab and Hisbul Islamiyya – identify themselves as Islamists. This is a remarkable shift in the Somali political landscape, underscoring the ascendance of political Islam in Somalia and yet exposing the fact that Islamism has failed to serve as the unifying force so many Somalis have hoped that it would. Second, the battles of 2009 are increasingly being described by Somalis in the country as a war within the Somali diaspora. Many of the leaders of the TFG and insurgents are diaspora members, reflecting the diasporisation of the Somali political and economic elite over the past decade. ‘Unhyphenated Somalis’ stuck in the country with no foreign passports are increasingly angry that they serve as the principal victims of a war over which their hyphenated cousins from the diaspora maintain control.

Counter-Terrorism Blowback

Far from rendering Somalia a less dangerous terrorist threat, the effect of the 2007–08 Ethiopian occupation was to make Somalia a much more dangerous place for the US, the West and Ethiopia itself. Somalis were radicalised by the extraordinary level of violence, displacement and humanitarian need. They blame the Ethiopian occupation and the uncontrolled TFG security forces for the catastrophe. But the blame does not
Most Somalis are convinced that the Ethiopian occupation was authorised and directed by the United States. Although this is a misinterpretation of the complex and often turbulent relationship between Addis Ababa and Washington – two allies with distinct agendas and preferences in the Horn of Africa – it has been an article of faith in the Somali community. The Somalis are not entirely wrong. In 2007 and 2008, the US did provide intelligence to the Ethiopians; was a major source of development and military assistance to Ethiopia; shielded Ethiopia from criticism of its occupation in the UN Security Council; collaborated with the Ethiopians and the TFG in multiple cases of rendition of Somalis suspected of terrorist involvement; and engaged in gunship and missile attacks on suspected terrorist targets inside Somalia since the Ethiopian occupation. These and other policies gave Somalis the clear impression that the United States had orchestrated the Ethiopian occupation and is therefore responsible for its impact.

Moreover, the West has also been held responsible for the abuses committed by the TFG security forces under Abdullahi Yusuf’s presidency until late 2008. This too, is a partial misreading; Western donors and aid agencies had little or no control over the actions of these armed groups and were frequently furious with them over their mistreatment of civilians and disruption of relief aid. But the fact remains that the TFG police were in 2007 trained by, and received salaries from, the UN Development Program, through which Western donor states channelled their ‘rule of law’ assistance to the TFG. For Somalis whose businesses were looted and whose family members were raped or killed by uncontrolled TFG security forces, the West is partly culpable for their suffering.

As a result, anti-Americanism and anti-Western sentiment in Somalia has been very high, posing the risk that more Somalis could become either passive or active supporters of the shabaab. Events since early 2009 have partially reversed this animosity toward the West and US, thanks to the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces, Western support for the new TFG, and Somali hopes for a policy shift in the Obama administration. Even so, Western and UN policies in Somalia face high levels of suspicious and mistrust among many Somalis.

**Conclusion**

For years, observers of the Horn of Africa opined that the Somalia crisis could not get any worse. Yet it has, and dramatically so. The country today faces a level of humanitarian, social, security and political disaster on a scale that would have shocked policy makers of 2006 had they had a glimpse into the future. The evidence speaks for itself. Policies pursued by Ethiopia, the United States and Western donors in the past three years have produced outcomes that advance no one’s interests, save perhaps a growing number of number of extreme jihadist cells in the country.

Throughout the crisis of 2007 and 2008, the international community’s insistence on treating Somalia as a ‘post-conflict’ setting, with aid programmes for rule of law, security sector reform and key transitional tasks, appeared increasingly out of touch with grim realities on the ground, and eventually reached the point of willful blindness. Political pressures from key donor states on aid agencies to downplay the humanitarian crisis, stay silent on TFG human rights abuses, and maintain aid programmes in spite of gross levels of abuse and insecurity to help maintain the legitimacy of the TFG, were critical in driving this dysfunctional policy approach.
Somalia has long faced severe internal challenges to peacebuilding and state-building. In recent years it has had to shoulder the additional burden of external policies which have actually helped to make things worse, not better. Finding innovative and constructive policies to confront Somalia’s intractable crises will not be easy, but it will be impossible if not based on more accurate and clear-eyed assessment of the situation on the ground.

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Endnotes

1. A more detailed account of recent events in Somalia since 2004 can be found in Menkhaus (2007).

2. Due to space limitations, the complex details of clan politics in shaping support for and opposition to the TFG are not provided here. For our purposes it is enough to note that clannism is one of a number of important elements contributing to the political divisions in Somalia today. For more details, see ICG (2004, 2007), Barnes and Hassan (2007) and Menkhaus (2007).

3. It was never clear that any of the main players in the Somali saga – hardliners in the TFG (including the President and Prime Minister), Ethiopia and hardliners in the ICU – would have been willing to see these power-sharing negotiations succeed, but at the time it was the best hope to bring peace to Somalia.

4. The precise position of the US Government vis-à-vis the Ethiopian military offensive and occupation of southern Somalia remains the subject of debate, with conflicting accounts even within the US Government. These debates centre around whether and to what extent the US acquiesced, gave tacit support for, gave a ‘green light’ to, or actively requested Ethiopian military action against the ICU. What is indisputable is that once the Ethiopian offensive was immanent, the US Government actively provided it with support.

5. AMISOM forces levels eventually reached 3,000 by late 2008.

6. The total population of Somalia is unknown and the subject of debate. The most common estimate is 8 to 9 million for the entire country, including the population of secessionist Somaliland in the northwest.

7. As of late 2008, there has been a sharp debate between various UN and NGO humanitarian aid agencies, donors and diplomats over whether adequate humanitarian space exists to permit effective food relief operations in the country. Some argue that the extraordinary number of assassinations of local and international aid workers has resulted in an almost complete evacuation of aid workers across the country, leaving aid agencies with no means of monitoring food shipment distribution. Others argue that despite the difficulties posed by the security crisis, some aid agencies have successfully relied on local partners to move food aid to the 3 million Somalis in need. For recent discussions, see UN OCHA (2008) and ‘Somalia nearing a ‘total famine’”.

8. Ten additional aid workers were killed in Somalia between July and October 2008, raising the total to 30 deaths for the year. The UN reports that between January and the end of October 2008, there were 152 security incidents involving humanitarian aid workers. See UN OCHA (2008, p. 6).

10. The ARS is now divided between the moderate wing, led by the two Sharifs and known as ‘ARS-Djibouti’, versus the ARS-Asmara wing headed by Hassan Dahir Aweys. Aweys rejects the Djibouti accord.

11. Correspondence with the author, July 2008.

References


The purpose of this article is to (re)introduce Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to the study of contemporary African societies. Widely accepted as foundational work in the field of critical pedagogy, it is argued that Freirean scholarship and analysis is also useful in examining the top-down manner in which ‘development’ is currently being implemented on the continent. By examining the case of post-apartheid South Africa, this article posits that a Freirean understanding of liberation/freedom as a dialogical exercise can aid in opening up a productive avenue of critical enquiry regarding the post-colonial condition in sub-Saharan Africa. This analysis will use Freire’s theoretical work in order to contribute to the literature regarding possibilities for more participatory, democratic and bottom-up struggles for social justice.

I remember vividly my first encounter with *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, as a colonized young man from Cape Verde who had been struggling with significant questions of cultural identity, yearning to break away from the yoke of Portuguese colonialism. Reading *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* gave me a language to critically understand the tensions, contradictions, fears, doubts, hopes, and ‘deferred’ dreams that are part and parcel of living a borrowed and colonized cultural existence. Reading *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* also gave me the inner strength to begin the arduous process of transcending a colonial existence that is almost culturally schizophrenic: being present and yet not visible, being visible and yet not present. (Donaldo Macedo, in Freire 2000, p. 11)

Paulo Freire’s seminal text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is essential reading for scholars engaged with literature on the topic of critical pedagogy. Although the work of Freire has been widely recognised in the field of educational theory since the 1970s, it has been utilised less so by scholars concerned with contemporary issues in the ‘developing world’. This article argues that Freire’s work transcends disciplines, and speaks beyond questions of pedagogy in a manner that is useful for the study of Africa’s post-colonial condition. Freire’s understanding of a more substantive process of liberation, as a dialogical exercise, can be a viable point of departure in analysing the failure of many African states fundamentally to enhance the lives of the continent’s people. Building on the work of scholars such as Patrick Bond, who argue for a more bottom-up approach to ‘development’ and democratisation on the continent.
(Bond 2006a), it is suggested that Freirean scholarship can add theoretical weight to the claims for participatory forms of democracy, and bottom-up struggles for social justice. For scholars, activists and development practitioners concerned with the economic and political disappointments on the African continent over the past 50 years, (re)reading Freirean scholarship can contribute a new and productive understanding of liberation/freedom as something that must be struggled for by everyone, not ‘delivered’ to a population by elites. In other words, Freire contributes to our analysis of Africans as active ‘subjects’, and innovative agents in choosing their own destinies, rather than ‘objects’ to be acted upon. This article will thus revisit Pedagogy of the Oppressed, with the intended aim of demonstrating the efficacy of applying Freire’s conceptual analysis of liberation and democracy to a present day case in sub-Saharan Africa.

The discussion will begin by summarising the foundations of Freire’s theoretical framework. This will involve examining Freire’s pedagogical thought, and how this translates into broader ideas regarding theories of liberation and democracy. The article will then examine the case of post-apartheid South Africa in order to apply the Freirean model. This analysis will demonstrate that the post-apartheid reconstruction effort is being conducted in a manner that is leaving the majority of South Africans behind. Not only does Freire’s method provide valuable insight into the failures of the South African Government’s attempt to ‘deliver’ liberation to the people, but it also suggests possible ways forward for a more democratic and egalitarian political project in the country. By discussing this case, and (re)introducing Freire’s work to the study of contemporary African societies, the aim is to provide a compelling first step in a dialogue regarding Freirean scholarship, and its potential for sparking a more robust move toward democratic, bottom-up politics on the continent. Thus, the intention is not to analyse or engage with specific mechanisms for implementing this type of political project, but rather to begin a discussion of the relevance and importance of Pedagogy in contemporary African societies.

Pedagogy of the Oppressed Revisited

Paulo Freire provided the starting point for a flourishing literature in the field of critical pedagogy. Writing in the Marxian tradition, class analysis was imperative to the work of Freire, but not at the expense of analysing the impact of race, gender, ethnicity, language and culture on the lives of oppressed people. He wrote Pedagogy in the context of severe colonial, and neo-colonial, exploitation across the ‘developing world’, and was intent on building critical tools for the oppressed to transform their societies into more free, democratic and egalitarian spaces. Moreover, Freire premised much of his work on the idea that education was a crucial element in either perpetuating the existing conditions of oppression, or conversely, sparking a transformation to a more free and democratic society. Freire believed that the predominant form of education, which he called the ‘banking’ concept of education, is fundamentally oppressive, and operates to maintain violent and exploitative forms of organisation in society. By indoctrinating people to accept, and adapt to, the ‘realities’ of the oppressive conditions in which they find themselves, individuals become incapable of imagining the world around them as something that is transformable. As Freire (2000, p. 77) states, the method of teaching employed by the oppressors ‘attempts to control thinking and action, leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power’. Hence, the ‘banking’ method of education does not challenge students to imagine innovative and creative ways to transform the world around
them (and the conditions of oppression therein), but acts to anaesthetise the learner, breeding conformity and passivity.

Alternatively, Freire maintained that education could become a potently subversive force for the transformation of an unjust and unequal society. Freire advocated a dialogical, or problem-posing, method of education. Rather than simply depositing information into the student, and thus treating the student as an empty receptacle or container, the educational goal should be to problematise the world around us, and the relations we have within it. In other words, the instructor/teacher would encourage students to become active and responsible participants in their own education. According to Freire, rather than simply dictating the ‘facts’ to students, teachers should pose questions and problems for the learner to engage with and analyse in creative and innovative ways. This constant interaction between students and teachers, in an open and non-hierarchal manner, is the essence of the dialogical approach to education. Freire (2000) elaborates:

Whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the submersion of consciousness; the latter strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality. (p. 81)

According to Freire, this consciousness would then allow people to ‘... develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation’ (2000, p. 83). It is worth quoting at length from Freire’s work (2000) to decipher the fundamental differences between the two approaches to education:

Banking education treats students as objects of assistance; problem-posing education makes them critical thinkers. Banking education inhibits creativity... Problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of persons as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation. In sum: banking theory and practice, as immobilizing and fixating forces, fail to acknowledge men and women as historical beings; problem-posing theory and practice take the people’s historicity as their starting point. (pp. 83–84)

Education, according to Freire, should therefore be directed toward raising the consciousness of the general population in a manner that enables them to recognise the causes of oppression in their daily lives, and ultimately act to change them. Freire had a great deal of confidence in people’s ability to recognise and understand the nature of their own oppression, and believed that education should work to reveal strategies for confronting and transforming these conditions.

The enduring oppression of the colonised by the colonisers beckoned intellectuals such as Freire to seek meaningful and democratic methods of resistance. Consistent with the manner in which he envisions a more democratic classroom, Freire also seeks to extend this to the population at large and its leaders. He posits, ‘Authentic liberation – the process of humanisation – is not another deposit to be made in men. Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it’ (2000, p. 79). Thus, he argues that it is impossible for political leaders simply to ‘deliver’ liberation and freedom to the people. On the contrary, Freire asserts, ‘Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift’ (2000, p. 47), and
that it is ‘essential for the oppressed to realise that when they accept the struggle for humanisation they also accept, from that moment, their total responsibility for the struggle’ (2000, p. 68). This sense of responsibility transforms the passive recipient of knowledge and liberation into the active and informed participant in the choosing and making of his/her own destiny.

Freire’s work leads one to engage directly with concepts such as liberation, freedom, democracy and revolution. Without proper clarification, these terms are sufficiently vague that one can imply anything and everything by using them (as the case study to follow will demonstrate). For Freire, revolution meant a radical and abrupt break from the colonial past, and the possibility for workers and peasants to take control of their own lives and destinies. This was predominantly a class-based approach to revolution or liberation, and Freire envisioned freedom as the absence of exploitative relations of production. However, the concept and practice of democracy was also essential for any true liberation to occur, according to Freire. In fact, he argued that liberation was not possible without the active engagement and participation of the ‘masses’. Thus, in describing democracy, Freire refers to a radically decentralised notion of participatory democracy, one in which every individual ultimately becomes responsible for the collective liberation of all. Nevertheless, concepts such as revolution and liberation remain problematic for a number of reasons, and Freire’s work does not escape criticism in this regard. As the twentieth century has demonstrated repeatedly, so-called ‘revolutions’ seldom, if ever, create a more free and democratic society. Furthermore, by using the language of revolution and liberation, one presumes that a group of people can arrive at a moment and space outside, or beyond, oppression and power. For these reasons, this article proposes that the value of Freire’s work lies more in his prescriptions for participation and engagement in decision-making processes that can confront relations of power and oppression in society, rather than his quest for an elusive revolutionary achievement. With this consideration in mind, the aim is to demonstrate that Freirean scholarship can contribute substantially to our understanding of why conditions of inequality and a lack of democracy persist.

How then does Freire envision the struggle for a more democratic and free society? Similar to his attitude toward education, what is required is a dialogical approach to transformation. As Freire points out: ‘It is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as Subjects of the transformation’ (2000, p. 128). Thus, leaders should not simply explain the way forward to the people, but should converse, and work in communion with them. This process ultimately ‘implies that revolutionary leaders do not go to the people in order to bring them a message of ‘salvation,’ but in order to come to know through dialogue with them both their objective situation and their awareness of that situation’ (2000, p. 95). Only then can leaders begin to understand the appropriate steps required for building, in constant dialogue with the masses, a more free and democratic society.

Throughout the process of engaging in dialogue with marginalised and oppressed people, there is ultimately the crucial issue of trusting in their ability to both apprehend their situation of oppression, and work productively in order to overcome it. Trust and faith in the people is central to Freire’s understanding of revolutionary praxis:

Dialogue further requires an intense faith in humankind, faith in their power to make and remake, to create and re-create, faith in their vocation to be more fully human (which is not
the privilege of an elite, but the birthright of all). Faith in people is an a priori requirement for dialogue. (2000, p. 90)

Trusting in the power and ability of oppressed people is an act that has seldom been practiced by so-called revolutionary leaders during the past 50 years, in any part of the world. However, the unwillingness or inability to do so indicates a fear of freedom, and negates the possibility of creating a more democratic and free society. Freire (2000) contends:

*Denial of communion in the revolutionary process, avoidance of dialogue with the people under the pretext of organizing them, of strengthening revolutionary power, or of ensuring a united front, is really a fear of freedom. It is fear of or lack of faith in the people. But if the people cannot be trusted, there is no reason for liberation.* (p. 129)

Hence, this commitment to trusting the abilities of oppressed people is imperative in overcoming conditions of exploitation. Without the active participation of these people in the governing of their affairs, democracy and freedom cannot exist.4

**The South African Case**

South Africans endured decades of minority rule and oppression at the hands of both the colonial and apartheid states. The fall of apartheid in 1994 signalled the end of institutionalised racism in the country, and was certainly an enormous victory for the forces of democracy and freedom. However, 15 years after the democratic transition began, South Africa remains plagued by numerous socio-economic problems. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Human Development Index (HDI) for South Africa fell between 1995 and 2003, and the country is currently one of the most unequal societies in the world in terms of income distribution.5 Despite the existence of formal democracy in the country, the socio-economic conditions for the majority of South Africans remain dire (Nattrass 2003).

South Africa maintains a unique position on the African continent. The legacy of apartheid and the monumental struggle against white minority rule has set this country apart, to a certain extent, and a great deal of academic attention has focused on its ‘exceptionalism’. In addition, the relative economic strength of South Africa on the continent (Ahwireng-Obeng and McGowan 2001),6 and the leadership role played by Mandela and Mbeki in the international arena7 have both served to draw attention to the South African case. However, this ‘exceptionalism’ that many attribute to the country can be contrasted with an acknowledgement that South Africa faces many of the same challenges as other countries on the continent, such as battling HIV/AIDS, fighting high levels of poverty and promoting democracy.8 South Africa experiences many of the same problems that any other post-colonial African country is facing in the twenty-first century. Yet, despite the similarities between South Africa and the rest of the continent, this perceived ‘exceptionalism’ means that South Africa plays an important role in shaping the future of the continent. The South African experience since 1994 has been remarkably prominent in the hearts and minds of not only those across the continent, but beyond. Therefore, decisions regarding development strategies in South Africa have been often monitored closely by others on the continent, and in some cases lauded by those promoting neo-liberal models of development. The exceptional degree of attention that South Africa commands in itself makes it a meaningful case to analyse.
Freirean theoretical tools provide a compelling framework for understanding the lack of progress toward a more free and egalitarian South African society in the post-apartheid period. The African National Congress (ANC), as the party of ‘liberation’ in South Africa, has governed with four consecutive overwhelming electoral victories in 1994, 1999, 2004 and 2009. Throughout this period, and particularly under the presidency of Thabo Mbeki since 1999, there has been a discernable trend toward the centralisation of political power within the ANC (Marais 2001, Chothia and Jacobs 2002, Mattes 2002, Vale and Ruiters 2004). The liberation movement was essentially demobilised after 1994, and consecutive ANC governments have attempted to ‘deliver’ liberation to the masses. As scholar/activist Dale McKinley asserts, since 1994 the ANC has ‘gradually demobilised and disempowered the very constituency capable of leading and carrying through a more complete democratic revolution – that class of South Africa’s workers and poor who have provided the party [the ANC] its democratic mandate’ (2001, p. 185). Thus, Freire’s warning regarding the consequences of excluding the masses from the process of transformation, and attempting to ‘deliver’ liberation to them, offers a powerful analytical framework for understanding the failure of the post-apartheid political leadership in South Africa. These shortcomings will be highlighted by a description of the manner in which the ANC leadership has aligned the South African economy to the interests of domestic and international capital, at the expense of the great majority of South Africans.

**From RDP to GEAR**

The ANC adhered to a development manifesto and plan established in 1994 called the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). This was a very broad document committed to material economic growth and basic needs provision, as well as to redressing past injustices (Lester et al. 2000, p. 248). The RDP was a significant part of the ANC platform in the 1994 elections, and was intended to be the basis of a project of socio-economic transformation in South Africa. The programme was described by Lester et al. as follows: ‘During 1994 and 1995, the RDP in effect became the cornerstone of government policy, with all government departments, unions, civic bodies and many non-governmental organisations broadly identifying with its principles’ (2000, p. 248). To coordinate the implementation of the RDP, ‘an RDP Office was established within the Office of the President, charged with the responsibility of coordinating RDP-related activities, including the spending of the initially modest RDP budget’ (Aliber 2003, p. 475). Yet, the RDP was awkwardly vague regarding questions of how exactly its goals would be met. As Michael Aliber contends, ‘Apart from a massive investment in infrastructure, . . . the document gave little indication what the new economic strategy would entail’ (2003, p. 475). In addition, unrealistic targets and an under-staffed RDP office may have added to the RDP’s lack of staying power (Lester et al. 2000, p. 251).

Ostensibly, the ANC felt pressured to conform to the dominant Western paradigm of neoliberal economic reform. Even by 1995, the ANC had re-written the RDP as a government White Paper that yielded to the more moderate, pragmatic elements within the party (Lester et al. 2000: 251). These changes culminated in the implementation of GEAR (Growth, Employment, and Reconstruction) in 1996 as the cornerstone of the government’s macroeconomic strategy. GEAR represents a typical neo-liberal macroeconomic agenda involving privatisation, deregulation, and the promotion of open markets. Ian Taylor (2001) provides a comprehensive and useful definition of neoliberalism:
The main points of the neoliberal project can be summarised as including the ‘rule of the market’ and the liberalisation and de-regulation of the economy so as to facilitate unfettered private enterprises to develop and – in theory – grow, thus allowing a ‘trickle down’ effect to the less advantaged. In order to do so, a reduction in labour costs is envisioned while greater openness to international trade and investment is privileged; cuts in social services and the ‘roll-back’ of the state are in order to cut government expenditure and further take the state out of interfering with the ‘natural’ mechanisms of ‘the market’ – the state being the ‘enemy of freedom’; and the privatisation of state-owned enterprises, goods and services to private investors, thus freeing government from having to expend on services that can – in theory – be better managed by private concerns while justifying a reduction in taxation that had formerly been collected to operate such enterprises.

This represents the logic behind the introduction of GEAR in the South African context. Although GEAR was implemented in 1996, some scholars would argue that the ANC had undertaken an ideological shift as early as 1990 or 1991. Lester et al. argue that: ‘Behind-the-scenes negotiations with overseas powers and global financial institutions influenced the ANC’s nascent economic policy as soon as it became clear that the movement would be playing a role in government’ (2000, p. 253).

Therefore, it is difficult to speculate exactly when the neoliberal hegemonic discourse truly took hold within the ANC elite. Nevertheless, by 1996 GEAR was implemented as the fundamental policy of government.

The manner in which GEAR was drafted and implemented was a top-down, exclusionary process from the beginning to end. Since 1994 scholars and activists have extensively documented the failures of GEAR and the authoritarian manner in which it was implemented. There will be a brief summary here of the key points of critique. First, it is important to remember that:

GEAR was drawn up by fifteen economists, two of them from the World Bank, the others were from various African banks, the Reserve Bank of South Africa, neoliberal think tanks and corporations. Only one economist had any footing in the South African democratic movement, and only one was black. (Kingsworth 2003, p. 39)

In addition to the unrepresentative nature of those involved in drafting the document, the secretive manner in which GEAR was implemented is often highlighted. Marais (2001) asserts:

GEAR was released after perfunctory ‘briefings’ of a few top-ranking ANC, SACP [South African Communist Party] and COSATU [Congress of South African Trade Unions] figures. The COSATU and SACP leaders, according to one participant, were shown only the section headings. (p. 162)

However, before these briefings, an initial meeting of Members of Parliament occurred, which was described by ANC MP Ben Turok (2003):

One afternoon in June 1996 some 20 MPs were invited to come to a meeting room in parliament where we found Minister of Finance, Trevor Manuel, waiting to address us. He announced that a new economic document had been prepared called ‘Growth, Employment and Redistribution’ (GEAR), and he presented an outline. Some questions were allowed but access to the document itself was refused on the grounds that it might be leaked to the press. (p. 273)
This candid admission from a senior ANC MP succinctly summarises the reluctance of those who favoured GEAR to engage in open debate, and their power in the decision-making process. Marais also quotes former President Mandela as admitting that ‘I confess even the ANC learnt of GEAR far too late – when it was almost complete’ (2001, p. 162). The implementation of GEAR illustrates the exact opposite of a dialogical and participatory method of decision making.

Not only did the drafting and implementation of GEAR conform to an elite-driven, undemocratic model, but the manner in which ANC leaders dealt with criticism of both the process and the substance of GEAR was anti-dialogical. Immediately following the implementation of GEAR, the government declared that it was ‘non-negotiable’ (Webster 2001, p. 261). The ANC refused to engage in any debate or discussion whatsoever regarding the merits of GEAR. After Mandela appeared at the SACP’s 10th Congress in 1998, a journalist for the Mail & Guardian (1998) noted:

President Nelson Mandela’s comments at the opening of the South African Communist Party conference that the growth, economic and redistribution (Gear) strategy is the fundamental policy of the African National Congress and that he will brook no opposition to it is just the latest sign of the ANC’s irritation at public criticism.

Mandela’s successor, Thabo Mbeki, consistently stressed the fact that GEAR was non-negotiable. For example, during the 2002 State of the Nation Address, he claimed:

On the whole, we should emphasise that the path of an open economy that we have charted for ourselves is not up for review. As we find our way into the future, we shall not seek solace in the past. (p. 14)

In the South African context, the top-down, elite driven process of implementing this reform package resulted in: ‘The failure of GEAR to perform anywhere close to its own expectations for growth and job creation’ (Webster 2001, p. 261). To put the failure of GEAR in achieving its targets into perspective, one author explains:

The only stated target of GEAR that has been achieved is that of reducing the fiscal deficit. In terms of real GDP growth, the projected annual average was 4.2%, versus the actual average of around 2.3% (Department of Finance, 2000; SARB, 2000). In terms of formal sector employment growth, the projected cumulative increase over the five years was 1.3 million, versus an actual net job loss of more than 800,000. (Aliber 2003, p. 476)

One of the main arguments behind the implementation of GEAR was that South Africa needed to create a more favourable investment climate. Supporters of GEAR argued that specific measures to ensure a stable economy, including maintaining low inflation, minimal fiscal deficits and competitive levels of taxation, were necessary in order to ensure investment, economic growth and the subsequent redistribution of economic resources. However, the record on foreign direct investment (FDI) in South Africa has been yet another blow to the economy in the post-apartheid era. According to the World Bank’s 2004 Global Development Finance report, ‘in dollar terms, South Africa’s FDI inflows are now just half of what they were in 1995. This despite total flows to the region [sub-Saharan Africa] nearly doubling from $4.3 billion in 1995 to $8.5 billion last year’ (cited in Mamaila, The Star 2004). Furthermore, since 1994 the economy has suffered what commentators have called an ‘investment strike’ on the part of domestic capital (Marais 2002, p. 88). These economic indicators highlight the dramatic failure of the current macroeconomic framework to attract investment
to South Africa. Overall this lack of investment has precipitated a crisis of unemployment in South Africa. Depending on the source, unemployment figures range from 28 per cent to 42 per cent.\textsuperscript{11}

**The National Democratic Revolution (NDR)**

The ANC Government adheres to the concept National Democratic Revolution (NDR) as a way to describe its aims of transforming the country from its colonial and apartheid past into a more just and equitable society. The NDR is described by the ANC as the struggle to achieve its core objectives, which are:

\ldots the creation of a united, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society. This means the liberation of Africans in particular and black people in general from political and economic bondage. It means uplifting the quality of life of all South Africans, especially the poor. (ANC 2006)

However, as the transition from the RDP to GEAR has demonstrated, this transformation is being conducted on behalf of the people, rather than through the direct participation of the people. From the Freirean perspective, it would appear antithetical for a liberation movement to concentrate decision-making power in the hands of a small ruling elite. Within the context of a detailed analysis of two specific development projects in post-apartheid South Africa (the Saldanha Steel Plant and the Paternoster Fish Market), David Bek, Tony Binns and Etienne Nel (2004) conclude that on behalf of the ANC Government:

There has also been a rejection of potential grassroots dynamics, as communities tend to be treated as either passive recipients or, even worse, as a hindrance or constraint. Instead, a neoliberal trickle-down has been relied upon to deliver growth and poverty reduction to marginalized areas and communities. (pp. 22–46)

This practice of centralising power and attempting to ‘deliver’ liberation to the people negates the possibility of forging a more democratic and free society. On the contrary, the dialogical Freirean model is premised on grassroots engagement and participation in decision-making processes, which are fundamentally lacking in the South African case. As Freire argues, there can be no transformation unless the masses are engaged in this process, participating actively as subjects.

Some ANC government officials are cognisant of the inherent contradictions and problems with the ANC’s approach to transformation in the post-apartheid context. As ANC MP Jeremy Cronin (2004) notes:

\textit{A huge problem is, apart from election period, as an Alliance we’ve not been mobilizing our mass base, because of technocratic illusions, state-centric illusions that we can now deliver liberation. And we must use the state and be technically effective and competent, but unless it’s combined with popular participation, popular organization, popular self-organization, you can’t transform the accumulation path \ldots So instead of a strategic convergence \ldots what you’re getting is a kind of deep tension between the state and elected representatives on the one hand, and seething social discontent and poverty on the other. There’s been a tendency to see this [engaging the masses] as mutinous, as dangerous, as problematic, rather than a huge advantage to the agenda that we’re nominally trying to achieve. We’re not going to get it done simply by sitting in Parliament.} (Interview with author, 16 August)
This rather frank admission by Cronin summarises the ANC’s approach to ‘liberation’ in the post-apartheid era. Rather than fostering mass based participation and political organisation since 1994, the ANC has relied on an elite driven, top-down politics. Furthermore, Cronin also alludes to the ANC’s fear of engaging the broader population, a problem that Freire describes as absolutely debilitating for any democratic project. Contrary to the democratic and participatory aspirations of many ANC activists before 1994, the post-apartheid NDR has proved to disable and dismantle democratic processes within the ruling ‘movement’. As Tom Lodge (1999) notes:

Notions of popular democracy constituted an important ingredient of activist culture within the African National Congress (ANC) and its allies in the decade preceding the 1994 elections. Taking their cue from the trade unions, spokespeople for the United Democratic Front (UDF) emphasised a vision of grassroots empowerment in which office bearers would be mandated delegates rather than executive decision makers. (p. 1)

Yet the post-apartheid ANC has instead functioned largely to the exclusion of mass based participation. Hundreds of ANC activists assumed positions as elected politicians or civil servants after the ‘transition’ from apartheid, leaving the grassroots of the party depleted. Furthermore, as the party of ‘liberation’, many expected the ANC to simply ‘deliver’ the promised bounties of the post-apartheid age. Lodge (1999) concurs, and adds:

Has organisational democracy played any role in the genesis of ANC strategy and policy since 1994? Not really. From time to time, conferences, workshops, and summits have supplied opportunities for the expression of objections by critics of government policy as well as placatory language by ANC leaders but these events appear to have slight policy impact. (p. 26)

Not only has the ANC drifted substantially away from any democratic ethos it once upheld, but many ANC leaders in either government or the private sector have become increasingly detached from the plight of the majority of the population. Former MP Philip Dexter admits: ‘Life looks different when you are being driven around in a BMW with tinted windows. You move so fast sometimes you can hardly see the shacks anymore. You almost forget’ (cited in Adams 2001, p. 222). Moreover, many ANC members and former activists in the anti-apartheid struggle have become extremely wealthy in the post-apartheid period. Riding the wave of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), individuals such as Cyril Ramaphosa and Tokyo Sexwale have amassed enormous fortunes, while the majority of blacks are struggling on a day-to-day basis to meet even the most basic human needs.

The South African Case, Freirean Scholarship and the Broader African Context

There is a well-established tradition in African scholarship, literature and activism of assessing, and providing critical foundations for understanding, the post-colonial political and social landscape. For example, Amílcar Cabral grasped the fundamental need to involve peasants, workers and others in the governing of their own affairs. He describes the ideal revolutionary movement as one where ‘the mass of workers and in particular the peasants, who are generally illiterate and have never moved beyond the confines of the village universe, would understand their situation as
decisive in the struggle’ (cited in Davidson 1992, p. 300). In the field of post-colonial literature, Chinua Achebe brilliantly assessed the many problems of leadership in the post-colonial African state in his novels, such as Anthills of the Savanna (1989). Nigerian political scientist Claude Ake asserted:

*Development strategies in Africa, with minor exceptions, have tended to be strategies by which the few use the many for their purposes. They are uncompromisingly top-down. There is not, and never has been, popular participation in political and economic decision-making.* (cited in Davidson 1992, p. 293)

Africans have been theorising and resisting oppression for decades, and the list of contributors to this line of thinking is long and distinguished. Hence, the intention here is to build upon this tradition by using Freirean scholarship and conceptual tools, not to suggest that Pedagogy would exist in a vacuum of political and social thought.

Scholars from the Western world have also contributed to a voluminous literature on the failure of the post-colonial African state to transform its colonial foundations. Crawford Young’s notion of a ‘guardian class’ that assumed power after the Europeans had retreated (1998), and Frederick Cooper’s description of the ‘gateway state’ that they now control (2002), are useful in understanding and analysing the post-colonial condition. These scholars draw attention to the importance of the colonial legacy and the authoritarianism of the colonial state, in shaping the post-colonial era. Bruce Berman reminds us that the colonial legacy for Africa involved the following key components: ‘bureaucratic authoritarianism, pervasive patron-client relations, and a complex ethnic dialectic of assimilation, fragmentation and competition’ (1998, p. 329). This analysis stresses the tremendous impact of colonialism on any prospects for a democratic political project in Africa.

It is important to recognise the marginalised position of most African states within the global economy, and the impact this may have on the options available to African leaders in the post-colonial period. Most independent African states inherited a colonial economy geared toward production and export of raw materials to the ‘developed’ world. As Hardt and Negri suggest, ‘liberation struggles found themselves ‘victorious’ but nonetheless consigned to the ghetto of the world market – a vast ghetto with indeterminate borders, a shantytown, a favela’ (2000, p. 252). In the post-independence decades, many of these countries experienced deteriorating terms of trade, escalating levels of debt and slumping demand for some of their key resources. Thus, understanding Africa’s unequal and exploitative integration into the global economy is extremely important in assessing the successes and failures on the continent during the past fifty years (Saul and Leys 1999).

While recognising the fundamental failures of the colonial state to provide sufficient democratic foundations for the post-colonial state, and Africa’s unfavourable position in the global economy, it is also imperative to address the failures of African elites since independence. With reference to the South African case in particular, and in assessing the ANC’s multiple failures since the end of apartheid, John Saul (2001) remarks:

*The best point of reference for analysing the South African transition might be Frantz Fanon’s notion of a false decolonisation: the rising African middle class, both entrepreneurial and political/bureaucratic in provenance, merely sliding comfortably into their political positions as,*
yes, ‘intermediaries’ of global Empire and, from these heights, fending off the claims of the poverty-stricken they have left behind. (p. 1)

Acknowledging the agency of those African leaders who have chosen the path described by Fanon is crucial in assessing the nature of the post-colonial state today. It is here that the contribution of Pedagogy becomes important, as Freire speaks directly to the need for leaders to operate in a dialogical relationship with those they claim to ‘represent’.

While Fanon’s work will continue to be imperative in analysing the post-colonial African state, it is argued here that Freire’s work can provide scholars and activists with additional means of interrogating the post-colonial condition in Africa. Moreover, this analysis rests on an understanding of post-colonialism as problematique, rather than as a chronological or temporal concept. Freire’s dialogical method can serve both as a means of critiquing the practices of elites across the continent (both African and ‘Western’), and also of organising mass-based resistance to the top-down ‘development’ strategies currently being pursued in most African countries. Freire’s conceptual framework aids us in understanding exactly why political leadership such as that displayed by Thabo Mbeki is antithetical to a democratic and free society. This lack of dialogue and communion with the people negates the possibility of stimulating progressive change in any society. Furthermore, this fear of engagement with the people, and not allowing them to participate meaningfully in the formation of their own destinies, represents a fear of freedom itself, and further enshrines the elitist nature of such political leadership. Implementing neoliberal reform, as described in the case of South Africa, must be done without the consent of the great majority of people, as it is simply not in their best interest. Thus, Habib and Taylor (2001) remark:

The emergence of a dominant party system in South Africa, and the relations of power in the global and national arenas, has ensured that citizens’ preferences are sacrificed in the interests of appeasing foreign investors and the domestic business community. This has manifested itself in the ANC’s abandonment of the RDP and its adoption of a neo-liberal economic strategy. The likely outcome of such policy choices is increasing inequality and poverty and undermining democracy (pp. 221–2).

The dialogical method can provide a useful tool, or point of departure, when building and mobilising resistance to the authoritarian nature of political and economic structures in Africa. Freirean pedagogy highlights the importance of participatory forms of dialogue and resistance, and provides critical insights into the nature and potential for more democratically organised movements and organisations. In the South African case, a multiplicity of new social movements has emerged since the late 1990s to challenge the elite-driven politics of the ANC. Economic and political marginalisation in South Africa compelled numerous loosely defined organisations to begin again to contest the dominant model of economic ‘development’ – one that was not open for negotiation. These movements range from the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) to the Landless People’s Movement (LPM), and rely on a diverse set of tactics and strategies. They participate in grassroots struggles surrounding issues such as housing, land, electricity and water, and could be considered ‘people-driven’ movements for social justice. The new social movements reflect many aspects of the Freirean model, which may contribute to their rising strength and popularity since the late 1990s. They tend to focus on mobilising and empowering people on the ground to act as creative agents of change, rather than treating them as ‘objects’ to be acted upon by state policies. From a Freirean perspective, much could be learned from the new social movements in South Africa. Moreover, these movements
provide a glimpse into issues that further research on applying Freirean theory to the African context could uncover.\textsuperscript{21}

**Limitations of Freire’s Pedagogy**

As noted earlier, ideas of revolutionary politics are problematic on a number of levels, and the purpose of this article is certainly not to uncritically celebrate *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In addition to the concerns raised earlier with regard to the concept ‘revolution’, it can be suggested that a second issue with Freire’s text is the manner in which he continues to differentiate between leaders and the ‘people’. This binary perpetuates the notion that an enlightened few should bring consciousness to the lower levels of society. Moreover, this conceptual distinction may in fact perpetuate many of the problems that Freire claims to be confronting. However, Freire does make it clear that interactions between leaders/teachers and the people/students should be dialogical, and that power should be shared between the two. Furthermore, faced with the dominant political institutions of today, Freire’s prescriptions would certainly be a step in the right direction for those concerned with creating a more non-hierarchical and democratic society. Finally, the issue of gender in Freire’s work is an important one. His initial class-based project, while attempting to incorporate issues of gender and race, was filled with gender-biased language and a general exclusion of many oppressed social groups. Although Freire addressed this issue briefly in later work (2004, pp. 54–56), the criticism of his initial work remains valid. Thus, it can be repeated that this article should serve merely as the beginning of a conversation regarding Freire’s work and its applicability to African studies in the twenty-first century.

**Conclusion**

Overall, Freire offers a refreshing lens with which to view the struggle for a more just and free society. His suggestions for a more participatory approach to decision making, and actively working to transform the world around us, can offer valuable analytical tools for engaging with issues of power and oppression. As the South African case suggests, liberation cannot be ‘delivered’ from above. On the contrary, top-down methods of change are antithetical to the creation of a free and democratic society, and any such attempts will ultimately negate the possibility for success. Notwithstanding Africa’s disadvantageous position within the structure of global capitalism, and the lasting effects of colonialism on the political, economic, social and psychological well-being of its people, Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* offers hope for a rejuvenated sense of agency and empowerment.

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**Endnotes**

1. Other prominent authors in the field include Henry A. Giroux, Stanley Aronowitz, and bell hooks.

2. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was first published in 1970. However, the edition used throughout this article is the 30th Anniversary Edition, published in 2000.

3. The ‘banking method’ of education is the commonly accepted form of teaching whereby the teacher/instructor ‘delivers’ knowledge to the students in a didactic manner. The student acts as
a passive recipient of knowledge, instead of actively participating in his/her own education.

Freire elucidates the typical features of the ‘banking method’ in Chapter Two of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, pp. 71–79.


5. According to the UNDP’s 2005 *Human Development Report*, South Africa ranked third in the world after Namibia and Brazil in income inequality, as measured by the GINI coefficient on income inequality. For further reading on poverty and inequality in South Africa, see Terreblanche (2002) and May (2000).

6. Furthermore, there is a growing literature describing South Africa as a sub-imperial power on the continent, as South African capital is spreading rapidly across the continent. For example, see Daniel *et al.* (2003) and Alden and Soko (2005).

7. The South African state has played a prominent role on the continent in terms of promoting democracy, leading international initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), and participating in peacekeeping and mediation efforts. For example see Landsberg (2000), Shubin and Prokopenko (2001), Simon (2001), Taylor and Williams (2001), and Schraeder (2001).

8. The work of Neville Alexander (2002) is important in this regard.

9. For example, see Bond (2000), Marais (2001), McKinley (2001), and Taylor (2001).

10. The South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) are in a partnership with the ANC, known as the Tripartite Alliance. This Alliance has deep roots in the anti-apartheid struggle, but has experienced a considerable degree of strain in the post-apartheid period. While occasionally raising concerns over GEAR, the SACP and COSATU have remained loyal to the ANC and its neo-liberal agenda since GEAR’s implementation in 1996.

11. Statistics South Africa reported official unemployment at 28.2 per cent in September 2003, yet unofficial or expanded unemployment is said to be 42.1 per cent. Khathu Mamaila reports that: ‘The term ‘official’ unemployment reduces unemployment, on paper, by at least a million. This is because a million people who are too poor to actively search and apply for work are excluded from the number of those who are actively seeking employment’ (Mamaila, *The Star*, 5 April 2004).

12. This does not mean that the ANC *never* attempts to mobilise people on the ground, or that they do not have some active branches at the grassroots level. The point is that organising people from the bottom-up has not been the predominant method of building ‘democracy’ for the ANC, but rather a technocratic system of ‘delivering’ to the masses is used more often.

13. BEE is a programme designed by the ANC in order to economically uplift the black population in South Africa. Rather than benefiting the majority black population, this programme has instead enriched a small number of blacks with political ties to the ANC.

14. It is important to acknowledge that Ake’s ‘few’ in this context refer not only to authoritarian African leaders, but international financial institutions (IFIs), ‘development’ agencies and multinational corporations (MNCs) who have conducted business on the continent. For further discussion, see Bond (2006b).


