Knocking on a Wide-open Door: Chinese Investments in Africa

Peter Kragelund

The current strong foothold of Chinese enterprises on the African continent concerns many Western observers. They fear that the West will lose leverage in Africa and simultaneously postpone development. Paradoxically, the advance of Chinese enterprises in Africa is not only the result of deliberate Chinese policies to gain access to resources and markets, but also the consequence of liberal African investment policies imposed by Western donors in the past. This article uses Zambia as a case study to challenge the often one-sided view of the local consequences of China’s engagement with Africa, and it shows that we need to consider the type of policies that guide investment flows, in order to increase the local benefits of China’s growing presence in the continent.

Introduction

The West no longer enjoys monopoly over Africa’s future development. For the first time since the end of the Cold War, other nations are taking notice of African politics and economics. They do not stand passively aside, but actively provide aid to, trade with and invest in African economies to leverage international politics, obtain access to growing markets and acquire much needed raw materials (Klare and Volman 2006).

Prominent among these ‘new’ actors is China, whose presence in Africa takes a multiplicity of (interwoven) forms, spanning migration, tourism, peacekeeping operations, development aid (including debt relief), trade (including tariff exemptions) and investments (both state and privately driven). While the return of many other new players to Africa has gone relatively unnoticed (for example, India), Chinese interests in Africa have triggered strong reactions from the West – especially from the US, but to a lesser extent also from Europe (Woods 2008).

The strong reactions vis-à-vis China do not, of course, solely originate in China’s activities in Africa. Rather, its presence in Africa is perceived as one element in its ‘global rise’ (Gu et al., 2008), which is perceived as a threat to US hegemony, as well as complicating ‘the tussle between the EU and the USA over “who controls Africa”’ (Campbell 2008, p. 91). Moreover, the reaction stems from the struggle for access to Africa’s oil (and other resources) (Klare and Volman 2006). Hence, criticism is articulated towards China’s presence in Africa (and how China invests, trades and gives aid), but equally important for the critics is the fact that the West no longer enjoys a monopoly.
To a large degree, China is pursuing its global strategy via its emerging transnational companies (TNCs) which produce cheap consumer goods, extract resources, move goods around the world, build infrastructure and carry out Chinese development projects. This is also the case in Africa. Indeed, Chinese TNCs are increasingly becoming a dominant factor in Africa, not least due to lack of domestic and international competition (Goldstein et al., 2006).

The literature on ‘China in Africa’ points to several aspects that make Africa particularly interesting for China and Chinese companies. Among the most important factors pushing Chinese (state-owned) companies overseas are: the accumulation of large reserves of foreign exchange; the need for primary commodities to keep the export-based economy going (amplified by the recent domestic recovery packages in China); the fluctuations of world market prices of raw materials, the promotion of domestic exports; the possibility of circumventing import quotas; and the need for political allies. Similarly, a number of factors pull China and Chinese enterprises to Africa. They include: the abundance of natural resources, the large untapped markets, the lack of competitors, and the opportunity to learn to internationalise (Alden and Davies 2006, Kaplinsky and Messner 2008, UNCTAD 2007a, Biggeri and Sanfilippo 2009, Taylor 2009).

This article seeks to further our understanding of the relationship between domestic policies and the developmental role of Chinese investments in Africa by challenging the general perception of how Chinese companies have been able to acquire a strong foothold in Africa and how China has therefore been able to deepen its relationship with African economies while Western governments have expressed their fears. It argues that a combination of deliberate Chinese policies (at home and abroad) and very liberal investment policies (enforced by Western donors) has made the current situation possible. Zambia is chosen as an illustrative case because of the close historical ties between China and Zambia, the current significance of Chinese investments in all sectors of the economy, and the role of donors in the political and economic development of Zambia.

The second section of this article lays out the framework for analysing the relationship between foreign direct investments (FDI) and policy interventions, before providing a brief account of Chinese investments in the Zambian economy in the third section. Against this background, the fourth section analyses how China facilitates its investments abroad, while the fifth section examines the other side of the equation by providing an overview of how Western donors have affected the possibilities for autonomous industrial policies and thereby paved the way for Chinese companies in Africa. The final section critically engages with the general perceptions of Chinese investments in Africa, and concludes that China’s rise in Africa could not have taken place without the assistance of Western donors. Thus, in order to understand the current strong foothold of Chinese companies in Africa, we not only need to consider the strategic role of these investments, but also the historical legacies of host-country investment policies.