16. See Fanon (1963) and (1967).

17. While a full discussion of the multiple definitions of post-colonialism is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to note that the author does not understand the term as describing a temporal period or era, but rather as a complex theoretical tool intended to analyse conditions of power and identity in regions of the world that experienced colonialism. For one useful source on this topic, see Gilbert and Tompkins (1996). In addition, Freirean scholarship should aid in opening up other avenues of critical enquiry into the concept of post-colonialism.
18. For an excellent discussion of how these communities mobilise, see Desai (2002).

19. Two key resources for understanding the new social movements in South Africa are: Ballard et al. (2005), Ballard et al. (2006).

20. The new social movements have also been criticised on a number of grounds; see Ballard et al. (2006). While these movements are by no means perfect solutions to the socio-economic problems confronting the people of Africa, they represent a sincere attempt to build a more bottom-up political project in South Africa.

21. It is hoped that future research can be conducted to explore how exactly Freirean theory and methodologies can be developed and adapted in an African context. Such research would also be accompanied by deeper analysis of historical attempts at more participatory forms of ‘development’ on the continent, including Freire’s own experience of working in Guinea Bissau (Freire 1978); the works of Amilcar Cabral (1969, 1973, 1980), and Hickey and Mohan (2006).

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In memoriam Chris Allen (8 December 1942–29 September 2008)

Chris was a founding editor of RoAPE. He was one of those at the meeting at which the idea of the journal was first discussed. The Review owes a great deal to his continued commitment to and his active editorial work, which was important in sustaining RoAPE as a journal for critical and informed research and writing on Africa. Chris was Managing Editor of the journal in the 1990s.

Chris came to the study of Africa from a first class degree in Philosophy and Psychology at Oxford in 1965. He engaged actively in the civil rights struggle in the US South, but said little of his doing so. He went to Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone in 1966, at which time he left the Communist Party (CPGB) because of its uncritical support for Kwame Nkrumah. Chris returned to Oxford, where he had worked with Thomas Hodgkin, first as a graduate student and then as a Research Fellow in Politics at Nuffield College. He lectured in History at Ahmadu Bello University from 1970–1971 and then in the Department of Politics and the Centre of African Studies at Edinburgh until his retirement in 2001.

Chris was, as generations of readers of the Review knew, an indefatigable bibliographer. He published his existing Radical Africa, later broadened to Current Africana, in the first issue: comprehensive surveys of literature in English and French. He continued to do so until 1998 and began the series Africa Bibliography. He wrote 10 editorials for the Review, six of them between 1997 and 2000, which extended across a range none of us could ever match.

In 1970, Chris Allen and R.W. Johnson published *African Perspectives*, in honour of Thomas Hodgkin. This book marked a break with liberal and nationalist, and also communist, writing on Africa, in favour of historical narrative and critical analysis. A decade later, I worked with Chris to edit collection of excerpts from key texts on the sociology of sub-Saharan Africa, which his knowledge of the literature and meticulous editing made possible.

The Republic of Benin attracted his attention before, and after, its sovereign national conference attracted academic analysts to study the process of ‘democratisation’. Chris set out his own account of the end of the ‘Short and sad story of socialism in Benin’ to ‘Restructuring an authoritarian state’ (both 1992). The second was published in RoAPE 54, which identified the scope for and limits of democratic politics at the start of the period blithely described by political scientists as ‘democratic transition’.

Chris’s approach was empirical; he was not given to ‘theorising’ and was impatient of it. Chris was often very intolerant about people and of ideas. He was particularly disparaging about the vacuities of political scientists. He could draw on his immense...
knowledge to paint the big picture in several articles for the Review. The most incisive was ‘Understanding African politics’, which is where my own students start their venture into the subject. He argues, simply and clearly, that political possibilities are shaped by their different institutional inheritances and sets out a model of different forms of spoils politics and their likely futures.

In his valedictory lecture at Edinburgh, he gave us a masterly overview of the field of African studies, where it had come from and where it was going. Sadly, he did not make it available for publication. He was fortunately wrong in anticipating a decline in the study of Africa. Student interest is probably at its highest. Academic fashions are indeed more narrowly disciplinary and are often driven by research methods rather than by substantive problems. The Review can claim credit for providing a space for a continuing tradition of informed, politically committed and radical scholarship and Chris for his own part in sustaining it.

On his retirement in 2001, Chris left academic studies (and his immense collection of books behind him) for rural life in France.

_Gavin Williams, Oxford_
Briefings

What Will the World Financial Crisis Do to Africa?

Peter Lawrence

Crises of over-production and under-consumption have been a regular feature of the history of capitalism. The crisis we are living through is another example of capitalism’s uneven development. This time it is coupled with a global financial crisis propelled by banks, insurance companies and mortgage companies’ over-exposure to the wonderfully named ‘toxic’ assets: pieces of paper which were assets as long as house prices were rising and borrowers were employed, but ‘toxic’ as soon as the speculators who had fuelled the growth of these assets suddenly realised they could be worthless if the housing market bubble burst and the long consumer credit-propelled boom threatened to come to an end. Recessions are normally short-lived as production is adjusted to lower demand until machines eventually need replacing and demand for capital goods gets the business cycle moving in an upward track, optimism about the future increases and the virtuous circle of growth leads to a boom again.

In recent years, economists and the governments they advised believed they had cured boom-and-bust by getting economic agents to make rational expectations about the future on the basis of the fullest information provided to them by governments and other public information providers. Thus, according to their assumptions, only an unpredictable event could disturb expectations. The unpredicted oil price hike and shock of the collapse of the US sub-prime mortgage market were the unpredictable events (shocks or surprises in economists’ jargon), that shattered the rational expectations of economic agents, even though some of them had already seen a recession looming, resulting from unsustainable consumer borrowing. Now we are heading for a deep recession that might become a depression, the like of which has not been seen since the 1930s.

The big question here is how these events are going to affect the African economies. Economists are not always very accurate in their prediction, so this economist will only discuss the major factors involved and suggest possible outcomes based on what we know usually happens in a global economic downturn.

There are two distinct views emerging from statements and commentaries by economists in international organisations and institutes. The first is that the African economies are so marginalised in global terms that there will be little effect on African economic performance. The alternative view is that because Africa is so marginal to the world economy, small changes in, for example, capital and aid flows, remittances or commodity earnings, will have a significant effect on the economies of the continent, especially if, through adopting structural adjustment policies, they have become even more exposed to the global economy than before.

The logic of globalisation tells us that those countries which have increasingly integrated into the global economy,
carried out liberalisation reforms in
finance and trade, for example, will be
most affected by the impending recession,
especially when they have just suffered
from the short-lived but significant oil
shock. Although primary commodity
prices rose along with the oil price,
although not as sharply, these prices
have fallen back to levels lower than
they were two years ago. The exception
has been gold, a commodity for which
demand rises in a crisis. Gold prices
have fallen, but not by very much and
remain 25 per cent higher than they
were two years ago.

On the other hand, with regard to the
financial crisis itself, fortunately for
African economies, in spite of increasing
liberalisation, they do not have banking
systems that have been involved in
trading the new financial instruments
that have been a major cause of the crisis
in banking. South Africa’s Finance Minis-
ter, Trevor Manuel, for example, has
claimed that South African banks, argu-
ably the most integrated with global
finance houses, are well supervised and
the banks themselves have stated that
they are minimally exposed to the toxic
assets of the US sub-prime markets,
even though some banks have been
exposed to global derivatives markets,
with one institution losing US$1.4 billion
because of the collapse of Bear Sterns.

With regard to the rest of Africa, the
effects are not likely to be uniform.
There are several countries for which the
world financial crisis is not the top item on the agenda. Zimbabwe and
the Democratic Republic of the Congo,
for example, have long-standing crises,
as do Sudan and Ethiopia. It is also impor-
tant to remember that we have just been
through a period of sharp increases in
food prices worldwide. This has
adversely affected those African econom-
ies that are, as a result of previous failures
to generate agricultural food output
growth, net food importers and increased
levels of poverty in them.

As a result of the high food prices and the
high oil prices, African economies will
already have suffered a deterioration in
their payments balances, ameliorated a
little by the increase in some of their
primary commodity export prices. However, it is one of the characteristics
of commodity markets that spot prices
are less important than long-term contract
prices, so that the commodity price
increases, because of their brevity, would
not have made much of an impact on
export earnings.

Many African economies are heavily
dependent on food aid, import support
and government budget support. This is
likely to increase as primary product
export earnings growth slows down or
becomes negative. Foreign investment is
also likely to decline following a boom
in the last few years. According to a
recent issue of the IMF Survey, some
countries (Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania,
Uganda and Zambia among the more
prominent) had experienced an increase
in private capital flows as a consequence
of improved economic performance,
resulting in lower risk ratings and
higher yields to private equity invest-
ment. However, 90 per cent of those
US$50 billion of these private equity
inflows into Africa in 2007 went to
South Africa. According to the same
source, almost two-thirds of direct
foreign investment goes to five countries,
and nearly half of that goes to Nigeria.
Now such foreign inflows are likely to
slow down, and at the same time inves-
tors short of cash in developed countries
are likely to repatriate profits, thus affect-
ing the payments balance and leading to
greater dependence on food aid and
import support. However, the effects are
likely to be concentrated in those more
open economies.

African economies are increasingly
dependent on remittances from African
nationals working in developed countries.
Although remittances are, with some
exceptions, a relatively small proportion
of GDP (around 3 per cent), they have become almost as important as aid and foreign investment as a source of transfers from developed countries to sub-Saharan Africa. Some estimates put remittance flows to SSA as high as US$24 billion in 2007 (Nigeria receiving almost half of this sum), compared with foreign aid flows of around US$40 billion and foreign investment of US$53 billion. The World Bank estimates that remittances will fall in 2009 by between 1.3 and 6.8 per cent and may not start to increase again beyond 2010. One reason for this aside from the recession is the decline in the value of sterling against the US dollar. For example, a Leeds University study estimated that approximately £700 million was remitted from the UK to Zimbabwe in 2007, equivalent to US$1.4 billion then, but only equal to US$1 billion in 2008. So, for the level of remittances to stay at their 2007 level in 2008, Zimbabweans in the UK would have had to increase remittances by 40 per cent in one year, highly unlikely given the crisis in the last third of the year. This reduction in flow will occur in other sub-Saharan African countries that largely receive sterling remittances. Even the euro has seen a decline against the US dollar over the last year of around 14 per cent, so remittances from these sources have to increase sharply to offset the currency decline – again highly unlikely. With increasing unemployment in the US and Europe, less money will be sent home, again affecting the balance of payments and resulting in increasing food aid and import support.

Therefore, we can expect the high growth rates that many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have enjoyed over much of the past decade, to decline sharply. We can expect countries in difficulties to return to the IMF and World Bank for payments support and development assistance. What will be their response? For the last 30 years these organisations have insisted that governments seeking their help should pursue market led policies. They have mirrored the change to market-led policies that characterised developed country government policies with the emphasis on lower taxes, privatisation and tougher social policy, all of these entailing ‘rolling back the state’. Suddenly in the wake of the current crisis, these policies have been put into reverse. The US and UK which pushed for privatisation now rescue private enterprise by bail outs which effectively take them into public ownership. As I write this, the US government is deciding whether or not to bail out the major US car companies. It used to be said that ‘What is good for General Motors is good for America’! Now there is a vote in the US Senate that suggests that politicians of the right are prepared to see General Motors and all their suppliers go to the wall and certainly precipitate a depression. But we also see the US Government, even under Bush, trying to bail out the companies to prevent a depression. It is clear the state has come back to restore order in the system, but not of course to change the system.

So what will the IMF and World Bank do to bail out African economies that suffer from the effects of recession and possibly depression on their economies? Will policies change to allow these countries to chart a more independent and initially protectionist course? Will sub-Saharan Africa be able to disengage from the world economy in a similar way to Latin America during the depression of the 1930s?

At present it looks as though the IMF and World Bank are calling on African economies not to abandon the ‘reform’ policies. This may be partly a combination of inability to supply sufficient resources through African states to alleviate the effects of the recession and an enduring belief that globalising market solutions was the right policy to follow, in spite of it leaving African economies as vulnerable if not more vulnerable than before. These institutions’ policies may change
as their member governments realise the need for continued government intervention and some direction of investment in their own countries. So the answer to the second of the above questions is possibly ‘yes’, but to a limited degree. The answer to the third question is probably ‘no’ because there is little evidence that African states have the political will, not to mention the institutional framework, to pursue an independent path. This is obviously the case in the country best placed to do so, South Africa. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that unless that country takes the lead in forging a more independent and African-interdependent strategy of disengagement from the global economy, other countries will seize that initiative.

The last great depression of the 1930s ended in a world war. Just as there were ways of preventing the last depression without resorting to war, there are ways of preventing a new great depression taking root. The developed capitalist countries have combined to a greater of lesser degree to try to ward off a depression by rescuing the financial institutions and trying to maintain consumer spending. There is talk of public infrastructure projects to maintain employment and inject a consumption multiplier into the system to keep consumer spending up. There is even talk of a renewed industrial strategy with directed investment by the publicly owned banks. Much hope rests on China to boost demand for capital goods for their investment spending. These policies may help to avoid depression, but they will not avoid recession. Banks are holding cash until they see signs of an upturn, but there will not be signs of an upturn unless the banks release cash. This is Keynes’s well known ‘liquidity trap’ with a vengeance.

Unless governments act collectively to inject investment funds into their economies, it will be a long time before the upturn comes. Spending on environmentally-friendly infrastructure in developed and developing countries could be the substitute to war that will regenerate sustainable economies, not just in developed capitalist countries but also in Africa, as well as in countries which have actually been subjected to wars. One thing is for certain. This is not the beginning of the end of capitalism but possibly a new stage in its development. How far that new stage might produce the seeds of some collective action by states, capital and popular movements remains to be seen, but ought to be an important subject of investigation in the near future.

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Angola: Thirty Years of Dos Santos

Alex Vines & Markus Weimer

José Eduardo dos Santos will mark his thirtieth year as President of Angola in September 2009. Since 2004 Angola has boomed, sustained by high government spending and a rapid increase in oil exports. At present Angola enjoys a healthy current account surplus and it posted the highest increase in its oil output between 2004 and 2007 (beating Russia, Azerbaijan, Brazil, Libya and Kazakhstan among others). Angola is also a strategic oil supplier to the world’s two largest oil consumers: in 2008, it was the sixth largest to the United States and the second largest to China. This is now changing and in 2009 Angola will fall probably behind Saudi Arabia and Iran as China’s main source of imported oil. After an initial expected GDP growth of 8.2 per cent in January 2009, the government has adjusted the figure to above 3 per cent. The World Bank predicts negative growth in 2009 owing to lower international oil prices and slowdown in global demand. Diamond prices have also collapsed.

Angola briefly surpassed Nigeria as the leading sub-Saharan African oil producer in 2008 and in 2009 it chairs the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) for the first time. On 24 October 2008, OPEC decided to reduce its output. Under the cuts Angola’s quota has been reduced from 1.9 million barrels/day (b/d) to 1.5 million b/d. It is predicted that peak oil will be attained around 2011 followed by a production decline rate of 7.5 per cent per year. Although older fields are reaching maturity, new oil fields will see a boost of overall output, from 1.9 million b/d in 2008 to 2.3 million b/d in 2015. There is little sign yet of a non-oil dependent economy flourishing and the World Bank’s ‘Doing Business’ report for 2009 ranks Angola 168th out of 181 countries surveyed. The average time taken to start up a business is 68 days according to the survey, but it still takes a staggering 328 days to build a warehouse.

Building upon Legislative Elections

The ruling Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) gained a resounding victory in the 2008 legislative elections. This has cemented the hegemony of the MPLA with 191 seats in the 220-seat National Assembly, and it allows the MPLA to amend Angola’s constitution if it so desires. Turnout was high at over 87 per cent, indicating popular enthusiasm for the first multiparty election in 16 years, but it was also a vote for peace. There have been allegations of official intimidation, corruption and presence of security forces at polling stations. The most embarrassing episode was that only 320 polling stations out of 2,584 polling stations opened in Luanda, as voter papers and voter registration lists had not been delivered despite a very expensive and high-tech process, forcing a second day of voting. According to individuals involved this was more due to incompetence and inexperience than conspiracy.

Out of a total of 6.4 million valid ballots, the MPLA secured 81.6 per cent. Its main rival, the former rebel group UNITA, won only 10 per cent and other parties secured just 8 per cent (see Table 1 for an overview of the election results). UNITA's performance in its traditional heartland, the central highlands of Huambo and Bié provinces, was poor as expected; the party’s parliamentarians had become distant while the MPLA had pumped resources into the area and had vigorously pursued a co-option effort with the traditional authorities since the end of the war.

UNITA’s main source of revenue was a US$14 million state grant based on the 70 parliamentary seats it won in 1992 – this has now gone, creating a serious impact.

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on its finances. UNITA now looks towards the 2009 municipal elections to start rebuilding its grassroots support base. However, UNITA’s leader Isaias Samakuva stands little chance of winning the presidential poll and given these strains, party unity may be harder to demand and maintain from the base up.

Other parties did even worse; only three managed to secure more than 1 per cent of the national vote. The opposition now have only 29 seats in total. The MPLA dominated the vote in all provinces except in Bie and Cabinda, where UNITA did better and in the Lunda provinces, where the Partido de Renovação Social (PRS) enjoys strong support from the Lunda/Chokwe people. UNITA’s strongest showing was in Cabinda, due to a protest vote and an official boycott of the election by the armed FLEC (Frente para a Libertação do Enclave de Cabinda) separatist group. The Frente Nacional para a Libertação de Angola (FNLA) did well in its Zaire province heartland, but failed to make an impact nationally.

The five parties that had polled less than 0.5 per cent of the national vote (four of which had held seats in the outgoing parliament) have been dissolved. Angola now has only six officially registered parties compared with 14 parties and coalitions during the election and 108 during the pre-election period.\(^1\) The MPLA with its 191 seats now completely dominates the political landscape.

### International response

The European Union, the Pan-African Parliament, the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP), Southern African Development Community (SADC), the US embassy and the African Union deployed observers. One or two groups from Angolan civil society were also authorised to be observers by the government but the CNE (National Election Commission) failed to accredit nearly half of the 2,640 civil society observers, with only 28 out of 370 receiving accreditation in Luanda. International observers gave a broadly positive assessment of the poll although criticising irregularities. The EU mission in particular was critical, especially of the state-controlled radio, television and newspaper, Jornal de Angola.

Just prior to the elections, Chatham House published *Angola’s Elections: A Democratic Oil Giant?* (Indira Campos 2008). This briefing paper highlighted how the MPLA enjoyed enormous financial advantages and started its election campaign before the official campaigning start of 8 August 2008. It also warned that the ‘playing field for the political contest is particularly unequal in access to the media’ in favour of the MPLA and that the body tasked with the electoral process, the CNE, had problems. Official figures published in 2009 show that the MPLA spent US$8.7 million on its campaign, more than seven times the amount spent by the 13 opposition parties. On the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Total votes</th>
<th>% of total valid votes</th>
<th>No. of seats</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MPLA</td>
<td>5,266,112</td>
<td>81.64</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNITA</td>
<td>670,197</td>
<td>10.39</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRS</td>
<td>204,478</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ND</td>
<td>77,405</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FNLA</td>
<td>71,600</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parties</td>
<td>160,615</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6,450,407</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>220</td>
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</tbody>
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Source: Comissão Nacional Eleitoral (CNE).
other hand, the Economist Intelligence Unit (UK) believes that the MPLA spent some US$300 million on its campaign compared with the US$17 million shared by the other parties.

On 17 October 2008 the National Assembly formally dissolved the national unity government (GURN), which represented a power-sharing agreement that began in April 1997 as part of the Lusaka peace accord. The MPLA’s dominance has been confirmed by the election of former Prime Minister, Fernando da Piedade dos Santos (‘Nando’), as President of the National Assembly. Bornito de Sousa, a relatively young MPLA rising star has become President of the MPLA’s parliamentary group. Among the newly nominated MPLA parliamentarians are Ana Paula dos Santos, the President’s wife and one of his daughters, Welwitchia dos Santos, although the first lady has indicated she does not wish to take up the post.

**Government Reshuffle**

In late September 2008, President dos Santos conducted the most significant reshuffle of government since 1997. A new government of 33 ministers (five more than its predecessor) was unveiled. Some portfolios have been split and two ministers without portfolio have been created, one for Antonio Bento Bembe, a former leader of the Cabindan separatist group, FLEC. The most significant changes are economic with the replacement of José Pedro de Morais as Finance Minister by his former Deputy Eduardo Severim de Morais. The appointment of the MPLA’s former Chief of Economic and Social Policy, Manuel Nunes Junior, to the new post of Economy Minister is also significant as it suggests that the presidency wants to reduce the assertiveness in recent years by the finance ministry. The former Deputy Prime Minister, Aguinaldo Jaime was also appointed head of a new commission charged with boosting foreign investment in the non-mineral sectors in addition to the private investment agency ANIP. The former Finance Minister, José Pedro de Morais, has also been charged to oversee the launch of Angola’s stock exchange. The long-serving Petroleum Minister, Desidério Costa, took up Angola’s presidency of OPEC in January 2009 and has been replaced by the former Energy Minister, José Maria Botelho. There was also a new Foreign Minister, Assunção Afonso dos Anjos.

Overall, the new administration emphasises continuity rather than change, with the key Ministers of Planning, Interior, Public Works, Transport and Education remaining the same. However, there may be a further reshuffle after the presidential elections.

The MPLA in its election manifesto pledges to put forward an even more ambitious second phase of post-war reconstruction. This includes the creation of two new cities, a new railway line running along the coast from Namibe to the enclave of Cabinda, as well as 1 million new houses across the country by 2012. How Angola is going to match this massive investment in physical infrastructure with investing in its citizens and their health and education remains to be seen. Skilled Angolan labour remains at a premium. Furthermore, due to a global recession and low oil prices, Angola may find itself under extra pressure to deliver on reconstruction and developing the non-oil sectors.

**Elections in 2009?**

2009 heralds the ‘Third Republic’ of Angola, once a new constitution is passed in parliament followed by presidential and municipal elections. Negotiations over a new constitution started in February 2009 and are expected to last around six months before a text is ready for ratification. For MPLA supporters the advent of a ‘new Angola’ is historic. It signifies the consolidation of Angolan ‘peace and
democracy’ and the completion of MPLA’s metamorphosis from a revolutionary Marxist independence movement into a modern political party with the resources and expertise to bring prosperity and development to the Angolan people. The advent of the ‘Third Republic’ also signifies to many – especially the former military commanders in the party – the ultimate victory of the MPLA over the Portuguese colonisers, the FNLA and UNITA.

President dos Santos has overshadowed the first President of independent Angola, Agostinho Neto. Against all odds he has remained in power since 1979, overcoming challenges of war and elections and at the same time displaying a highly refined political craftsmanship. He is an accomplished and shrewd economic and political dealmaker with an instinct for political survival. Under his leadership Angola gained increasing regional importance to the point where Angola rivals South Africa as the major regional power.

In 2001 it looked like as if dos Santos wanted to step down as President and retire from Angolan politics. However, events in neighbouring Zambia where Frederick Chiluba, the former Head of State was stripped of his immunity by a unanimous vote of parliament, and faced 59 charges including abuse of office and theft, contributed to a change of mind. Dos Santos may have decided then to retain the reins of power and prevent any such ‘retribution politics’ to take place in Angola. His decision to remain in power (and retain power) permeates Angolan politics, from the fluidity of government and ministerial posts which are re-distributed frequently (and probably will be shuffled again after the presidential elections) to the new process of arriving at a constitution for the country.

The constitution has been evolving since 1991 with the legislative elections of 2008 preparing the ground for a parliamentary ad hoc commission. Despite the MPLA majority in the Assembleia Nacional (the Angolan parliament), there appear to be limits to the changes possible. These limits are set out in fundamental principles agreed in 1991 and codified in the constitutional law of Angola as well as the law on the amendment of the constitution. The Constitutional Court as the guardian of the constitutional law will perform an oversight function.

The new constitution will decree whether the President is elected through parliament or popular vote, as is the case now. It will also clarify the powers of the Prime Minister and the President. Last year Dos Santos said a presidential election would only take place after a new constitution was approved by parliament. There has been a marked absence of debate on these issues in the Angolan state media.

In terms of legitimacy, the election of the President through a direct vote would send a far stronger signal than the de facto appointment of the President through the national parliament. The announcement in early 2009 that the MPLA has postponed its sixth congress to December 2009 suggests that presidential elections may not be held in 2009. This is due to the time needed to agree upon a new constitution, but also an impact of the global economic downturn. Direct presidential polls would also be judged against the backdrop of the legislative elections in 2008, and improvements would be expected from the international community and observers. The chaos seen in the outskirts of Luanda with missing ballots and lack of electoral resources would be judged differently a second time around, as would the role of the CNE in the electoral process. The final EU report on the legislative elections, for example, has clear recommendations on the roles of the oversight bodies and institutions of the elections as well as specifics on how to strengthen the work of the CNE and operational
instruments. All these are risks to the success of the ‘grand narrative’ culminating in the ‘third republic’. The greatest concern for the MPLA and President dos Santos would be if he won fewer votes as a presidential candidate than the party as a whole won in 2008.

**Economic Policy**

In October 2008, the ministerial council approved the draft 2009 budget, which proposed increasing total expenditure to US$42 billion, some 40 per cent higher than the revised 2008 budget, reflecting the government’s desire to increase social spending, especially health and education. A 2009 National Plan focuses on improving access to housing, increasing food security and health, and creating 320,000 new jobs – although the government admits it will have to cut back on some of its ambitions due to lower oil prices and global recession. A return to budget deficits in the next few years cannot be ruled out if oil prices continue to fall, and the Economist Intelligence Unit predicts that real GDP growth will average -2.3 per cent in 2009 before recovering to 6.2 per cent in 2010. Newly-appointed Finance Minister Severim de Morais already reduced the benchmark oil price in the 2009 budget from an already low US$65 to US$55 per barrel, and a re-negotiation of contracts signed at the peak of commodity prices cannot be ruled out. There is also increasing pressure on international companies to cut expatriate staff and hire Angolans.

Until recently Angola relied primarily on costly syndicated oil-backed loans from international banks, contracted by the national oil company SONANGOL. In recent years this has changed with the availability of external credit. Angola has benefited from some US$7 billion from China, but has also benefited from new credit lines from Western export-credit agencies (see Table 2 for selected credit lines in 2007). In October 2008, the Canadian export credit agency, EDC, announced it would provide up to US$1 billion in financing for Angolan infrastructure projects. The fact that much of this financing consists of public guaranteed export-credit finance, with lines already committed, suggests that the global financial crisis will have limited impact.

**Angola’s Vision**

For the last decade, Angola has viewed itself as a regional superpower. This policy originated in Luanda’s conflict with UNITA, which ended in 2002. It required crafting an aggressive policy throughout Africa to erode support of UNITA. This external strategy of isolating UNITA and its leader Jonas Savimbi abroad was coupled with a fierce ‘peace through war’ strategy inside Angola (Le Billion *et al.* 2008). Since its military victory in February 2002, the Angolan Government had also benefited from the commodities boom and especially high oil prices. Flush with oil revenues, the Angolan Government can now continue to pursue its strategic goals independently.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Amount (US$)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>4.5 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>2.3 billion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>1.1 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>600 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>500 million</td>
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<td>Israel</td>
<td>500 million</td>
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Sources: EIU, Reuters, World Bank.
and has enabled Angola’s leadership to embark upon a gradualist policy of domestic change at its own pace, and not influenced by outside pressure.

If Angola is ‘in peace’, it is not yet ‘fully at peace’. Armed conflict has ended (with the exception of the separatist conflict in Cabinda) and the dominant party, the MPLA faces no serious internal competition, but the vast majority of the population has not yet reaped the benefits of a ‘prosperous peace’. This situation itself has important implications for Angola’s international status. The Angolan Government’s capabilities abroad and its external image will be in part measured by social improvements for its population.

In southern Africa, Angola’s main competitor is South Africa and this relationship at presidential level has been frosty because of former South African President Thabo Mbeki’s efforts to mediate during the Angolan conflict. With Mbeki’s departure Angola-South African relations are likely to improve significantly. This signals the ending of the war diplomacy that has provided a backbone to Angolan foreign policy since the mid-1990s. Most importantly, in the Congos, Angola maintains a heavy political and security footprint in Congo-Brazzaville and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Luanda sees both countries as its own backyard. With the low-intensity conflict ongoing in Angola’s Cabinda province, the government wants to continue to neutralise any rear-base support. DRC officials also complain of heavy-handed Angolan policing of frontiers and expulsions of migrants, but admit that they are too weak to complain as the Kabila Government remains deeply reliant on Angolan security advice. Angola advised DRC President Joseph Kabila to act definitively against opposition leader Jean-Pierre Bemba and his supporters. This has also been Angola’s message in late 2008 on dealing with rebel groups in eastern Congo.

Beyond this historic backbone of Luanda’s security strategy, a wider Angolan ambition is emerging: that of being a major power in the Gulf of Guinea. Two forces are at work here – the post-conflict confidence of the Luanda elite and a realistic assessment that Angola can never effectively challenge South Africa’s regional hegemony in the SADC. There has been a big push over the last few years to open or expand Angolan embassies in West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea. The Angolan national oil company SONANGOL has also played a role by entering down-stream joint ventures, although the investment fervour of SONANGOL in the region is set to slow considerably in the current global economic climate.

Diversification of Partnerships

Angola’s post-conflict behaviour reflects Luanda’s pragmatism to avoid any rigid adherence to dogma. President dos Santos made this point clear in his 2008 New Year’s address to the diplomatic corps by stressing that the Angolan Government plans to reinforce its bilateral and commercial relationships with other countries:

... globalization naturally makes us see the need to diversify international relations and to accept the principle of competition, which has in a dynamic world, replaced the petrified concept of zones of influence that used to characterize the world.

Angola’s diversification strategy allows it to maintain beneficial economic arrangements with whoever it chooses, by offering them both access to its rich oil fields, but also not allowing any foreign country to become too influential. In the short term China has offered Angola things others do not offer, such as rapid post-conflict infrastructural development that is important to the Angolan Government in a pre-election context (Campos
and Vines 2008). A more business-like relationship with China is emerging, although the global economic downturn has resulted in Luanda’s ‘diversification’ efforts being cut-back.

A second step has been Angola’s backing of the Gulf of Guinea Commission, which was launched in October 2006 and aims to mediate disputes in the region over oil exploration and fisheries. Hosted by Angola, the Commission also includes Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, the DRC and São Tomé. In November 2008 a summit of heads of state of the Commission was held in Luanda, and its Declaration focused on the conflict in the DRC and the consequences for the sub-region of the world financial crisis and the oil price drop. It called for a more robust UN response in Congo. In his speech to the Commission, as Angola took over the chair of this organisation, President dos Santos said that:

*The Gulf of Guinea sub-region is responsible for 15 per cent of the world’s oil production, has the second biggest stretch of water and forests in the world after the Amazon, and has jointly, in terms of population numbers, a market of about 250 million inhabitants.*

Dos Santos also emphasised that the Commission was there to mediate over disputes, especially over natural resource access along common borders.

Similarly, Angola also took a leading role in the creation of the African Diamond Producers Association (ADPA) in November 2006. Following Botswana’s regional model in attempting to improve the local beneficiation impact of the diamond production process, the Luanda-based ADPA is focused on increasing employment and value-addition in the country of origin. The body, which includes Angola, Botswana, South Africa, Namibia and the DRC, has tried to downplay fears of an OPEC-style cartel.

**Long-term Vision**

MPLA policy documents talk of 25 years more rule and the Angolan Government has commissioned ‘blue skies’ scenario planning to model education, food production and energy needs in 2025. There is no doubt that Luanda’s horizons are changing and that change is also occurring inside Angola. What is also certain is that although President dos Santos will not rule Angola for another 30 years he plans to remain head of state for the time being. 2009 will mark the MPLA’s tightening its grip further on power, although the down-turn in the international economy will result in some of its plans being re-appraised, and this provides openings for bureaucratic reform and more focus on better state service delivery, improving human capital and poverty reduction – the most immediate challenges for post-conflict development in Angola and what will be the ultimate statement of the legacy of the Dos Santos era.

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**Endnote**

1. Although some parties have since re-registered under the same name, for example, the Frente para Democracia (FpD).

**References**

‘Dollarisation’ in Zimbabwe and the Death of an Industry

Rory Pilossof

Zimbabwe’s entwined political and economic crises, which until recently have shown little signs of abating, have wreaked havoc on the once prosperous nation. However, after years of turmoil and crisis, a significant breakthrough on the political front was achieved earlier this year with the ruling Zanu (PF) and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) agreeing to the formation of a government of national unity. As a result there was renewed hope that these developments would see an upturn in the country’s fortunes.

Unsurprisingly, while the government of national unity strives to find its footing, many observers remain sceptical of its feasibility. Considering that many of the recent actions undertaken by President Robert Mugabe and Zanu (PF) seem intended to destabilise the new government, this scepticism remains a valid concern, especially when one adds the consequences of the tragically unfortunate car accident that claimed the life of Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai’s wife. However, as the power battles play out, the economic turmoil in Zimbabwe shows little sign of abating. The chronic woes of the economy have been well documented, but there have been a number of important developments over the last few months that have fundamentally restructured the way that both the ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ sectors of the economy work and interact. These essentially revolve around the ‘dollarisation’ of the economy, a move which has been long called for, but one that both the government and the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) have been resisting for some time. Observations and interviews with money traders on the streets of Harare, who now find themselves facing a
collapse of their primary mode of income, provide a remarkable insight into the byzantine processes of the black market and give indications as to why the government has been so reluctant to ‘dollarise’. In particular, they reveal the intimate inter-dependent relationship between the supposedly distinct structures of the official economy and the ‘illegal’ black market trade.

Although inflation has presented a massive problem for the Zimbabwean economy for more than a decade, the last three to four years have seen the problem escalate to completely unmanageable levels. The RBZ has faced the unenviable task of trying to find measures to curb the level of inflation whilst keeping the Zimbabwe dollar as a viable unit of currency, with limited assistance from a government more concerned with political survival rather than economic revival. One tried and tested stopgap measure was to ‘drop’ zeros off the unmanageable currency. In February 2009, the RBZ once again decided to revalue the Zimbabwe dollar and remove 12 zeros. This had been done before, in 2006, when three zeros were cut, and in August 2008, when 10 zeros were removed. In August 2008 the largest note was the Z$100 billion (100,000,000,000) ‘Special Agro Cheque’, which was then revalued to Z$10. The popular joke at the time was, ‘we will have them back by Christmas’, a prediction which turned out to be remarkably accurate. Within six months, the underlying and unsolved problems driving hyperinflation made a mockery out of the monetary reforms of August 2008. So rampant is the rate of inflation that economists have had a hard time working it out. The official estimate is that it is more than 231 million percent. However, this figure has been roundly criticised as a vast understatement and recent, independent findings put the annual inflation rate at around 6.5 quindecillion novemdecillion percent – or 65 followed by 107 zeros. In January 2009, the government released the latest, and largest, notes in this new set of money; the 10, 20, 50 and 100 trillion dollar notes (100,000,000,000,000) and by so doing set a record for a banknote with the most zeros shown in the design. The previous record was the 500 billion dinar banknote of Yugoslavia (500,000,000,000). The Z$100 trillion is not the largest denomination ever issued though. That accolade goes to the Hungarian 100 million b.-pengő released in 1946 (pengő being the unit of currency and b.-pengő being a billion pengos. Written in full this note had 20 zeros: 100,000,000,000,000,000,000). However, the release of the Z$100 trillion note caused excitement worldwide as money collectors and memorabilia enthusiasts rushed to get their hands on them. As I was in Zimbabwe at the time of its release, I decided to try and get some of these notes for myself. However, this proved more problematic than first imagined.

All of my traditional money contacts had nothing for me. In fact most people had not even seen the Z$100 trillion. This was because by early 2009 Zimbabwean dollars had become unusable and therefore pointless for the vast majority of people. Just about everywhere, goods and services were paid for in foreign currency and the only things that one could pay for in Zimbabwe dollars were para-statal bills and rates – water, phone and electricity. So, as a last resort, I went into town to several of the main bus stops to speak to street traders there to see if they had some of these notes. These places have been havens for black market dealers and money traders over the past decade, but, as a result, are closely monitored by plain clothes policemen and the CIO (Central Intelligence Office). But with ‘dollarisation’ and the political changes afoot, I figured it was safe enough to see how money trading was still working in the city. My first stop was the Chinhoyi Street bus stop. The first dealers I spoke to said they had 100 and 50 trillion notes. A ‘brick’ of 100
trillion notes was equivalent to US$20. A ‘brick’ is a wad of a hundred sequential notes still bound in the band as issued from the RBZ. In the case of the 100 trillion brick this works out to 10 quadrillion, or 10,000,000,000,000,000; an exchange rate of 500 trillion to US$1. For the 50 trillion brick it was US$10, the same exchange rate as the 100’s. They had no 10 or 20 trillions, or the new notes, so I went to the next bus stop, the Fourth Street Roadport. Here people were openly changing money, walking around with wads of new, revalued Zimbabwe dollar notes, and with some offering 10 trillions. I asked how much for a brick of 10 trillions (1 quadrillion), expecting it to cost US$2, based on the exchange rate at the Chinhoyi stop. However, I was told it was US$10. Thinking I was being ripped off I asked why, and the answer was intriguing. He explained that the 100 and 50 trillion notes were ‘too big to use’.3 Since so few people actually used Zimbabwe dollars, no one had change, so you had to use notes that would pay for your goods or bills or whatever, as exactly as you could. In addition, people only wanted to change as much as they needed to pay for the specific cost and Z$10 trillion notes were most useful for this.

What this shows is that money, or the size of money, has become a commodity in itself in Zimbabwe. As demand for those notes that are more useful increases, so does the price, regardless of how this interacts with the ‘exchange rate’ of the day. ‘Money’ fluctuates and changes with regard to the context it surrounding it. With regard to Zimbabwe, this process has expressed itself in various guises throughout the past 10 years: premiums paid for Zimbabwean cash; better exchange rates for cash or bank transfers; premiums paid for small foreign currency bills, particularly US$1 notes; and convenient exchange rates of foreign currencies, such as the 10 South African Rand equalling US$1.

This process was even more pronounced with the new, revalued money. I asked one of the traders selling new Z$1 notes (which was 1 trillion in the old money), how many I could buy for US$1. He said five. That meant that the ‘exchange rate’, for whatever it was worth, was 100 times more expensive for the new notes than that for the old 100 and 50 trillions. To buy a 100 new Z$1 notes, the equivalent in face value of one of the Z$100 trillion notes, would cost me US$20; the same price as I paid for the 100 trillion ‘brick’, which totals 10 quadrillion. However, this did not apply consistently. The new revalued set of notes consists of seven denominations; 1, 5, 10, 20, 50, 100 and 500. I asked to buy a complete set of these and, after a long time looking around, all except the 50 were found. Going by the ‘exchange rate’ of the Z$1’s, this set which totalled Z$636, should have cost me in the region of US$125. However, the dealer asked for US$15. This was because the large notes from Z$50 to Z$500 were useless to him because nobody wanted them or used them. He was essentially happy to give them away. Demand dictated what notes he could sell and how much for.

I then asked this one trader how business was. He said it was terrible now because of ‘dollarisation’. People no longer needed his services because they could pay for most things with foreign currency. He went on, ‘last year I could change [US]$10 000 a day, maybe 2000 in one transaction’.4 Now he was lucky to change US$500 a day. Indeed, the government’s decision to allow the use of foreign currency in everyday transactions destroyed the lucrative and flourishing dealing industry. As one dealer has commented:

The trading of money had become one of the largest employers, as tens of thousands of people throughout the country saw it as the only viable source of income... Many people in that trade made a lot of money, which they used to buy houses, vehicles, and as seed money to start business operations. Those who made wise investments
when the going was good are sitting pretty and enjoying the fruits of their labour.

The money traders have long been an important part of the Zimbabwean black market economy, but very few questions have been asked about how these people operate, how they get access to Zimbabwean dollars, how they work out exchange rates and how they deal with the state. Money trading is technically illegal, but, in a country like Zimbabwe where the political and economic crises have necessitated that everyone become ‘criminal’ to survive, that label is meaningless. The few pieces of journalism that have emerged on the rise and fall of the street money trader have typically portrayed the traders as quick witted, opportunistic individuals who sought to make the best of an unpromising situation. They survive through their own innovations and do so outside of the state. In a sense they exploit the opportunities created by the state’s ridiculous economic policies for their own ends. For example, a recent report in the Washington Post quotes a dealer who stated, ‘it was an opportunity which [had] arisen, and we grabbed it’.6

On the other hand, the government of Zimbabwe has a long history of depicting a very negative picture of the ‘illegal forex traders’.7 Often blamed for hoarding hard currency, spurring inflation and generally undermining both the economy and the government’s measures for resurrecting it, there has been a concerted and deliberate effort on behalf of the government to distance themselves from the street traders. However, the space between the street traders and the state may not be as clear cut as the media or the state have asserted. I asked the dealers how they got the Zimbabwean dollars to sell, and the response was startling. It turned out that many of these street traders were actually being supplied directly by the RBZ. As the traders put it, ‘Gono’s runners’ would come from the bank every day with ‘tubes’ of fresh Zimbabwean money (a ‘tube’ is a sealed bag of 10 bricks). This is either purchased immediately by the traders with US dollars, or the ‘runners’ would return in the afternoon to collect the US dollars exchanged during the day’s (illegal) trading. It has often been suspected that Zanu (PF) was systematically involved in driving and benefiting from the black market/parallel economy, but such analysis demonstrates the level of that involvement. Serving as another example of the hypocrisy of the Zanu (PF) and RBZ hierarchy, this revelation illustrates that the street traders only exist through a symbiotic relationship with the corrupt state. Although most of the traders openly criticise the state of the country and the government of Mugabe, they willingly compromise their distance from the state in order to make a living and profit off the state’s collapse. As one candidly pointed out, ‘there’s no way we can be making profit when there’s a government that can run [the country properly]’.8

The symbiotic nature of this relationship is defined by the fluctuations of the economy. Many of the dealers noted that at times when Gono and Zanu (PF) desperately needed foreign currency, there was a palpable rush for it, as ‘Gono’s runners’ scoured the streets for any source of forex.9 In turn, this would prompt a spike in the exchange rate and resulted in a flurry of activity. These were apparently the best times to be dealing as the government, scrambling to get its hands on as much currency as possible, relaxed its façade of opposition to the money trade. However, the traders all repeated that they still got arrested on a regular basis. One in particular told me that every day the police would come and apprehend him and his partner; it was just something that he had to get used to in his line of work. He knew the drill, and every time he was taken into custody he would go through the motions, pay the bribe and be back on his beat the next day. This was his only source of income, and despite the decline
of the trade, there was still some business to be done. At the Chinhoyi street bus stop, there was still a very real sense that money trading was a risky activity. The deals were done as surreptitiously as possible – often in the back of a car. Once the rate or amount was decided, one of the dealers would slip out and return with the Zimbabwean dollars. The public show of harassment by the police was carried out partly as a measure by the authorities to make it appear to be tackling the ‘scourge’ of money traders. It was also a ploy by enterprising policemen to solicit bribes from the dealers who obviously had the resources to pay worthwhile bribes. However, the distribution of this attention from the police is highly uneven, as evidenced by the ease with which people traded money at the Roadport.

It is obvious that this street trading has been a hugely lucrative business in the last decade, especially so when one considers the scale of international remittances to Zimbabwe. Recent research by Magunha et al. suggests that approximately US$0.94 billion was remitted to Zimbabwe by people living in the UK in 2007 alone. This figure does not include remittances from Zimbabweans anywhere else in the world (for example, from South Africa, where large numbers of Zimbabwean refugees are working and remitting money to Zimbabwe). These remittances, if not used in their foreign currency format, would have been changed into Zimbabwean dollars on the black market rather than via ‘official’ channels because there was such a large discrepancy between the official exchange rate and the black market one. Until the recent ‘dollarisation’ of the economy, it is therefore safe to assume that a large proportion of these remittances would have been changed on the street, at places like the Chinhoyi street taxi rank and the Fourth Street Roadport. As a consequence, a large part of the remitted foreign currency would then have found its way into the hands of Zanu (PF) through Gono’s ‘runners’.

The irony is obvious. Those Zimbabweans who decided to leave, a majority of whom were opposed to Mugabe and his regime, have probably played a vital role in Zanu (PF)’s survival and ability to maintain that regime financially. Observers have long been wondering how Zanu (PF) has been funding itself and its supporters, and this ability to intervene in the black market trade has probably been one of its most significant means of fundraising. What it also shows is the ability of Zanu (PF) to develop strategies of survival that confound traditional understandings of the state and the economy. However, the ‘dollarisation’ of the economy has eroded this form of income for the state and left it with few alternatives to pursue in order to fill the void left by this loss of revenue. Without this income, Zanu (PF) no longer has the means to continue to support itself and its supporters. This begs the question, is it a coincidence that the ‘dollarisation’ of the economy and the signing of the political deal between Zanu and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) happened within such a short space of each other?

Economists have long been critical of the government’s economic policies, claiming that they have been short sighted and disastrous for the economy, particularly in fuelling hyperinflation. For example, a Professor of Applied Economics at Johns Hopkins University, Steve Hanke, has stated that the ‘root cause of the hyperinflation is that government policies have forced the RBZ to print money’. He goes on to explain:

The source of Zimbabwe’s hyperinflation is the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe’s money machine. The government spends, and the RBZ finances the spending by printing money. The RBZ has no ability in practice to resist the government’s demands for cash. Accordingly, the RBZ cannot hope to regain credibility anytime soon. To stop hyperinflation, Zimbabwe needs to immediately adopt a different monetary system.12
The problem is that these assessments presume that the state wishes to have a ‘functional’ economy. They fail to see that Zanu (PF) itself is driving these measures because they are so useful and lucrative for themselves.

The obvious explanation as to why the black market trading has now become unviable is that the rate of inflation has become so debilitating that the Zimbabwean currency has finally become irrelevant, despite state pressure to keep it afloat. Hanke, quoting himself has pointed out:

‘Zimbabwe is in the late stages of a classic hyperinflation. … Inflation is galloping ahead as the supply of Zimbabwe dollars surges and the demand for them shrinks. Eventually, the currency will totally collapse as people simply refuse to accept it.’ In recent months, facts on the ground have validated this prognostication. The Zimbabwe dollar is dead.13

The street traders are all too well aware of the wholesale popular rejection of the Zimbabwean dollar and how this has resulted in their loss of livelihood and the need to find new means of survival. The street traders find themselves trapped off by the working out of the contradictions of profiteering out of collapse. The failing dollar and crumbling economy, concomitant with foreign currency supplied by remittances of the diasporic populations, opened the space for these entrepreneurs to exploit currency loopholes for impressive returns. However, all this was achieved in conspiracy with the corrupt state and, just as the controllers of that state have found, the final collapse of the dollar has left them with few options but to renegotiate a new deal and means of survival.

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Endnote


2. That figure written out is: 6,500,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,% Zimbabwe: inflation at 6.5 quindecillion novemdecillion percent. IRIN Online, 4 March 2009. Available from: http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=82500

3. All traders wished to remain anonymous. Interview with Street Trader 1, Harare, 6 February 2009.

4. Interview with Street Trader 2, Harare, 6 February 2009.


9. Interview with Street Trader 1.

10. Interview with Street Trader 3, Harare, 6 February 2009.


What Will the World Financial Crisis Do to Africa?

Peter Lawrence

Crises of over-production and under-consumption have been a regular feature of the history of capitalism. The crisis we are living through is another example of capitalism’s uneven development. This time it is coupled with a global financial crisis propelled by banks, insurance companies and mortgage companies’ over-exposure to the wonderfully named ‘toxic’ assets: pieces of paper which were assets as long as house prices were rising and borrowers were employed, but ‘toxic’ as soon as the speculators who had fuelled the growth of these assets suddenly realised they could be worthless if the housing market bubble burst and the long consumer credit-propelled boom threatened to come to an end. Recessions are normally short-lived as production is adjusted to lower demand until machines eventually need replacing and demand for capital goods gets the business cycle moving on an upward track, optimism about the future increases and the virtuous circle of growth leads to a boom again.

In recent years, economists and the governments they advised believed they had cured boom-and-bust by getting economic agents to make rational expectations about the future on the basis of the fullest information provided to them by governments and other public information providers. Thus, according to their assumptions, only an unpredictable event could disturb expectations. The unpredicted oil price hike and shock of the collapse of the US sub-prime mortgage market were the unpredictable events (shocks or surprises in economists’ jargon), that shattered the rational expectations of economic agents, even though some of them had already seen a recession looming, resulting from unsustainable consumer borrowing. Now we are heading for a deep recession that might become a depression, the like of which has not been seen since the 1930s.

The big question here is how these events are going to affect the African economies. Economists are not always very accurate in their prediction, so this economist will only discuss the major factors involved and suggest possible outcomes based on what we know usually happens in a global economic downturn.

There are two distinct views emerging from statements and commentaries by economists in international organisations and institutes. The first is that the African economies are so marginalised in global terms that there will be little effect on African economic performance. The alternative view is that because Africa is so marginal to the world economy, small changes in, for example, capital and aid flows, remittances or commodity earnings, will have a significant effect on the economies of the continent, especially if, through adopting structural adjustment policies, they have become even more exposed to the global economy than before.

The logic of globalisation tells us that those countries which have increasingly integrated into the global economy,
carried out liberalisation reforms in finance and trade, for example, will be most affected by the impending recession, especially when they have just suffered from the short-lived but significant oil shock. Although primary commodity prices rose along with the oil price, although not as sharply, these prices have fallen back to levels lower than they were two years ago. The exception has been gold, a commodity for which demand rises in a crisis. Gold prices have fallen, but not by very much and remain 25 per cent higher than they were two years ago.

On the other hand, with regard to the financial crisis itself, fortunately for African economies, in spite of increasing liberalisation, they do not have banking systems that have been involved in trading the new financial instruments that have been a major cause of the crisis in banking. South Africa’s Finance Minister, Trevor Manuel, for example, has claimed that South African banks, arguably the most integrated with global finance houses, are well supervised and the banks themselves have stated that they are minimally exposed to the toxic assets of the US sub-prime markets, even though some banks have been exposed to global derivatives markets, with one institution losing US$1.4 billion because of the collapse of Bear Sterns.

With regard to the rest of Africa, the effects are not likely to be uniform. There are several countries for which the world financial crisis is not the top item on the agenda. Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, have long-standing crises, as do Sudan and Ethiopia. It is also important to remember that we have just been through a period of sharp increases in food prices worldwide. This has adversely affected those African economies that are, as a result of previous failures to generate agricultural food output growth, net food importers and increased levels of poverty in them.

As a result of the high food prices and the high oil prices, African economies will already have suffered a deterioration in their payments balances, ameliorated a little by the increase in some of their primary commodity export prices. However, it is one of the characteristics of commodity markets that spot prices are less important than long-term contract prices, so that the commodity price increases, because of their brevity, would not have made much of an impact on export earnings.

Many African economies are heavily dependent on food aid, import support and government budget support. This is likely to increase as primary product export earnings growth slows down or becomes negative. Foreign investment is also likely to decline following a boom in the last few years. According to a recent issue of the IMF Survey, some countries (Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia among the more prominent) had experienced an increase in private capital flows as a consequence of improved economic performance, resulting in lower risk ratings and higher yields to private equity investment. However, 90 per cent of those US$50 billion of these private equity inflows into Africa in 2007 went to South Africa. According to the same source, almost two-thirds of direct foreign investment goes to five countries, and nearly half of that goes to Nigeria. Now such foreign inflows are likely to slow down, and at the same time investors short of cash in developed countries are likely to repatriate profits, thus affecting the payments balance and leading to greater dependence on food aid and import support. However, the effects are likely to be concentrated in those more open economies.

African economies are increasingly dependent on remittances from African nationals working in developed countries. Although remittances are, with some exceptions, a relatively small proportion
of GDP (around 3 per cent), they have become almost as important as aid and foreign investment as a source of transfers from developed countries to sub-Saharan Africa. Some estimates put remittance flows to SSA as high as US$24 billion in 2007 (Nigeria receiving almost half of this sum), compared with foreign aid flows of around US$40 billion and foreign investment of US$53 billion. The World Bank estimates that remittances will fall in 2009 by between 1.3 and 6.8 per cent and may not start to increase again beyond 2010. One reason for this aside from the recession is the decline in the value of sterling against the US dollar. For example, a Leeds University study estimated that approximately £700 million was remitted from the UK to Zimbabwe in 2007, equivalent to US$1.4 billion then, but only equal to US$1 billion in 2008. So, for the level of remittances to stay at their 2007 level in 2008, Zimbabweans in the UK would have had to increase remittances by 40 per cent in one year, highly unlikely given the crisis in the last third of the year. This reduction in flow will occur in other sub-Saharan African countries that largely receive sterling remittances. Even the euro has seen a decline against the US dollar over the last year of around 14 per cent, so remittances from these sources have to increase sharply to offset the currency decline – again highly unlikely. With increasing unemployment in the US and Europe, less money will be sent home, again affecting the balance of payments and resulting in increasing food aid and import support.

Therefore, we can expect the high growth rates that many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have enjoyed over much of the past decade, to decline sharply. We can expect countries in difficulties to return to the IMF and World Bank for payments support and development assistance. What will be their response? For the last 30 years these organisations have insisted that governments seeking their help should pursue market led policies. They have mirrored the change to market-led policies that characterised developed country government policies with the emphasis on lower taxes, privatisation and tougher social policy, all of these entailing ‘rolling back the state’. Suddenly in the wake of the current crisis, these policies have been put into reverse. The US and UK which pushed for privatisation now rescue private enterprise by bail outs which effectively take them into public ownership. As I write this, the US government is deciding whether or not to bail out the major US car companies. It used to be said that ‘What is good for General Motors is good for America’! Now there is a vote in the US Senate that suggests that politicians of the right are prepared to see General Motors and all their suppliers go to the wall and certainly precipitate a depression. But we also see the US Government, even under Bush, trying to bail out the companies to prevent a depression. It is clear the state has come back to restore order in the system, but not of course to change the system.

So what will the IMF and World Bank do to bail out African economies that suffer from the effects of recession and possibly depression on their economies? Will policies change to allow these countries to chart a more independent and initially protectionist course? Will sub-Saharan Africa be able to disengage from the world economy in a similar way to Latin America during the depression of the 1930s?

At present it looks as though the IMF and World Bank are calling on African economies not to abandon the ‘reform’ policies. This may be partly a combination of inability to supply sufficient resources through African states to alleviate the effects of the recession and an enduring belief that globalising market solutions was the right policy to follow, in spite of it leaving African economies as vulnerable if not more vulnerable than before. These institutions’ policies may change
as their member governments realise the need for continued government intervention and some direction of investment in their own countries. So the answer to the second of the above questions is possibly ‘yes’, but to a limited degree. The answer to the third question is probably ‘no’ because there is little evidence that African states have the political will, not to mention the institutional framework, to pursue an independent path. This is obviously the case in the country best placed to do so, South Africa. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that unless that country takes the lead in forging a more independent and African-interdependent strategy of disengagement from the global economy, other countries will seize that initiative.

The last great depression of the 1930s ended in a world war. Just as there were ways of preventing the last depression without resorting to war, there are ways of preventing a new great depression taking root. The developed capitalist countries have combined to a greater of lesser degree to try to ward off a depression by rescuing the financial institutions and trying to maintain consumer spending. There is talk of public infrastructure projects to maintain employment and inject a consumption multiplier into the system to keep consumer spending up. There is even talk of a renewed industrial strategy with directed investment by the publicly owned banks. Much hope rests on China to boost demand for capital goods for their investment spending. These policies may help to avoid depression, but they will not avoid recession. Banks are holding cash until they see signs of an upturn, but there will not be signs of an upturn unless the banks release cash. This is Keynes’s well known ‘liquidity trap’ with a vengeance.

Unless governments act collectively to inject investment funds into their economies, it will be a long time before the upturn comes. Spending on environmentally-friendly infrastructure in developed and developing countries could be the substitute to war that will regenerate sustainable economies, not just in developed capitalist countries but also in Africa, as well as in countries which have actually been subjected to wars. One thing is for certain. This is not the beginning of the end of capitalism but possibly a new stage in its development. How far that new stage might produce the seeds of some collective action by states, capital and popular movements remains to be seen, but ought to be an important subject of investigation in the near future.

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Angola: Thirty Years of Dos Santos

Alex Vines & Markus Weimer

José Eduardo dos Santos will mark his thirtieth year as President of Angola in September 2009. Since 2004 Angola has boomed, sustained by high government spending and a rapid increase in oil exports. At present Angola enjoys a healthy current account surplus and it posted the highest increase in its oil output between 2004 and 2007 (beating Russia, Azerbaijan, Brazil, Libya and Kazakhstan among others). Angola is also a strategic oil supplier to the world’s two largest oil consumers: in 2008, it was the sixth largest to the United States and the second largest to China. This is now changing and in 2009 Angola will fall probably behind Saudi Arabia and Iran as China’s main source of imported oil. After an initial expected GDP growth of 8.2 per cent in January 2009, the government has adjusted the figure to above 3 per cent. The World Bank predicts negative growth in 2009 owing to lower international oil prices and slowdown in global demand. Diamond prices have also collapsed.

Angola briefly surpassed Nigeria as the leading sub-Saharan African oil producer in 2008 and in 2009 it chairs the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) for the first time. On 24 October 2008, OPEC decided to reduce its output. Under the cuts Angola’s quota has been reduced from 1.9 million barrels/day (b/d) to 1.5 million b/d. It is predicted that peak oil will be attained around 2011 followed by a production decline rate of 7.5 per cent per year. Although older fields are reaching maturity, new oil fields will see a boost of overall output, from 1.9 million b/d in 2008 to 2.3 million b/d in 2015. There is little sign yet of a non-oil dependent economy flourishing and the World Bank’s ‘Doing Business’ report for 2009 ranks Angola 168th out of 181 countries surveyed. The average time taken to start up a business is 68 days according to the survey, but it still takes a staggering 328 days to build a warehouse.

Building upon Legislative Elections

The ruling Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) gained a resounding victory in the 2008 legislative elections. This has cemented the hegemony of the MPLA with 191 seats in the 220-seat National Assembly, and it allows the MPLA to amend Angola’s constitution if it so desires. Turnout was high at over 87 per cent, indicating popular enthusiasm for the first multiparty election in 16 years, but it was also a vote for peace. There have been allegations of official intimidation, corruption and presence of security forces at polling stations. The most embarrassing episode was that only 320 polling stations out of 2,584 polling stations opened in Luanda, as voter papers and voter registration lists had not been delivered despite a very expensive and high-tech process, forcing a second day of voting. According to individuals involved this was more due to incompetence and inexperience than conspiracy. Out of a total of 6.4 million valid ballots, the MPLA secured 81.6 per cent. Its main rival, the former rebel group UNITA, won only 10 per cent and other parties secured just 8 per cent (see Table 1 for an overview of the election results). UNITA’s performance in its traditional heartland, the central highlands of Huambo and Bie provinces, was poor as expected; the party’s parliamentarians had become distant while the MPLA had pumped resources into the area and had vigorously pursued a co-option effort with the traditional authorities since the end of the war.

UNITA’s main source of revenue was a US$14 million state grant based on the 70 parliamentary seats it won in 1992 – this has now gone, creating a serious impact.
on its finances. UNITA now looks towards the 2009 municipal elections to start rebuilding its grassroots support base. However, UNITA’s leader Isaias Samakuva stands little chance of winning the presidential poll and given these strains, party unity may be harder to demand and maintain from the base up.

Other parties did even worse; only three managed to secure more than 1 per cent of the national vote. The opposition now have only 29 seats in total. The MPLA dominated the vote in all provinces except in Bie and Cabinda, where UNITA did better and in the Lunda provinces, where the Partido de Renovação Social (PRS) enjoys strong support from the Lunda/Chokwe people. UNITA’s strongest showing was in Cabinda, due to a protest vote and an official boycott of the election by the armed FLEC (Frente para a Libertação do Enclave de Cabinda) separatist group. The Frente Nacional para a Libertação de Angola (FNLA) did well in its Zaire province heartland, but failed to make an impact nationally.

The five parties that had polled less than 0.5 per cent of the national vote (four of which had held seats in the outgoing parliament) have been dissolved. Angola now has only six officially registered parties compared with 14 parties and coalitions during the election and 108 during the pre-election period.1 The MPLA with its 191 seats now completely dominates the political landscape.

### Table 1. Legislative election results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Total votes</th>
<th>% of total valid votes</th>
<th>No. of seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MPLA</td>
<td>5,266,112</td>
<td>81.64</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNITA</td>
<td>670,197</td>
<td>10.39</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRS</td>
<td>204,478</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ND</td>
<td>77,405</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FNLA</td>
<td>71,600</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parties</td>
<td>160,615</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6,450,407</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Comissão Nacional Eleitoral (CNE).

### International response

The European Union, the Pan-African Parliament, the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP), Southern African Development Community (SADC), the US embassy and the African Union deployed observers. One or two groups from Angolan civil society were also authorised to be observers by the government but the CNE (National Election Commission) failed to accredit nearly half of the 2,640 civil society observers, with only 28 out of 370 receiving accreditation in Luanda. International observers gave a broadly positive assessment of the poll although criticising irregularities. The EU mission in particular was critical, especially of the state-controlled radio, television and newspaper, Jornal de Angola.

Just prior to the elections, Chatham House published *Angola’s Elections: A Democratic Oil Giant?* (Indira Campos 2008). This briefing paper highlighted how the MPLA enjoyed enormous financial advantages and started its election campaign before the official campaigning start of 8 August 2008. It also warned that the ‘playing field for the political contest is particularly unequal in access to the media’ in favour of the MPLA and that the body tasked with the electoral process, the CNE, had problems. Official figures published in 2009 show that the MPLA spent US$8.7 million on its campaign, more than seven times the amount spent by the 13 opposition parties. On the
other hand, the Economist Intelligence Unit (UK) believes that the MPLA spent some US$300 million on its campaign compared with the US$17 million shared by the other parties.

On 17 October 2008 the National Assembly formally dissolved the national unity government (GURN), which represented a power-sharing agreement that began in April 1997 as part of the Lusaka peace accord. The MPLA’s dominance has been confirmed by the election of former Prime Minister, Fernando da Piedade dos Santos (’Nando’), as President of the National Assembly. Bornito de Sousa, a relatively young MPLA rising star has become President of the MPLA’s parliamentary group. Among the newly nominated MPLA parliamentarians are Ana Paula dos Santos, the President’s wife and one of his daughters, Welwitchia dos Santos, although the first lady has indicated she does not wish to take up the post.

Government Reshuffle

In late September 2008, President dos Santos conducted the most significant reshuffle of government since 1997. A new government of 33 ministers (five more than its predecessor) was unveiled. Some portfolios have been split and two ministers without portfolio have been created, one for Antonio Bento Bembe, a former leader of the Cabindan separatist group, FLEC. The most significant changes are economic with the replacement of José Pedro de Morais as Finance Minister by his former Deputy Eduardo Severim de Morais. The appointment of the MPLA’s former Chief of Economic and Social Policy, Manuel Nunes Junior, to the new post of Economy Minister is also significant as it suggests that the presidency wants to reduce the assertiveness in recent years by the finance ministry. The former Deputy Prime Minister, Aguinaldo Jaime was also appointed head of a new commission charged with boosting foreign investment in the non-mineral sectors in addition to the private investment agency ANIP. The former Finance Minister, José Pedro de Morais, has also been charged to oversee the launch of Angola’s stock exchange. The long-serving Petroleum Minister, Desidério Costa, took up Angola’s presidency of OPEC in January 2009 and has been replaced by the former Energy Minister, José Maria Botelho. There was also a new Foreign Minister, Assunção Afonso dos Anjos.

Overall, the new administration emphasises continuity rather than change, with the key Ministers of Planning, Interior, Public Works, Transport and Education remaining the same. However, there may be a further reshuffle after the presidential elections.

The MPLA in its election manifesto pledges to put forward an even more ambitious second phase of post-war reconstruction. This includes the creation of two new cities, a new railway line running along the coast from Namibe to the enclave of Cabinda, as well as 1 million new houses across the country by 2012. How Angola is going to match this massive investment in physical infrastructure with investing in its citizens and their health and education remains to be seen. Skilled Angolan labour remains at a premium. Furthermore, due to a global recession and low oil prices, Angola may find itself under extra pressure to deliver on reconstruction and developing the non-oil sectors.

Elections in 2009?

2009 heralds the ‘Third Republic’ of Angola, once a new constitution is passed in parliament followed by presidential and municipal elections. Negotiations over a new constitution started in February 2009 and are expected to last around six months before a text is ready for ratification. For MPLA supporters the advent of a ‘new Angola’ is historic. It signifies the consolidation of Angolan ‘peace and
democracy’ and the completion of MPLA’s metamorphosis from a revolutionary Marxist independence movement into a modern political party with the resources and expertise to bring prosperity and development to the Angolan people. The advent of the ‘Third Republic’ also signifies to many – especially the former military commanders in the party – the ultimate victory of the MPLA over the Portuguese colonisers, the FNLA and UNITA.

President dos Santos has overshadowed the first President of independent Angola, Agostinho Neto. Against all odds he has remained in power since 1979, overcoming challenges of war and elections and at the same time displaying a highly refined political craftsmanship. He is an accomplished and shrewd economic and political dealmaker with an instinct for political survival. Under his leadership Angola gained increasing regional importance to the point where Angola rivals South Africa as the major regional power.

In 2001 it looked like as if dos Santos wanted to step down as President and retire from Angolan politics. However, events in neighbouring Zambia where Frederick Chiluba, the former Head of State was stripped of his immunity by a unanimous vote of parliament, and faced 59 charges including abuse of office and theft, contributed to a change of mind. Dos Santos may have decided then to retain the reins of power and prevent any such ‘retribution politics’ to take place in Angola. His decision to remain in power (and retain power) permeates Angolan politics, from the fluidity of government and ministerial posts which are re-distributed frequently (and probably will be shuffled again after the presidential elections) to the new process of arriving at a constitution for the country.

The constitution has been evolving since 1991 with the legislative elections of 2008 preparing the ground for a parliamentary ad hoc commission. Despite the MPLA majority in the Assembleia Nacional (the Angolan parliament), there appear to be limits to the changes possible. These limits are set out in fundamental principles agreed in 1991 and codified in the constitutional law of Angola as well as the law on the amendment of the constitution. The Constitutional Court as the guardian of the constitutional law will perform an oversight function.

The new constitution will decree whether the President is elected through parliament or popular vote, as is the case now. It will also clarify the powers of the Prime Minister and the President. Last year Dos Santos said a presidential election would only take place after a new constitution was approved by parliament. There has been a marked absence of debate on these issues in the Angolan state media.

In terms of legitimacy, the election of the President through a direct vote would send a far stronger signal than the de facto appointment of the President through the national parliament. The announcement in early 2009 that the MPLA has postponed its sixth congress to December 2009 suggests that presidential elections may not be held in 2009. This is due to the time needed to agree upon a new constitution, but also an impact of the global economic downturn. Direct presidential polls would also be judged against the backdrop of the legislative elections in 2008, and improvements would be expected from the international community and observers. The chaos seen in the outskirts of Luanda with missing ballots and lack of electoral resources would be judged differently a second time around, as would the role of the CNE in the electoral process. The final EU report on the legislative elections, for example, has clear recommendations on the roles of the oversight bodies and institutions of the elections as well as specifics on how to strengthen the work of the CNE and operational
instruments. All these are risks to the success of the ‘grand narrative’ culminating in the ‘third republic’. The greatest concern for the MPLA and President dos Santos would be if he won fewer votes as a presidential candidate than the party as a whole won in 2008.

Economic Policy

In October 2008, the ministerial council approved the draft 2009 budget, which proposed increasing total expenditure to US$42 billion, some 40 per cent higher than the revised 2008 budget, reflecting the government’s desire to increase social spending, especially health and education. A 2009 National Plan focuses on improving access to housing, increasing food security and health, and creating 320,000 new jobs – although the government admits it will have to cut back on some of its ambitions due to lower oil prices and global recession. A return to budget deficits in the next few years cannot be ruled out if oil prices continue to fall, and the Economist Intelligence Unit predicts that real GDP growth will average -2.3 per cent in 2009 before recovering to 6.2 per cent in 2010. Newly-appointed Finance Minister Severim de Morais already reduced the benchmark oil price in the 2009 budget from an already low US$65 to US$55 per barrel, and a re-negotiation of contracts signed at the peak of commodity prices cannot be ruled out. There is also increasing pressure on international companies to cut expatriate staff and hire Angolans.

Until recently Angola relied primarily on costly syndicated oil-backed loans from international banks, contracted by the national oil company SONANGOL. In recent years this has changed with the availability of external credit. Angola has benefited from some US$7 billion from China, but has also benefited from new credit lines from Western export-credit agencies (see Table 2 for selected credit lines in 2007). In October 2008, the Canadian export credit agency, EDC, announced it would provide up to US$1 billion in financing for Angolan infrastructure projects. The fact that much of this financing consists of public guaranteed export-credit finance, with lines already committed, suggests that the global financial crisis will have limited impact.

Angola’s Vision

For the last decade, Angola has viewed itself as a regional superpower. This policy originated in Luanda’s conflict with UNITA, which ended in 2002. It required crafting an aggressive policy throughout Africa to erode support of UNITA. This external strategy of isolating UNITA and its leader Jonas Savimbi abroad was coupled with a fierce ‘peace through war’ strategy inside Angola (Le Billion et al. 2008). Since its military victory in February 2002, the Angolan Government had also benefited from the commodities boom and especially high oil prices. Flush with oil revenues, the Angolan Government can now continue to pursue its strategic goals independently.

Table 2. Selected credit lines in 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Amount (US$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>4.5 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>2.3 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>1.1 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>600 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>500 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>500 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: EIU, Reuters, World Bank.
and has enabled Angola’s leadership to embark upon a gradualist policy of domestic change at its own pace, and not influenced by outside pressure.

If Angola is ‘in peace’, it is not yet ‘fully at peace’. Armed conflict has ended (with the exception of the separatist conflict in Cabinda) and the dominant party, the MPLA faces no serious internal competition, but the vast majority of the population has not yet reaped the benefits of a ‘prosperous peace’. This situation itself has important implications for Angola’s international status. The Angolan Government’s capabilities abroad and its external image will be in part measured by social improvements for its population.

In southern Africa, Angola’s main competitor is South Africa and this relationship at presidential level has been frosty because of former South African President Thabo Mbeki’s efforts to mediate during the Angolan conflict. With Mbeki’s departure Angola-South African relations are likely to improve significantly. This signals the ending of the war diplomacy that has provided a backbone to Angolan foreign policy since the mid-1990s. Most importantly, in the Congos, Angola maintains a heavy political and security footprint in Congo-Brazzaville and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Luanda sees both countries as its own backyard. With the low-intensity conflict ongoing in Angola’s Cabinda province, the government wants to continue to neutralise any rear-base support. DRC officials also complain of heavy-handed Angolan policing of frontiers and expulsions of migrants, but admit that they are too weak to complain as the Kabila Government remains deeply reliant on Angolan security advice. Angola advised DRC President Joseph Kabila to act definitively against opposition leader Jean-Pierre Bemba and his supporters. This has also been Angola’s message in late 2008 on dealing with rebel groups in eastern Congo.

Beyond this historic backbone of Luanda’s security strategy, a wider Angolan ambition is emerging: that of being a major power in the Gulf of Guinea. Two forces are at work here – the post-conflict confidence of the Luanda elite and a realistic assessment that Angola can never effectively challenge South Africa’s regional hegemony in the SADC. There has been a big push over the last few years to open or expand Angolan embassies in West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea. The Angolan national oil company SONANGOL has also played a role by entering down-stream joint ventures, although the investment fervour of SONANGOL in the region is set to slow considerably in the current global economic climate.

**Diversification of Partnerships**

Angola’s post-conflict behaviour reflects Luanda’s pragmatism to avoid any rigid adherence to dogma. President dos Santos made this point clear in his 2008 New Year’s address to the diplomatic corps by stressing that the Angolan Government plans to reinforce its bilateral and commercial relationships with other countries:

> ... globalization naturally makes us see the need to diversify international relations and to accept the principle of competition, which has in a dynamic world, replaced the petrified concept of zones of influence that used to characterize the world.

Angola’s diversification strategy allows it to maintain beneficial economic arrangements with whoever it chooses, by offering them both access to its rich oil fields, but also not allowing any foreign country to become too influential. In the short term China has offered Angola things others do not offer, such as rapid post-conflict infrastructural development that is important to the Angolan Government in a pre-election context (Campos
and Vines 2008). A more business-like relationship with China is emerging, although the global economic downturn has resulted in Luanda’s ‘diversification’ efforts being cut-back.

A second step has been Angola’s backing of the Gulf of Guinea Commission, which was launched in October 2006 and aims to mediate disputes in the region over oil exploration and fisheries. Hosted by Angola, the Commission also includes Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, the DRC and São Tomé. In November 2008 a summit of heads of state of the Commission was held in Luanda, and its Declaration focused on the conflict in the DRC and the consequences for the sub-region of the world financial crisis and the oil price drop. It called for a more robust UN response in Congo. In his speech to the Commission, as Angola took over the chair of this organisation, President dos Santos said that:

The Gulf of Guinea sub-region is responsible for 15 per cent of the world’s oil production, has the second biggest stretch of water and forests in the world after the Amazon, and has jointly, in terms of population numbers, a market of about 250 million inhabitants.

Dos Santos also emphasised that the Commission was there to mediate over disputes, especially over natural resource access along common borders.

Similarly, Angola also took a leading role in the creation of the African Diamond Producers Association (ADPA) in November 2006. Following Botswana’s regional model in attempting to improve the local beneficiation impact of the diamond production process, the Luanda-based ADPA is focused on increasing employment and value-addition in the country of origin. The body, which includes Angola, Botswana, South Africa, Namibia and the DRC, has tried to downplay fears of an OPEC-style cartel.

Long-term Vision

MPLA policy documents talk of 25 years more rule and the Angolan Government has commissioned ‘blue skies’ scenario planning to model education, food production and energy needs in 2025. There is no doubt that Luanda’s horizons are changing and that change is also occurring inside Angola. What is also certain is that although President dos Santos will not rule Angola for another 30 years he plans to remain head of state for the time being. 2009 will mark the MPLA’s tightening its grip further on power, although the down-turn in the international economy will result in some of its plans being reappraised, and this provides openings for bureaucratic reform and more focus on better state service delivery, improving human capital and poverty reduction – the most immediate challenges for post-conflict development in Angola and what will be the ultimate statement of the legacy of the Dos Santos era.

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Endnote

1. Although some parties have since re-registered under the same name, for example, the Frente para Democracia (FpD).

References

'Dollarisation’ in Zimbabwe and the Death of an Industry

Rory Pilossof

Zimbabwe’s entwined political and economic crises, which until recently have shown little signs of abating, have wreaked havoc on the once prosperous nation. However, after years of turmoil and crisis, a significant breakthrough on the political front was achieved earlier this year with the ruling Zanu (PF) and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) agreeing to the formation of a government of national unity. As a result there was renewed hope that these developments would see an upturn in the country’s fortunes.

Unsurprisingly, while the government of national unity strives to find its footing, many observers remain sceptical of its feasibility. Considering that many of the recent actions undertaken by President Robert Mugabe and Zanu (PF) seem intended to destabilise the new government, this scepticism remains a valid concern, especially when one adds the consequences of the tragically unfortunate car accident that claimed the life of Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai’s wife. However, as the power battles play out, the economic turmoil in Zimbabwe shows little sign of abating. The chronic woes of the economy have been well documented, but there have been a number of important developments over the last few months that have fundamentally restructured the way that both the ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ sectors of the economy work and interact. These essentially revolve around the ‘dollarisation’ of the economy, a move which has been long called for, but one that both the government and the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) have been resisting for some time. Observations and interviews with money traders on the streets of Harare, who now find themselves facing a

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collapse of their primary mode of income, provide a remarkable insight into the byzantine processes of the black market and give indications as to why the government has been so reluctant to ‘dollarise’. In particular, they reveal the intimate inter-dependent relationship between the supposedly distinct structures of the official economy and the ‘illegal’ black market trade.

Although inflation has presented a massive problem for the Zimbabwean economy for more than a decade, the last three to four years have seen the problem escalate to completely unmanageable levels. The RBZ has faced the unenviable task of trying to find measures to curb the level of inflation whilst keeping the Zimbabwe dollar as a viable unit of currency, with limited assistance from a government more concerned with political survival rather than economic revival. One tried and tested stopgap measure was to ‘drop’ zeros off the unmanageable currency. In February 2009, the RBZ once again decided to revalue the Zimbabwe dollar and remove 12 zeros. This had been done before, in 2006, when three zeros were cut, and in August 2008, when 10 zeros were removed. In August 2008 the largest note was the Z$100 billion (100,000,000,000) ‘Special Agro Cheque’, which was then revalued to Z$10. The popular joke at the time was, ‘we will have them back by Christmas’, a prediction which turned out to be remarkably accurate. Within six months, the underlying and unsolved problems driving hyperinflation made a mockery out of the monetary reforms of August 2008. So rampant is the rate of inflation that economists have had a hard time working it out. The official estimate is that it is more than 231 million percent. However, this figure has been roundly criticised as a vast understatement and recent, independent findings put the annual inflation rate at around 6.5 quindecillion novemdecillion percent – or 65 followed by 107 zeros.

In January 2009, the government released the latest, and largest, notes in this new set of money; the 10, 20, 50 and 100 trillion dollar notes (100,000,000,000,000) and by so doing set a record for a banknote with the most zeros shown in the design. The previous record was the 500 billion dinar banknote of Yugoslavia (500,000,000,000). The Z$100 trillion is not the largest denomination ever issued though. That accolade goes to the Hungarian 100 million b.-pengő released in 1946 (pengő being the unit of currency and b.-pengő being a billion pengos. Written in full this note had 20 zeros: 100,000,000,000,000,000,000). However, the release of the Z$100 trillion note caused excitement worldwide as money collectors and memorabilia enthusiasts rushed to get their hands on them. As I was in Zimbabwe at the time of its release, I decided to try and get some of these notes for myself. However, this proved more problematic that first imagined. All of my traditional money contacts had nothing for me. In fact most people had not even seen the Z$100 trillion. This was because by early 2009 Zimbabwean dollars had become unusable and therefore pointless for the vast majority of people. Just about everywhere, goods and services were paid for in foreign currency and the only things that one could pay for in Zimbabwe dollars were parastatal bills and rates – water, phone and electricity. So, as a last resort, I went into town to several of the main bus stops to speak to street traders there to see if they had some of these notes. These places have been havens for black market dealers and money traders over the past decade, but, as a result, are closely monitored by plain clothes policemen and the CIO (Central Intelligence Office). But with ‘dollarisation’ and the political changes afoot, I figured it was safe enough to see how money trading was still working in the city. My first stop was the Chinhoyi Street bus stop. The first dealers I spoke to said they had 100 and 50 trillion notes. A ‘brick’ of 100
thousand notes was equivalent to US$20. A
‘brick’ is a wad of a hundred sequential
notes still bound in the band as issued
from the RBZ. In the case of the 100 trillion
brick this works out to 10 quadrillion,
or 10,000,000,000,000,000; an exchange
rate of 500 trillion to US$1. For the 50 trillion
brick it was US$10, the same exchange
rate as the 100’s. They had no 10 or 20 tril-
ions, or the new notes, so I went to the next
bus stop, the Fourth Street Roadport. Here
people were openly changing money,
walking around with wads of new, reval-
uated Zimbabwe dollar notes, and with
some offering 10 trillions. I asked how
much for a brick of 10 trillions (1 quadri-
lion), expecting it to cost US$2, based on
the exchange rate at the Chinhoyi stop.
However, I was told it was US$10. Think-
ing I was being ripped off I asked why,
and the answer was intriguing. He
explained that the 100 and 50 trillion
notes were ‘too big to use’.
Since so few
people actually used Zimbabwe dollars,
no one had change, so you had to use
notes that would pay for your goods or
bills or whatever, as exactly as you could.
In addition, people only wanted to
change as much as they needed to pay
for the specific cost and Z$10 trillion
notes were most useful for this.

What this shows is that money, or the size of
money, has become a commodity in itself in
Zimbabwe. As demand for those notes that
are more useful increases, so does the price,
regardless of how this interacts with the
‘exchange rate’ of the day. ‘Money’ fluctu-
ates and changes with regard to the context it surrounding it. With regard to
Zimbabwe, this process has expressed
itself in various guises throughout the
past 10 years: premiums paid for Zimbabwe-
wean cash; better exchange rates for cash
or bank transfers; premiums paid for
small foreign currency bills, particularly
US$1 notes; and convenient exchange
rates of foreign currencies, such as the 10

This process was even more pronounced
with the new, revalued money. I asked
one of the traders selling new Z$1 notes
(which was 1 trillion in the old money),
how many I could buy for US$1. He said
five. That meant that the ‘exchange rate’,
for whatever it was worth, was 100
times more expensive for the new notes
than that for the old 100 and 50 trillions.
To buy a 100 new Z$1 notes, the equivalent
in face value of one of the Z$100 trillion
notes, would cost me US$20; the
same price as I paid for the 100 trillion
‘brick’, which totals 10 quadrillion.
However, this did not apply consistently.
The new revalued set of notes consists of
seven denominations; 1, 5, 10, 20, 50, 100
and 500. I asked to buy a complete set of
these and, after a long time looking
around, all except the 50 were found.
Going by the ‘exchange rate’ of the
Z$1’s, this set which totalled Z$636,
should have cost me in the region of
US$125. However, the dealer asked for
US$15. This was because the large notes
from Z$50 to Z$500 were useless to him
because nobody wanted them or used
them. He was essentially happy to give
them away. Demand dictated what notes
he could sell and how much for.

I then asked this one trader how business
was. He said it was terrible now because
of ‘dollarisation’. People no longer
needed his services because they could
pay for most things with foreign currency.
He went on, ‘last year I could change
[US$10 000 a day, maybe 2000 in one
transaction’. Now he was lucky to
change US$500 a day. Indeed, the govern-
ment’s decision to allow the use of foreign
currency in everyday transactions
destroyed the lucrative and flourishing
dealing industry. As one dealer has
commented:

The trading of money had become one of
the largest employers, as tens of thousands
of people throughout the country saw it as
the only viable source of income. . . . Many
people in that trade made a lot of money,
which they used to buy houses, vehicles,
and as seed money to start business oper-
ations. Those who made wise investments
when the going was good are sitting pretty and enjoying the fruits of their labour.\textsuperscript{5, 7}

The money traders have long been an important part of the Zimbabwean black market economy, but very few questions have been asked about how these people operate, how they get access to Zimbabwean dollars, how they work out exchange rates and how they deal with the state. Money trading is technically illegal, but, in a country like Zimbabwe where the political and economic crises have necessitated that everyone become ‘criminal’ to survive, that label is meaningless. The few pieces of journalism that have emerged on the rise and fall of the street money trader have typically portrayed the traders as quick witted, opportunistic individuals who sought to make the best of an unpromising situation. They survive through their own innovations and do so outside of the state. In a sense they exploit the opportunities created by the state’s ridiculous economic policies for their own ends. For example, a recent report in the Washington Post quotes a dealer who stated, ‘it was an opportunity which [had] arisen, and we grabbed it’.\textsuperscript{6}

On the other hand, the government of Zimbabwe has a long history of depicting a very negative picture of the ‘illegal forex traders’.\textsuperscript{7} Often blamed for hoarding hard currency, spurring inflation and generally undermining both the economy and the government’s measures for resurrecting it, there has been a concerted and deliberate effort on behalf of the government to distance themselves from the street traders. However, the space between the street traders and the state may not be as clear cut as the media or the state have asserted. I asked the dealers how they got the Zimbabwean dollars to sell, and the response was startling. It turned out that many of these street traders were actually being supplied directly by the RBZ. As the traders put it, ‘Gono’s runners’ would come from the bank every day with ‘tubes’ of fresh Zimbabwean money (a ‘tube’ is a sealed bag of 10 bricks). This is either purchased immediately by the traders with US dollars, or the ‘runners’ would return in the afternoon to collect the US dollars exchanged during the day’s (illegal) trading. It has often been suspected that Zanu (PF) was systematically involved in driving and benefiting from the black market/parallel economy, but such analysis demonstrates the level of that involvement. Serving as another example of the hypocrisy of the Zanu (PF) and RBZ hierarchy, this revelation illustrates that the street traders only exist through a symbiotic relationship with the corrupt state. Although most of the traders openly criticise the state of the country and the government of Mugabe, they willingly compromise their distance from the state in order to make a living and profit off the state’s collapse. As one candidly pointed out, ‘there’s no way we can be making profit when there’s a government that can run [the country properly]’.\textsuperscript{8}

The symbiotic nature of this relationship is defined by the fluctuations of the economy. Many of the dealers noted that at times when Gono and Zanu (PF) desperately needed foreign currency, there was a palpable rush for it, as ‘Gono’s runners’ scoured the streets for any source of forex.\textsuperscript{9} In turn, this would prompt a spike in the exchange rate and resulted in a flurry of activity. These were apparently the best times to be dealing as the government, scrambling to get its hands on as much currency as possible, relaxed its façade of opposition to the money trade. However, the traders all repeated that they still got arrested on a regular basis. One in particular told me that every day the police would come and apprehend him and his partner; it was just something that he had to get used to in his line of work. He knew the drill, and every time he was taken into custody he would go through the motions, pay the bribe and be back on his beat the next day. This was his only source of income, and despite the decline
of the trade, there was still some business to be done. At the Chinhoyi street bus stop, there was still a very real sense that money trading was a risky activity. The deals were done as surreptitiously as possible – often in the back of a car. Once the rate or amount was decided, one of the dealers would slip out and return with the Zimbabwean dollars. The public show of harassment by the police was carried out partly as a measure by the authorities to make it appear to be tackling the ‘scourge’ of money traders. It was also a ploy by enterprising policemen to solicit bribes from the dealers who obviously had the resources to pay worthwhile bribes. However, the distribution of this attention from the police is highly uneven, as evidenced by the ease with which people traded money at the Roadport.

It is obvious that this street trading has been a hugely lucrative business in the last decade, especially so when one considers the scale of international remittances to Zimbabwe. Recent research by Magunha et al. suggests that approximately US$0.94 billion was remitted to Zimbabwe by people living in the UK in 2007 alone. This figure does not include remittances from Zimbabweans anywhere else in the world (for example, from South Africa, where large numbers of Zimbabwean refugees are working and remitting money to Zimbabwe). These remittances, if not used in their foreign currency format, would have been changed into Zimbabwean dollars on the black market rather than via ‘official’ channels because there was such a large discrepancy between the official exchange rate and the black market one. Until the recent ‘dollarisation’ of the economy, it is therefore safe to assume that a large proportion of these remittances would have been changed on the street, at places like the Chinhoyi street taxi rank and the Fourth Street Roadport. As a consequence, a large part of the remitted foreign currency would then have found its way into the hands of Zanu (PF) through Gono’s ‘runners’.

The irony is obvious. Those Zimbabweans who decided to leave, a majority of whom were opposed to Mugabe and his regime, have probably played a vital role in Zanu (PF)’s survival and ability to maintain that regime financially. Observers have long been wondering how Zanu (PF) has been funding itself and its supporters, and this ability to intervene in the black market trade has probably been one of its most significant means of fundraising. What it also shows is the ability of Zanu (PF) to develop strategies of survival that confound traditional understandings of the state and the economy. However, the ‘dollarisation’ of the economy has eroded this form of income for the state and left it with few alternatives to pursue in order to fill the void left by this loss of revenue. Without this income, Zanu (PF) no longer has the means to continue to support itself and its supporters. This begs the question, is it a coincidence that the ‘dollarisation’ of the economy and the signing of the political deal between Zanu and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) happened within such a short space of each other?

Economists have long been critical of the government’s economic policies, claiming that they have been short sighted and disastrous for the economy, particularly in fuelling hyperinflation. For example, a Professor of Applied Economics at Johns Hopkins University, Steve Hanke, has stated that the ‘root cause of the hyperinflation is that government policies have forced the RBZ to print money’. He goes on to explain:

The source of Zimbabwe’s hyperinflation is the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe’s money machine. The government spends, and the RBZ finances the spending by printing money. The RBZ has no ability in practice to resist the government’s demands for cash. Accordingly, the RBZ cannot hope to regain credibility anytime soon. To stop hyperinflation, Zimbabwe needs to immediately adopt a different monetary system.
The problem is that these assessments presume that the state wishes to have a ‘functional’ economy. They fail to see that Zanu (PF) itself is driving these measures because they are so useful and lucrative for themselves.

The obvious explanation as to why the black market trading has now become unviable is that the rate of inflation has become so debilitating that the Zimbabwean currency has finally become irrelevant, despite state pressure to keep it afloat. Hanke, quoting himself has pointed out:

‘Zimbabwe is in the late stages of a classic hyperinflation. … Inflation is galloping ahead as the supply of Zimbabwe dollars surges and the demand for them shrinks. Eventually, the currency will totally collapse as people simply refuse to accept it.’ In recent months, facts on the ground have validated this prognostication. The Zimbabwe dollar is dead.13

The street traders are all too well aware of the wholesale popular rejection of the Zimbabwean dollar and how this has resulted in their loss of livelihood and the need to find new means of survival. The street traders find themselves trapped off by the working out of the contradictions of profiteering out of collapse. The failing dollar and crumbling economy, concomitant with foreign currency supplied by remittances of the diasporic populations, opened the space for these entrepreneurs to exploit currency loopholes for impressive returns. However, all this was achieved in conspiracy with the corrupt state and, just as the controllers of that state have found, the final collapse of the dollar has left them with few options but to renegotiate a new deal and means of survival.

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-endnote-


2. That figure written out is: 6,500,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000%. Zimbabwe: inflation at 6.5 quindecillion nymdecillion percent. IRIN Online, 4 March 2009. Available from: http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=82500

3. All traders wished to remain anonymous. Interview with Street Trader 1, Harare, 6 February 2009.

4. Interview with Street Trader 2, Harare, 6 February 2009.


9. Interview with Street Trader 1.

10. Interview with Street Trader 3, Harare, 6 February 2009.


The climate crisis is not only imminent, but in some respects is already here. As the environmental effects of human-induced climate change become more evident, so too do the political, social and economic ramifications of the strategies adopted to combat them. Larry Lohmann’s central argument in this excellent critique of carbon trading is that the trading mechanisms at the heart of the Kyoto Protocol not only fail to address the climate crisis, but also produce new forms of exploitation and inequality that tend to perpetuate colonial-style relationships between the global North and South.

Despite the conversational tone and dialogical structure, this is a meticulously researched and referenced book that progresses from densely packed theoretical arguments to empirical examples. The inclusion of an index might help readers negotiate what is often quite dense material.

Beginning from the premise that avoiding catastrophic climate change will require leaving most of the remaining fossil fuels in the ground, Lohmann convincingly argues that the carbon trading mechanisms enshrined in the Kyoto Protocol and the EU’s Emissions Trading Scheme are unequal to this task. This is fundamentally because emissions trading is about organising pollution more efficiently, rather than eliminating it. Lohmann traces the history of this rationality from the US cap-and-trade schemes for sulphur dioxide, lead and nitrogen oxides through to contemporary carbon trading schemes. The claim by advocates that trading reduces pollution more efficiently than conventional regulation is interrogated: what exactly is made efficient, and for whom? Lohmann observes that ‘if a market makes it easier for companies to put their pollution anywhere they want, it will wind up on the doorsteps of the poor and less powerful’ (p. 122). Even the price mechanism at the heart of carbon trading relies more on hope than on sound science when it assumes that carbon absorption rates, baseline emissions and alternative scenarios can be precisely quantified and traded. Situations characterised by uncertainty, ignorance and indeterminacy cannot always be translated into calculable risk.

The practical pitfalls of carbon trading are explored through accounts of specific projects for offsetting emissions through investments in carbon sinks or alternative technologies abroad, such as under Kyoto’s Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). Drawing on the work of other researchers and journalists, Lohmann shows how tree plantations in Uganda, for example, not only failed to achieve anywhere near the projected carbon ‘savings’, but also exploited local authorities and displaced rural communities. Some of these examples are rather brief and raise more questions than they answer, but what is lost in depth is gained in breadth.

One of the more in-depth examples focuses on a World Bank project to earn carbon credits by capturing and burning
methane from the Bisasar waste dump in Durban, South Africa. This has drawn fierce opposition from local residents and environmentalists, such as Sajida Khan, whose personal struggle tragically ended with her death in July 2007 from the cancer she attributed to the dump’s carcinogenic emissions. The complex and multifaceted story of Bisasar is handled sensitively by Lohmann, who allows space for multiple perspectives – including the support for the project from groups living in the adjacent Kennedy Road informal settlement.

In contrast, the Kuyasa housing project in Cape Town was awarded the ‘Gold Standard’ for CDM projects that are deemed to be highly environmentally and socially sustainable. The project retrofitted low-cost Reconstruction and Development Programme homes in Khayelitsha township with insulation, energy efficient lighting and solar water heaters. Lohmann’s critique of such attempts at certification as marginal is justifiable within his broader argument, and he shows that the Kuyasa project was primarily a one-off public sector investment which was ‘virtually incompatible’ with CDM as it currently operates (p. 297).

However, rather than entirely rejecting such efforts at certification as Lohmann does (pp. 182–184), perhaps they might offer some possibility of a more socially and environmentally sustainable form of carbon trading, especially if the price of carbon credits rises and there is pressure from activists and civil society for ‘Gold Standard’ credits to become the norm rather than the exception.

Broadly, however, the critique of carbon trading as a ‘market fix’ – the myth that calculating risks and efficiencies will bypass tough political struggles and decisions – is spot on. As Lohmann notes, ‘markets transform and centralise coercion in certain ways; they do not get rid of it’ (p. 342). Trading carbon is not the only, nor even the most obvious option, we are reminded, and large-scale public works, the shifting of subsidies, conventional regulation, green taxes and legal action are all presented as alternatives. In the end his demolition of the notion of trading our way out of the climate crisis is so compelling, and the alternatives he offers so familiar, that it is almost possible to lose sight of quite how radical and important this contribution is.


In most African countries, students inhabit a contradictory class position. A good example would be the students at the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) who feature prominently in this study. Until the end of the 1990s, students received a grant which was perfectly adequate to cover living expenses, accommodation and remittances back home. In 1995, the grant was five times higher than the annual salary of a teacher with a high school diploma. In 1998, students at UZ took part in a heroic struggle to defend the principle of a grant, against government plans to replace it with a loan. Despite their defeat, a loan is little hardship in a society characterised by hyper-inflation. Since 1998, a greater concern has in fact been the need to maintain the grant at a living rate, against a backdrop of cuts to the public sector. The physical fabric of the university has been allowed to rot in the same period. A library which was a national treasure has been subject to widespread petty theft. Students, who were far above the average (in terms of wealth, prospects and cultural capital) remain privileged, but the extent of their privilege is significantly eroded.

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The relative decline of student privilege has not stopped student activists and former student activists from playing a prominent role in social protests. Indeed, where the economic decline has been most marked – as in the DRC or Zimbabwe – students and ex-students have been most likely to be found at the head of opposition movements. Zimbabwe forms a useful case study, not merely for the part played in the Movement for Democratic Change by former student militants including Tendai Biti and Arthur Mutambara, but also for the serious attempt made by students (well documented in Zeilig’s book) to link their campaigns to those of workers and the urban poor, especially during Zimbabwe’s biennio rosso of 1996–1998.

Our moment is not that of 1968. The world is not full of protesting students, claiming to speak on behalf of the nation, or still less on behalf of the oppressed generally. Yet, where regimes have decayed, and protest coalitions have formed to challenge them, a prominent part is played, invariably, by students and former students.

Zeilig’s second case study is the mobilisation principally at the University of Cheikh Anta Diop in Senegal that lasted from 1999 to 2004. Campaigns included a national student strike (February–April 1999), protests against the printing of fake education cards in the run up to the contested Presidential elections of 2000, a strike calling for an increase in the student grant (February 2000), protests against increases in university entrance fees (January–February 2001), and further mobilisations in February 2001, following the killing of a student demonstrator Balla Gaye. In the aftermath of the killing, the students’ main economic demands were conceded.

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In the final chapter of his book, Zeilig gives a range of examples, from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria and elsewhere to back up the central arguments of his book: that there is still such a thing as a student intelligentsia, and that despite the poverty of many African campuses, the roots of student radicalism still lie to some extent in a sense of privilege. It is the position of the student as a member of an elite that allows her or him to speak on behalf of the nation or the world. Student activism, he concludes, can be recharged as a result of the anti-capitalist mobilisations that have taken place elsewhere in the world, including notably Seattle and Genoa.

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Woods has produced an outstanding explanation of the origins, development and growth of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs). The text is thorough, thoughtful, articulate, dense and balanced. She indicates that these organisations (together with aid and global firms) are the face of globalisation in the Third World. She presents a synthetic work – this is not meant to belittle the account, because she employs a remarkable 23-page bibliography. These analyses index a vital understanding of the extant publications on the IFIs and their commentators; all this has been augmented by some 22 interviews.

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She recounts their funding, the historical evolution, the influence of the US, the pressures of the Cold War and their tools. The debt crisis is explained, as is the rise of the Washington Consensus and structural adjustment. As the book recounts the complex interventions in Mexico and Russia, the hidden messages are the massive set of publications of these organisations and the influence of their vocabulary.

However, although the book is excellent at what it does, a scholar of Africa will be extremely disquieted. The clue to this is in the title ‘Globalizers’ and in the chapter ‘Mission Unaccomplished in Africa’. What is actually taking place in Africa is the other side of the coin – the incorporation of Africa, with profound and negative consequences for its countries, regions and people. Accompanying this globalisation is the unalterable mindset of the IFIs, the author and much of the referenced literature: neo-liberalism (there are some critics cited, but where are writers such as Susan George and Colin Leys?).

Woods does address the negative effects of the IFIs, but only in a partial sense; the thrust of the text is from the position of the IFIs (although she addresses conditionality and the Washington Consensus). Most of the publications referenced are from the IFIs or those of the same mindset (for example, only one ROAPE article is noted). The Bank and Fund champion the market, a subservient and weakened state, and privatisation; Africa needs to be lifted out of poverty, experience economic growth, and have development occur; they say this, but their programmes lead to devastation (from SAPs to HIPC) The IFIs treat only with countries; but what of the AU (continent) or ECOWAS (regions) or African citizens whose world has fallen apart with SAPs?

I have a great difficulty in separating my concern with the IFIs and Woods’ text, but it is because Woods views these agencies as bringing the ‘correct’ economics into a part of the world where economics blends with politics and
culture in a ‘holistic union’. To underline my concern is the issue of currency devaluation (one of the conditionalities of most IFI programmes) about which the text is silent. Such devaluation may be ‘correct’ to economists in righting these African economies, but the resulting price increases are destroying the lives of Africa’s citizens.

The great disappointments are the chapters 6 and 7. In chapter 6, ‘Mission Unaccomplished in Africa’, she indicates that the programmes of the IFIs in Africa with conditionality, the weakening of the state and privatisation have been failures, that the continent continues to wallow in debt, and that most states are kleptocratic. Rather than debate a solution to the debt crises, in much of the chapter the history of the IFIs in Africa is recounted, with national illustrations. There is some critical comment on the negative effects, but it is buried in the voluminous detail. As she indicates: ‘In practice, there was little modification to the overall approach of the Fund and Bank’ (p.150). Programmes were rendered more humane with ‘participation’, ‘ownership’, and the HIPC programme, but the mindset of neo-liberalism remains unchanged.

The reader hopes that the answer resides in chapter 7: ‘Reforming the IMF and World Bank’; after all there is a great need for a ‘global development agency’ to foster development, relieve debt and return Africa to the world economy. Instead, the difficulties facing these organisations are recounted, and the solution is more of the same (but with better implementation and soothing rhetoric this time). We learn of the funding crisis, and the solution is internal reform of these organisations – but there is no mention of addressing Africa’s crises.

Woods’ text is put aside with mixed feelings. On a positive note, if the reader’s quest is to understand the inner workings and histories of the World Bank and IMF, this is a well-written and thorough account. However, it offers no solution to Africa’s economic crisis except more of the same but with a soothing vocabulary!


In February 2008, mineworkers at Chambishi Copper Smelter (CCS) went on strike demanding a rise in their salaries. According to reports, workers were paid K291,000 (US$80) per month and demanded salaries of K800,000 (US$219). When the demand was not met, the workers became violent and riotous. In the process, one Chinese and two Zambian workers sustained severe injuries, and there was extensive destruction of mine property, infrastructure, as well as Chinese workers’ hostels. Theriot ended only after the intervention of riot police, and the strike was met with mixed reactions. Mike Mulongoti, Minister of Information and Broadcasting Services and the chief government spokesman, stated in an interview that ‘the workers may have genuine reasons but then it might be difficult to sympathise with them because they have damaged company property’. He further stated ‘As a government, we don’t condone such destructive behaviour’. The Permanent Secretary for the Copperbelt Province, Jennipher Musonda, who rushed to the scene condemned the workers for damaging company property, stating that:

management would take action against the ring leaders once they were identified as

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the ones who led the violence. What has happened is shameful, but as government, we would like to assure the Chinese people and Government of our continued support and that their investment is protected.

The leadership of the National Union of Mines and Allied workers (NUMAW), a breakaway union from the Mine Workers Union of Zambia, joined government in condemning the violence. The result was the dismissal of 500 workers, even though some have subsequently been reinstated, and the focus is now on a few deemed to be the ring leaders. Following the dismissals, Joshua Mutisa, Kalulushi District Commissioner, commented that ‘the workers’ behaviour deserves the kind of punishment which has been meted on them’.

The above scenario contextualises Miles Larmer’s book, where he sets out to demonstrate the relationship between the development of the labour movement and politics in post-colonial societies. Although the author does review the developments of labour movements elsewhere, the focus is on Zambia. The author contends that some analysts have portrayed a generally conflictual relationship between progressive nationalism on the one hand and apolitical, privileged and reactionary trade unionism on the other (p. 2). Larmer challenges this view, stating that mine workers have always used their privileged position in the economy as leverage for improved conditions of work. The privileged position stems from the centrality of the mines in the Zambian economy, and over time mineworkers have come to realise the importance of their labour in ensuring the success of the copper industry and, through it, national development. Larmer also points out that it is erroneous to think of the mineworkers as a single homogenous unit that has thought and acted uniformly in their struggles. Instead, they are a highly differentiated grouping, where conflicts within the mineworkers’ union have led to formation of new unions within the mining industry.

As the author rightly points out, ‘politically informed divisions between rank-and-file members, local union officials and national leaders have occurred since the mineworkers union was founded in the early 1950’s’ (p. 4). Differences have arisen from conflicting perspectives regarding the appropriate political role for the union in a post-colonial African context, reflecting the differing interests of the union members and leaders.

These differences are exemplified by the strike action at Chambeshi Copper Smelter, where the general membership decided to go on strike, disregarding the pleas of their national leadership whom they regard as compromised. The political leadership and the union leaders have always expected the union members to support the programmes of government. Union leaders have always stated that they will work with the government in power. However, the government privatisation programme has put many jobs at risk and has contributed greatly to the decline in wages. Naturally, the workers are not in favour of the privatisation programme, blaming it for the erosion of their standards of living. Thus, from time to time they organise strikes in defiance of their leadership. That is why in the case of the Chambeshi strike the political and union leadership was quick to condemn the strike which they regarded as an action retarding development. However, the core of the problem in the mining industry is the low salaries paid by the Chinese owners who apparently have the support of the Zambian Government. The action taken by the mineworkers and the reaction of the union leadership shows the heterogeneous nature of the grouping called mineworkers. The strike action at Chambeshi also shows how solidarity among the mineworkers has weakened. In days past, the strike at Chambeshi would have been reinforced by workers from other mines, but the fragmented nature of contemporary unionism prevents
this. Today, it is not uncommon to find workers in the same mine represented by two or more unions. There are also other factors that have contributed to the weakening of the mineworkers’ sense of solidarity: the reduction in employment levels brought about by privatisation, the increase in the number of mine owners, and the resulting differences in remuneration are all factors that have contributed to the weakened sense of solidarity (p. 203).

Larmer’s book raises most of these issues, making it an interesting and informative read. The book has six major chapters. Chapter one describes in a historical context the role of the mineworkers in Zambia and places the analysis within the wider study of labour in Africa, while chapter two discusses the role of the mine workers in political change in Northern Rhodesia and Zambia. Chapters three to five present the major findings of the study, while chapter six studies the developments in Zambia after 1991. The main finding in the book is that the major conflicts in Zambia’s copper mines since independence took place over wages and living conditions, in particular the ‘social wage’ (p. 202).

This book should be read by all who would like to learn about the development of the labour movement in Zambia and how through history the movement’s leadership has been compromised by either offers of position within government or access to highly placed government offices. However, the workers on the ground still continue to defend their basic interests and as a consequence they have been assumed to be apolitical or simply reactionary.


In discussions of the conflict in the Niger Delta, portrayals of the Nigerian state as a puppet of transnational oil companies abound. The dependency of the economy on oil has led to a widespread perception that the Nigerian federal state has no power, and that in effect the oil companies, and most notably Shell, are for all intents and purposes the country’s governing power. It is this view of an intimate and hegemonic alliance between the oil companies and the state elite that is the target of Kenneth Omeje’s analysis. While recognising that there is some value to the hegemonic alliance theory, Omeje argues against the view that the oil companies are the dominant partner in the alliance. Instead, he suggests that the Nigerian state is in a position to privilege its own interests in the construction of oil legislation and policies. Given that the state is the majority shareholder in all oil companies active in the country and takes over 70 per cent of the total oil revenues from joint venture operations, it is, according to Omeje, far from powerless.

Omeje situates his argument within an analysis of Nigeria’s rentier economy, where the high stakes of the oil industry determine the interests and actions of the various stakeholders. While this is a useful framing, the book’s conceptual and theoretical framework is perhaps not as tight and consistent as one might have hoped for, but much of what follows is nevertheless interesting and important reading. After a useful chapter outlining the historical and institutional context of the oil conflict, Omeje turns to an investigation of the security policies and strategies of the three biggest oil companies operating in Nigeria, namely Shell, Exxon-Mobil and ChevronTexaco. What emerges from these three chapters is a clear sense

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of how the transnational companies have come to the realisation that their former dependence on the repressive and often brutal state security apparatus is no longer in their interest.

While there are clear differences, the three companies have since the late 1990s increasingly turned towards various community development initiatives as their main security strategy. Omeje is careful not to overestimate the success or extent of these development efforts, nor does he avoid the fact that military oppression always remains an option for the companies. As such, he is in no way an apologist for the oil companies, but presents a nuanced critique which regards the move away from a sole reliance on military violence as a means of solving conflicts over oil resources as a significant change. The Nigerian state, by contrast, appears to have changed less, and is still predisposed towards military violence against local oil protests. While the Niger Delta Development Committee signals some intent towards development and redistribution on behalf of the federal government, Omeje describes the agency as ‘reprehensively elitist, dictatorial, exclusivist, incomprehensive and non-beneficiary oriented’ (p. 175). Moreover, the development efforts of the federal government are contradicted by the individual Niger Delta States and the local governments, which despite considerably higher revenues from oil, have more or less abandoned any pretence towards development initiatives. Omeje accordingly suggests that to a certain extent, the range of development functions performed by the oil companies repositions them as the de facto government or quasi state in the oil region and that local authorities are content to abdicate this responsibility (p. 173).

The Nigerian state, Omeje concludes, is primarily promoting ‘the economic and material well-being of the dominant rentier elites’ (p.160). The interests of transnational oil companies are coincidental, and hence, the state cannot be regarded as the subservient partner in the oil relationship. What remains a constant, however, is the exclusion of the majority of people in the oil bearing communities from any benefits from oil extraction. For Omeje, the solution for a more peaceful and inclusive Niger Delta lies in a comprehensive conflict resolution and security reform framework. While well-meaning, the suggested framework lacks a solid political analysis of how the state and the oil companies can be made to change their ways, pinning its hopes on the actions of ‘global civil society’. However, it would be wholly unfair to dismiss this book on the basis of not providing an adequate ‘solution’ to the conflicts in the Niger Delta; that is clearly a highly difficult task and Omeje’s book is a helpful step on the way.

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In _Becoming Somaliland_, Bradbury provides a meticulous background to the emergence of the self-styled, but internationally unrecognised, Republic of Somaliland and what he describes as a state ‘rooted in a popular consciousness and embedded in society rather than imposed from above’ (p. 242). As a part of the defunct Democratic Republic of Somalia, widely considered the foremost example of a failed state, such a remarkable exception to a dismal perception is assuredly worthy of close examination. That so much international effort on Somali state-building continues to adhere to the view that state-formation can be introduced through the templates of Western aid delivery when Somalis in Somaliland have proven them-
selves so much more successful at the task suggests an unforgivable ignorance of the more positive developments in the Somali territories.

With the collapse of the autocratic regime of Siad Barre at the beginning of 1991, Somaliland declared the restoration of the sovereignty it had momentarily enjoyed in 1960. With that declaration, the territory embarked on a remarkable journey that has encompassed a succession of peace conferences together with popular elections for local government, the presidency and parliament, preceded by a referendum on the adoption of a constitution.

Operating with a miniscule annual budget that has tended to sit within a range of US$20–30 million a year, the state has gradually been able to consolidate its position, while stability has permitted rapid growth in a remittance-fuelled economy. Given the paucity of government resources, exacerbated by the severe restrictions imposed by non-recognition on access to donor aid and concessionary credit through international financial institutions, stability and state consolidation have evidently been enabled largely through popular tolerance rather than imposition on a reluctant populace.

While Somaliland’s story is in many ways an encouraging one, it would be dangerous to ignore both context and shortcomings. Indeed, Bradbury brings depth to his review through his demonstrable understanding of the rich social, cultural and political history of the area, as well as his thoughtful examination of the faults and challenges that have marked each of the phases in that process over the past 17 years.

At the time of writing, Somaliland is attempting to complete an ambitious voter registration programme (the first since the run-up to the 1969 election in Somalia, and the first population count of any kind since the 1975 census), and is scheduled to hold a second presidential election at the end of September 2009. Voter registration was briefly suspended when three suicide bombers detonated their explosives in the compounds of the President, the UNDP and the Ethiopian representative. Although not immediately claimed by any group, the bombings were timed to coincide with a smaller attack in the Puntland port city of Bosasso, and seem likely to have been designed to demonstrate the ability of groups opposed to the Ethiopian presence and influence in Somali territories to operate throughout the erstwhile Democratic Republic. This act graphically illustrates the challenge to the nascent democracy afforded by those who oppose Somaliland for political or religious reasons.

A further set of risks arises from internal politics. Fundamental constitutional incongruities remain unaddressed and the Guurti or upper house of Parliament still lacks any agreed system for the appointment or election of members. The government is accused of corruption, the Judiciary remains patently dependent on the Executive, and the House of Representatives struggles to establish itself as a viable balance to presidential power. Faced with immediate and, in some instances, fundamental challenges to the continued institutionalisation of what has been described as a ‘hybrid’ system of democracy combining elements of Somali tradition with the institutions of representative nation-state democracy, Bradbury’s book provides a valuable background.

There are times when Bradbury’s conclusions seem somewhat timid given the compelling account he provides of progress to date. His equivocation is most evident when he is addressing the contentious issue of Somaliland’s quest for international recognition. He rather mildly suggests that ‘...greater diplomatic creativity and international acceptance of alternative formulations of state governance may prove necessary’ (p. 245, italics...
added), when his preceding argument presents a compelling case for the urgency of such flexibility. While still not willing to commit himself to a more specific set of recommendations, however, two pages later he does betray the depth of his disillusion with the efforts of donors in the political arena when he describes the state-building frameworks of donors as ‘simplistic if not delusional’ (p. 247). Bradbury’s long association with Somali issues, and his excellent description of the process of peace- and state-building in Somaliland put him in an ideal position to offer positive suggestions on a more appropriate basis for engagement in the area, and their lack represents the book’s primary, if understandable, deficiency.

Nevertheless, *Becoming Somaliland* provides a well written and carefully researched background to an area that has long received far less attention than it deserves. With international interest in Somalia so transparently focused on the security interests of neighbours and rich nations at the expense of the much more immediate and genuine needs of Somalis, the book introduces a welcome engagement with the people and politics of an area whose rich contemporary (and older) history can provide valuable insights.
Book Reviews


The climate crisis is not only imminent, but in some respects is already here. As the environmental effects of human-induced climate change become more evident, so too do the political, social and economic ramifications of the strategies adopted to combat them. Larry Lohmann’s central argument in this excellent critique of carbon trading is that the trading mechanisms at the heart of the Kyoto Protocol not only fail to address the climate crisis, but also produce new forms of exploitation and inequality that tend to perpetuate colonial-style relationships between the global North and South.

Despite the conversational tone and dialogical structure, this is a meticulously researched and referenced book that progresses from densely packed theoretical arguments to empirical examples. The inclusion of an index might help readers negotiate what is often quite dense material.

Beginning from the premise that avoiding catastrophic climate change will require leaving most of the remaining fossil fuels in the ground, Lohmann convincingly argues that the carbon trading mechanisms enshrined in the Kyoto Protocol and the EU’s Emissions Trading Scheme are unequal to this task. This is fundamentally because emissions trading is about organis-
methane from the Bisasar waste dump in Durban, South Africa. This has drawn fierce opposition from local residents and environmentalists, such as Sajida Khan, whose personal struggle tragically ended with her death in July 2007 from the cancer she attributed to the dump’s carcinogenic emissions. The complex and multifaceted story of Bisasar is handled sensitively by Lohmann, who allows space for multiple perspectives – including the support for the project from groups living in the adjacent Kennedy Road informal settlement.

In contrast, the Kuyasa housing project in Cape Town was awarded the ‘Gold Standard’ for CDM projects that are deemed to be highly environmentally and socially sustainable. The project retrofitted low-cost Reconstruction and Development Programme homes in Khayelitsha township with insulation, energy efficient lighting and solar water heaters. Lohmann’s critique of such attempts at certification as marginal is justifiable within his broader argument, and he shows that the Kuyasa project was primarily a one-off public sector investment which was ‘virtually incompatible’ with CDM as it currently operates (p. 297). However, rather than entirely rejecting such efforts at certification as Lohmann does (pp. 182–184), perhaps they might offer some possibility of a more socially and environmentally sustainable form of carbon trading, especially if the price of carbon credits rises and there is pressure from activists and civil society for ‘Gold Standard’ credits to become the norm rather than the exception.

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Woods does address the negative effects of the IFIs, but only in a partial sense; the thrust of the text is from the position of the IFIs (although she addresses conditionality and the Washington Consensus). Most of the publications referenced are from the IFIs or those of the same mindset (for example, only one ROAPE article is noted). The Bank and Fund champion the market, a subservient and weakened state, and privatisation; Africa needs to be lifted out of poverty, experience economic growth, and have development occur; they say this, but their programmes lead to devastation (from SAPs to HIPCks)! The IFIs treat only with countries; but what of the AU (continent) or ECOWAS (regions) or African citizens whose world has fallen apart with SAPs?

I have a great difficulty in separating my concern with the IFIs and Woods’ text, but it is because Woods views these agencies as bringing the ‘correct’ economics into a part of the world where economics blends with politics and
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The reader hopes that the answer resides in chapter 7: ‘Reforming the IMF and World Bank’; after all there is a great need for a ‘global development agency’ to foster development, relieve debt and return Africa to the world economy. Instead, the difficulties facing these organisations are recounted, and the solution is more of the same (but with better implementation and soothing rhetoric this time). We learn of the funding crisis, and the solution is internal reform of these organisations – but there is no mention of addressing Africa’s crises.

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In February 2008, mineworkers at Chambishi Copper Smelter (CCS) went on strike demanding a rise in their salaries. According to reports, workers were paid K291,000 (US$80) per month and demanded salaries of K800,000 (US$219). When the demand was not met, the workers became violent and riotous. In the process, one Chinese and two Zambian workers sustained severe injuries, and there was extensive destruction of mine property, infrastructure, as well as Chinese workers’ hostels. The riot ended only after the intervention of riot police, and the strike was met with mixed reactions. Mike Mulongoti, Minister of Information and Broadcasting Services and the chief government spokesman, stated in an interview that ‘the workers may have genuine reasons but then it might be difficult to sympathise with them because they have damaged company property’. He further stated ‘As a government, we don’t condone such destructive behaviour’. The Permanent Secretary for the Copperbelt Province, Jennipher Musonda, who rushed to the scene condemned the workers for damaging company property, stating that:

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The leadership of the National Union of Mines and Allied workers (NUMAW), a breakaway union from the Mine Workers Union of Zambia, joined government in condemning the violence. The result was the dismissal of 500 workers, even though some have subsequently been reinstated, and the focus is now on a few deemed to be the ring leaders. Following the dismissals, Joshua Mutisa, Kalulushi District Commissioner, commented that ‘the workers’ behaviour deserves the kind of punishment which has been meted on them’.

The above scenario contextualises Miles Larmer’s book, where he sets out to demonstrate the relationship between the development of the labour movement and politics in post-colonial societies. Although the author does review the developments of labour movements elsewhere, the focus is on Zambia. The author contends that some analysts have portrayed a generally conflictual relationship between progressive nationalism on the one hand and apolitical, privileged and reactionary trade unionism on the other (p. 2). Larmer challenges this view, stating that mine workers have always used their privileged position in the economy as leverage for improved conditions of work. The privileged position stems from the centrality of the mines in the Zambian economy, and over time mineworkers have come to realise the importance of their labour in ensuring the success of the copper industry and, through it, national development. Larmer also points out that it is erroneous to think of the mineworkers as a single homogenous unit that has thought and acted uniformly in their struggles. Instead, they are a highly differentiated grouping, where conflicts within the mineworkers’ union have led to formation of new unions within the mining industry.

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These differences are exemplified by the strike action at Chambeshi Copper Smelter, where the general membership decided to go on strike, disregarding the pleas of their national leadership whom they regard as compromised. The political leadership and the union leaders have always expected the union members to support the programmes of government. Union leaders have always stated that they will work with the government in power. However, the government privatisation programme has put many jobs at risk and has contributed greatly to the decline in wages. Naturally, the workers are not in favour of the privatisation programme, blaming it for the erosion of their standards of living. Thus, from time to time they organise strikes in defiance of their leadership. That is why in the case of the Chambeshi strike the political and union leadership was quick to condemn the strike which they regarded as an action retarding development. However, the core of the problem in the mining industry is the low salaries paid by the Chinese owners who apparently have the support of the Zambian Government. The action taken by the mineworkers and the reaction of the union leadership shows the heterogeneous nature of the grouping called mineworkers. The strike action at Chambeshi also shows how solidarity among the mineworkers has weakened. In days past, the strike at Chambeshi would have been reinforced by workers from other mines, but the fragmented nature of contemporary unionism prevents
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This book should be read by all who would like to learn about the development of the labour movement in Zambia and how through history the movement’s leadership has been compromised by either offers of position within government or access to highly placed government offices. However, the workers on the ground still continue to defend their basic interests and as a consequence they have been assumed to be apolitical or simply reactionary.


In discussions of the conflict in the Niger Delta, portrayals of the Nigerian state as a puppet of transnational oil companies abound. The dependency of the economy on oil has led to a widespread perception that the Nigerian federal state has no power, and that in effect the oil companies, and most notably Shell, are for all intents and purposes the country’s governing power. It is this view of an intimate and hegemonic alliance between the oil companies and the state elite that is the target of Kenneth Omeje’s analysis. While recognising that there is some value to the hegemonic alliance theory, Omeje argues against the view that the oil companies are the dominant partner in the alliance. Instead, he suggests that the Nigerian state is in a position to privilege its own interests in the construction of oil legislation and policies. Given that the state is the majority shareholder in all oil companies active in the country and takes over 70 per cent of the total oil revenues from joint venture operations, it is, according to Omeje, far from powerless.

Omeje situates his argument within an analysis of Nigeria’s rentier economy, where the high stakes of the oil industry determine the interests and actions of the various stakeholders. While this is a useful framing, the book’s conceptual and theoretical framework is perhaps not as tight and consistent as one might have hoped for, but much of what follows is nevertheless interesting and important reading. After a useful chapter outlining the historical and institutional context of the oil conflict, Omeje turns to an investigation of the security policies and strategies of the three biggest oil companies operating in Nigeria, namely Shell, ExxonMobil and ChevronTexaco. What emerges from these three chapters is a clear sense
of how the transnational companies have come to the realisation that their former dependence on the repressive and often brutal state security apparatus is no longer in their interest.

While there are clear differences, the three companies have since the late 1990s increasingly turned towards various community development initiatives as their main security strategy. Omeje is careful not to overestimate the success or extent of these development efforts, nor does he avoid the fact that military oppression always remains an option for the companies. As such, he is in no way an apologist for the oil companies, but presents a nuanced critique which regards the move away from a sole reliance on military violence as a means of solving conflicts over oil resources as a significant change.

The Nigerian state, by contrast, appears to have changed less, and is still predisposed towards military violence against local oil protests. While the Niger Delta Development Committee signals some intent towards development and redistribution on behalf of the federal government, Omeje describes the agency as ‘reprehensively elitist, dictatorial, exclusivist, incomprehensive and non-beneficiary oriented’ (p. 175). Moreover, the development efforts of the federal government are contradicted by the individual Niger Delta States and the local governments, which despite considerably higher revenues from oil, have more or less abandoned any pretence towards development initiatives. Omeje accordingly suggests that to a certain extent, the range of development functions performed by the oil companies repositions them as the de facto government or quasi state in the oil region and that local authorities are content to abdicate this responsibility (p. 173).

The Nigerian state, Omeje concludes, is primarily promoting ‘the economic and material well-being of the dominant rentier elites’ (p.160). The interests of transnational oil companies are coincidental, and hence, the state cannot be regarded as the subservient partner in the oil relationship. What remains a constant, however, is the exclusion of the majority of people in the oil bearing communities from any benefits from oil extraction. For Omeje, the solution for a more peaceful and inclusive Niger Delta lies in a comprehensive conflict resolution and security reform framework. While well-meaning, the suggested framework lacks a solid political analysis of how the state and the oil companies can be made to change their ways, pinning its hopes on the actions of ‘global civil society’. However, it would be wholly unfair to dismiss this book on the basis of not providing an adequate ‘solution’ to the conflicts in the Niger Delta; that is clearly a highly difficult task and Omeje’s book is a helpful step on the way.


In *Becoming Somaliland*, Bradbury provides a meticulous background to the emergence of the self-styled, but internationally unrecognised, Republic of Somaliland and what he describes as a state ‘rooted in a popular consciousness and embedded in society rather than imposed from above’ (p. 242). As a part of the defunct Democratic Republic of Somalia, widely considered the foremost example of a failed state, such a remarkable exception to a dismal perception is assuredly worthy of close examination. That so much international effort on Somali state-building continues to adhere to the view that state formation can be introduced through the templates of Western aid delivery when Somalis in Somaliland have proven them-
selves so much more successful at the task suggests an unforgivable ignorance of the more positive developments in the Somali territories.

With the collapse of the autocratic regime of Siad Barre at the beginning of 1991, Somaliland declared the restoration of the sovereignty it had momentarily enjoyed in 1960. With that declaration, the territory embarked on a remarkable journey that has encompassed a succession of peace conferences together with popular elections for local government, the presidency and parliament, preceded by a referendum on the adoption of a constitution.

Operating with a miniscule annual budget that has tended to sit within a range of US$20–30 million a year, the state has gradually been able to consolidate its position, while stability has permitted rapid growth in a remittance-fuelled economy. Given the paucity of government resources, exacerbated by the severe restrictions imposed by non-recognition on access to donor aid and concessory credit through international financial institutions, stability and state consolidation have evidently been enabled largely through popular tolerance rather than imposition on a reluctant populace.

While Somaliland’s story is in many ways an encouraging one, it would be dangerous to ignore both context and shortcomings. Indeed, Bradbury brings depth to his review through his demonstrable understanding of the rich social, cultural and political history of the area, as well as his thoughtful examination of the faults and challenges that have marked each of the phases in that process over the past 17 years.

At the time of writing, Somaliland is attempting to complete an ambitious voter registration programme (the first since the run-up to the 1969 election in Somalia, and the first population count of any kind since the 1975 census), and is scheduled to hold a second presidential election at the end of September 2009. Voter registration was briefly suspended when three suicide bombers detonated their explosives in the compounds of the President, the UNDP and the Ethiopian representative. Although not immediately claimed by any group, the bombings were timed to coincide with a smaller attack in the Puntland port city of Bosasso, and seem likely to have been designed to demonstrate the ability of groups opposed to the Ethiopian presence and influence in Somali territories to operate throughout the erstwhile Democratic Republic. This act graphically illustrates the challenge to the nascent democracy afforded by those who oppose Somaliland for political or religious reasons.

A further set of risks arises from internal politics. Fundamental constitutional incongruities remain unaddressed and the Guurti or upper house of Parliament still lacks any agreed system for the appointment or election of members. The government is accused of corruption, the Judiciary remains patently dependent on the Executive, and the House of Representatives struggles to establish itself as a viable balance to presidential power. Faced with immediate and, in some instances, fundamental challenges to the continued institutionalisation of what has been described as a ‘hybrid’ system of democracy combining elements of Somali tradition with the institutions of representative nation-state democracy, Bradbury’s book provides a valuable background.

There are times when Bradbury’s conclusions seem somewhat timid given the compelling account he provides of progress to date. His equivocation is most evident when he is addressing the contentious issue of Somaliland’s quest for international recognition. He rather mildly suggests that ‘...greater diplomatic creativity and international acceptance of alternative formulations of state governance may prove necessary’ (p. 245, italics
added), when his preceding argument presents a compelling case for the urgency of such flexibility. While still not willing to commit himself to a more specific set of recommendations, however, two pages later he does betray the depth of his disillusion with the efforts of donors in the political arena when he describes the state-building frameworks of donors as ‘simplistic if not delusional’ (p. 247). Bradbury’s long association with Somali issues, and his excellent description of the process of peace- and state-building in Somaliland put him in an ideal position to offer positive suggestions on a more appropriate basis for engagement in the area, and their lack represents the book’s primary, if understandable, deficiency.

Nevertheless, Becoming Somaliland provides a well written and carefully researched background to an area that has long received far less attention than it deserves. With international interest in Somalia so transparently focused on the security interests of neighbours and rich nations at the expense of the much more immediate and genuine needs of Somalis, the book introduces a welcome engagement with the people and politics of an area whose rich contemporary (and older) history can provide valuable insights.
The climate crisis is not only imminent, but in some respects is already here. As the environmental effects of human-induced climate change become more evident, so too do the political, social and economic ramifications of the strategies adopted to combat them. Larry Lohmann’s central argument in this excellent critique of carbon trading is that the trading mechanisms at the heart of the Kyoto Protocol not only fail to address the climate crisis, but also produce new forms of exploitation and inequality that tend to perpetuate colonial-style relationships between the global North and South.

Despite the conversational tone and dialogical structure, this is a meticulously researched and referenced book that progresses from densely packed theoretical arguments to empirical examples. The inclusion of an index might help readers negotiate what is often quite dense material.

Beginning from the premise that avoiding catastrophic climate change will require leaving most of the remaining fossil fuels in the ground, Lohmann convincingly argues that the carbon trading mechanisms enshrined in the Kyoto Protocol and the EU’s Emissions Trading Scheme are unequal to this task. This is fundamentally because emissions trading is about organis-
methane from the Bisasar waste dump in Durban, South Africa. This has drawn fierce opposition from local residents and environmentalists, such as Sajida Khan, whose personal struggle tragically ended with her death in July 2007 from the cancer she attributed to the dump’s carcinogenic emissions. The complex and multifaceted story of Bisasar is handled sensitively by Lohmann, who allows space for multiple perspectives – including the support for the project from groups living in the adjacent Kennedy Road informal settlement.

In contrast, the Kuyasa housing project in Cape Town was awarded the ‘Gold Standard’ for CDM projects that are deemed to be highly environmentally and socially sustainable. The project retrofitted low-cost Reconstruction and Development Programme homes in Khayelitsha township with insulation, energy efficient lighting and solar water heaters. Lohmann’s critique of such attempts at certification as marginal is justifiable within his broader argument, and he shows that the Kuyasa project was primarily a one-off public sector investment which was ‘virtually incompatible’ with CDM as it currently operates (p. 297). However, rather than entirely rejecting such efforts at certification as Lohmann does (pp. 182–184), perhaps they might offer some possibility of a more socially and environmentaly sustainable form of carbon trading, especially if the price of carbon credits rises and there is pressure from activists and civil society for ‘Gold Standard’ credits to become the norm rather than the exception.

Broadly, however, the critique of carbon trading as a ‘market fix’ – the myth that calculating risks and efficiencies will bypass tough political struggles and decisions – is spot on. As Lohmann notes, ‘markets transform and centralise coercion in certain ways; they do not get rid of it’ (p. 342). Trading carbon is not the only, nor even the most obvious option, we are reminded, and large-scale public works, the shifting of subsidies, conventional regulation, green taxes and legal action are all presented as alternatives. In the end his demolition of the notion of trading our way out of the climate crisis is so compelling, and the alternatives he offers so familiar, that it is almost possible to lose sight of quite how radical and important this contribution is.


In most African countries, students inhabit a contradictory class position. A good example would be the students at the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) who feature prominently in this study. Until the end of the 1990s, students received a grant which was perfectly adequate to cover living expenses, accommodation and remittances back home. In 1995, the grant was five times higher than the annual salary of a teacher with a high school diploma. In 1998, students at UZ took part in a heroic struggle to defend the principle of a grant, against government plans to replace it with a loan. Despite their defeat, a loan is little hardship in a society characterised by hyper-inflation. Since 1998, a greater concern has in fact been the need to maintain the grant at a living rate, against a backdrop of cuts to the public sector. The physical fabric of the university has been allowed to rot in the same period. A library which was a national treasure has been subject to widespread petty theft. Students, who were far above the average (in terms of wealth, prospects and cultural capital) remain privileged, but the extent of their privilege is significantly eroded.
The relative decline of student privilege has not stopped student activists and former student activists from playing a prominent role in social protests. Indeed, where the economic decline has been most marked—as in the DRC or Zimbabwe—students and ex-students have been most likely to be found at the head of opposition movements. Zimbabwe forms a useful case study, not merely for the part played in the Movement for Democratic Change by former student militants including Tendai Biti and Arthur Mutambara, but also for the serious attempt made by students (well documented in Zeilig’s book) to link their campaigns to those of workers and the urban poor, especially during Zimbabwe’s biennio rosso of 1996–1998.

Our moment is not that of 1968. The world is not full of protesting students, claiming to speak on behalf of the nation, or still less on behalf of the oppressed generally. Yet, where regimes have decayed, and protest coalitions have formed to challenge them, a prominent part is played, invariably, by students and former students.

Zeilig’s second case study is the mobilisation principally at the University of Cheikh Anta Diop in Senegal that lasted from 1999 to 2004. Campaigns included a national student strike (February–April 1999), protests against the printing of fake education cards in the run up to the contested Presidential elections of 2000, a strike calling for an increase in the student grant (February 2000), protests against increases in university entrance fees (January–February 2001), and further mobilisations in February 2001, following the killing of a student demonstrator Balla Gaye. In the aftermath of the killing, the students’ main economic demands were conceded.

Zeilig quotes one student, Jean-Claude Kongo, as a spokesman for this generation of protesters:

*If you think how few members of society actually gain access to university in Senegal… students are privileged; they are in a better position to help and ultimately control the nation. But every student I know has the problem of money although students are here for themselves and for society in general. Materially they certainly aren’t a privileged class, that’s not possible. I know a student with a scholarship who can’t live at the university but has to live in the suburbs. The price of transport, accommodation, everything, I know two students who committed suicide because life was impossible for them.*

In the final chapter of his book, Zeilig gives a range of examples, from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria and elsewhere to back up the central arguments of his book: that there is still such a thing as a student intelligentsia, and that despite the poverty of many African campuses, the roots of student radicalism still lie to some extent in a sense of privilege. It is the position of the student as a member of an elite that allows her or him to speak on behalf of the nation or the world. Student activism, he concludes, can be recharged as a result of the anti-capitalist mobilisations that have taken place elsewhere in the world, including notably Seattle and Genoa.

This is a valuable study; certainly, the events Zeilig documents in Zimbabwe (being so out of kilter with the clichés about that country, which are endlessly reported in the global press) deserved to be much more widely known.
Woods has produced an outstanding explanation of the origins, development and growth of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs). The text is thorough, thoughtful, articulate, dense and balanced. She indicates that these organisations (together with aid and global firms) are the face of globalisation in the Third World. She presents a synthetic work – this is not meant to belittle the account, because she employs a remarkable 23-page bibliography. These analyses index a vital understanding of the extant publications on the IFIs and their commentators; all this has been augmented by some 22 interviews.

Woods is an Oxford Fellow and Economist. Her book begins on a critical note by indicating that these IFIs have received fault-finding comment from both the left and right as they have been at the forefront of the integration of the world into a single economy. The operations of these organisations are somewhat complex in that they are influenced by powerful governments, their own bureaucracy of mainly professional economists, and their relationships with borrowing governments. As she indicates: ‘This book is about the relationship between political power, economists, and borrowing governments in the work of the IMF and the World Bank . . . The greatest success . . . has been as globalizers’ (p. 2). The tools have been trade, money, investment and capital. Here, she examines their creation and evolution; their definition of missions; how they interact with borrowing countries; and their actions are interpreted in great detail with the concrete examples of Mexico and Russia.

She recounts their funding, the historical evolution, the influence of the US, the pressures of the Cold War and their tools. The debt crisis is explained, as is the rise of the Washington Consensus and structural adjustment. As the book recounts the complex interventions in Mexico and Russia, the hidden messages are the massive set of publications of these organisations and the influence of their vocabulary.

However, although the book is excellent at what it does, a scholar of Africa will be extremely disquieted. The clue to this is in the title ‘Globalizers’ and in the chapter ‘Mission Unaccomplished in Africa’. What is actually taking place in Africa is the other side of the coin – the incorporation of Africa, with profound and negative consequences for its countries, regions and people. Accompanying this globalisation is the unalterable mindset of the IFIs, the author and much of the referenced literature: neo-liberalism (there are some critics cited, but where are writers such as Susan George and Colin Leys?).

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This book should be read by all who would like to learn about the development of the labour movement in Zambia and how through history the movement’s leadership has been compromised by either offers of position within government or access to highly placed government offices. However, the workers on the ground still continue to defend their basic interests and as a consequence they have been assumed to be apolitical or simply reactionary.

In discussions of the conflict in the Niger Delta, portrayals of the Nigerian state as a puppet of transnational oil companies abound. The dependency of the economy on oil has led to a widespread perception that the Nigerian federal state has no power, and that in effect the oil companies, and most notably Shell, are for all intents and purposes the country’s governing power. It is this view of an intimate and hegemonic alliance between the oil companies and the state elite that is the target of Kenneth Omeje’s analysis. While recognising that there is some value to the hegemonic alliance theory, Omeje argues against the view that the oil companies are the dominant partner in the alliance. Instead, he suggests that the Nigerian state is in a position to privilege its own interests in the construction of oil legislation and policies. Given that the state is the majority shareholder in all oil companies active in the country and takes over 70 per cent of the total oil revenues from joint venture operations, it is, according to Omeje, far from powerless.

Omeje situates his argument within an analysis of Nigeria’s rentier economy, where the high stakes of the oil industry determine the interests and actions of the various stakeholders. While this is a useful framing, the book’s conceptual and theoretical framework is perhaps not as tight and consistent as one might have hoped for, but much of what follows is nevertheless interesting and important reading. After a useful chapter outlining the historical and institutional context of the oil conflict, Omeje turns to an investigation of the security policies and strategies of the three biggest oil companies operating in Nigeria, namely Shell, Exxon-Mobil and ChevronTexaco. What emerges from these three chapters is a clear sense

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of how the transnational companies have come to the realisation that their former dependence on the repressive and often brutal state security apparatus is no longer in their interest.

While there are clear differences, the three companies have since the late 1990s increasingly turned towards various community development initiatives as their main security strategy. Omeje is careful not to overestimate the success or extent of these development efforts, nor does he avoid the fact that military oppression always remains an option for the companies. As such, he is in no way an apologist for the oil companies, but presents a nuanced critique which regards the move away from a sole reliance on military violence as a means of solving conflicts over oil resources as a significant change.

The Nigerian state, by contrast, appears to have changed less, and is still predisposed towards military violence against local oil protests. While the Niger Delta Development Committee signals some intent towards development and redistribution on behalf of the federal government, Omeje describes the agency as ‘reprehensively elitist, dictatorial, exclusivist, incomprehensive and non-beneficiary oriented’ (p. 175). Moreover, the development efforts of the federal government are contradicted by the individual Niger Delta States and the local governments, which despite considerably higher revenues from oil, have more or less abandoned any pretence towards development initiatives. Omeje accordingly suggests that to a certain extent, the range of development functions performed by the oil companies repositions them as the de facto government or quasi state in the oil region and that local authorities are content to abdicate this responsibility (p. 173).

The Nigerian state, Omeje concludes, is primarily promoting ‘the economic and material well-being of the dominant rentier elites’ (p.160). The interests of transnational oil companies are coincidental, and hence, the state cannot be regarded as the subservient partner in the oil relationship. What remains a constant, however, is the exclusion of the majority of people in the oil bearing communities from any benefits from oil extraction. For Omeje, the solution for a more peaceful and inclusive Niger Delta lies in a comprehensive conflict resolution and security reform framework. While well-meaning, the suggested framework lacks a solid political analysis of how the state and the oil companies can be made to change their ways, pinning its hopes on the actions of ‘global civil society’. However, it would be wholly unfair to dismiss this book on the basis of not providing an adequate ‘solution’ to the conflicts in the Niger Delta; that is clearly a highly difficult task and Omeje’s book is a helpful step on the way.

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In Becoming Somaliland, Bradbury provides a meticulous background to the emergence of the self-styled, but internationally unrecognised, Republic of Somaliland and what he describes as a state ‘rooted in a popular consciousness and embedded in society rather than imposed from above’ (p. 242). As a part of the defunct Democratic Republic of Somalia, widely considered the foremost example of a failed state, such a remarkable exception to a dismal perception is assuredly worthy of close examination. That so much international effort on Somali state-building continues to adhere to the view that state-formation can be introduced through the templates of Western aid delivery when Somalis in Somaliland have proven them-
selves so much more successful at the task suggests an unforgivable ignorance of the more positive developments in the Somali territories.

With the collapse of the autocratic regime of Siad Barre at the beginning of 1991, Somaliland declared the restoration of the sovereignty it had momentarily enjoyed in 1960. With that declaration, the territory embarked on a remarkable journey that has encompassed a succession of peace conferences together with popular elections for local government, the presidency and parliament, preceded by a referendum on the adoption of a constitution.

Operating with a miniscule annual budget that has tended to sit within a range of US$20–30 million a year, the state has gradually been able to consolidate its position, while stability has permitted rapid growth in a remittance-fuelled economy. Given the paucity of government resources, exacerbated by the severe restrictions imposed by non-recognition on access to donor aid and concessionary credit through international financial institutions, stability and state consolidation have evidently been enabled largely through popular tolerance rather than imposition on a reluctant populace.

While Somaliland’s story is in many ways an encouraging one, it would be dangerous to ignore both context and shortcomings. Indeed, Bradbury brings depth to his review through his demonstrable understanding of the rich social, cultural and political history of the area, as well as his thoughtful examination of the faults and challenges that have marked each of the phases in that process over the past 17 years.

At the time of writing, Somaliland is attempting to complete an ambitious voter registration programme (the first since the run-up to the 1969 election in Somalia, and the first population count of any kind since the 1975 census), and is scheduled to hold a second presidential election at the end of September 2009. Voter registration was briefly suspended when three suicide bombers detonated their explosives in the compounds of the President, the UNDP and the Ethiopian representative. Although not immediately claimed by any group, the bombings were timed to coincide with a smaller attack in the Puntland port city of Bosasso, and seem likely to have been designed to demonstrate the ability of groups opposed to the Ethiopian presence and influence in Somali territories to operate throughout the erstwhile Democratic Republic. This act graphically illustrates the challenge to the nascent democracy afforded by those who oppose Somaliland for political or religious reasons.

A further set of risks arises from internal politics. Fundamental constitutional incongruities remain unaddressed and the Guurti or upper house of Parliament still lacks any agreed system for the appointment or election of members. The government is accused of corruption, the Judiciary remains patently dependent on the Executive, and the House of Representatives struggles to establish itself as a viable balance to presidential power. Faced with immediate and, in some instances, fundamental challenges to the continued institutionalisation of what has been described as a ‘hybrid’ system of democracy combining elements of Somali tradition with the institutions of representative nation-state democracy, Bradbury’s book provides a valuable background.

There are times when Bradbury’s conclusions seem somewhat timid given the compelling account he provides of progress to date. His equivocation is most evident when he is addressing the contentious issue of Somaliland’s quest for international recognition. He rather mildly suggests that ‘...greater diplomatic creativity and international acceptance of alternative formulations of state governance may prove necessary’ (p. 245, italics
added), when his preceding argument presents a compelling case for the urgency of such flexibility. While still not willing to commit himself to a more specific set of recommendations, however, two pages later he does betray the depth of his disillusion with the efforts of donors in the political arena when he describes the state-building frameworks of donors as ‘simplistic if not delusional’ (p. 247). Bradbury’s long association with Somali issues, and his excellent description of the process of peace- and state-building in Somaliland put him in an ideal position to offer positive suggestions on a more appropriate basis for engagement in the area, and their lack represents the book’s primary, if understandable, deficiency.

Nevertheless, *Becoming Somaliland* provides a well written and carefully researched background to an area that has long received far less attention than it deserves. With international interest in Somalia so transparently focused on the security interests of neighbours and rich nations at the expense of the much more immediate and genuine needs of Somalis, the book introduces a welcome engagement with the people and politics of an area whose rich contemporary (and older) history can provide valuable insights.
The climate crisis is not only imminent, but in some respects is already here. As the environmental effects of human-induced climate change become more evident, so too do the political, social and economic ramifications of the strategies adopted to combat them. Larry Lohmann’s central argument in this excellent critique of carbon trading is that the trading mechanisms at the heart of the Kyoto Protocol not only fail to address the climate crisis, but also produce new forms of exploitation and inequality that tend to perpetuate colonial-style relationships between the global North and South.

Despite the conversational tone and dialogical structure, this is a meticulously researched and referenced book that progresses from densely packed theoretical arguments to empirical examples. The inclusion of an index might help readers negotiate what is often quite dense material.

Beginning from the premise that avoiding catastrophic climate change will require leaving most of the remaining fossil fuels in the ground, Lohmann convincingly argues that the carbon trading mechanisms enshrined in the Kyoto Protocol and the EU’s Emissions Trading Scheme are unequal to this task. This is fundamentally because emissions trading is about organis-
methane from the Bisasar waste dump in Durban, South Africa. This has drawn fierce opposition from local residents and environmentalists, such as Sajida Khan, whose personal struggle tragically ended with her death in July 2007 from the cancer she attributed to the dump’s carcinogenic emissions. The complex and multifaceted story of Bisasar is handled sensitively by Lohmann, who allows space for multiple perspectives – including the support for the project from groups living in the adjacent Kennedy Road informal settlement.

In contrast, the Kuyasa housing project in Cape Town was awarded the ‘Gold Standard’ for CDM projects that are deemed to be highly environmentally and socially sustainable. The project retrofitted low-cost Reconstruction and Development Programme homes in Khayelitsha township with insulation, energy efficient lighting and solar water heaters. Lohmann’s critique of such attempts at certification as marginal is justifiable within his broader argument, and he shows that the Kuyasa project was primarily a one-off public sector investment which was ‘virtually incompatible’ with CDM as it currently operates (p. 297). However, rather than entirely rejecting such efforts at certification as Lohmann does (pp. 182–184), perhaps they might offer some possibility of a more socially and environmentally sustainable form of carbon trading, especially if the price of carbon credits rises and there is pressure from activists and civil society for ‘Gold Standard’ credits to become the norm rather than the exception.

Broadly, however, the critique of carbon trading as a ‘market fix’ – the myth that calculating risks and efficiencies will bypass tough political struggles and decisions – is spot on. As Lohmann notes, ‘markets transform and centralise coercion in certain ways; they do not get rid of it’ (p. 342). Trading carbon is not the only, nor even the most obvious option, we are reminded, and large-scale public works, the shifting of subsidies, conventional regulation, green taxes and legal action are all presented as alternatives. In the end his demolition of the notion of trading our way out of the climate crisis is so compelling, and the alternatives he offers so familiar, that it is almost possible to lose sight of quite how radical and important this contribution is.


In most African countries, students inhabit a contradictory class position. A good example would be the students at the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) who feature prominently in this study. Until the end of the 1990s, students received a grant which was perfectly adequate to cover living expenses, accommodation and remittances back home. In 1995, the grant was five times higher than the annual salary of a teacher with a high school diploma. In 1998, students at UZ took part in a heroic struggle to defend the principle of a grant, against government plans to replace it with a loan. Despite their defeat, a loan is little hardship in a society characterised by hyper-inflation. Since 1998, a greater concern has in fact been the need to maintain the grant at a living rate, against a backdrop of cuts to the public sector. The physical fabric of the university has been allowed to rot in the same period. A library which was a national treasure has been subject to widespread petty theft. Students, who were far above the average (in terms of wealth, prospects and cultural capital) remain privileged, but the extent of their privilege is significantly eroded.

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The relative decline of student privilege has not stopped student activists and former student activists from playing a prominent role in social protests. Indeed, where the economic decline has been most marked – as in the DRC or Zimbabwe – students and ex-students have been most likely to be found at the head of opposition movements. Zimbabwe forms a useful case study, not merely for the part played in the Movement for Democratic Change by former student militants including Tendai Biti and Arthur Mutambara, but also for the serious attempt made by students (well documented in Zeilig’s book) to link their campaigns to those of workers and the urban poor, especially during Zimbabwe’s *biennio rosso* of 1996–1998.

Our moment is not that of 1968. The world is not full of protesting students, claiming to speak on behalf of the nation, or still less on behalf of the oppressed generally. Yet, where regimes have decayed, and protest coalitions have formed to challenge them, a prominent part is played, invariably, by students and former students.

Zeilig’s second case study is the mobilisation principally at the University of Cheikh Anta Diop in Senegal that lasted from 1999 to 2004. Campaigns included a national student strike (February–April 1999), protests against the printing of fake education cards in the run up to the contested Presidential elections of 2000, a strike calling for an increase in the student grant (February 2000), protests against increases in university entrance fees (January–February 2001), and further mobilisations in February 2001, following the killing of a student demonstrator Balla Gaye. In the aftermath of the killing, the students’ main economic demands were conceded.

Zeilig quotes one student, Jean-Claude Kongo, as a spokesman for this generation of protesters:

> If you think how few members of society actually gain access to university in Senegal ... students are privileged; they are in a better position to help and ultimately control the nation. But every student I know has the problem of money although students are here for themselves and for society in general. Materially they certainly aren’t a privileged class, that’s not possible. I know a student with a scholarship who can’t live at the university but has to live in the suburbs. The price of transport, accommodation, everything, I know two students who committed suicide because life was impossible for them.

In the final chapter of his book, Zeilig gives a range of examples, from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria and elsewhere to back up the central arguments of his book: that there is still such a thing as a student intelligentsia, and that despite the poverty of many African campuses, the roots of student radicalism still lie to some extent in a sense of privilege. It is the position of the student as a member of an elite that allows her or him to speak on behalf of the nation or the world. Student activism, he concludes, can be recharged as a result of the anti-capitalist mobilisations that have taken place elsewhere in the world, including notably Seattle and Genoa.

This is a valuable study; certainly, the events Zeilig documents in Zimbabwe (being so out of kilter with the clichés about that country, which are endlessly reported in the global press) deserved to be much more widely known.
Woods has produced an outstanding explanation of the origins, development and growth of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs). The text is thorough, thoughtful, articulate, dense and balanced. She indicates that these organisations (together with aid and global firms) are the face of globalisation in the Third World. She presents a synthetic work – this is not meant to belittle the account, because she employs a remarkable 23-page bibliography. These analyses index a vital understanding of the extant publications on the IFIs and their commentators; all this has been augmented by some 22 interviews. Woods is an Oxford Fellow and Economist. Her book begins on a critical note by indicating that these IFIs have received fault-finding comment from both the left and right as they have been at the forefront of the integration of the world into a single economy. The operations of these organisations are somewhat complex in that they are influenced by powerful governments, their own bureaucracy of mainly professional economists, and their relationships with borrowing governments. As she indicates: ‘This book is about the relationship between political power, economists, and borrowing governments in the work of the IMF and the World Bank . . . The greatest success . . . has been as globalizers’ (p. 2). The tools have been trade, money, investment and capital. Here, she examines their creation and evolution; their definition of missions; how they interact with borrowing countries; and their actions are interpreted in great detail with the concrete examples of Mexico and Russia.

She recounts their funding, the historical evolution, the influence of the US, the pressures of the Cold War and their tools. The debt crisis is explained, as is the rise of the Washington Consensus and structural adjustment. As the book recounts the complex interventions in Mexico and Russia, the hidden messages are the massive set of publications of these organisations and the influence of their vocabulary.

However, although the book is excellent at what it does, a scholar of Africa will be extremely disquieted. The clue to this is in the title ‘Globalizers’ and in the chapter ‘Mission Unaccomplished in Africa’. What is actually taking place in Africa is the other side of the coin – the incorporation of Africa, with profound and negative consequences for its countries, regions and people. Accompanying this globalisation is the unalterable mindset of the IFIs, the author and much of the referenced literature: neo-liberalism (there are some critics cited, but where are writers such as Susan George and Colin Leys?). Woods does address the negative effects of the IFIs, but only in a partial sense; the thrust of the text is from the position of the IFIs (although she addresses conditionality and the Washington Consensus). Most of the publications referenced are from the IFIs or those of the same mindset (for example, only one ROAPE article is noted). The Bank and Fund champion the market, a subservient and weakened state, and privatisation; Africa needs to be lifted out of poverty, experience economic growth, and have development occur; they say this, but their programmes lead to devastation (from SAPs to HIPCbs)! The IFIs treat only with countries; but what of the AU (continent) or ECOWAS (regions) or African citizens whose world has fallen apart with SAPs?

I have a great difficulty in separating my concern with the IFIs and Woods’ text, but it is because Woods views these agencies as bringing the ‘correct’ economics into a part of the world where economics blends with politics and
culture in a ‘holistic union’. To underline my concern is the issue of currency devaluation (one of the conditionalities of most IFI programmes) about which the text is silent. Such devaluation may be ‘correct’ to economists in righting these African economies, but the resulting price increases are destroying the lives of Africa’s citizens.

The great disappointments are the chapters 6 and 7. In chapter 6, ‘Mission Unaccomplished in Africa’, she indicates that the programmes of the IFIs in Africa with conditionality, the weakening of the state and privatisation have been failures, that the continent continues to wallow in debt, and that most states are kleptocratic. Rather than debate a solution to the debt crises, in much of the chapter the history of the IFIs in Africa is recounted, with national illustrations. There is some critical comment on the negative effects, but it is buried in the voluminous detail. As she indicates: ‘In practice, there was little modification to the overall approach of the Fund and Bank’ (p.150). Programmes were rendered more humane with ‘participation’, ‘ownership’, and the HIPC programme, but the mindset of neo-liberalism remains unchanged.

The reader hopes that the answer resides in chapter 7: ‘Reforming the IMF and World Bank’; after all there is a great need for a ‘global development agency’ to foster development, relieve debt and return Africa to the world economy. Instead, the difficulties facing these organisations are recounted, and the solution is more of the same (but with better implementation and soothing rhetoric this time). We learn of the funding crisis, and the solution is internal reform of these organisations – but there is no mention of addressing Africa’s crises.

Woods’ text is put aside with mixed feelings. On a positive note, if the reader’s quest is to understand the inner workings and histories of the World Bank and IMF, this is a well-written and thorough account. However, it offers no solution to Africa’s economic crisis except more of the same but with a soothing vocabulary!


In February 2008, mineworkers at Chambishi Copper Smelter (CCS) went on strike demanding a rise in their salaries. According to reports, workers were paid K291,000 (US$80) per month and demanded salaries of K800,000 (US$219). When the demand was not met, the workers became violent and riotous. In the process, one Chinese and two Zambian workers sustained severe injuries, and there was extensive destruction of mine property, infrastructure, as well as Chinese workers’ hostels. The riot ended only after the intervention of riot police, and the strike was met with mixed reactions. Mike Mulongoti, Minister of Information and Broadcasting Services and the chief government spokesman, stated in an interview that ‘the workers may have genuine reasons but then it might be difficult to sympathise with them because they have damaged company property’. He further stated ‘As a government, we don’t condone such destructive behaviour’. The Permanent Secretary for the Copperbelt Province, Jennipher Musonda, who rushed to the scene condemned the workers for damaging company property, stating that:

management would take action against the ring leaders once they were identified as

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the ones who led the violence. What has happened is shameful, but as government, we would like to assure the Chinese people and Government of our continued support and that their investment is protected.

The leadership of the National Union of Mines and Allied workers (NUMAW), a breakaway union from the Mine Workers Union of Zambia, joined government in condemning the violence. The result was the dismissal of 500 workers, even though some have subsequently been reinstated, and the focus is now on a few deemed to be the ring leaders. Following the dismissals, Joshua Mutisa, Kalulushi District Commissioner, commented that ‘the workers’ behaviour deserves the kind of punishment which has been meted on them’.

The above scenario contextualises Miles Larmer’s book, where he sets out to demonstrate the relationship between the development of the labour movement and politics in post-colonial societies. Although the author does review the developments of labour movements elsewhere, the focus is on Zambia. The author contends that some analysts have portrayed a generally conflictual relationship between progressive nationalism on the one hand and apolitical, privileged and reactionary trade unionism on the other (p. 2). Larmer challenges this view, stating that mine workers have always used their privileged position in the economy as leverage for improved conditions of work. The privileged position stems from the centrality of the mines in the Zambian economy, and over time mineworkers have come to realise the importance of their labour in ensuring the success of the copper industry and, through it, national development. Larmer also points out that it is erroneous to think of the mineworkers as a single homogenous unit that has thought and acted uniformly in their struggles. Instead, they are a highly differentiated grouping, where conflicts within the mineworkers’ union have led to formation of new unions within the mining industry.

As the author rightly points out, ‘politically informed divisions’ between rank-and-file members, local union officials and national leaders have occurred since the mineworkers union was founded in the early 1950’s’ (p. 4). Differences have arisen from conflicting perspectives regarding the appropriate political role for the union in a post-colonial African context, reflecting the differing interests of the union members and leaders.

These differences are exemplified by the strike action at Chambeshi Copper Smelter, where the general membership decided to go on strike, disregarding the pleas of their national leadership whom they regard as compromised. The political leadership and the union leaders have always expected the union members to support the programmes of government. Union leaders have always stated that they will work with the government in power. However, the government privatisation programme has put many jobs at risk and has contributed greatly to the decline in wages. Naturally, the workers are not in favour of the privatisation programme, blaming it for the erosion of their standards of living. Thus, from time to time they organise strikes in defiance of their leadership. That is why in the case of the Chambeshi strike the political and union leadership was quick to condemn the strike which they regarded as an action retarding development. However, the core of the problem in the mining industry is the low salaries paid by the Chinese owners who apparently have the support of the Zambian Government. The action taken by the mineworkers and the reaction of the union leadership shows the heterogeneous nature of the grouping called mineworkers. The strike action at Chambeshi also shows how solidarity among the mineworkers has weakened. In days past, the strike at Chambeshi would have been reinforced by workers from other mines, but the fragmented nature of contemporary unionism prevents
this. Today, it is not uncommon to find workers in the same mine represented by two or more unions. There are also other factors that have contributed to the weakening of the mineworkers’ sense of solidarity: the reduction in employment levels brought about by privatisation, the increase in the number of mine owners, and the resulting differences in remuneration are all factors that have contributed to the weakened sense of solidarity (p. 203).

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Omeje situates his argument within an analysis of Nigeria’s rentier economy, where the high stakes of the oil industry determine the interests and actions of the various stakeholders. While this is a useful framing, the book’s conceptual and theoretical framework is perhaps not as tight and consistent as one might have hoped for, but much of what follows is nevertheless interesting and important reading. After a useful chapter outlining the historical and institutional context of the oil conflict, Omeje turns to an investigation of the security policies and strategies of the three biggest oil companies operating in Nigeria, namely Shell, ExxonMobil and ChevronTexaco. What emerges from these three chapters is a clear sense
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With the collapse of the autocratic regime of Siad Barre at the beginning of 1991, Somaliland declared the restoration of the sovereignty it had momentarily enjoyed in 1960. With that declaration, the territory embarked on a remarkable journey that has encompassed a succession of peace conferences together with popular elections for local government, the presidency and parliament, preceded by a referendum on the adoption of a constitution.

Operating with a miniscule annual budget that has tended to sit within a range of US$20–30 million a year, the state has gradually been able to consolidate its position, while stability has permitted rapid growth in a remittance-fuelled economy. Given the paucity of government resources, exacerbated by the severe restrictions imposed by non-recognition on access to donor aid and concessory credit through international financial institutions, stability and state consolidation have evidently been enabled largely through popular tolerance rather than imposition on a reluctant populace.

While Somaliland’s story is in many ways an encouraging one, it would be dangerous to ignore both context and shortcomings. Indeed, Bradbury brings depth to his review through his demonstrable understanding of the rich social, cultural and political history of the area, as well as his thoughtful examination of the faults and challenges that have marked each of the phases in that process over the past 17 years.

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A further set of risks arises from internal politics. Fundamental constitutional incongruities remain unaddressed and the Guurti or upper house of Parliament still lacks any agreed system for the appointment or election of members. The government is accused of corruption, the Judiciary remains patently dependent on the Executive, and the House ofRepresentatives struggles to establish itself as a viable balance to presidential power. Faced with immediate and, in some instances, fundamental challenges to the continued institutionalisation of what has been described as a ‘hybrid’ system of democracy combining elements of Somali tradition with the institutions of representative nation-state democracy, Bradbury’s book provides a valuable background.

There are times when Bradbury’s conclusions seem somewhat timid given the compelling account he provides of progress to date. His equivocation is most evident when he is addressing the contentious issue of Somaliland’s quest for international recognition. He rather mildly suggests that ‘... greater diplomatic creativity and international acceptance of alternative formulations of state governance may prove necessary’ (p. 245, italics
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Nevertheless, *Becoming Somaliland* provides a well written and carefully researched background to an area that has long received far less attention than it deserves. With international interest in Somalia so transparently focused on the security interests of neighbours and rich nations at the expense of the much more immediate and genuine needs of Somalis, the book introduces a welcome engagement with the people and politics of an area whose rich contemporary (and older) history can provide valuable insights.
The climate crisis is not only imminent, but in some respects is already here. As the environmental effects of human-induced climate change become more evident, so too do the political, social and economic ramifications of the strategies adopted to combat them. Larry Lohmann’s central argument in this excellent critique of carbon trading is that the trading mechanisms at the heart of the Kyoto Protocol not only fail to address the climate crisis, but also produce new forms of exploitation and inequality that tend to perpetuate colonial-style relationships between the global North and South.

Despite the conversational tone and dialogical structure, this is a meticulously researched and referenced book that progresses from densely packed theoretical arguments to empirical examples. The inclusion of an index might help readers negotiate what is often quite dense material.

Beginning from the premise that avoiding catastrophic climate change will require leaving most of the remaining fossil fuels in the ground, Lohmann convincingly argues that the carbon trading mechanisms enshrined in the Kyoto Protocol and the EU’s Emissions Trading Scheme are unequal to this task. This is fundamentally because emissions trading is about organising pollution more efficiently, rather than eliminating it. Lohmann traces the history of this rationality from the US cap-and-trade schemes for sulphur dioxide, lead and nitrogen oxides through to contemporary carbon trading schemes. The claim by advocates that trading reduces pollution more efficiently than conventional regulation is interrogated: what exactly is made efficient, and for whom? Lohmann observes that ‘if a market makes it easier for companies to put their pollution anywhere they want, it will wind up on the doorsteps of the poor and less powerful’ (p. 122). Even the price mechanism at the heart of carbon trading relies more on hope than on sound science when it assumes that carbon absorption rates, baseline emissions and alternative scenarios can be precisely quantified and traded. Situations characterised by uncertainty, ignorance and indeterminacy cannot always be translated into calculable risk.

The practical pitfalls of carbon trading are explored through accounts of specific projects for offsetting emissions through investments in carbon sinks or alternative technologies abroad, such as under Kyoto’s Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). Drawing on the work of other researchers and journalists, Lohmann shows how tree plantations in Uganda, for example, not only failed to achieve anywhere near the projected carbon ‘savings’, but also exploited local authorities and displaced rural communities. Some of these examples are rather brief and raise more questions than they answer, but what is lost in depth is gained in breadth.

One of the more in-depth examples focuses on a World Bank project to earn carbon credits by capturing and burning
methane from the Bisasar waste dump in Durban, South Africa. This has drawn fierce opposition from local residents and environmentalists, such as Sajida Khan, whose personal struggle tragically ended with her death in July 2007 from the cancer she attributed to the dump’s carcinogenic emissions. The complex and multifaceted story of Bisasar is handled sensitively by Lohmann, who allows space for multiple perspectives – including the support for the project from groups living in the adjacent Kennedy Road informal settlement.

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Broadly, however, the critique of carbon trading as a ‘market fix’ – the myth that calculating risks and efficiencies will bypass tough political struggles and decisions – is spot on. As Lohmann notes, ‘markets transform and centralise coercion in certain ways; they do not get rid of it’ (p. 342). Trading carbon is not the only, nor even the most obvious option, we are reminded, and large-scale public works, the shifting of subsidies, conventional regulation, green taxes and legal action are all presented as alternatives. In the end his demolition of the notion of trading our way out of the climate crisis is so compelling, and the alternatives he offers so familiar, that it is almost possible to lose sight of quite how radical and important this contribution is.


In most African countries, students inhabit a contradictory class position. A good example would be the students at the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) who feature prominently in this study. Until the end of the 1990s, students received a grant which was perfectly adequate to cover living expenses, accommodation and remittances back home. In 1995, the grant was five times higher than the annual salary of a teacher with a high school diploma. In 1998, students at UZ took part in a heroic struggle to defend the principle of a grant, against government plans to replace it with a loan. Despite their defeat, a loan is little hardship in a society characterised by hyper-inflation. Since 1998, a greater concern has in fact been the need to maintain the grant at a living rate, against a backdrop of cuts to the public sector. The physical fabric of the university has been allowed to rot in the same period. A library which was a national treasure has been subject to widespread petty theft. Students, who were far above the average (in terms of wealth, prospects and cultural capital) remain privileged, but the extent of their privilege is significantly eroded.

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The relative decline of student privilege has not stopped student activists and former student activists from playing a prominent role in social protests. Indeed, where the economic decline has been most marked – as in the DRC or Zimbabwe – students and ex-students have been most likely to be found at the head of opposition movements. Zimbabwe forms a useful case study, not merely for the part played in the Movement for Democratic Change by former student militants including Tendai Biti and Arthur Mutambara, but also for the serious attempt made by students (well documented in Zeilig’s book) to link their campaigns to those of workers and the urban poor, especially during Zimbabwe’s biennio rosso of 1996–1998.

Our moment is not that of 1968. The world is not full of protesting students, claiming to speak on behalf of the nation, or still less on behalf of the oppressed generally. Yet, where regimes have decayed, and protest coalitions have formed to challenge them, a prominent part is played, invariably, by students and former students.

Zeilig’s second case study is the mobilisation principally at the University of Cheikh Anta Diop in Senegal that lasted from 1999 to 2004. Campaigns included a national student strike (February–April 1999), protests against the printing of fake education cards in the run up to the contested Presidential elections of 2000, a strike calling for an increase in the student grant (February 2000), protests against increases in university entrance fees (January–February 2001), and further mobilisations in February 2001, following the killing of a student demonstrator Balla Gaye. In the aftermath of the killing, the students’ main economic demands were conceded.

Zeilig quotes one student, Jean-Claude Kongo, as a spokesman for this generation of protesters:

If you think how few members of society actually gain access to university in Senegal ... students are privileged; they are in a better position to help and ultimately control the nation. But every student I know has the problem of money although students are here for themselves and for society in general. Materially they certainly aren't a privileged class, that's not possible. I know a student with a scholarship who can't live at the university but has to live in the suburbs. The price of transport, accommodation, everything, I know two students who committed suicide because life was impossible for them.

In the final chapter of his book, Zeilig gives a range of examples, from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria and elsewhere to back up the central arguments of his book: that there is still such a thing as a student intelligentsia, and that despite the poverty of many African campuses, the roots of student radicalism still lie to some extent in a sense of privilege. It is the position of the student as a member of an elite that allows her or him to speak on behalf of the nation or the world. Student activism, he concludes, can be recharged as a result of the anti-capitalist mobilisations that have taken place elsewhere in the world, including notably Seattle and Genoa.

This is a valuable study; certainly, the events Zeilig documents in Zimbabwe (being so out of kilter with the clichés about that country, which are endlessly reported in the global press) deserved to be much more widely known.
Woods has produced an outstanding explanation of the origins, development and growth of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs). The text is thorough, thoughtful, articulate, dense and balanced. She indicates that these organisations (together with aid and global firms) are the face of globalisation in the Third World. She presents a synthetic work – this is not meant to belittle the account, because she employs a remarkable 23-page bibliography. These analyses index a vital understanding of the extant publications on the IFIs and their commentators; all this has been augmented by some 22 interviews.

Woods is an Oxford Fellow and Economist. Her book begins on a critical note by indicating that these IFIs have received fault-finding comment from both the left and right as they have been at the forefront of the integration of the world into a single economy. The operations of these organisations are somewhat complex in that they are influenced by powerful governments, their own bureaucracy of mainly professional economists, and their relationships with borrowing governments. As she indicates: ‘This book is about the relationship between political power, economists, and borrowing governments in the work of the IMF and the World Bank . . . The greatest success . . . has been as globalizers’ (p. 2). The tools have been trade, money, investment and capital. Here, she examines their creation and evolution; their definition of missions; how they interact with borrowing countries; and their actions are interpreted in great detail with the concrete examples of Mexico and Russia.

She recounts their funding, the historical evolution, the influence of the US, the pressures of the Cold War and their tools. The debt crisis is explained, as is the rise of the Washington Consensus and structural adjustment. As the book recounts the complex interventions in Mexico and Russia, the hidden messages are the massive set of publications of these organisations and the influence of their vocabulary.

However, although the book is excellent at what it does, a scholar of Africa will be extremely disquieted. The clue to this is in the title ‘Globalizers’ and in the chapter ‘Mission Unaccomplished in Africa’. What is actually taking place in Africa is the other side of the coin – the incorporation of Africa, with profound and negative consequences for its countries, regions and people. Accompanying this globalisation is the unalterable mindset of the IFIs, the author and much of the referenced literature: neo-liberalism (there are some critics cited, but where are writers such as Susan George and Colin Leys?).

Woods does address the negative effects of the IFIs, but only in a partial sense; the thrust of the text is from the position of the IFIs (although she addresses conditionality and the Washington Consensus). Most of the publications referenced are from the IFIs or those of the same mindset (for example, only one ROAPE article is noted). The Bank and Fund champion the market, a subservient and weakened state, and privatisation; Africa needs to be lifted out of poverty, experience economic growth, and have development occur; they say this, but their programmes lead to devastation (from SAPs to HIPCs)! The IFIs treat only with countries; but what of the AU (continent) or ECOWAS (regions) or African citizens whose world has fallen apart with SAPs?

I have a great difficulty in separating my concern with the IFIs and Woods’ text, but it is because Woods views these agencies as bringing the ‘correct’ economics into a part of the world where economics blends with politics and
culture in a ‘holistic union’. To underline my concern is the issue of currency devaluation (one of the conditionalities of most IFI programmes) about which the text is silent. Such devaluation may be ‘correct’ to economists in righting these African economies, but the resulting price increases are destroying the lives of Africa’s citizens.

The great disappointments are the chapters 6 and 7. In chapter 6, ‘Mission Unaccomplished in Africa’, she indicates that the programmes of the IFIs in Africa with conditionality, the weakening of the state and privatisation have been failures, that the continent continues to wallow in debt, and that most states are kleptocratic. Rather than debate a solution to the debt crises, in much of the chapter the history of the IFIs in Africa is recounted, with national illustrations. There is some critical comment on the negative effects, but it is buried in the voluminous detail. As she indicates: ‘In practice, there was little modification to the overall approach of the Fund and Bank’ (p.150). Programmes were rendered more humane with ‘participation’, ‘ownership’, and the HIPC programme, but the mindset of neo-liberalism remains unchanged.

The reader hopes that the answer resides in chapter 7: ‘Reforming the IMF and World Bank’; after all there is a great need for a ‘global development agency’ to foster development, relieve debt and return Africa to the world economy. Instead, the difficulties facing these organisations are recounted, and the solution is more of the same (but with better implementation and soothing rhetoric this time). We learn of the funding crisis, and the solution is internal reform of these organisations – but there is no mention of addressing Africa’s crises.

Woods’ text is put aside with mixed feelings. On a positive note, if the reader’s quest is to understand the inner workings and histories of the World Bank and IMF, this is a well-written and thorough account. However, it offers no solution to Africa’s economic crisis except more of the same but with a soothing vocabulary!


In February 2008, mineworkers at Chambishi Copper Smelter (CCS) went on strike demanding a rise in their salaries. According to reports, workers were paid K291,000 (US$80) per month and demanded salaries of K800,000 (US$219). When the demand was not met, the workers became violent and riotous. In the process, one Chinese and two Zambian workers sustained severe injuries, and there was extensive destruction of mine property, infrastructure, as well as Chinese workers’ hostels. The riot ended only after the intervention of riot police, and the strike was met with mixed reactions. Mike Mulongoti, Minister of Information and Broadcasting Services and the chief government spokesman, stated in an interview that ‘the workers may have genuine reasons but then it might be difficult to sympathise with them because they have damaged company property’. He further stated ‘As a government, we don’t condone such destructive behaviour’. The Permanent Secretary for the Copperbelt Province, Jennipher Musonda, who rushed to the scene condemned the workers for damaging company property, stating that:

management would take action against the ring leaders once they were identified as
the ones who led the violence. What has happened is shameful, but as government, we would like to assure the Chinese people and Government of our continued support and that their investment is protected.

The leadership of the National Union of Mines and Allied workers (NUMAW), a breakaway union from the Mine Workers Union of Zambia, joined government in condemning the violence. The result was the dismissal of 500 workers, even though some have subsequently been reinstated, and the focus is now on a few deemed to be the ring leaders. Following the dismissals, Joshua Mutisa, Kalulushi District Commissioner, commented that ‘the workers’ behaviour deserves the kind of punishment which has been meted on them’.

The above scenario contextualises Miles Larmer’s book, where he sets out to demonstrate the relationship between the development of the labour movement and politics in post-colonial societies. Although the author does review the developments of labour movements elsewhere, the focus is on Zambia. The author contends that some analysts have portrayed a generally conflictual relationship between progressive nationalism on the one hand and apolitical, privileged and reactionary trade unionism on the other (p. 2). Larmer challenges this view, stating that mine workers have always used their privileged position in the economy as leverage for improved conditions of work. The privileged position stems from the centrality of the mines in the Zambian economy, and over time mineworkers have come to realise the importance of their labour in ensuring the success of the copper industry and, through it, national development. Larmer also points out that it is erroneous to think of the mineworkers as a single homogenous unit that has thought and acted uniformly in their struggles. Instead, they are a highly differentiated grouping, where conflicts within the mineworkers’ union have led to formation of new unions within the mining industry.

As the author rightly points out, ‘politically informed divisions’ between rank-and-file members, local union officials and national leaders have occurred since the mineworkers union was founded in the early 1950’s’ (p. 4). Differences have arisen from conflicting perspectives regarding the appropriate political role for the union in a post-colonial African context, reflecting the differing interests of the union members and leaders.

These differences are exemplified by the strike action at Chambeshi Copper Smelter, where the general membership decided to go on strike, disregarding the pleas of their national leadership whom they regard as compromised. The political leadership and the union leaders have always expected the union members to support the programmes of government. Union leaders have always stated that they will work with the government in power. However, the government privatisation programme has put many jobs at risk and has contributed greatly to the decline in wages. Naturally, the workers are not in favour of the privatisation programme, blaming it for the erosion of their standards of living. Thus, from time to time they organise strikes in defiance of their leadership. That is why in the case of the Chambeshi strike the political and union leadership was quick to condemn the strike which they regarded as an action retarding development. However, the core of the problem in the mining industry is the low salaries paid by the Chinese owners who apparently have the support of the Zambian Government. The action taken by the mineworkers and the reaction of the union leadership shows the heterogeneous nature of the grouping called mineworkers. The strike action at Chambeshi also shows how solidarity among the mineworkers has weakened. In days past, the strike at Chambeshi would have been reinforced by workers from other mines, but the fragmented nature of contemporary unionism prevents...
this. Today, it is not uncommon to find workers in the same mine represented by two or more unions. There are also other factors that have contributed to the weakening of the mineworkers’ sense of solidarity: the reduction in employment levels brought about by privatisation, the increase in the number of mine owners, and the resulting differences in remuneration are all factors that have contributed to the weakened sense of solidarity (p. 203).

Larmer’s book raises most of these issues, making it an interesting and informative read. The book has six major chapters. Chapter one describes in a historical context the role of the mineworkers in Zambia and places the analysis within the wider study of labour in Africa, while chapter two discusses the role of the mine workers in political change in Northern Rhodesia and Zambia. Chapters three to five present the major findings of the study, while chapter six studies the developments in Zambia after 1991. The main finding in the book is that the major conflicts in Zambia’s copper mines since independence took place over wages and living conditions, in particular the ‘social wage’ (p. 202).

This book should be read by all who would like to learn about the development of the labour movement in Zambia and how through history the movement’s leadership has been compromised by either offers of position within government or access to highly placed government offices. However, the workers on the ground still continue to defend their basic interests and as a consequence they have been assumed to be apolitical or simply reactionary.


In discussions of the conflict in the Niger Delta, portrayals of the Nigerian state as a puppet of transnational oil companies abound. The dependency of the economy on oil has led to a widespread perception that the Nigerian federal state has no power, and that in effect the oil companies, and most notably Shell, are for all intents and purposes the country’s governing power. It is this view of an intimate and hegemonic alliance between the oil companies and the state elite that is the target of Kenneth Omeje’s analysis. While recognising that there is some value to the hegemonic alliance theory, Omeje argues against the view that the oil companies are the dominant partner in the alliance. Instead, he suggests that the Nigerian state is in a position to privilege its own interests in the construction of oil legislation and policies. Given that the state is the majority shareholder in all oil companies active in the country and takes over 70 per cent of the total oil revenues from joint venture operations, it is, according to Omeje, far from powerless.

Omeje situates his argument within an analysis of Nigeria’s rentier economy, where the high stakes of the oil industry determine the interests and actions of the various stakeholders. While this is a useful framing, the book’s conceptual and theoretical framework is perhaps not as tight and consistent as one might have hoped for, but much of what follows is nevertheless interesting and important reading. After a useful chapter outlining the historical and institutional context of the oil conflict, Omeje turns to an investigation of the security policies and strategies of the three biggest oil companies operating in Nigeria, namely Shell, ExxonMobil and ChevronTexaco. What emerges from these three chapters is a clear sense
of how the transnational companies have come to the realisation that their former dependence on the repressive and often brutal state security apparatus is no longer in their interest.

While there are clear differences, the three companies have since the late 1990s increasingly turned towards various community development initiatives as their main security strategy. Omeje is careful not to overestimate the success or extent of these development efforts, nor does he avoid the fact that military oppression always remains an option for the companies. As such, he is in no way an apologist for the oil companies, but presents a nuanced critique which regards the move away from a sole reliance on military violence as a means of solving conflicts over oil resources as a significant change. The Nigerian state, by contrast, appears to have changed less, and is still predisposed towards military violence against local oil protests. While the Niger Delta Development Committee signals some intent towards development and redistribution on behalf of the federal government, Omeje describes the agency as ‘reprehensively elitist, dictatorial, exclusivist, incomprehensive and non-beneficiary oriented’ (p. 175). Moreover, the development efforts of the federal government are contradicted by the individual Niger Delta States and the local governments, which despite considerably higher revenues from oil, have more or less abandoned any pretence towards development initiatives. Omeje accordingly suggests that to a certain extent, the range of development functions performed by the oil companies repositions them as the de facto government or quasi state in the oil region and that local authorities are content to abdicate this responsibility (p. 173).

The Nigerian state, Omeje concludes, is primarily promoting ‘the economic and material well-being of the dominant rentier elites’ (p.160). The interests of transnational oil companies are coincidental, and hence, the state cannot be regarded as the subservient partner in the oil relationship. What remains a constant, however, is the exclusion of the majority of people in the oil bearing communities from any benefits from oil extraction. For Omeje, the solution for a more peaceful and inclusive Niger Delta lies in a comprehensive conflict resolution and security reform framework. While well-meaning, the suggested framework lacks a solid political analysis of how the state and the oil companies can be made to change their ways, pinning its hopes on the actions of ‘global civil society’. However, it would be wholly unfair to dismiss this book on the basis of not providing an adequate ‘solution’ to the conflicts in the Niger Delta; that is clearly a highly difficult task and Omeje’s book is a helpful step on the way.


In Becoming Somaliland, Bradbury provides a meticulous background to the emergence of the self-styled, but internationally unrecognised, Republic of Somaliland and what he describes as a state ‘rooted in a popular consciousness and embedded in society rather than imposed from above’ (p. 242). As a part of the defunct Democratic Republic of Somalia, widely considered the foremost example of a failed state, such a remarkable exception to a dismal perception is assuredly worthy of close examination. That so much international effort on Somali state-building continues to adhere to the view that state-formation can be introduced through the templates of Western aid delivery when Somalis in Somaliland have proven them-
selves so much more successful at the task suggests an unforgivable ignorance of the more positive developments in the Somali territories.

With the collapse of the autocratic regime of Siad Barre at the beginning of 1991, Somaliland declared the restoration of the sovereignty it had momentarily enjoyed in 1960. With that declaration, the territory embarked on a remarkable journey that has encompassed a succession of peace conferences together with popular elections for local government, the presidency and parliament, preceded by a referendum on the adoption of a constitution.

Operating with a miniscule annual budget that has tended to sit within a range of US$20–30 million a year, the state has gradually been able to consolidate its position, while stability has permitted rapid growth in a remittance-fuelled economy. Given the paucity of government resources, exacerbated by the severe restrictions imposed by non-recognition on access to donor aid and concessionary credit through international financial institutions, stability and state consolidation have evidently been enabled largely through popular tolerance rather than imposition on a reluctant populace.

While Somaliland’s story is in many ways an encouraging one, it would be dangerous to ignore both context and shortcomings. Indeed, Bradbury brings depth to his review through his demonstrable understanding of the rich social, cultural and political history of the area, as well as his thoughtful examination of the faults and challenges that have marked each of the phases in that process over the past 17 years.

At the time of writing, Somaliland is attempting to complete an ambitious voter registration programme (the first since the run-up to the 1969 election in Somalia, and the first population count of any kind since the 1975 census), and is scheduled to hold a second presidential election at the end of September 2009. Voter registration was briefly suspended when three suicide bombers detonated their explosives in the compounds of the President, the UNDP and the Ethiopian representative. Although not immediately claimed by any group, the bombings were timed to coincide with a smaller attack in the Puntland port city of Bosasso, and seem likely to have been designed to demonstrate the ability of groups opposed to the Ethiopian presence and influence in Somali territories to operate throughout the erstwhile Democratic Republic. This act graphically illustrates the challenge to the nascent democracy afforded by those who oppose Somaliland for political or religious reasons.

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In contrast, the Kuyasa housing project in Cape Town was awarded the ‘Gold Standard’ for CDM projects that are deemed to be highly environmentally and socially sustainable. The project retrofitted low-cost Reconstruction and Development Programme homes in Khayelitsha township with insulation, energy efficient lighting and solar water heaters. Lohmann’s critique of such attempts at certification as marginal is justifiable within his broader argument, and he shows that the Kuyasa project was primarily a one-off public sector investment which was ‘virtually incompatible’ with CDM as it currently operates (p. 297). However, rather than entirely rejecting such efforts at certification as Lohmann does (pp. 182–184), perhaps they might offer some possibility of a more socially and environmentally sustainable form of carbon trading, especially if the price of carbon credits rises and there is pressure from activists and civil society for ‘Gold Standard’ credits to become the norm rather than the exception.

Broadly, however, the critique of carbon trading as a ‘market fix’ – the myth that calculating risks and efficiencies will bypass tough political struggles and decisions – is spot on. As Lohmann notes, ‘markets transform and centralise coercion in certain ways; they do not get rid of it’ (p. 342). Trading carbon is not the only, nor even the most obvious option, we are reminded, and large-scale public works, the shifting of subsidies, conventional regulation, green taxes and legal action are all presented as alternatives. In the end his demolition of the notion of trading our way out of the climate crisis is so compelling, and the alternatives he offers so familiar, that it is almost possible to lose sight of quite how radical and important this contribution is.
The relative decline of student privilege has not stopped student activists and former student activists from playing a prominent role in social protests. Indeed, where the economic decline has been most marked – as in the DRC or Zimbabwe – students and ex-students have been most likely to be found at the head of opposition movements. Zimbabwe forms a useful case study, not merely for the part played in the Movement for Democratic Change by former student militants including Tendai Biti and Arthur Mutambara, but also for the serious attempt made by students (well documented in Zeilig’s book) to link their campaigns to those of workers and the urban poor, especially during Zimbabwe’s biennio rosso of 1996–1998.

Our moment is not that of 1968. The world is not full of protesting students, claiming to speak on behalf of the nation, or still less on behalf of the oppressed generally. Yet, where regimes have decayed, and protest coalitions have formed to challenge them, a prominent part is played, invariably, by students and former students.

Zeilig’s second case study is the mobilisation principally at the University of Cheikh Anta Diop in Senegal that lasted from 1999 to 2004. Campaigns included a national student strike (February–April 1999), protests against the printing of fake education cards in the run up to the contested Presidential elections of 2000, a strike calling for an increase in the student grant (February 2000), protests against increases in university entrance fees (January–February 2001), and further mobilisations in February 2001, following the killing of a student demonstrator Balla Gaye. In the aftermath of the killing, the students’ main economic demands were conceded.

Zeilig quotes one student, Jean-Claude Kongo, as a spokesman for this generation of protesters:

“If you think how few members of society actually gain access to university in Senegal ... students are privileged; they are in a better position to help and ultimately control the nation. But every student I know has the problem of money although students are here for themselves and for society in general. Materially they certainly aren’t a privileged class, that’s not possible. I know a student with a scholarship who can’t live at the university but has to live in the suburbs. The price of transport, accommodation, everything, I know two students who committed suicide because life was impossible for them.”

In the final chapter of his book, Zeilig gives a range of examples, from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria and elsewhere to back up the central arguments of his book: that there is still such a thing as a student intelligentsia, and that despite the poverty of many African campuses, the roots of student radicalism still lie to some extent in a sense of privilege. It is the position of the student as a member of an elite that allows her or him to speak on behalf of the nation or the world. Student activism, he concludes, can be recharged as a result of the anti-capitalist mobilisations that have taken place elsewhere in the world, including notably Seattle and Genoa.

This is a valuable study; certainly, the events Zeilig documents in Zimbabwe (being so out of kilter with the clichés about that country, which are endlessly reported in the global press) deserved to be much more widely known.
Woods has produced an outstanding explanation of the origins, development and growth of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs). The text is thorough, thoughtful, articulate, dense and balanced. She indicates that these organisations (together with aid and global firms) are the face of globalisation in the Third World. She presents a synthetic work – this is not meant to belittle the account, because she employs a remarkable 23-page bibliography. These analyses index a vital understanding of the extant publications on the IFIs and their commentators; all this has been augmented by some 22 interviews.

Woods is an Oxford Fellow and Economist. Her book begins on a critical note by indicating that these IFIs have received fault-finding comment from both the left and right as they have been at the forefront of the integration of the world into a single economy. The operations of these organisations are somewhat complex in that they are influenced by powerful governments, their own bureaucracy of mainly professional economists, and their relationships with borrowing governments. As she indicates: ‘This book is about the relationship between political power, economists, and borrowing governments in the work of the IMF and the World Bank . . . The greatest success . . . has been as globalizers’ (p. 2). The tools have been trade, money, investment and capital. Here, she examines their creation and evolution; their definition of missions; how they interact with borrowing countries; and their actions are interpreted in great detail with the concrete examples of Mexico and Russia.

She recounts their funding, the historical evolution, the influence of the US, the pressures of the Cold War and their tools. The debt crisis is explained, as is the rise of the Washington Consensus and structural adjustment. As the book recounts the complex interventions in Mexico and Russia, the hidden messages are the massive set of publications of these organisations and the influence of their vocabulary.

However, although the book is excellent at what it does, a scholar of Africa will be extremely disquieted. The clue to this is in the title ‘Globalizers’ and in the chapter ‘Mission Unaccomplished in Africa’. What is actually taking place in Africa is the other side of the coin – the incorporation of Africa, with profound and negative consequences for its countries, regions and people. Accompanying this globalisation is the unalterable mindset of the IFIs, the author and much of the referenced literature: neo-liberalism (there are some critics cited, but where are writers such as Susan George and Colin Leys?).

Woods does address the negative effects of the IFIs, but only in a partial sense; the thrust of the text is from the position of the IFIs (although she addresses conditionality and the Washington Consensus). Most of the publications referenced are from the IFIs or those of the same mindset (for example, only one ROAPE article is noted). The Bank and Fund champion the market, a subservient and weakened state, and privatisation; Africa needs to be lifted out of poverty, experience economic growth, and have development occur; they say this, but their programmes lead to devastation (from SAPs to HIPCs)! The IFIs treat only with countries; but what of the AU (continent) or ECOWAS (regions) or African citizens whose world has fallen apart with SAPs?

I have a great difficulty in separating my concern with the IFIs and Woods’ text, but it is because Woods views these agencies as bringing the ‘correct’ economics into a part of the world where economics blends with politics and
culture in a ‘holistic union’. To underline my concern is the issue of currency devaluation (one of the conditionalities of most IFI programmes) about which the text is silent. Such devaluation may be ‘correct’ to economists in righting these African economies, but the resulting price increases are destroying the lives of Africa’s citizens.

The great disappointments are the chapters 6 and 7. In chapter 6, ‘Mission Unaccomplished in Africa’, she indicates that the programmes of the IFIs in Africa with conditionality, the weakening of the state and privatisation have been failures, that the continent continues to wallow in debt, and that most states are kleptocratic. Rather than debate a solution to the debt crises, in much of the chapter the history of the IFIs in Africa is recounted, with national illustrations. There is some critical comment on the negative effects, but it is buried in the voluminous detail. As she indicates: ‘In practice, there was little modification to the overall approach of the Fund and Bank’ (p.150). Programmes were rendered more humane with ‘participation’, ‘ownership’, and the HIPC programme, but the mindset of neo-liberalism remains unchanged.

The reader hopes that the answer resides in chapter 7: ‘Reforming the IMF and World Bank’; after all there is a great need for a ‘global development agency’ to foster development, relieve debt and return Africa to the world economy. Instead, the difficulties facing these organisations are recounted, and the solution is more of the same (but with better implementation and soothing rhetoric this time). We learn of the funding crisis, and the solution is internal reform of these organisations – but there is no mention of addressing Africa’s crises.

Woods’ text is put aside with mixed feelings. On a positive note, if the reader’s quest is to understand the inner workings and histories of the World Bank and IMF, this is a well-written and thorough account. However, it offers no solution to Africa’s economic crisis except more of the same but with a soothing vocabulary!

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In February 2008, mineworkers at Chambishi Copper Smelter (CCS) went on strike demanding a rise in their salaries. According to reports, workers were paid K291,000 (US$80) per month and demanded salaries of K800,000 (US$219). When the demand was not met, the workers became violent and riotous. In the process, one Chinese and two Zambian workers sustained severe injuries, and there was extensive destruction of mine property, infrastructure, as well as Chinese workers’ hostels. The riot ended only after the intervention of riot police, and the strike was met with mixed reactions. Mike Mulongoti, Minister of Information and Broadcasting Services and the chief government spokesman, stated in an interview that ‘the workers may have genuine reasons but then it might be difficult to sympathise with them because they have damaged company property’. He further stated ‘As a government, we don’t condone such destructive behaviour’. The Permanent Secretary for the Copperbelt Province, Jennipher Musonda, who rushed to the scene condemned the workers for damaging company property, stating that:

*management would take action against the ring leaders once they were identified as*
the ones who led the violence. What has happened is shameful, but as government, we would like to assure the Chinese people and Government of our continued support and that their investment is protected.

The leadership of the National Union of Mines and Allied workers (NUMAW), a breakaway union from the Mine Workers Union of Zambia, joined government in condemning the violence. The result was the dismissal of 500 workers, even though some have subsequently been reinstated, and the focus is now on a few deemed to be the ring leaders. Following the dismissals, Joshua Mutisa, Kalulushi District Commissioner, commented that ‘the workers’ behaviour deserves the kind of punishment which has been meted on them’.

The above scenario contextualises Miles Larmer’s book, where he sets out to demonstrate the relationship between the development of the labour movement and politics in post-colonial societies. Although the author does review the developments of labour movements elsewhere, the focus is on Zambia. The author contends that some analysts have portrayed a generally conflictual relationship between progressive nationalism on the one hand and apolitical, privileged and reactionary trade unionism on the other (p. 2). Larmer challenges this view, stating that mine workers have always used their privileged position in the economy as leverage for improved conditions of work. The privileged position stems from the centrality of the mines in the Zambian economy, and over time mineworkers have come to realise the importance of their labour in ensuring the success of the copper industry and, through it, national development. Larmer also points out that it is erroneous to think of the mineworkers as a single homogenous unit that has thought and acted uniformly in their struggles. Instead, they are a highly differentiated grouping, where conflicts within the mineworkers’ union have led to formation of new unions within the mining industry.

As the author rightly points out, ‘politically informed divisions between rank-and-file members, local union officials and national leaders have occurred since the mineworkers union was founded in the early 1950’s’ (p. 4). Differences have arisen from conflicting perspectives regarding the appropriate political role for the union in a post-colonial African context, reflecting the differing interests of the union members and leaders.

These differences are exemplified by the strike action at Chambeshi Copper Smelter, where the general membership decided to go on strike, disregarding the pleas of their national leadership whom they regard as compromised. The political leadership and the union leaders have always expected the union members to support the programmes of government. Union leaders have always stated that they will work with the government in power. However, the government privatisation programme has put many jobs at risk and has contributed greatly to the decline in wages. Naturally, the workers are not in favour of the privatisation programme, blaming it for the erosion of their standards of living. Thus, from time to time they organise strikes in defiance of their leadership. That is why in the case of the Chambeshi strike the political and union leadership was quick to condemn the strike which they regarded as an action retarding development. However, the core of the problem in the mining industry is the low salaries paid by the Chinese owners who apparently have the support of the Zambian Government. The action taken by the mineworkers and the reaction of the union leadership shows the heterogeneous nature of the grouping called mineworkers. The strike action at Chambeshi also shows how solidarity among the mineworkers has weakened. In days past, the strike at Chambeshi would have been reinforced by workers from other mines, but the fragmented nature of contemporary unionism prevents
this. Today, it is not uncommon to find workers in the same mine represented by two or more unions. There are also other factors that have contributed to the weakening of the mineworkers’ sense of solidarity: the reduction in employment levels brought about by privatisation, the increase in the number of mine owners, and the resulting differences in remuneration are all factors that have contributed to the weakened sense of solidarity (p. 203).

Larmer’s book raises most of these issues, making it an interesting and informative read. The book has six major chapters. Chapter one describes in a historical context the role of the mineworkers in Zambia and places the analysis within the wider study of labour in Africa, while chapter two discusses the role of the mine workers in political change in Northern Rhodesia and Zambia. Chapters three to five present the major findings of the study, while chapter six studies the developments in Zambia after 1991. The main finding in the book is that the major conflicts in Zambia’s copper mines since independence took place over wages and living conditions, in particular the ‘social wage’ (p. 202).

This book should be read by all who would like to learn about the development of the labour movement in Zambia and how through history the movement’s leadership has been compromised by either offers of position within government or access to highly placed government offices. However, the workers on the ground still continue to defend their basic interests and as a consequence they have been assumed to be apolitical or simply reactionary.


In discussions of the conflict in the Niger Delta, portrayals of the Nigerian state as a puppet of transnational oil companies abound. The dependency of the economy on oil has led to a widespread perception that the Nigerian federal state has no power, and that in effect the oil companies, and most notably Shell, are for all intents and purposes the country’s governing power. It is this view of an intimate and hegemonic alliance between the oil companies and the state elite that is the target of Kenneth Omeje’s analysis. While recognising that there is some value to the hegemonic alliance theory, Omeje argues against the view that the oil companies are the dominant partner in the alliance. Instead, he suggests that the Nigerian state is in a position to privilege its own interests in the construction of oil legislation and policies. Given that the state is the majority shareholder in all oil companies active in the country and takes over 70 per cent of the total oil revenues from joint venture operations, it is, according to Omeje, far from powerless.

Omeje situates his argument within an analysis of Nigeria’s rentier economy, where the high stakes of the oil industry determine the interests and actions of the various stakeholders. While this is a useful framing, the book’s conceptual and theoretical framework is perhaps not as tight and consistent as one might have hoped for, but much of what follows is nevertheless interesting and important reading. After a useful chapter outlining the historical and institutional context of the oil conflict, Omeje turns to an investigation of the security policies and strategies of the three biggest oil companies operating in Nigeria, namely Shell, ExxonMobil and ChevronTexaco. What emerges from these three chapters is a clear sense
of how the transnational companies have come to the realisation that their former dependence on the repressive and often brutal state security apparatus is no longer in their interest.

While there are clear differences, the three companies have since the late 1990s increasingly turned towards various community development initiatives as their main security strategy. Omeje is careful not to overestimate the success or extent of these development efforts, nor does he avoid the fact that military oppression always remains an option for the companies. As such, he is in no way an apologist for the oil companies, but presents a nuanced critique which regards the move away from a sole reliance on military violence as a means of solving conflicts over oil resources as a significant change.

The Nigerian state, by contrast, appears to have changed less, and is still predisposed towards military violence against local oil protests. While the Niger Delta Development Committee signals some intent towards development and redistribution on behalf of the federal government, Omeje describes the agency as ‘reprehensively elitist, dictatorial, exclusivist, incomprehensive and non-beneficiary oriented’ (p. 175). Moreover, the development efforts of the federal government are contradicted by the individual Niger Delta States and the local governments, which despite considerably higher revenues from oil, have more or less abandoned any pretence towards development initiatives. Omeje accordingly suggests that to a certain extent, the range of development functions performed by the oil companies repositions them as the de facto government or quasi state in the oil region and that local authorities are content to abdicate this responsibility (p. 173).

The Nigerian state, Omeje concludes, is primarily promoting ‘the economic and material well-being of the dominant rentier elites’ (p.160). The interests of transnational oil companies are coincidental, and hence, the state cannot be regarded as the subservient partner in the oil relationship. What remains a constant, however, is the exclusion of the majority of people in the oil bearing communities from any benefits from oil extraction. For Omeje, the solution for a more peaceful and inclusive Niger Delta lies in a comprehensive conflict resolution and security reform framework. While well-meaning, the suggested framework lacks a solid political analysis of how the state and the oil companies can be made to change their ways, pinning its hopes on the actions of ‘global civil society’. However, it would be wholly unfair to dismiss this book on the basis of not providing an adequate ‘solution’ to the conflicts in the Niger Delta; that is clearly a highly difficult task and Omeje’s book is a helpful step on the way.


In Becoming Somaliland, Bradbury provides a meticulous background to the emergence of the self-styled, but internationally unrecognised, Republic of Somaliland and what he describes as a state ‘rooted in a popular consciousness and embedded in society rather than imposed from above’ (p. 242). As a part of the defunct Democratic Republic of Somalia, widely considered the foremost example of a failed state, such a remarkable exception to a dismal perception is assuredly worthy of close examination. That so much international effort on Somali state-building continues to adhere to the view that state-formation can be introduced through the templates of Western aid delivery when Somalis in Somaliland have proven them-
selves so much more successful at the task suggests an unforgivable ignorance of the more positive developments in the Somali territories.

With the collapse of the autocratic regime of Siad Barre at the beginning of 1991, Somaliland declared the restoration of the sovereignty it had momentarily enjoyed in 1960. With that declaration, the territory embarked on a remarkable journey that has encompassed a succession of peace conferences together with popular elections for local government, the presidency and parliament, preceded by a referendum on the adoption of a constitution.

Operating with a miniscule annual budget that has tended to sit within a range of US$20–30 million a year, the state has gradually been able to consolidate its position, while stability has permitted rapid growth in a remittance-fuelled economy. Given the paucity of government resources, exacerbated by the severe restrictions imposed by non-recognition on access to donor aid and concessionary credit through international financial institutions, stability and state consolidation have evidently been enabled largely through popular tolerance rather than imposition on a reluctant populace.

While Somaliland’s story is in many ways an encouraging one, it would be dangerous to ignore both context and shortcomings. Indeed, Bradbury brings depth to his review through his demonstrable understanding of the rich social, cultural and political history of the area, as well as his thoughtful examination of the faults and challenges that have marked each of the phases in that process over the past 17 years.

At the time of writing, Somaliland is attempting to complete an ambitious voter registration programme (the first since the run-up to the 1969 election in Somalia, and the first population count of any kind since the 1975 census), and is scheduled to hold a second presidential election at the end of September 2009. Voter registration was briefly suspended when three suicide bombers detonated their explosives in the compounds of the President, the UNDP and the Ethiopian representative. Although not immediately claimed by any group, the bombings were timed to coincide with a smaller attack in the Puntland port city of Bosasso, and seem likely to have been designed to demonstrate the ability of groups opposed to the Ethiopian presence and influence in Somali territories to operate throughout the erstwhile Democratic Republic. This act graphically illustrates the challenge to the nascent democracy afforded by those who oppose Somaliland for political or religious reasons.

A further set of risks arises from internal politics. Fundamental constitutional incongruities remain unaddressed and the Guurti or upper house of Parliament still lacks any agreed system for the appointment or election of members. The government is accused of corruption, the Judiciary remains patently dependent on the Executive, and the House of Representatives struggles to establish itself as a viable balance to presidential power. Faced with immediate and, in some instances, fundamental challenges to the continued institutionalisation of what has been described as a ‘hybrid’ system of democracy combining elements of Somali tradition with the institutions of representative nation-state democracy, Bradbury’s book provides a valuable background.

There are times when Bradbury’s conclusions seem somewhat timid given the compelling account he provides of progress to date. His equivocation is most evident when he is addressing the contentious issue of Somaliland’s quest for international recognition. He rather mildly suggests that ‘… greater diplomatic creativity and international acceptance of alternative formulations of state governance may prove necessary’ (p. 245, italics...
added), when his preceding argument presents a compelling case for the urgency of such flexibility. While still not willing to commit himself to a more specific set of recommendations, however, two pages later he does betray the depth of his disillusion with the efforts of donors in the political arena when he describes the state-building frameworks of donors as ‘simplistic if not delusional’ (p. 247). Bradbury’s long association with Somali issues, and his excellent description of the process of peace- and state-building in Somaliland put him in an ideal position to offer positive suggestions on a more appropriate basis for engagement in the area, and their lack represents the book’s primary, if understandable, deficiency.

Nevertheless, Becoming Somaliland provides a well written and carefully researched background to an area that has long received far less attention than it deserves. With international interest in Somalia so transparently focused on the security interests of neighbours and rich nations at the expense of the much more immediate and genuine needs of Somalis, the book introduces a welcome engagement with the people and politics of an area whose rich contemporary (and older) history can provide valuable insights.
Conflict and Peace in the Horn of Africa

Lionel Cliffe, Roy Love & Kjetil Tronvoll

Introduction: Global Shifts

ROAPE has commissioned several special issues on the Horn of Africa in the last 25 years. The first in 1984 (No. 30), ‘Conflict in the Horn of Africa’, started off by characterising the hallmark of the region as ‘manifold, violent social conflict . . .’ Although by 1996 (No. 70), ‘The Horn of Africa’ looked forward hopefully to peace dividends emanating from the successful end to liberation wars within the region, and from the end of the Cold War which had been fuelling conflicts in this part of Africa, new conflicts within Somalia had already ruptured the state there. By 2003, the ‘Horn of Conflict’ (No. 97) emphasised the centrality of violence to the region’s political economy.

This general labelling is just as appropriate to the present issue of ROAPE, which has been built up on an initial foundation of a set of articles on Eritrea and Ethiopia in collaboration with Kjetil Tronvoll and the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights at the University of Oslo. Although the contributions focus on the major confrontation between Ethiopia and Eritrea, this is only one of many dimensions of conflict in the region. Indeed, one central characteristic of the Horn is that analysis can start with any conflict situation – whether it be Eritrea and Ethiopia, Somalia, Darfur or Northern Uganda – and map out a trail linking to other countries and their internal or bilateral conflicts.

Some of the older conflicts have taken on changing forms and patterns, and new ones have emerged. Relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia are becoming more fraught but not yet violent, in turn impacting on most of their neighbours. Somalia is marked by a more polarised confrontation than the multiplicity of clan and other militia fighting suggests, and has been the scene of direct intervention by Ethiopia and indirect by the US; Eritrea was also involved in skirmishes with Djibouti in 2008 (Tadesse 2008). In one of the three major cleavages in Sudan, Darfur continues to involve open fighting. Peace initiatives, another characteristic of war zones, have abounded. Some are in place, if precariously (that between North and South in Sudan and on that country’s Eastern Front, in post-election Kenya); others have been unravelling (for example, in Somalia); and others have not yet been delivered or are being set in train (in Northern Uganda, Darfur).

Any speculation of what might be in store in any region of the world at the end of the decade is forced to start by recognising how the world is undergoing shifts which may be as profound as anything seen in half a century, as a result of two coincidental events: the credit crunch in the global economy and the election of Barack Obama as US President from 2009. So it is inevitable that this Editorial begins by starting to tease out the possible implications for Africa and especially for the Horn of these two unfolding events. Some of the commentaries by participants at the US African
Studies Association Conference that immediately followed the elections are included for the benefit of readers outside the US. These offer views on the state of the debate on development thinking and can thus be seen as embodying ‘advice’ to the incoming administration rather than attempting to speculate what changes might or might not be expected in US dealings with Africa.

With regard to the Horn of Africa specifically, key questions about possible Obama policies are suggested, particularly by Lyons on the region as a whole, and by Menkhaus on Somalia. Will the approach of the US, and Europe for that matter, to the region and any of its problems continue to be based centrally on the ‘global war on terror’ (GWOT)? The temptations for the US to use this ‘for-us-or-against-us’ formula are greater in the Horn than elsewhere in Africa, given a superficial view of some of the cleavages there, and the proximity to the Middle East. But that perspective has in fact dictated the US taking sides over conflicts in the Horn – in relation to Eritrea-Ethiopia, and the US backing of Ethiopian intervention in Somalia, for example, in ways that are counter-productive to the purposes of peace. Some early initiatives of the Barack administration suggest that the misguided notion of a GWOT might even be ditched by the new White House. An indication may lie in the critical comments of the concept by the British Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, while in Mumbai in January 2009, and in Barack Obama’s announcing plans for the closing down of Guantanamo Bay prison in his first week of office.

The doctrine of humanitarian intervention has been at the root of several interventions in the Horn: the original premise for US and UN actions in the 1990s in Somalia, and for peacekeeping missions and post-conflict rehabilitation in Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan before and since then. It has also helped shape the institutional mechanisms set up within the continent to handle the peace/security agenda. Thus, the regional body in the Horn, the Inter Governmental Agency for Development (IGAD), has been the main mechanism for pursuing peace agreements in Somalia and in the North-South Sudan war, and has done so by harnessing a range of international ‘partners’, while seeking to avoid being pushed out of the driving seat. The African Union (AU) has faced similar balancing acts in relation to Darfur and Somalia, where it has sent in peacekeeping missions. Diplomats associated with peace processes in Somalia, Sudan and Darfur have voiced concerns that ‘partners’ from the West have in fact hijacked agendas and dictated timing and tactics. But this formula of humanitarian intervention, with its view of riding to the aid of ‘victims’, does not always provide a close fit with local realities nor produce the intended results of peace and development.

The broad question of whether intervention can be justified, on humanitarian or other grounds, has to be faced. It is understandable to be shocked by massive and seemingly uncontrollable atrocities against civilians or severe repressive measures, but a small step to see them as ‘intolerable’ – as so many, even of those on the ‘left’, are doing in relation to Darfur, Somalia or Zimbabwe – and thus crying out for something to be done. But then there is the rub. By whom and by what means? Archbishop Tutu has just said it is time for ‘the West to step in’ in Zimbabwe. But who, operationally, is the ‘West’? Are they even willing? What has their track record of intervention been like? In the Horn it has been ‘mixed’ to say the least, as contributions to this issue bring out, and in the Somalia case counter-productive in ending violence or instituting any kind of governance. This is not a prescription for accepting the unacceptable, but recognition of the need for solutions devised and led from within Africa, in which international agencies and Western powers can contribute. This formula has been often enunciated in the Horn, but rarely followed completely.
It remains to be seen how far the change of administration in Washington leads to a reconsideration of policies based on the tired doctrines of the ‘GWOT’ and humanitarian intervention. Concretely this could open up new opportunities in the Horn. Might the US reopen a dialogue with Eritrea, which feels beleaguered, which may unlock the stalemate in the peace process with Ethiopia and dampen the proxy dimension of conflicts? The Eritrean President welcomed Obama’s victory and expressed a hope that US policy in the Horn of Africa would indeed ‘change’ with Obama in office, although it is unlikely that the US will drop Ethiopia as their main regional ‘partner’ even if events are no longer viewed through the prism of the ‘war on terror’. Another hope would be for there to be a shift in US strategy to Somalia, as an alternative to siding with the one set of warlords. The West seems to have played a decisive role in the resignation of the intransigent President Yusuf of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in late 2008. They seem to be giving backing to the new government set up in mid-February 2009, under President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, a former moderate leader of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), after parliament was expanded to include members of his moderate Islamist ARS (Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia). But will other interventions there be positive: greater resources for demobilisation and alternative livelihoods, or some recognition and support of Somaliland, for example?

We have been unable to assemble anything like the same coverage of the other scenario – speculation on the impact of the global credit crisis is clearly of even greater consequence and which indeed will shape and constrain the Obama impact. These limitations are not just to be measured in terms of fewer resources available for Africa, nor in whether there will be enough political will when it comes to operationalising good intentions, but very much to do with the objective process of weakened US clout in the world political economy. There seems to be a general recognition, including in policy-making circles in Washington even before Obama’s ascension, that its dictates are not decisive; other actors will be part of the equation, not least in the Horn of Africa. What is in store as a result of a global financial and economic crunch still in its early stages is even more opaque and complex than what might be in Obama’s mind, and thus difficult to fathom. Peter Lawrence provides a preliminary set of questions that must urgently and will for certain occupy the attention of contributors to this Review for the next decade. What his prioritisation of issues implies for this region are a reduction of remittances to countries, especially Somalia and Eritrea, that are especially reliant on them; a collapse in commodity prices that has been the main motor behind the boom in African economies, particularly in Sudan; the predicted decline in the flow of development aid is likely to mean in particular less available for any ‘peace dividends’, and thus in turn undermine existing agreements such as those between North and South in Sudan or the several in the throes of negotiation, in Darfur, Eastern Sudan, between Eritrea and both Ethiopia and Djibouti, and in Northern Uganda.

The Ethiopia-Eritrea Conflict as a Major Fulcrum

The Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict that started in 1998 with the border war has remained tense since the termination of the UN peacekeeping mission to Eritrea and Ethiopia (UNMEE) and the pull-out of all troops and observers during the summer of 2008. Eritrean and Ethiopian troops are only a few metres apart on certain sections of the border and some incidents of cross-border shootings have been reported. Otherwise the ‘war’ is currently fought by words and through proxies. The physical demarcation following the decision by the Eritrean Ethiopian Boundary Commission (EEBC) continues to be
in deadlock, with Eritrea rejecting any delegation or envoy that will ‘re-open’ the decision through new talks, while Ethiopia dismisses the virtual demarcation as ‘legal nonsense’, and is steadfast in its position not to accept demarcation directly as prescribed by EEBC. In a statement at the end of 2008, the Ethiopian Foreign Ministry noted that ‘the ball is in Eritrea’s court’ and that ‘Ethiopia may have reached the end of the road in terms of what can be expected of its contributions to peace’.  

At the time of writing it is difficult to foresee any developments – other than a regime change of one or both of the two protagonists – that may influence the two governments’ entrenched positions. It is also difficult to predict how Eritrea’s ongoing conflict with Djibouti and Ethiopia’s pull-out from Somalia will influence the dynamics of the Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict.

Economically, Ethiopia is more capable of weathering the current stalemate, while the Eritrean economy is stagnating, due in large part to the stalemate. However, it is unlikely that a popular uprising against the regime in Eritrea will be seen, given the omnipresent security system. It is possible that a regime change may emerge from within the middle-level military leadership, or as a consequence of a new all-out war with Ethiopia. Unfortunately, if President Isaias Afeworki is pushed sufficiently into a corner by foreign or domestic pressures then the latter may be the only solution for him to sustain his position.

In addition, Ethiopia has an interest in a continuation of the status quo, as it will continue to administer and occupy Badme, and the conflict may be used, there as in Eritrea, to further their political control in the country and region. But, if the Eritrean proxy war becomes too much a ‘nuisance’ for the Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) – and they obtain a solid international backing – they may take upon themselves the task to remove Isaias from power.

If civil society organisations are severely repressed in Eritrea it is interesting that there has been a parallel, albeit less complete, movement in Ethiopia. An important recent example of this is the new restrictive NGO legislation (Aalen and Tronvoll). The law also restricts the type of activities and projects a foreign NGO can undertake or support. *Inter alia*, it will be prohibited for foreign NGOs to engage in what often form part of their core activities: human rights; conflict resolution and reconciliation; citizenship and community development; and justice and law enforcement services. The measure may be a reaction to the monetary support received by the opposition during the 2005 elections from the (mostly US based) diaspora, and the fear among top EPRDF echelons of a foreign supported ‘velvet revolution’ removing them from power in 2010. The draft proclamation has received broad criticism internationally, as it will undermine or alter the work of more or less the whole civil society sector in the country – both ‘foreign’ and ‘domestic’.  

The activities of trades unions are similarly heavily constrained with many leaders being regularly intimidated and detained without trial, especially those of the Ethiopian Teachers Association (ITUC/CSI/IGB: 2008, Annual Survey of Violation of Trade Union Rights).

The post-2005 election process and the implementation of the 2008 local elections (postponed from 2006) offer disquieting signs on the future of liberal democracy in
Ethiopia. In 2008, state sponsored harassment and intimidation made it impossible for the opposition to register candidates, forcing the main opposition contenders to withdraw from the electoral race and producing a result in which only three of a possible 3.6 million local and by-election seats were taken by opposition candidates! A repeat of this in the general election of 2010 will eliminate any real alternatives for the Ethiopian electorate, only a symbolic vote to ‘re-confirm’ the power of the EPRDF. For many opponents of the government the re-arrest of UDJ President Birtukan Mideksa at the end of 2008 confirms their expectation of such an outcome and, as we go to press, official reports of arrests of plotters against the government accused of having links to the opposition group Ginbot7 add fuel to such an expectation. The more restrictive political space in the country may also push disaffected opponents, especially youth, towards support for the armed opposition groups. Yet Ethiopia’s critical position as a major mixed faith nation in the Horn, with broad Western sympathies, means international protests against repression in its domestic policies are muted and allows the government to dismiss them. This ignoring of worsening repression was reinforced in 2009 when Meles Zenawi’s personal international standing was still such as to have him invited by Gordon Brown, nominated by the AU, and as current chair of NEPAD, to attend the G20 March summit. In turn, this gives him a stature in dealing with the heads of state in Sudan and Somalia (having met both in the first four months of 2009) and in remaining intransigent towards Eritrea, and thus propels Ethiopia toward the position of ‘regional hegemon’ in the Horn, which may or may not assist in the gradual construction of some sort of regional stability.

Somalia: Rotting Corpse or Phoenix Awakening?

One specific arena where the antagonisms between Ethiopia and Eritrea spill over into ‘proxy wars’ is treated by Ken Menkhaus’ article, which both reminds readers of the origins and main dimensions of the 17 years of conflicts in Somalia, but also brings out the new and more global features of the new dynamics, and their even greater humanitarian toll. He sees external policies as having become more determinant – and their being misinformed and based on wrong calculations means they are even more drivers of conflict today. We might add that the US’ one-eyed concentration on the GWOT has specifically led to the same widespread rendition of ‘suspected terrorists’ as seen in other arenas of the world being replicated in and around Somalia (Chicago Tribune, 24 November 2008). Immediate prospects for peacemaking are further cast in doubt as a result of two further destabilising happenings as this issue goes to press. Any minimal authority that the TFG may have possessed was undermined by a major split within it, involving President Abdullahi Yousuf replacing the Prime Minister without the approval of parliament. Yousuf was blamed for this dangerous division by most of the TFG’s supporters, including Ethiopia, Western powers and the AU; even the usually cautious IGAD made a statement in December threatening sanctions unless the PM was restored. Eventually, under this pressure Yousuf himself resigned on 29 December 2008, the parliament was expanded to incorporate a component from the Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia (ARS), and a new President, formerly from the UIC, was chosen.

A second dramatic announcement came from Ethiopia, stating that they would withdraw their occupying forces by the end of 2008, as they did only a few weeks beyond that deadline. Even those, like us, who thought that the original intervention was ill-conceived and even counter-productive, have to recognise that the short-term consequences of withdrawal, in the absence of adequate AU and UN ‘peacekeeping’, and a
peace agreement that leaves out one major part (al Shabaab) of the former Islamic Courts Union (UIC), are likely to be a worsening of the instability in Somalia (although evidence in January 2009 is that al Shabaab is meeting more internal local resistance as the common enemy, Ethiopia, withdraws).

Two other immediate areas where the impact of the Eritrea-Ethiopia confrontation can be signalled for future attention are Somaliland and the Somali Region (Ogaden) of Ethiopia, both of which have been affected by the Ethiopian intervention in Somalia proper. One repercussion of the confrontation between the UIC and the forces of Ethiopia and the TFG in Somalia has been the spread of bombings in the latter part of 2008 into Puntland in the north-east and Somaliland to the north-west. These normally peaceful areas now face the threat of a wider expansion of the escalating violence in Somalia, fuelled as it is by outside intervention. This potential for undermining peace and stability in Somaliland has gone unnoticed in international media and in calculations of international actors, including the UN. Indeed, the world’s ultimate peacekeeper has a dismal record of ignoring and sometimes undermining the stability of Somaliland ever since its declaration of independence in 1991, as documented in Lewis’s new primer on Somalia (2008). Yet the process of an internally brokered peace agreement, constitution-making and state-building and Somaliland’s other considerable achievements in the political and social realms since the mid-1990s should be closely studied for its lessons for Somalia and the region as well as on its own terms. The book by Bradbury (2008), reviewed in this Issue, is especially welcome as it is the first overall evaluation in the English language of what Somaliland has accomplished, and what it offers to the region. That record cannot be ignored since it constitutes an exemplar of the other dimension of conflict: the search for peace – one that is indigenous, and thus a most powerful counter to the dismissive pessimism about the inevitability of violent conflict in the Horn.

The huge Somali Region of Ethiopia (administrative Region V) has clan connections with Somaliland, and through migration for grazing and trade, with contiguous parts of southern Somalia. It is not surprising that there have been knock-on effects there as a result of the intensification of, and shifts in, struggle in Somalia following the Ethiopian incursion in late 2006. Not only have there been displaced people coming into the region but the long-standing opposition of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) to the government in Addis Ababa, and the ‘low-level insurgency’ against it have flared up, which in turn have been fuelled by Eritrea. Repression by the Ethiopian forces has intensified through attempts to close the border and curtail cross-border trade in livestock and food and exports such as gum Arabic and khat, which have literally been a lifeline for the people of the Ogaden (Healy 2007). Accusations have been made (Human Rights Watch, 2008) that Ethiopian counter-insurgency has included collective punishments, the use of famine as a weapon and the indiscriminate extra-judicial killings of civilians. But after some months, the Ethiopian Minister of Foreign Affairs took the trouble to issue a 47-page refutation (26 November 2008) of the HRW Report. On the other hand, the HRW report was also criticised by ONLF. Some of the allegations had been substantiated by satellite images of the burning of villages in a report by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (12 June 2008). Whatever the impact of political measures on food insecurity and living conditions, they have been aggravated by drought and locust infestation, as well as food price increases and crashing of animal prices as people sought to dispose of livestock. But humanitarian efforts to alleviate the situation have also been political measures: UNHCR was asked to leave the Gode area (where refugees were coming in from Somalia proper), and food delivery
flights of the UN Humanitarian Air Service were suspended at the end of 2007. These political processes in Region V add up to one major element in the overall retreat into repression by the Ethiopian regime, which is highlighted in the Tronvoll and Aalen article.

Another dimension of the new patterns of conflict involving Somalia illustrates one reality of globalisation: that Africa is not always on the receiving end; initiatives from Africa can sometimes have a worldwide impact. We refer to the piracy business, which gradually built up unnoticed from a side-line for fishermen, some even suggesting it became a defensive mechanism against over-fishing by foreign fleets, into a major, well organised and financed business. Its impact on the 20 per cent of all global shipping going through the Gulf of Aden into and out of the Red Sea finally and dramatically captured world-wide publicity in 2008 with the capture of a massive oil tanker and an arms shipment, and led to alarmed calculations of the scale of its impact on global trade links and profitability. Suddenly there are fleets and protection task forces from Russia, EU, India, Canada, NATO and the notorious US-based private military firm, Blackwater (see ROAPE 118), all joining existing US Operations in the Red Sea, and even a maritime security patrol zone. Yet this fire power may not achieve much as it is constrained by the limited legal powers it has both under the International Law of the Sea, and by the absence of any law or law-enforcing state in coastal waters (see Leymarie 2008). Recent initiatives by international powers have seen them seeking a fig leaf of authorisation – from the Kenya Government which has taken court proceedings against pirates captured by foreign navies and attempts to get Somalia’s TFG to follow suit, to getting authorisation from regional states and the UN to conduct anti-piracy operations on land. How the pirate flotillas and their backers operate is set out by Leymarie and by Middleton (2008). But they are, in turn, linked back to internal Somali and regional political dynamics. Although the financier organisers are just warlords who have diversified, and reputedly have some links with the administration of Puntland which is the base of the controversial ex-President of the TFG, Abdullahi Yusuf, they seem to be in it for the money not the politics. However, various actors seek to take opportunistic advantage of the situation and efforts to interdict them: Puntland using it as a bid to get recognition, Somaliland offering port facilities for the operations, Eritrea making statements about pirated vessels ‘pillaging marine resources’ or engaging in their own illegal acts, giving some justification for piracy (quoted in Leymarie 2008).

Multiple Conflicts in Sudan

Many of the interactions that can be traced through a web, meshing the different countries of the Horn, lead in turn to the largest territory in the region, and in Africa, Sudan. The country has had to contend with a multiplicity of violent conflicts ever since Independence, which deserve close and continuing attention. The most dramatic in scale, between North and South, did reach some kind of denouement in 2005 with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) negotiated under the auspices of the (then) seven-country regional body, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). In general, the peace has held, despite taxing moments concerning the withdrawal of troops behind the North-South border, the definition of that border and now of the demarcation of population by the April 2008 Census, which is likely to be the basis for controversy because it will affect proportions of representation and of allocation of oil revenues, and publications of its results have so far been withheld. There have also been controversies about the borders, revenue allocation and future
status of those three territories, technically in the North, which were the subject of special agreements attached to the CPA – especially in the oil-rich area of Abyei where fighting broke out in mid-2008. As the dates for elections for a self-determination referendum in the South are beginning to hover in the near rather than the distant future, supposedly before July 2009, tensions will build and make the peaceable fulfilment of these provisions of the CPA more difficult. Among other determinants of that scenario will be the commitment, or lack of it, of those who signed up as guarantors of the implementation – including the US, UK and other Western and regional powers, and IGAD and the AU. Here it is worth pondering the implications of the presumed loss of direct political influence of the Christian right under a US Democrat administration, for their obsessive view of Sudan as a ‘crusade’ meant they were the most powerful lobby, insisting on Sudan and the situation of the South being a US priority concern. But whatever external investment and diplomacy is or is not forthcoming, peaceful implementation is constrained by the limitations inherent in the CPA itself. One that has long been recognised by most analysts is the fact that it is far from ‘Comprehensive’ – although Darfur and the several other conflicts and tensions in Sudan are connected, the Agreement does not deal with them, indeed, the lack of mechanisms for an overall democratisation in an accord between two authoritarian governing entities precludes solutions to other conflicts. Indeed, a major new area of tension has been building up in the province of South Khordofan, another ‘border’ area between North and South, and bordering Darfur. Less subject to comment has been the fact the CPA did not require a wholesale disarmament and demobilisation of the two armies, only of militias, although there was supposed to be ‘proportional down-sizing’ and a regrouping of forces across the North-South border, and the formation of some unified national military units. Eventually, 2008 saw the working out of a donor-funded package for demobilisation and reintegration in both North and South, although it is yet to be implemented. Perhaps most worrying for those inside and outside the country, who look forward to a resolution that retains a united Sudan, is the absence of any process of actual reconciliation between armies and peoples.

Meanwhile, a general peace formula to resolve the divisions in Darfur remains unrealised. A Peace Agreement was signed in 2006, but only by one of the four armed opposition movements, as well as the government. Most informed observers agree that the diplomatic methods of the West, imposing a sharp and arbitrary deadline for movements to sign up, was what precluded a really comprehensive agreement. Since then, despite a temporary cease-fire, recent reports from UN bodies offer the same picture, although on a reduced scale, of mass killings of civilians, forced displacement and systematic rape that were reported by the first investigations of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2003. There is little difference between accounts of what is happening, although analysts disagree about who or what circumstances must take the main blame, and there is major debate about what can be done to stop human rights violations and to make and keep peace.

In July 2008 the Prosecutor of the ICC recommended that a warrant be issued to hold the President of Sudan, Omar al-Bashir, for war crimes in Darfur. This initiative has evoked intense debate. A range of different views by informed specialists from Sudan and outside have been usefully brought together by the US Social Science Research Council in a summary of a blog debate they hosted (de Waal 2008). In terms of analysis of actual events, the debates are less about the terrible actions against people in Darfur, although the Government of Sudan (GoS) claims that the situation on the ground has improved, but more about how far the nature of the
conflict and the actual violations are solely attributable to GoS, acting in a consistent and orchestrated way. Some maintain scepticism about the pragmatic political value of the ICC issuing a warrant, on the grounds that it is a classic case of the demands of justice clashing with those of stability and peace (Justice Africa 2008). For those who see a realistic possibility of a comprehensive peace agreement, perhaps encouraged by diplomatic pressure, a beleaguered al-Bashir regime is unlikely to sign up. The AU in fact responded to the ICC Prosecutor’s application for a warrant by a resolution suggesting a postponement in considering it, in order to allow time for negotiations. Notwithstanding, the ICC endorsed the issuing of a warrant in March 2009, although, significantly, it rejected one of the three grounds in the Prosecutor’s recommendation, that of genocide. In response, the registration of 16 of the international NGOs providing aid in Darfur was revoked, fostering a wide range of criticism of the wisdom of the ICC action, or at least its timing. Others, of course, argue that pursuing the application will not only provide pressure, but also more broadly signal that not even a head of state is beyond prosecution for war crimes and human rights violations.

The Articles in this Issue

The starting point of this Issue is an extended account by Terence Lyons of the background to the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea which broke out in 1998, following which the failure to reach a resolution acceptable to each side has had a major impact on the entire Horn region. Lyons recounts events leading up to the conflict, examines the causes and the consequences, the latter particularly for Eritrea where the continuation of tensions with Ethiopia over the border demarcation justifies the prolongation of a severely authoritarian government, where political debate and dissent is heavily suppressed and, indeed, ‘criminalised’ (also characterised in the article by Reid as ‘the politics of silence’). Increased authoritarianism has also been evident in Ethiopia (examined in greater detail in the article by Aalen and Tronvoll), partly also in a drive to control and limit opposition which is often suspected of having links with armed groups supported by Eritrea. The disagreement over the border dispute, together with certain more fundamental underlying differences for which the border problem has become a highly emotive symbol, has also coloured each country’s approach to foreign policy, particularly in Somalia where their respective interventions overlie and contribute to the complex interplay of local factors. The consequence for that country is a veritable ‘witches brew’ in which

the intermeshing of domestic insecurities, interstate antagonisms, and global policies create regional ‘security complexes’ in which the security of each actor is intrinsically linked to the others (Lyons: this Issue).

Ethiopia’s entry into Somalia in late 2006 marked a significant change in regional dynamics and provided a gift to Asmara as it clearly diverted Ethiopian military resources from potential action at the disputed northern border with Eritrea, and made it easier to portray Ethiopia as perpetuating its historical imperialist ambitions in the region. It also identified Ethiopia as a US ally, and in opposition eyes, a proxy for the USA in supporting the weak puppet government of the TFG, hence raising the legitimacy of Eritrean support of the opposing Islamic movements, consistent with emerging diplomatic ties by Eritrea with Yemen, Sudan and Iraq while also conveniently supplying channels for support to armed opposition groups within Ethiopia such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and ONLF. However, although Ethiopia’s presence in Somalia identified it with US motives in seeking to pin down al-Qaeda
connections in that part of the world, Lyons is surely right (together with other observers such as Menkhaus, also in this Issue) in surmising that Ethiopia would probably have entered Somalia in any case, both in response to the directions in which the Islamic Courts appeared to be moving in late 2006, and in order to control incursions from Somali territory by the OLF and ONLF. The result is that Somalia has become an arena where bitter local rivals circle each other in the absence of any effective centralised state – where there is no monopoly of power in the classic sense, and where the conflicting interests of regional actors such as Ethiopia and Eritrea combine with the looming presence of the United States in its ‘war on terror’ (or ‘overseas contingency operations’) to create a vortex of forces and alliances the outcome of which, for the entire region, is highly unpredictable. Although Lyons also points to the lobbying significance of the Ethiopian and Eritrean diaspora communities, especially in the USA, and to US reservations in classifying Eritrean activities as ‘terrorist’ related, hence implying that doors are still open for negotiated solutions, he can only conclude that it is the local dynamics that are fundamental to any resolution of the many overlapping problems.

There then follow two articles that examine the Ethiopian position in more detail. In the first of these, Christopher Clapham places the policies and practices of the Tigra-yan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), which is the dominant element of the EPRDF, firmly in a tradition of centralised authoritarianism, having its roots in the monarchist structures of the highland regions of Amhara and Tigrai in the nineteenth century, which continued throughout much of the twentieth century under Haile Sellassie, and which remains manifest today despite the administrative decentralisation associated with the creation of a federalised state in 1991. The degree to which this legacy in itself is affecting the nature of the emerging modern state in Ethiopia is a matter of debate, but it cannot avoid reference to the ethnic variety of the peoples that were consolidated within the boundaries of what became the Ethiopia of today, and therefore to the practical imperatives, faced by any Ethiopian Government, of now holding together this mosaic of rival ‘nations’ where their various nationalisms are reinforced by ethnically-based federalism. This is the context in which Christopher Clapham chooses four key areas for an examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the TPLF. These are the internal arena of the regime, highlighting the isolated position of Meles and the TPLF within the top levels of government; the national arena, and the growing influence of opposition (albeit severely constrained) in the towns; the arena of ‘nationalities’ and the regional tensions created by ethnic federalism; and finally, the international arena, including Ethiopia’s activities in the wider Horn context. This thematic characterisation captures the essence of the (often self-gener-ated) constraints that channel the actions of the TPLF in the direction of ever increasing authoritarianism. Although personalities cannot explain everything, Clapham additionally makes the interesting point that, in contrast to Haile Sellassie for example, or even to Mengistu, Meles Zenawi is seldom seen in public and remains a distant figure to the masses of the population. One consequence of this is that there is very little drive from the top to promote a popular sense of ‘Ethiopian’ nationality, leaving ethnic rivalries and jealousies to fester and to seek outlets in opposition politics aligned to regional rather than national agendas.

The argument usually presented to the rest of the world by the Ethiopian Government is that ‘democracy’ is new to Ethiopia and involves a transition that has to be managed, if necessary by temporary authoritarian control over those deemed to be abusing their freedom to choose. Interestingly, although Clapham makes the point that the TPLF must ‘manage’ democratic transition peacefully if it is to sustain any long-term
legitimacy, the aftermath of the 2005 elections illustrates not simply a failure by the TPLF leadership to ‘manage’ without resort to violence, but also a failure to foresee the true nature of their vulnerability. This does not mean that the TPLF should be granted the benefit of the doubt about their intentions as this would be a concession belied by the pattern, tracked by Aalen and Tronvoll in the second article on Ethiopia, of a steady increase in the extent and nature of authoritarian state control, both before and after the 2005 elections. The series of alterations to the electoral law, restrictions on parliamentary rules, extension of political control down to kebele (smallest local government unit) level, expansion of governing party membership, the weakness of parliament, and the 2008 regulations on foreign funding of NGOs (especially those working in the area of human rights), all adds to public perceptions that the regime is concerned primarily with its own survival and even, in some quarters, that there is a hidden agenda of a ‘greater Tigrai’ being planned for the longer run. There can be no doubt of the fact that the situation is being managed, but the object of this ‘electoral authoritarianism’ points only in one direction, which is the continuation in power of the TPLF/EPRDP. The threats (perceived or actual) to the government which prompted this trend, the fears at the top which it exposes, and the ever increasing restrictions on political freedoms lead Aalen and Tronvoll to suggest, controversially, that the only effective means of opposition now available are increasingly those of armed resistance, apart from exile and diaspora campaigning.

Meanwhile, the dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea remains unresolved, which is a matter of less immediacy for Ethiopia than for Eritrea where the continued maintenance of a large standing army is creating a generation of disillusioned youth recruited for indefinite national service either as soldiers or as low paid civil employees. Although it is customary to present the situation as one of stalemate, it is not necessarily the case, as Reid argues in his article on Eritrea, that the perception of a ‘politics of silence’ in that country, induced by repression, does not mean that subtle and important shifts are not underway. In a series of interviews with, of necessity, un-named informants, Reid presents a picture of a society in waiting, but a society whose fear of any alternative in the short term has generated a resigned patience, tempered by residual respect for the struggles of the past, and hoping in due course for a peaceable transition to a new more liberal leadership.

Reid extends his analysis to the state as well as society, seeking to go beyond mere condemnation of its repressive character and understand its aims and strategies in its own terms. In this approach he tends to explain the authoritarianism as a control mechanism necessary to tackle immediate major problems, and thus to see a chink of light which might allow some future though limited reform. Reid is revealing about the operation of power today, showing that the distinctions between party, state and the presidency are fudged and the mechanisms of policy making are opaque – making his task of detecting its strategies more problematic. However, whatever the intention, the extensive militarisation of society, especially through national service and the education system, has produced a massive haemorrhaging of young people escaping to neighbouring countries and further afield (HRW 2009). For those who remain, disillusionment and resentment are damaging their respect for the generation who fought for independence and who apparently are unable to engage in political compromise.

Meanwhile, the Eritrean economy sits in the doldrums, dependent on the patience and tolerance of the extensive diaspora community and its remittances (and tax payments) while that of Ethiopia has proved more buoyant despite severe problems of food security in many parts of the country, but bolstered by international aid, favourable
export prices (coffee, khat, cut flowers), and the multiplier effects of road and buildings construction in and around Addis Ababa. A particular tragedy for both countries is the loss of the Eritrean port of Assab (in favour of Djibouti) as the main conduit for Ethiopia’s foreign trade, and thus as a major income earner for Eritrea. Although Djibouti and even Berbera in Somaliland have benefited from the continuing disagreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the same can certainly not be said of south-central Somalia.

Here the story is picked up in the article by Menkhaus in which the recent history of fluctuating coalitions, ever-dividing and regrouping militias, the dysfunctional and disconnected TFG, and the predictably counterproductive interventions of Ethiopia and the United States is illuminatingly summarised. He shows that the particular patterns of intervention by the UN (on humanitarian and state building grounds), by the USA (in its ‘war on terror’), and by a powerful ‘peacekeeping’ neighbour (to control its boundaries and the scope for regional dissent) have rebounded negatively on each of them in widespread anti-Westernism and anti-Ethiopianism, while at the same time actually deepening clan, ideological and sectarian divisions within the country, rendering it no nearer to a harmonious solution than before. The underlying explanation for this, according to Menkhaus, is that by misreading Somalia as a post-conflict scenario, these actors have invariably intervened via cooperation with the TFG, thus identifying themselves with its partisan composition, and in effect inflaming the situation.

By January 2009 Ethiopia had withdrawn from Mogadishu, having previously announced its intention to remove its troops by the end of 2008 – in part disillusioned by the failure of the TFG to cohere, in part hoping that divisions within the Islamic opposition increases the likelihood of a negotiated compromise outcome, and in part perhaps calculating that if a reclamation of power by some variant of the Islamic Courts Union emerges then it will be easier to contain from within Ethiopia. An indication that the Ethiopian Government plans to withdraw from Somalia in order to concentrate its military and administrative resources in its own Somali region is seen in the robust response which the government made to the reports by HRW of atrocities in the Ogaden section of the region. That the Ethiopian Government has countered with its own detailed ‘independent’ report (Press Statement, Ministry of Foreign Affairs 26 November 2008), which it has widely publicised, may not be merely window dressing but an indication that it sees the presence of federal troops in the region as a ‘long haul’ and thus that a ‘hearts and minds’ approach cannot be ignored if Somali irredentism is finally to be repelled.

In the remainder of the issue are two articles, not on the Horn, but the contents of which have relevance to future policy making in regions such as this when they emerge from prolonged conflict. One on Sierra Leone, by Castaneda, analyses how an externally driven concentration on macroeconomic post recovery stability can effectively sideline the pressing need at the local level for an equitable distribution of microeconomic support of a volume sufficient to pre-empt a return to violence driven by poverty and exclusion. The second is a timely reminder, by Thomas, on the continuing relevance of the contributions of earlier thinkers, in this case of Paulo Freire and the application of the broader implications of his ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’ to the way in which social and economic policy of the ANC in post-apartheid South Africa has been dictated by the interests of the newly emerging elite, and of how his approach can provide a schema for a more grassroots based construction of policy.
Endnotes


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Development in Africa: What is the Cutting Edge in Thinking and Policy?

Introduction

Elizabeth Schmidt & James H. Mittelman

In September 1958, the US African Studies Association (ASA) held its first annual meeting in Evanston, Illinois, just outside Chicago. Fifty years later, when the ASA reconvened in Chicago to celebrate this anniversary, Mayor Richard M. Daley proclaimed 9–16 November 2008 ‘African Week in Chicago’. He recognised the city’s ‘long history of involvement with Africa [and its] many African immigrant communities and influential centres of African Studies’. Chicago’s ties to Africa had received even greater attention one week earlier, when as many as 1 million people assembled in Chicago’s Grant Park to celebrate Illinois Senator Barack Obama’s historic election to the US presidency.

While an Obama presidency offers new hope for fundamental change in the United States and its relationship with the rest of the world, these hopes are dampened by sober realities, including a dearth of new thinking about the challenges that confront Africa today. The American economic crisis that helped to propel the Obama administration into power is dwarfed by the deepening crisis in Africa. Today, more than ever before, the failed development strategies and practices of the past must be re-evaluated. To mark the 50th anniversary of the ASA’s annual meetings, the ASA Board of Directors organised a plenary session to consider the current African development crisis and new approaches to its resolution. The core questions of the panel were: has development thinking in Africa reached an impasse? Has it failed to inform policy? Are there promising new initiatives? With the rise of globalisation, what is the mix of constraints and opportunities on the ground? What is the extent of policy space? What are the best practices in development in Africa?

While scholars and activists are generally adept at critiquing ideas and policies, particularly the ethnocentric and neoliberal frameworks that marginalise Africa, they are often less skilled at proposing alternatives to the dominant development paradigm. Yet it is not constructive merely to call for de-centring knowledge without mapping new avenues of inquiry. Nor is it productive to envisage social transformation without careful consideration of the power relations and strategies that would effect it. Failure to track the forces on the ground that might obstruct fundamental change would reduce this conversation to a utopian exercise. To avoid these pitfalls, scholars and policy makers must strive for a deeper understanding of historical context. They must be equally aware of the nuances of specific localities and the broader globalising processes. They must be attuned to evolving hierarchies of race, class, ethnicity, gender and religion. Only with such awareness can they produce alternative ideas about development that have the possibility of successful implementation.

Fantu Cheru argues that the post-1945 economic order and its free market
dogma are in deep crisis, exposing the hollowness of the first world development models that African countries have been instructed to emulate. As once peripheral countries such as China, India, Brazil and South Korea assert their influence over the capitalist core, the tyranny of received wisdom has fallen to the wayside. As challenges to Western imperial projects percolate up from below, there are new openings for the private sector, democratic activist states and civil society to transform African societies by initiating and implementing an ‘emancipatory national project’ that will distribute productive forces more equitably.

Aili Mari Tripp focuses on the post-Cold War merger of development and human rights discourses into a new rights-based approach that stresses economic, social and cultural rights, as well as civil and political rights. The result is a re-thinking of development, not only as a need, but as a fundamental human right. The rights-based approach has been adopted by a wide range of actors: movements of marginalised peoples, environmental, anti-poverty and human rights organisations, and by domestic non-governmental organisations and international agencies. Although generally optimistic about the new approach, Tripp offers a note of caution. Because the rights-based approach is supported by disparate groups with competing interests, the agenda can be manipulated in ways that contradict its purported mission.

James Mittelman holds that the ‘Washington Consensus’, which divorced economic reform from social policy, is now discredited. The emergence of China and India on Africa’s development scene, the availability of new resources from oil-producing countries, and the decline in dependence on the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, present new opportunities for rethinking development strategies and expanding policy space. Mittelman identifies six strategic points of engagement, or ‘levers’, to promote home-grown sol-

utions based on locally-produced knowledge – bolstered by learning from experiences beyond Africa. These levers are: to resuscitate the national project; resecuritise development; thrust out regionally; ease external constraints; spark creativity; and emphasise synergies.

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Development in Africa: The Imperial Project Versus the National Project and the Need for Policy Space

 Fantu Cheru

The question is not whether development in Africa has reached an impasse; there has never been much development to start with. What is normally accepted as ‘development’ in Africa has essentially been an imperial project, derived and financed by the dominant Western powers to serve Western needs. As our late colleague Claude Ake (1996, pp. 40, 118) observed: ‘It is not that development has failed in Africa. It has never got started … Because of exogeneity and its contradictions, Africa never had a development agenda – but a confusion of agendas.’ According to Ake, development theories were predicated upon an evolutionist vision that was based on earlier European capitalist development experience, and thus they tended to ignore the peculiarities of African countries and cultures. He then called upon all of us to ‘challenge and subvert’ the constraints of dominant and received disciplinary approaches and paradigms.

In more ways than not, the post-independence development model resembled the colonial development model, which stifled peasant autonomy and production. Development became something to be organised from above and from outside instead of a process of unleashing people’s energies for their self-improvement from below. Like the colonial system, neither participation nor accountability has been passed on to local structures, and consequently, the capacity of peasants and their local communities to initiate development autonomously on the basis of local reality was severely circumscribed. Under the guise of nation building, elite bureaucrats and party loyalists, far removed from the reality of life on the ground, began to dictate what peasants could and could not produce, at what price they should sell their outputs, and even where they should cultivate. All of these actions were justified by post-independence African governments on the grounds of advancing the national interest. Not only were these top-down development policies anti-peasant and anti-poor, but also even projects financed by the ‘new lords of poverty’ – the external donors – ended up marginalising the poor. The familiar cry from the poor became ‘Please don’t develop us!’

Have there been any promising initiatives in development in Africa at all? Yes, there are promising initiatives, but these are essentially resistance projects. The flag bearers of this new political renaissance are based in the church, the informal economy, ecology movements and human rights groups. They employ both overt and hidden forms of resistance, thus pressing demands on the state through the ‘politics of claims’, non-payment of taxes and open insurrections in some countries.

What really went wrong with development in Africa?

The conventional wisdom about Africa is that the continent is marginalised because it is not sufficiently integrated into the global economy. On the contrary, I take the position that a proper understanding of globalisation’s influence on Africa must focus on the theoretical assumptions and institutional structures which underpin the changing nature of North-South relations and, in particular, the aid, debt and trade regimes through which African development is regulated. Bad rules, unjust trade agreements, illegitimate debts and bad policies imposed on Africa by the institutions of the world system have produced multiple ‘black holes’ of social exclusion, pockets of slums, and disabled nation-states that have increasingly become more
accountable to external forces than to their own citizens.

While the conditions for Africa’s growth and development are much more favourable today than 15 years ago, the fact remains that the ability of African countries to chart their own independent development path remains very limited. New blueprints purporting to identify the right path that Africa must follow continue to be presented by numerous external actors. The challenge to all of us is how to sift through the different narratives and roadmaps on Africa’s future and to identify the line up of the balance of social forces that are shaping the trajectory of Africa’s development.

Learning from history: remembering the national project

None of the blueprints, be it African or external in origin, offers a viable alternative to the current paralysis. We are left with one option: to go back to the basics – to revisit the nationalist period and the aborted national project. Inspired by the political thinking of early nationalist leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, Modibo Keita, Sékou Touré and Nnamdi Azikiwe among others, African countries once embarked upon programmes of nation building and national development designed to overcome the institutional legacies of colonialism and bring the fruits of social and economic growth to all sections of the population. In concrete terms, the national project was oriented towards achieving a more equitable appropriation of the productive forces at the local level while at the same time playing a critical role within the G77 and the United Nations system for a new international economic order. As a result of deliberate state actions, African economies registered impressive growth rates during the 1960s and early 1970s given the initial conditions at the time of independence. Physical infrastructures were greatly improved, particularly in the areas of health, education and communication. New universities, agricultural research centres, national transport networks and local government structures were established to facilitate the national development project. Elaborate social subsidies and social programmes were developed as part of the nation building project which helped diffuse social tensions.

There were, of course, many contradictions and tensions in the national project of the 1960s given the social basis of nationalism. Among the many contradictions that Mkandawire (2007) insightfully points out was the tendency to emphasise national unity and nation building while dismissing the existence of deep cleavages based on ethnicity, gender, class and religion. Thus, policies such as ‘indigenisation’ and ‘Africanisation’ were applauded in the face of growing intra-group inequality. However, despite these criticisms the early national project did accomplish a lot more on the economic and social front than the donor-driven development policies that followed it.

What really contributed to the premature demise of the national project?

As Africa entered the decade of the 1970s, the national project was being threatened from within and without. At the domestic level, the national project was undermined by poor political governance as unaccountable elites, often supported by Western powers, let loose their predatory instincts and indulged in corruption, abuse of office and repression. Policies came to be determined solely by concern with the means rather than the conditions of development. This gave rise to a preoccupation with structures, leading to centralisation and expansion of the state bureaucracies, and it encouraged a top-down approach to management of public affairs.
More importantly, the post-independence international context was no more propitious than the colonial. Africa became the prime battleground in the East-West rivalry. Conflicts between and within African states were intensified as a result. Each side backed its ‘own’ dictators, who abused their power to enrich themselves. As the African national project came to be perceived by the Western powers as being synonymous with ‘communism’, leaders who expressed any desire to chart an independent development path were either assassinated or overthrown by Western sponsored military coups. In their place, neocolonial regimes – both civilian and military juntas – were imposed, and were often sustained by foreign aid. Thus, barely half way into the second decade of independence, the vision of an independent Africa had started to fall apart and the gulf between state and society widened considerably in the process.

With the ascendance of neoliberalism since the early 1980s, the optimistic mood that prevailed across Africa in the previous two decades was replaced by a sense of despair, increased levels of poverty, social disintegration, and political instability. Debt structures, conditional aid flows and unequal system of trade became the main instruments to keep Africa in bondage. African countries were forced to open up their markets, dismantle many aspects of the African state and institute minimal democratic procedures essential for the proper functioning of the market. As a consequence, African governments increasingly became more accountable to external actors than to their own citizens. In the process, what was left of ‘development welfarism’ of the 1960s and 1970s was completely erased from the political scene. So, policy making, an important aspect of sovereignty, has been wrenched out of the hands of the African state. This is recolonisation, not development.

Resuscitating the national project: the way forward

Africa’s marginal position in the new global hierarchy, therefore, provides us with a compelling occasion to set in motion a transformative and emancipatory national project that will create the necessary policy space. I agree with Issa Shivji’s observation that ‘a national or new democratic revolution on a Pan-African scale is on the agenda, both as a form of resistance and an alternative framework for reconstruction’ (2006, p. 6). This is feasible for two reasons: (1) the demise of the post-1945 economic order and its laissez-faire ideology; and (2) the emergence of new powerful countries, such as China, India, Brazil and South Korea, on the world stage, challenging the old power architecture. In this new environment, it is possible to dream about a transformative and emancipatory African national project. Of course, this will entail the need to adopt key reforms at national and regional levels, with greater emphasis on ‘strategic integration’ of the national economy into the international economy. The big questions are: who should resuscitate and drive the national project? What are the social forces capable of contributing to the construction of new emancipatory national project? Research in this area is critically needed.

While the aborted ‘national project’ of the 1960s operated within the confines of the inherited colonial order, the new transformative national project is essentially a strategy for more equitable appropriation of the productive forces at the local, continental and global levels. It involves deliberate intervention to strengthen national political capacity.

This brings us face-to-face with the issue of the role of the state in national development. Central to an emancipatory national project is the development of a strong, democratic and activist state that would assert its development role within the context of a common national vision. We
know well that successful developing countries have been those that have shaped a constructive, mutually supportive relationship between the public and private sectors, rather than the ones that have opted either for the primacy of the market or the primacy of the state. In other words, African countries need policy space to exercise institutional innovations that depart from the now discredited conventional orthodoxies of the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The lessons from China and East Asia certainly demonstrate the importance of national policies that support strategic industries, develop internal infrastructure, invest in human capital formation to provide equal opportunity and upward mobility for all, and control financial markets. They were able to succeed for two reasons: (1) governments had the freedom to control basic economic policy; and (2) the state had the administrative, legal and regulatory capacity to guide the market in a way favourable to national development. Therefore, an effective state is a prerequisite for a well-functioning market.

By way of conclusion, the current international economic and governance architecture plays a key role in determining which countries are free to control their economic destiny. The few instances of economic success in the Third World today have been in countries that have marched to their own drums. The key for Africa in today’s world is to try to engage with the world-economy and maintain as much independence (or policy space) as possible. After all, what nation-states do with regard to broad policy issues – domestic wage levels, foreign investment, public services and economic diversification etc. – can help determine, to a considerable extent, whether a country develops or not. Although these powers are not always simple or easy to exercise, they have by no means completely disappeared from the national arena. A critical and retrospective analysis of the aborted national project of the 1960s is the best starting point for a renewed debate on the transformative national project.

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Development and the New Rights-Based Approaches in Africa

Aili Mari Tripp

One of the most important transformations globally and within Africa particularly after the late 1990s could be seen in the merger of two distinct discourses, those of development and of human rights, to form what might be called new rights-based approaches (RBAs). This convergence has been evident among a diverse set of development related actors, ranging from United Nations agencies through international financial institutions, to international and domestic non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The language of rights has also been adopted by a wide range of movements of marginalised peoples, including movements of the disabled, women, children, the landless, pastoralist and indigenous peoples. It has been adopted by environmentalist, anti-poverty and human rights groups, as well as lawyers fighting to maintain the independence of the judiciary; church leaders fighting against debt; media workers defending press freedom; and activists seeking to preserve NGO autonomy. Women’s organisations such as Wangari Maathai’s Greenbelt movement in Kenya were often at the forefront of trying to bring together these various concerns, showing the connections between development, the environment, women’s rights, human rights and democratisation.

This expansion of rights-based approaches took place with the end of the Cold War, bringing back together the two strands of human rights that had been originally enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights: (1) those of civil and political rights; and (2) of economic, social and cultural rights pertaining to food, water, health, education, housing and employment. However, during the Cold War, Western countries had focused on civil and political rights, while the Soviet bloc and many developing countries emphasised economic and social rights. By the 1990s, the ideological barriers that had led to these distinctions had been removed, with the spread of democracy and political liberalisation around the globe.

Many of these discourses on rights are not new in Africa. In Africa, the struggles for independence were situated within demands for the right to self-rule, self-determination and the right to citizenship. Later they were incorporated in the UN’s New International Economic Order in the 1970s and popular notions of sustainable development and later ‘people-centred development’.

Some of the latest thinking on rights-based approaches was inspired by the late Senegalese jurist and legal scholar Kéba Mbaye’s notion of development as a human right, as well as work on entitlements and human capabilities by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum.

The adoption of the 1986 UN Declaration on the Right to Development was a watershed for the United Nations in connecting rights and development both conceptually and programmatically. By 1998, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan announced the mainstreaming of human rights through all UN agencies and the World Bank also recognised the promotion and protection of human rights as one of its goals. UN agencies began to use human rights measures as benchmarks to evaluate progress toward their objectives. African discourses on rights were both shaped by and helped shape these changing international norms and debates around rights.

The new RBAs represented a coalescence of international development and human rights concerns, bringing liberal thinking about rights together with African and other global realities based in economic and social concerns. More importantly, the RBAs represent a paradigmatic shift in thinking from seeing development as a need to development as a right.
As we move into an era of rights-based approaches, it is also worth paying attention to the many and often competing understandings of rights and the political purposes for which these discourses are employed. Some institutions may adopt the rhetoric of rights in order to gain greater legitimacy, while others hold out the promise of rights with little capacity to realise those same rights. Repressive governments have relied on legislative and constitutional sources of authority to rein in and control civil society and the media, while civil society has sought protection and autonomy using the same instruments. Land and other property laws have been embraced to protect the rights of marginalised groups while also unleashing the forces of the market, creating forces that work at odds and establishing possible collision courses. New democratizing constitutions in Africa often invigorated not only women’s and children’s rights activists, but also traditional authorities and religious activists who worked at cross purposes when it came to issues like women’s land rights, child marriage and polygamy.

It is thus necessary to look not only at the emergence of rights-based approaches, but also at the reasons and ways in which rights discourses are being appropriated by different societal actors as well as the state. We need to examine the competing claims between these various actors that are making rights-based appeals and better understand the political uses of these opposing discourses.

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Strategic Levers for Development Thinking and Policy

James H. Mittelman

To commemorate the 50th annual meeting of the African Studies Association, I want to tell what is said to be a favourite story of a young president, John F. Kennedy. It involves a French nobleman who summoned his gardener and instructed him to plant a particular tree. The gardener objected, pointing out that it would take at least 50 years for the seedling to mature and bear fruit. The nobleman replied: ‘Then plant it this afternoon. We have no time to waste.’ He understood the urgency of making long-term investments. Fifty years on, has the Africanist seedbed born fruitful knowledge about development? What are the links between this thinking and policy? What is to be done?

Discourses and underlying conditions

The development industry has produced buzzwords in abundance: partners in development, development cooperation, basic needs, sustainable development, capacity building, millennium development goals, and so on. In this business, fads and fashions, sometimes wrapped in the banner of ‘consensus’, quickly come in and out of vogue. One of them, the ‘Washington Consensus’, now discredited, de-linked economic reform and social policy. Meanwhile social critics called for re-linking economic reform and social policy. A prominent critical thinker, Claude Ake (1996, pp. 1, 159), famously observed that the problem with development is that it has not been tried.

Since a 1996 plane crash robbed Africa of this leading scholar-activist, the global political economy has shifted. The emergence of China and India, the increase in sovereign (state-managed) wealth funds...
from several countries, the availability of resources from oil-exporting countries, and the consequent lessening of reliance on the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund affords more policy space for experimentation.

**Strategic levers**

Quite clearly, there are no speedy fixes or single formulas for jumpstarting development. Solutions must be home-grown. Nonetheless, six strategic levers can be identified:

1. **Resuscitate the national project.** At the time of decolonisation, the postcolonial state was based on the supposition that national leaders could really make meaningful decisions within their territorial jurisdictions. Developmentalism (the ideology of modernisation) justified this effort. However, with the rise of neoliberal globalisation in the 1970s leaders in Africa became managers of global flows, not autonomous agents. Now, in the 2000s, the task is to summon the political will to capture control in key spheres. The challenge is to expand policy space for both promoting economic growth and reducing inequality.

2. **Resecuritise development.** In the conventional paradigm, development presupposes and contributes to peace. Post-9/11, this narrative is used to justify the militarisation of development aid and humanitarian interventions. In some cases, counter-insurgency and development programmes are interlinked. Duffield (2007) argues that this strategic error has hurt development. For him, the corrective is to desecuritise development in the sense of separating it from governmental and intergovernmental means of violence. But it is more appropriate to think in terms of resecuritising development, for surely good governance must take into account cross-border crimes that reduce the scope of national governments to act alone. For example, environmental crimes include the release of toxic wastes in rivers, mercury pollution, land degradation, lack of clean water, wildlife loss, deterioration of aquatic ecosystems and deforestation. Linked to vulnerabilities in Africa, they are part of human security.

3. **Thrust out regionally.** Unlike erstwhile forms of regionalism in Africa and outside the continent, a development integration model assigns priority to spurring production and improving infrastructure. It also calls for a higher degree of state intervention in the economy than does the market model. Development integration includes redistributive measures or compensatory schemes, for the benefits of regionalisation tend to gravitate toward poles of growth and are thus uneven. Moreover, the first priority in trade should be intra-regional flows rather than extra-regional commerce.

4. **Ease external constraints.** Persistent structures that restrain development remain entrenched. Consider an illustration of the disproportionate reward for labour at a world level: what the Tanzanian coffee farmer earns in one year, an employee at Starbucks in Washington DC makes in a week. Of course, several global commissions have evaluated this inequality and economic growth rates, and have called for poverty reduction. Tony Blair’s Commission for Africa is one of many such summits that set ambitious targets; however, at this point, the pledges constitute unmet promises. Perhaps it is time to evaluate the performance of these commissions and to decommission development, for the impetus should be found among social forces on the ground. This is evident in the present economic downturn. Rich countries have quickly come up with billions to bail out wealthy investors but not the world’s poor.
(5) Spark creativity. A major challenge in breaking the logjam that blocks development is building resourcefulness, not relying on transfers of resources. Sparking inventiveness is what produces inventions. Home-grown development entails the regeneration of indigenous knowledge: approaches that can be harnessed to contemporary problems.

(6) Emphasise synergies. Coordinating efforts must entail sequencing activities and targeting who will gain in the context of limited budgets. For example, educating young girls from poverty-ridden backgrounds achieves returns in income, health, infant mortality and incidence of HIV-AIDS.

In sum

The goals are to establish home-produced knowledge structures and strategic levers strengthened by learning from different contexts. Leverage for realising these objectives turns on political will. A key to mobilising it is movement-building. Indeed, after John F. Kennedy met death at an early age, Robert F. Kennedy not only embraced social movements organised around issues of poverty and civil rights in America, but also visited South Africa and spoke forcefully against the injustices of apartheid. By means of collective action, he sought to grow the seedlings planted by his brother.

In this connection, it is well to recall what another political strategist who suffered a premature death, Claude Ake, said to me during the time of military rule in Nigeria: ‘You know that if anything happens to us, we will have put up a good fight.’ His legacy exemplifies how voice can matter.

References


What Will the World Financial Crisis Do to Africa?

Peter Lawrence

Crisis of over-production and under-consumption have been a regular feature of the history of capitalism. The crisis we are living through is another example of capitalism’s uneven development. This time it is coupled with a global financial crisis propelled by banks, insurance companies and mortgage companies’ over-exposure to the wonderfully named ‘toxic’ assets: pieces of paper which were assets as long as house prices were rising and borrowers were employed, but ‘toxic’ as soon as the speculators who had fuelled the growth of these assets suddenly realised they could be worthless if the housing market bubble burst and the long consumer credit-propelled boom threatened to come to an end. Recessions are normally short-lived as production is adjusted to lower demand until machines eventually need replacing and demand for capital goods gets the business cycle moving on an upward track, optimism about the future increases and the virtuous circle of growth leads to a boom again.

In recent years, economists and the governments they advised believed they had cured boom-and-bust by getting economic agents to make rational expectations about the future on the basis of the fullest information provided to them by governments and other public information providers. Thus, according to their assumptions, only an unpredictable event could disturb expectations. The unpredicted oil price hike and shock of the collapse of the US sub-prime mortgage market were the unpredictable events (shocks or surprises in economists’ jargon), that shattered the rational expectations of economic agents, even though some of them had already seen a recession looming, resulting from unsustainable consumer borrowing. Now we are heading for a deep recession that might become a depression, the like of which has not been seen since the 1930s.

The big question here is how these events are going to affect the African economies. Economists are not always very accurate in their prediction, so this economist will only discuss the major factors involved and suggest possible outcomes based on what we know usually happens in a global economic downturn.

There are two distinct views emerging from statements and commentaries by economists in international organisations and institutes. The first is that the African economies are so marginalised in global terms that there will be little effect on African economic performance. The alternative view is that because Africa is so marginal to the world economy, small changes in, for example, capital and aid flows, remittances or commodity earnings, will have a significant effect on the economies of the continent, especially if, through adopting structural adjustment policies, they have become even more exposed to the global economy than before.

The logic of globalisation tells us that those countries which have increasingly integrated into the global economy,
carried out liberalisation reforms in finance and trade, for example, will be most affected by the impending recession, especially when they have just suffered from the short-lived but significant oil shock. Although primary commodity prices rose along with the oil price, although not as sharply, these prices have fallen back to levels lower than they were two years ago. The exception has been gold, a commodity for which demand rises in a crisis. Gold prices have fallen, but not by very much and remain 25 per cent higher than they were two years ago.

On the other hand, with regard to the financial crisis itself, fortunately for African economies, in spite of increasing liberalisation, they do not have banking systems that have been involved in trading the new financial instruments that have been a major cause of the crisis in banking. South Africa’s Finance Minister, Trevor Manuel, for example, has claimed that South African banks, arguably the most integrated with global finance houses, are well supervised and the banks themselves have stated that they are minimally exposed to the toxic assets of the US sub-prime markets, even though some banks have been exposed to global derivatives markets, with one institution losing US$1.4 billion because of the collapse of Bear Sterns.

With regard to the rest of Africa, the effects are not likely to be uniform. There are several countries for which the world financial crisis is not the top item on the agenda. Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, have long-standing crises, as do Sudan and Ethiopia. It is also important to remember that we have just been through a period of sharp increases in food prices worldwide. This has adversely affected those African economies that are, as a result of previous failures to generate agricultural food output growth, net food importers and increased levels of poverty in them.

As a result of the high food prices and the high oil prices, African economies will already have suffered a deterioration in their payments balances, ameliorated a little by the increase in some of their primary commodity export prices. However, it is one of the characteristics of commodity markets that spot prices are less important than long-term contract prices, so that the commodity price increases, because of their brevity, would not have made much of an impact on export earnings.

Many African economies are heavily dependent on food aid, import support and government budget support. This is likely to increase as primary product export earnings growth slows down or becomes negative. Foreign investment is also likely to decline following a boom in the last few years. According to a recent issue of the IMF Survey, some countries (Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia among the more prominent) had experienced an increase in private capital flows as a consequence of improved economic performance, resulting in lower risk ratings and higher yields to private equity investment. However, 90 per cent of those US$50 billion of these private equity inflows into Africa in 2007 went to South Africa. According to the same source, almost two-thirds of direct foreign investment goes to five countries, and nearly half of that goes to Nigeria. Now such foreign inflows are likely to slow down, and at the same time investors short of cash in developed countries are likely to repatriate profits, thus affecting the payments balance and leading to greater dependence on food aid and import support. However, the effects are likely to be concentrated in those more open economies.

African economies are increasingly dependent on remittances from African nationals working in developed countries. Although remittances are, with some exceptions, a relatively small proportion...
of GDP (around 3 per cent), they have become almost as important as aid and foreign investment as a source of transfers from developed countries to sub-Saharan Africa. Some estimates put remittance flows to SSA as high as US$24 billion in 2007 (Nigeria receiving almost half of this sum), compared with foreign aid flows of around US$40 billion and foreign investment of US$53 billion. The World Bank estimates that remittances will fall in 2009 by between 1.3 and 6.8 per cent and may not start to increase again beyond 2010. One reason for this aside from the recession is the decline in the value of sterling against the US dollar. For example, a Leeds University study estimated that approximately £700 million was remitted from the UK to Zimbabwe in 2007, equivalent to US$1.4 billion then, but only equal to US$1 billion in 2008. So, for the level of remittances to stay at their 2007 level in 2008, Zimbabweans in the UK would have had to increase remittances by 40 per cent in one year, highly unlikely given the crisis in the last third of the year. This reduction in flow will occur in other sub-Saharan African countries that largely receive sterling remittances. Even the euro has seen a decline against the US dollar over the last year of around 14 per cent, so remittances from these sources have to increase sharply to offset the currency decline – again highly unlikely. With increasing unemployment in the US and Europe, less money will be sent home, again affecting the balance of payments and resulting in increasing food aid and import support.

Therefore, we can expect the high growth rates that many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have enjoyed over much of the past decade, to decline sharply. We can expect countries in difficulties to return to the IMF and World Bank for payments support and development assistance. What will be their response? For the last 30 years these organisations have insisted that governments seeking their help should pursue market led policies. They have mirrored the change to market-led policies that characterised developed country government policies with the emphasis on lower taxes, privatisation and tougher social policy, all of these entailing ‘rolling back the state’. Suddenly in the wake of the current crisis, these policies have been put into reverse. The US and UK which pushed for privatisation now rescue private enterprise by bail outs which effectively take them into public ownership. As I write this, the US government is deciding whether or not to bail out the major US car companies. It used to be said that ‘What is good for General Motors is good for America’! Now there is a vote in the US Senate that suggests that politicians of the right are prepared to see General Motors and all their suppliers go to the wall and certainly precipitate a depression. But we also see the US Government, even under Bush, trying to bail out the companies to prevent a depression. It is clear the state has come back to restore order in the system, but not of course to change the system.

So what will the IMF and World Bank do to bail out African economies that suffer from the effects of recession and possibly depression on their economies? Will policies change to allow these countries to chart a more independent and initially protectionist course? Will sub-Saharan Africa be able to disengage from the world economy in a similar way to Latin America during the depression of the 1930s?

At present it looks as though the IMF and World Bank are calling on African economies not to abandon the ‘reform’ policies. This may be partly a combination of inability to supply sufficient resources through African states to alleviate the effects of the recession and an enduring belief that globalising market solutions was the right policy to follow, in spite of it leaving African economies as vulnerable if not more vulnerable than before. These institutions’ policies may change.
as their member governments realise the need for continued government intervention and some direction of investment in their own countries. So the answer to the second of the above questions is possibly ‘yes’, but to a limited degree. The answer to the third question is probably ‘no’ because there is little evidence that African states have the political will, not to mention the institutional framework, to pursue an independent path. This is obviously the case in the country best placed to do so, South Africa. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that unless that country takes the lead in forging a more independent and African-interdependent strategy of disengagement from the global economy, other countries will seize that initiative.

The last great depression of the 1930s ended in a world war. Just as there were ways of preventing the last depression without resorting to war, there are ways of preventing a new great depression taking root. The developed capitalist countries have combined to a greater or lesser degree to try to ward off a depression by rescuing the financial institutions and trying to maintain consumer spending. There is talk of public infrastructure projects to maintain employment and inject a consumption multiplier into the system to keep consumer spending up. There is even talk of a renewed industrial strategy with directed investment by the publicly owned banks. Much hope rests on China to boost demand for capital goods for their investment spending. These policies may help to avoid depression, but they will not avoid recession. Banks are holding cash until they see signs of an upturn, but there will not be signs of an upturn unless the banks release cash. This is Keynes’s well known ‘liquidity trap’ with a vengeance.

Unless governments act collectively to inject investment funds into their economies, it will be a long time before the upturn comes. Spending on environmentally-friendly infrastructure in developed and developing countries could be the substitute to war that will regenerate sustainable economies, not just in developed capitalist countries but also in Africa, as well as in countries which have actually been subjected to wars. One thing is for certain. This is not the beginning of the end of capitalism but possibly a new stage in its development. How far that new stage might produce the seeds of some collective action by states, capital and popular movements remains to be seen, but ought to be an important subject of investigation in the near future.

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Angola: Thirty Years of Dos Santos

Alex Vines & Markus Weimer

José Eduardo dos Santos will mark his thirtieth year as President of Angola in September 2009. Since 2004 Angola has boomed, sustained by high government spending and a rapid increase in oil exports. At present Angola enjoys a healthy current account surplus and it posted the highest increase in its oil output between 2004 and 2007 (beating Russia, Azerbaijan, Brazil, Libya and Kazakhstan among others). Angola is also a strategic oil supplier to the world’s two largest oil consumers: in 2008, it was the sixth largest to the United States and the second largest to China. This is now changing and in 2009 Angola will fall probably behind Saudi Arabia and Iran as China’s main source of imported oil. After an initial expected GDP growth of 8.2 per cent in January 2009, the government has adjusted the figure to above 3 per cent. The World Bank predicts negative growth in 2009 owing to lower international oil prices and slowdown in global demand. Diamond prices have also collapsed.

Angola briefly surpassed Nigeria as the leading sub-Saharan African oil producer in 2008 and in 2009 it chairs the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) for the first time. On 24 October 2008, OPEC decided to reduce its output. Under the cuts Angola’s quota has been reduced from 1.9 million barrels/day (b/d) to 1.5 million b/d. It is predicted that peak oil will be attained around 2011 followed by a production decline rate of 7.5 per cent per year. Although older fields are reaching maturity, new oil fields will see a boost of overall output, from 1.9 million b/d in 2008 to 2.3 million b/d in 2015. There is little sign yet of a non-oil dependent economy flourishing and the World Bank’s ‘Doing Business’ report for 2009 ranks Angola 168th out of 181 countries surveyed. The average time taken to start up a business is 68 days according to the survey, but it still takes a staggering 328 days to build a warehouse.

Building upon Legislative Elections

The ruling Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) gained a resounding victory in the 2008 legislative elections. This has cemented the hegemony of the MPLA with 191 seats in the 220-seat National Assembly, and it allows the MPLA to amend Angola’s constitution if it so desires. Turnout was high at over 87 per cent, indicating popular enthusiasm for the first multiparty election in 16 years, but it was also a vote for peace. There have been allegations of official intimidation, corruption and presence of security forces at polling stations. The most embarrassing episode was that only 320 polling stations out of 2,584 polling stations opened in Luanda, as voter papers and voter registration lists had not been delivered despite a very expensive and high-tech process, forcing a second day of voting. According to individuals involved this was more due to incompetence and inexperience than conspiracy. Out of a total of 6.4 million valid ballots, the MPLA secured 81.6 per cent. Its main rival, the former rebel group UNITA, won only 10 per cent and other parties secured just 8 per cent (see Table 1 for an overview of the election results). UNITA’s performance in its traditional heartland, the central highlands of Huambo and Bie provinces, was poor as expected; the party’s parliamentarians had become distant while the MPLA had pumped resources into the area and had vigorously pursued a co-option effort with the traditional authorities since the end of the war.

UNITA’s main source of revenue was a US$14 million state grant based on the 70 parliamentary seats it won in 1992 – this has now gone, creating a serious impact.
on its finances. UNITA now looks towards the 2009 municipal elections to start rebuilding its grassroots support base. However, UNITA’s leader Isaias Samakuva stands little chance of winning the presidential poll and given these strains, party unity may be harder to demand and maintain from the base up.

Other parties did even worse; only three managed to secure more than 1 per cent of the national vote. The opposition now have only 29 seats in total. The MPLA dominated the vote in all provinces except in Bie and Cabinda, where UNITA did better and in the Lunda provinces, where the Partido de Renovação Social (PRS) enjoys strong support from the Lunda/Chokwe people. UNITA’s strongest showing was in Cabinda, due to a protest vote and an official boycott of the election by the armed FLEC (Frente para a Libertação do Enclave de Cabinda) separatist group. The Frente Nacional para a Libertação de Angola (FNLA) did well in its Zaire province heartland, but failed to make an impact nationally.

The five parties that had polled less than 0.5 per cent of the national vote (four of which had held seats in the outgoing parliament) have been dissolved. Angola now has only six officially registered parties compared with 14 parties and coalitions during the election and 108 during the pre-election period.\(^1\) The MPLA with its 191 seats now completely dominates the political landscape.

### International response

The European Union, the Pan-African Parliament, the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP), Southern African Development Community (SADC), the US embassy and the African Union deployed observers. One or two groups from Angolan civil society were also authorised to be observers by the government but the CNE (National Election Commission) failed to accredit nearly half of the 2,640 civil society observers, with only 28 out of 370 receiving accreditation in Luanda. International observers gave a broadly positive assessment of the poll although criticising irregularities. The EU mission in particular was critical, especially of the state-controlled radio, television and newspaper, Jornal de Angola.

Just prior to the elections, Chatham House published Angola’s Elections: A Democratic Oil Giant? (Indira Campos 2008). This briefing paper highlighted how the MPLA enjoyed enormous financial advantages and started its election campaign before the official campaigning start of 8 August 2008. It also warned that the ‘playing field for the political contest is particularly unequal in access to the media’ in favour of the MPLA and that the body tasked with the electoral process, the CNE, had problems. Official figures published in 2009 show that the MPLA spent US$8.7 million on its campaign, more than seven times the amount spent by the 13 opposition parties. On the

### Table 1. Legislative election results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Total votes</th>
<th>% of total valid votes</th>
<th>No. of seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MPLA</td>
<td>5,266,112</td>
<td>81.64</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNITA</td>
<td>670,197</td>
<td>10.39</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRS</td>
<td>204,478</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ND</td>
<td>77,405</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FNLA</td>
<td>71,600</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parties</td>
<td>160,615</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6,450,407</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Comissão Nacional Eleitoral (CNE).
other hand, the Economist Intelligence Unit (UK) believes that the MPLA spent some US$300 million on its campaign compared with the US$17 million shared by the other parties.

On 17 October 2008 the National Assembly formally dissolved the national unity government (GURN), which represented a power-sharing agreement that began in April 1997 as part of the Lusaka peace accord. The MPLA’s dominance has been confirmed by the election of former Prime Minister, Fernando da Piedade dos Santos (‘Nando’), as President of the National Assembly. Bornito de Sousa, a relatively young MPLA rising star has become President of the MPLA’s parliamentary group. Among the newly nominated MPLA parliamentarians are Ana Paula dos Santos, the President’s wife and one of his daughters, Welwitchia dos Santos, although the first lady has indicated she does not wish to take up the post.

Government Reshuffle

In late September 2008, President dos Santos conducted the most significant reshuffle of government since 1997. A new government of 33 ministers (five more than its predecessor) was unveiled. Some portfolios have been split and two ministers without portfolio have been created, one for Antonio Bento Bembe, a former leader of the Cabindan separatist group, FLEC. The most significant changes are economic with the replacement of José Pedro de Morais as Finance Minister by his former Deputy Eduardo Severim de Morais. The appointment of the MPLA’s former Chief of Economic and Social Policy, Manuel Nunes Junior, to the new post of Economy Minister is also significant as it suggests that the presidency wants to reduce the assertiveness in recent years by the finance ministry. The former Deputy Prime Minister, Aguinaldo Jaime was also appointed head of a new commission charged with boosting foreign investment in the non-mineral sectors in addition to the private investment agency ANIP. The former Finance Minister, José Pedro de Morais, has also been charged to oversee the launch of Angola’s stock exchange. The long-serving Petroleum Minister, Desidério Costa, took up Angola’s presidency of OPEC in January 2009 and has been replaced by the former Energy Minister, José Maria Botelho. There was also a new Foreign Minister, Assunção Afonso dos Anjos.

Overall, the new administration emphasises continuity rather than change, with the key Ministers of Planning, Interior, Public Works, Transport and Education remaining the same. However, there may be a further reshuffle after the presidential elections.

The MPLA in its election manifesto pledges to put forward an even more ambitious second phase of post-war reconstruction. This includes the creation of two new cities, a new railway line running along the coast from Namibe to the enclave of Cabinda, as well as 1 million new houses across the country by 2012. How Angola is going to match this massive investment in physical infrastructure with investing in its citizens and their health and education remains to be seen. Skilled Angolan labour remains at a premium. Furthermore, due to a global recession and low oil prices, Angola may find itself under extra pressure to deliver on reconstruction and developing the non-oil sectors.

Elections in 2009?

2009 heralds the ‘Third Republic’ of Angola, once a new constitution is passed in parliament followed by presidential and municipal elections. Negotiations over a new constitution started in February 2009 and are expected to last around six months before a text is ready for ratification. For MPLA supporters the advent of a ‘new Angola’ is historic. It signifies the consolidation of Angolan ‘peace and
democracy’ and the completion of MPLA’s metamorphosis from a revolutionary Marxist independence movement into a modern political party with the resources and expertise to bring prosperity and development to the Angolan people. The advent of the ‘Third Republic’ also signifies to many – especially the former military commanders in the party – the ultimate victory of the MPLA over the Portuguese colonisers, the FNLA and UNITA.

President dos Santos has overshadowed the first President of independent Angola, Agostinho Neto. Against all odds he has remained in power since 1979, overcoming challenges of war and elections and at the same time displaying a highly refined political craftsmanship. He is an accomplished and shrewd economic and political dealmaker with an instinct for political survival. Under his leadership Angola gained increasing regional importance to the point where Angola rivals South Africa as the major regional power.

In 2001 it looked like as if dos Santos wanted to step down as President and retire from Angolan politics. However, events in neighbouring Zambia where Frederick Chiluba, the former Head of State was stripped of his immunity by a unanimous vote of parliament, and faced 59 charges including abuse of office and theft, contributed to a change of mind. Dos Santos may have decided then to retain the reins of power and prevent any such ‘retribution politics’ to take place in Angola. His decision to remain in power (and retain power) permeates Angolan politics, from the fluidity of government and ministerial posts which are re-distributed frequently (and probably will be shuffled again after the presidential elections) to the new process of arriving at a constitution for the country.

The constitution has been evolving since 1991 with the legislative elections of 2008 preparing the ground for a parlia-

The new constitution will decree whether the President is elected through parliament or popular vote, as is the case now. It will also clarify the powers of the Prime Minister and the President. Last year Dos Santos said a presidential election would only take place after a new constitution was approved by parliament. There has been a marked absence of debate on these issues in the Angolan state media.

In terms of legitimacy, the election of the President through a direct vote would send a far stronger signal than the de facto appointment of the President through the national parliament. The announcement in early 2009 that the MPLA has postponed its sixth congress to December 2009 suggests that presidential elections may not be held in 2009. This is due to the time needed to agree upon a new constitution, but also an impact of the global economic downturn. Direct presidential polls would also be judged against the backdrop of the legislative elections in 2008, and improvements would be expected from the international community and observers. The chaos seen in the outskirts of Luanda with missing ballots and lack of electoral resources would be judged differently a second time around, as would the role of the CNE in the electoral process. The final EU report on the legislative elections, for example, has clear recommendations on the roles of the oversight bodies and institutions of the elections as well as specifics on how to strengthen the work of the CNE and operational
Economic Policy

In October 2008, the ministerial council approved the draft 2009 budget, which proposed increasing total expenditure to US$42 billion, some 40 per cent higher than the revised 2008 budget, reflecting the government’s desire to increase social spending, especially health and education. A 2009 National Plan focuses on improving access to housing, increasing food security and health, and creating 320,000 new jobs – although the government admits it will have to cut back on some of its ambitions due to lower oil prices and global recession. A return to budget deficits in the next few years cannot be ruled out if oil prices continue to fall, and the Economist Intelligence Unit predicts that real GDP growth will average -2.3 per cent in 2009 before recovering to 6.2 per cent in 2010. Newly-appointed Finance Minister Severim de Morais already reduced the benchmark oil price in the 2009 budget from an already low US$65 to US$55 per barrel, and a re-negotiation of contracts signed at the peak of commodity prices cannot be ruled out. There is also increasing pressure on international companies to cut expatriate staff and hire Angolans.

Until recently Angola relied primarily on costly syndicated oil-backed loans from international banks, contracted by the national oil company SONANGOL. In recent years this has changed with the availability of external credit. Angola has benefited from some US$7 billion from China, but has also benefited from new credit lines from Western export-credit agencies (see Table 2 for selected credit lines in 2007). In October 2008, the Canadian export credit agency, EDC, announced it would provide up to US$1 billion in financing for Angolan infrastructure projects. The fact that much of this financing consists of public guaranteed export-credit finance, with lines already committed, suggests that the global financial crisis will have limited impact.

Angola’s Vision

For the last decade, Angola has viewed itself as a regional superpower. This policy originated in Luanda’s conflict with UNITA, which ended in 2002. It required crafting an aggressive policy throughout Africa to erode support of UNITA. This external strategy of isolating UNITA and its leader Jonas Savimbi abroad was coupled with a fierce ‘peace through war’ strategy inside Angola (Le Billion et al. 2008). Since its military victory in February 2002, the Angolan Government had also benefited from the commodities boom and especially high oil prices. Flush with oil revenues, the Angolan Government can now continue to pursue its strategic goals independently.

Table 2. Selected credit lines in 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Amount (US$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>4.5 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>2.3 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>1.1 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>600 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>500 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>500 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: EIU, Reuters, World Bank.
and has enabled Angola’s leadership to embark upon a gradualist policy of domestic change at its own pace, and not influenced by outside pressure.

If Angola is ‘in peace’, it is not yet ‘fully at peace’. Armed conflict has ended (with the exception of the separatist conflict in Cabinda) and the dominant party, the MPLA faces no serious internal competition, but the vast majority of the population has not yet reaped the benefits of a ‘prosperous peace’. This situation itself has important implications for Angola’s international status. The Angolan Government’s capabilities abroad and its external image will be in part measured by social improvements for its population.

In southern Africa, Angola’s main competitor is South Africa and this relationship at presidential level has been frosty because of former South African President Thabo Mbeki’s efforts to mediate during the Angolan conflict. With Mbeki’s departure Angola-South African relations are likely to improve significantly. This signals the ending of the war diplomacy that has provided a backbone to Angolan foreign policy since the mid-1990s. Most importantly, in the Congos, Angola maintains a heavy political and security footprint in Congo-Brazzaville and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Luanda sees both countries as its own backyard. With the low-intensity conflict ongoing in Angola’s Cabinda province, the government wants to continue to neutralise any rear-base support. DRC officials also complain of heavy-handed Angolan policing of frontiers and expulsions of migrants, but admit that they are too weak to complain as the Kabila Government remains deeply reliant on Angolan security advice. Angola advised DRC President Joseph Kabila to act definitively against opposition leader Jean-Pierre Bemba and his supporters. This has also been Angola’s message in late 2008 on dealing with rebel groups in eastern Congo.

Beyond this historic backbone of Luanda’s security strategy, a wider Angolan ambition is emerging: that of being a major power in the Gulf of Guinea. Two forces are at work here – the post-conflict confidence of the Luanda elite and a realistic assessment that Angola can never effectively challenge South Africa’s regional hegemony in the SADC. There has been a big push over the last few years to open or expand Angolan embassies in West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea. The Angolan national oil company SONANGOL has also played a role by entering down-stream joint ventures, although the investment fervour of SONANGOL in the region is set to slow considerably in the current global economic climate.

Diversification of Partnerships

Angola’s post-conflict behaviour reflects Luanda’s pragmatism to avoid any rigid adherence to dogma. President dos Santos made this point clear in his 2008 New Year’s address to the diplomatic corps by stressing that the Angolan Government plans to reinforce its bilateral and commercial relationships with other countries:

... globalization naturally makes us see the need to diversify international relations and to accept the principle of competition, which has in a dynamic world, replaced the petrified concept of zones of influence that used to characterize the world.

Angola’s diversification strategy allows it to maintain beneficial economic arrangements with whoever it chooses, by offering them both access to its rich oil fields, but also not allowing any foreign country to become too influential. In the short term China has offered Angola things others do not offer, such as rapid post-conflict infrastructural development that is important to the Angolan Government in a pre-election context (Campos
and Vines 2008). A more business-like relationship with China is emerging, although the global economic downturn has resulted in Luanda’s ‘diversification’ efforts being cut-back.

A second step has been Angola’s backing of the Gulf of Guinea Commission, which was launched in October 2006 and aims to mediate disputes in the region over oil exploration and fisheries. Hosted by Angola, the Commission also includes Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, the DRC and São Tomé. In November 2008 a summit of heads of state of the Commission was held in Luanda, and its Declaration focused on the conflict in the DRC and the consequences for the sub-region of the world financial crisis and the oil price drop. It called for a more robust UN response in Congo. In his speech to the Commission, as Angola took over the chair of this organisation, President dos Santos said that:

*The Gulf of Guinea sub-region is responsible for 15 per cent of the world’s oil production, has the second biggest stretch of water and forests in the world after the Amazon, and has jointly, in terms of population numbers, a market of about 250 million inhabitants.*

Dos Santos also emphasised that the Commission was there to mediate over disputes, especially over natural resource access along common borders.

Similarly, Angola also took a leading role in the creation of the African Diamond Producers Association (ADPA) in November 2006. Following Botswana’s regional model in attempting to improve the local beneficiation impact of the diamond production process, the Luanda-based ADPA is focused on increasing employment and value-addition in the country of origin. The body, which includes Angola, Botswana, South Africa, Namibia and the DRC, has tried to downplay fears of an OPEC-style cartel.

**Long-term Vision**

MPLA policy documents talk of 25 years more rule and the Angolan Government has commissioned ‘blue skies’ scenario planning to model education, food production and energy needs in 2025. There is no doubt that Luanda’s horizons are changing and that change is also occurring inside Angola. What is also certain is that although President dos Santos will not rule Angola for another 30 years he plans to remain head of state for the time being. 2009 will mark the MPLA’s tightening its grip further on power, although the down-turn in the international economy will result in some of its plans being reappraised, and this provides openings for bureaucratic reform and more focus on better state service delivery, improving human capital and poverty reduction – the most immediate challenges for post-conflict development in Angola and what will be the ultimate statement of the legacy of the Dos Santos era.

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**Endnote**

1. Although some parties have since re-registered under the same name, for example, the Frente para Democracia (FpD).

**References**

‘Dollarisation’ in Zimbabwe and the Death of an Industry

Rory Pilossof

Zimbabwe’s entwined political and economic crises, which until recently have shown little signs of abating, have wreaked havoc on the once prosperous nation. However, after years of turmoil and crisis, a significant breakthrough on the political front was achieved earlier this year with the ruling Zanu (PF) and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) agreeing to the formation of a government of national unity. As a result there was renewed hope that these developments would see an upturn in the country’s fortunes.

Unsurprisingly, while the government of national unity strives to find its footing, many observers remain sceptical of its feasibility. Considering that many of the recent actions undertaken by President Robert Mugabe and Zanu (PF) seem intended to destabilise the new government, this scepticism remains a valid concern, especially when one adds the consequences of the tragically unfortunate car accident that claimed the life of Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai’s wife. However, as the power battles play out, the economic turmoil in Zimbabwe shows little sign of abating. The chronic woes of the economy have been well documented, but there have been a number of important developments over the last few months that have fundamentally restructured the way that both the ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ sectors of the economy work and interact. These essentially revolve around the ‘dollarisation’ of the economy, a move which has been long called for, but one that both the government and the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) have been resisting for some time. Observations and interviews with money traders on the streets of Harare, who now find themselves facing a

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collapse of their primary mode of income, provide a remarkable insight into the byzantine processes of the black market and give indications as to why the government has been so reluctant to ‘dollarise’. In particular, they reveal the intimate inter-dependent relationship between the supposedly distinct structures of the official economy and the ‘illegal’ black market trade.

Although inflation has presented a massive problem for the Zimbabwean economy for more than a decade, the last three to four years have seen the problem escalate to completely unmanageable levels. The RBZ has faced the unenviable task of trying to find measures to curb the level of inflation whilst keeping the Zimbabwe dollar as a viable unit of currency, with limited assistance from a government more concerned with political survival rather than economic revival. One tried and tested stopgap measure was to ‘drop’ zeros off the unmanageable currency. In February 2009, the RBZ once again decided to revalue the Zimbabwe dollar and remove 12 zeros. This had been done before, in 2006, when three zeros were cut, and in August 2008, when 10 zeros were removed. In August 2008 the largest note was the Z$100 billion (100,000,000,000) ‘Special Agro Cheque’, which was then revalued to Z$10. The popular joke at the time was, ‘we will have them back by Christmas’, a prediction which turned out to be remarkably accurate. Within six months, the underlying and unsolved problems driving hyperinflation made a mockery out of the monetary reforms of August 2008. So rampant is the rate of inflation that economists have had a hard time working it out. The official estimate is that it is more than 231 million percent. In January 2009, the government released the latest, and largest, notes in this new set of money; the 10, 20, 50 and 100 trillion dollar notes (100,000,000,000,000) and by so doing set a record for a banknote with the most zeros shown in the design. The previous record was the 500 billion dinar banknote of Yugoslavia (500,000,000,000). The Z$100 trillion is not the largest denomination ever issued though. That accolade goes to the Hungarian 100 million b.-pengő released in 1946 (pengő being the unit of currency and b.-pengő being a billion pengos. Written in full this note had 20 zeros: 100,000,000,000,000,000,000). However, the release of the Z$100 trillion note caused excitement worldwide as money collectors and memorabilia enthusiasts rushed to get their hands on them. As I was in Zimbabwe at the time of its release, I decided to try and get some of these notes for myself. However, this proved more problematic that first imagined.

All of my traditional money contacts had nothing for me. In fact most people had not even seen the Z$100 trillion. This was because by early 2009 Zimbabwean dollars had become unusable and therefore pointless for the vast majority of people. Just about everywhere, goods and services were paid for in foreign currency and the only things that one could pay for in Zimbabwe dollars were parastatal bills and rates – water, phone and electricity. So, as a last resort, I went into town to several of the main bus stops to speak to street traders there to see if they had some of these notes. These places have been havens for black market dealers and money traders over the past decade, but, as a result, are closely monitored by plain clothes policemen and the CIO (Central Intelligence Office). But with ‘dollarisation’ and the political changes afoot, I figured it was safe enough to see how money trading was still working in the city. My first stop was the Chinhoyi Street bus stop. The first dealers I spoke to said they had 100 and 50 trillion notes. A ‘brick’ of 100
trillion notes was equivalent to US$20. A ‘brick’ is a wad of a hundred sequential notes still bound in the band as issued from the RBZ. In the case of the 100 trillion brick this works out to 10 quadrillion, or 10,000,000,000,000,000; an exchange rate of 500 trillion to US$1. For the 50 trillion brick it was US$10, the same exchange rate as the 100’s. They had no 10 or 20 trillions, or the new notes, so I went to the next bus stop, the Fourth Street Roadport. Here people were openly changing money, walking around with wads of new, revalued Zimbabwe dollar notes, and with some offering 10 trillions. I asked how much for a brick of 10 trillions (1 quadrillion), expecting it to cost US$2, based on the exchange rate at the Chinhoyi stop. However, I was told it was US$10. Thinking I was being ripped off I asked why, and the answer was intriguing. He explained that the 100 and 50 trillion notes were ‘too big to use’. Since so few people actually used Zimbabwe dollars, no one had change, so you had to use notes that would pay for your goods or bills or whatever, as exactly as you could. In addition, people only wanted to change as much as they needed to pay for the specific cost and Z$10 trillion notes were most useful for this.

What this shows is that money, or the size of money, has become a commodity in itself in Zimbabwe. As demand for those notes that are more useful increases, so does the price, regardless of how this interacts with the ‘exchange rate’ of the day. ‘Money’ fluctuates and changes with regard to the context it surrounding it. With regard to Zimbabwe, this process has expressed itself in various guises throughout the past 10 years: premiums paid for Zimbabwean cash; better exchange rates for cash or bank transfers; premiums paid for small foreign currency bills, particularly US$1 notes; and convenient exchange rates of foreign currencies, such as the 10 South African Rand equalling US$1.

This process was even more pronounced with the new, revalued money. I asked one of the traders selling new Z$1 notes (which was 1 trillion in the old money), how many I could buy for US$1. He said five. That meant that the ‘exchange rate’, for whatever it was worth, was 100 times more expensive for the new notes than that for the old 100 and 50 trillions. To buy a 100 new Z$1 notes, the equivalent in face value of one of the Z$100 trillion notes, would cost me US$20; the same price as I paid for the 100 trillion ‘brick’, which totals 10 quadrillion. However, this did not apply consistently. The new revalued set of notes consists of seven denominations; 1, 5, 10, 20, 50, 100 and 500. I asked to buy a complete set of these and, after a long time looking around, all except the 50 were found. Going by the ‘exchange rate’ of the Z$1’s, this set which totalled Z$636, should have cost me in the region of US$125. However, the dealer asked for US$15. This was because the large notes from Z$50 to Z$500 were useless to him because nobody wanted them or used them. He was essentially happy to give them away. Demand dictated what notes he could sell and how much for.

I then asked this one trader how business was. He said it was terrible now because of ‘dollarisation’. People no longer needed his services because they could pay for most things with foreign currency. He went on, ‘last year I could change [US]$10 000 a day, maybe 2000 in one transaction’. Now he was lucky to change US$500 a day. Indeed, the government’s decision to allow the use of foreign currency in everyday transactions destroyed the lucrative and flourishing dealing industry. As one dealer has commented:

The trading of money had become one of the largest employers, as tens of thousands of people throughout the country saw it as the only viable source of income... Many people in that trade made a lot of money, which they used to buy houses, vehicles, and as seed money to start business operations. Those who made wise investments...
when the going was good are sitting pretty and enjoying the fruits of their labour.5

The money traders have long been an important part of the Zimbabwean black market economy, but very few questions have been asked about how these people operate, how they get access to Zimbabwean dollars, how they work out exchange rates and how they deal with the state. Money trading is technically illegal, but, in a country like Zimbabwe where the political and economic crises have necessitated that everyone become ‘criminal’ to survive, that label is meaningless. The few pieces of journalism that have emerged on the rise and fall of the street money trader have typically portrayed the traders as quick witted, opportunistic individuals who sought to make the best of an unpromising situation. They survive through their own innovations and do so outside of the state. In a sense they exploit the opportunities created by the state’s ridiculous economic policies for their own ends. For example, a recent report in the Washington Post quotes a dealer who stated, ‘it was an opportunity which [had] arisen, and we grabbed it’.6

On the other hand, the government of Zimbabwe has a long history of depicting a very negative picture of the ‘illegal forex traders’.7 Often blamed for hoarding hard currency, spurring inflation and generally undermining both the economy and the government’s measures for resurrecting it, there has been a concerted and deliberate effort on behalf of the government to distance themselves from the street traders. However, the space between the street traders and the state may not be as clear cut as the media or the state have asserted. I asked the dealers how they got the Zimbabwean dollars to sell, and the response was startling. It turned out that many of these street traders were actually being supplied directly by the RBZ. As the traders put it, ‘Gono’s runners’ would come from the bank every day with ‘tubes’ of fresh Zimbabwean money (a ‘tube’ is a sealed bag of 10 bricks). This is either purchased immediately by the traders with US dollars, or the ‘runners’ would return in the afternoon to collect the US dollars exchanged during the day’s (illegal) trading. It has often been suspected that Zanu (PF) was systematically involved in driving and benefiting from the black market/parallel economy, but such analysis demonstrates the level of that involvement. Serving as another example of the hypocrisy of the Zanu (PF) and RBZ hierarchy, this revelation illustrates that the street traders only exist through a symbiotic relationship with the corrupt state. Although most of the traders openly criticise the state of the country and the government of Mugabe, they willingly compromise their distance from the state in order to make a living and profit off the state’s collapse. As one candidly pointed out, ‘there’s no way we can be making profit when there’s a government that can run [the country properly]’.8

The symbiotic nature of this relationship is defined by the fluctuations of the economy. Many of the dealers noted that at times when Gono and Zanu (PF) desperately needed foreign currency, there was a palpable rush for it, as ‘Gono’s runners’ scoured the streets for any source of forex.9 In turn, this would prompt a spike in the exchange rate and resulted in a flurry of activity. These were apparently the best times to be dealing as the government, scrambling to get its hands on as much currency as possible, relaxed its façade of opposition to the money trade. However, the traders all repeated that they still got arrested on a regular basis. One in particular told me that every day the police would come and apprehend him and his partner; it was just something that he had to get used to in his line of work. He knew the drill, and every time he was taken into custody he would go through the motions, pay the bribe and be back on his beat the next day. This was his only source of income, and despite the decline...
of the trade, there was still some business to be done. At the Chinhoyi street bus stop, there was still a very real sense that money trading was a risky activity. The deals were done as surreptitiously as possible – often in the back of a car. Once the rate or amount was decided, one of the dealers would slip out and return with the Zimbabwean dollars. The public show of harassment by the police was carried out partly as a measure by the authorities to make it appear to be tackling the ‘scourge’ of money traders. It was also a ploy by enterprising policemen to solicit bribes from the dealers who obviously had the resources to pay worthwhile bribes. However, the distribution of this attention from the police is highly uneven, as evidenced by the ease with which people traded money at the Roadport.

It is obvious that this street trading has been a hugely lucrative business in the last decade, especially so when one considers the scale of international remittances to Zimbabwe. Recent research by Magunha et al. suggests that approximately US$0.94 billion was remitted to Zimbabwe by people living in the UK in 2007 alone. This figure does not include remittances from Zimbabweans anywhere else in the world (for example, from South Africa, where large numbers of Zimbabwean refugees are working and remitting money to Zimbabwe). These remittances, if not used in their foreign currency format, would have been changed into Zimbabwean dollars on the black market rather than via ‘official’ channels because there was such a large discrepancy between the official exchange rate and the black market one. Until the recent ‘dollarisation’ of the economy, it is therefore safe to assume that a large proportion of these remittances would have been changed on the street, at places like the Chinhoyi street taxi rank and the Fourth Street Roadport. As a consequence, a large part of the remitted foreign currency would then have found its way into the hands of Zanu (PF) through Gono’s ‘runners’.

The irony is obvious. Those Zimbabweans who decided to leave, a majority of whom were opposed to Mugabe and his regime, have probably played a vital role in Zanu (PF)’s survival and ability to maintain that regime financially. Observers have long been wondering how Zanu (PF) has been funding itself and its supporters, and this ability to intervene in the black market trade has probably been one of its most significant means of fundraising. What it also shows is the ability of Zanu (PF) to develop strategies of survival that confound traditional understandings of the state and the economy. However, the ‘dollarisation’ of the economy has eroded this form of income for the state and left it with few alternatives to pursue in order to fill the void left by this loss of revenue. Without this income, Zanu (PF) no longer has the means to continue to support itself and its supporters. This begs the question, is it a coincidence that the ‘dollarisation’ of the economy and the signing of the political deal between Zanu and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) happened within such a short space of each other?

Economists have long been critical of the government’s economic policies, claiming that they have been short sighted and disastrous for the economy, particularly in fuelling hyperinflation. For example, a Professor of Applied Economics at Johns Hopkins University, Steve Hanke, has stated that the ‘root cause of the hyperinflation is that government policies have forced the RBZ to print money’. He goes on to explain:

The source of Zimbabwe’s hyperinflation is the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe’s money machine. The government spends, and the RBZ finances the spending by printing money. The RBZ has no ability in practice to resist the government’s demands for cash. Accordingly, the RBZ cannot hope to regain credibility anytime soon. To stop hyperinflation, Zimbabwe needs to immediately adopt a different monetary system.
The problem is that these assessments presume that the state wishes to have a ‘functional’ economy. They fail to see that Zanu (PF) itself is driving these measures because they are so useful and lucrative for themselves.

The obvious explanation as to why the black market trading has now become unviable is that the rate of inflation has become so debilitating that the Zimbabwean currency has finally become irrelevant, despite state pressure to keep it afloat. Hanke, quoting himself has pointed out:

‘Zimbabwe is in the late stages of a classic hyperinflation… Inflation is galloping ahead as the supply of Zimbabwe dollars surges and the demand for them shrinks. Eventually, the currency will totally collapse as people simply refuse to accept it.’ In recent months, facts on the ground have validated this prognostication. The Zimbabwe dollar is dead.

The street traders are all too well aware of the wholesale popular rejection of the Zimbabwean dollar and how this has resulted in their loss of livelihood and the need to find new means of survival. The street traders find themselves trapped off by the working out of the contradictions of profiteering out of collapse. The failing dollar and crumbling economy, concomitant with foreign currency supplied by remittances of the diasporic populations, opened the space for these entrepreneurs to exploit currency loopholes for impressive returns. However, all this was achieved in conspiracy with the corrupt state and, just as the controllers of that state have found, the final collapse of the dollar has left them with few options but to renegotiate a new deal and means of survival.

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Endnote

2. That figure written out is: 6,500,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000%. Zimbabwe: inflation at 6.5 quindecillion nivemdecillion percent. IRIN Online, 4 March 2009. Available from: http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=82500

3. All traders wished to remain anonymous. Interview with Street Trader 1, Harare, 6 February 2009.

4. Interview with Street Trader 2, Harare, 6 February 2009.


9. Interview with Street Trader 1.

10. Interview with Street Trader 3, Harare, 6 February 2009.


Jan Burgess – Retirement

Jan Burgess is retiring as a Managing Editor of ROAPE after taking over the management of the journal in 1978. During the last 31 years she has been instrumental in seeing the journal through a number of changes which leave ROAPE in a significantly stronger state than when she arrived. She organised the establishment of ROAPE Publications as a cooperative and secured its transfer to the publishing company, Carfax, later taken into the Taylor and Francis stable. This move secured its financial stability without losing its editorial independence. She re-designed the journal in a way which made it more accessible to a wider readership, oversaw the succession of highly successful conferences, organised the regular editorial working group meetings and kept the editors of individual issues focused on producing them to schedule. She represented ROAPE at international conferences, especially those of the American ASA. She also found time to visit Eritrea in the 1980s and co-author a book on Eritrean women, as well as co-author contributions for ROAPE.

Jan has not seen her role as simply an administrator. She did, of course, professionalise ROAPE’s operations so that publication was regular and financial stability maintained. Her input into the content of the journal has been very important in keeping it true to its original objectives. She has been passionately committed to the politics of ROAPE and has held very strong views on its role in exposing the machinations of imperialism, and in particular her native USA, just as much as in analysing the specifics of the political economy of African states and their economic and social development. She has commissioned articles, debates and briefings where she has considered it important that ROAPE should be involved. She has also recognised the importance of greater African participation in ROAPE.

It is probably no exaggeration to say that without Jan, ROAPE would have gone the way of many journals established in the heady days of the 1970s and ceased to exist. We are extremely grateful for her invaluable contribution to its success over the years. We know that her many comrades and friends throughout the world – but especially in Africa – will want to join us in wishing her a happy and politically active ‘retirement’.

A Luta Continua!

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