These issues are addressed drawing on the author’s fieldwork in Zambia from January to March 2008 and again from October to November 2008. More than 60 interviews were conducted with CEOs of Chinese companies, representatives of Chinese institutions in Zambia, and Zambian government officials, as well as stakeholders of the Zambian private sector, its civil society and academia in order to map the investments as well as examine the regulatory regime facing foreign investors.
The role of government policies in maximising the benefits of Foreign Direct Investments (FDI)

The overall effects of FDI for host governments in developing countries depend among others on the characteristics of the TNC and the structure of the host economy. Nonetheless, donors and policy makers often promote FDI uncritically, as it is perceived to be an effective way to not only to generate employment but also to increase valuable capabilities in developing countries (Bennell 1997). Consequently, developing countries have lowered barriers to FDI and created fiscal and financial incentives to attract FDI. The underlying argument concerns both the direct effects on the recipient of FDI and ‘closely related’ suppliers, and the indirect effects via the diffusion of skills and technology in the host economy that is not paid for in markets, the so-called spillovers (UNCTAD 1999).

The type and degree of direct and indirect effects depend on a whole range of variables, such as (1) the absorptive capacity of the local economy, as spillovers are said to be higher the more advanced the local companies of the host economy; (2) the orientation of the TNC, as backward linkages to local suppliers tend to be stronger and more numerous if TNCs target a local market compared to an export market; (3) the strategies of TNCs, as firms differ in the extent to which they assign responsibilities to local firms; and (4) the ‘nationality’ of the TNC, as local backward linkages depend on the organisational set-up of the TNC, which is said to depend largely on the institutional set-up in the home country (Blomstrom and Kokko 1998, Alfaro and Rodrı́guez-Clare 2004).

Furthermore, the FDI literature also points to different mechanisms that may generate these effects. Among these are the cooperation between TNCs and local firms, demonstration effects, the flow of workers away from the TNC towards domestic companies, the establishment of training programmes with local institutions, and regular human interaction between employees performing similar jobs for different companies. Spillovers may occur via standards of quality, reliability and speed of delivery that are forced upon suppliers, as well as from competition between TNCs and local companies (Gershenberg 1987, Blomstrom and Kokko 1998, Alfaro and Rodrı́guez-Clare 2004).

The FDI literature distinguishes between two different roles vis-à-vis the domestic private sector, namely crowding in or crowding out. Crowding in denotes the development and upgrading of private firms to benefit from linkages with TNCs. Crowding out, in contrast, denotes the distortion of growth of the domestic private sector, either directly via competition on the market or indirectly via limiting access to finance and skills (Kumar 2003).

Basically, government policies, ranging from investment through industrial to macroeconomic policies, seek to enhance the former and reduce the latter and thereby increase the developmental effects of FDI. Crudely speaking these policies may seek (1) to affect potential investors to invest (to influence the decision process of TNCs as well as to exercise selectivity vis-à-vis TNCs); (2) to affect already established firms (to facilitate their upgrading by intervening in resource allocation and thereby enhance potential positive spillovers); or (3) to affect the response of domestic firms (to ensure that domestic firms can capture the spillover effects of TNCs) (te Velde 2003).

In theory, these policies are either in the hands of the host economy (e.g. as industrial or macroeconomic policies), or relate to the international arena (e.g. membership of...
WTO, bilateral treaties and historical ties). In practice, however, the distinction is not clear – and gets less and less clear – as external policies (such as WTO-membership or donor-induced reforms) impact upon the domestic policy space. Despite this, policies determining whether or not to invest, investors upgrading strategies, and their linkages to the domestic private sector to a large degree determine the extent to which FDI crowds in or crowds out local companies.

**Chinese investments in Zambia: not only resource extraction**

FDI to Africa is currently growing at very rapidly. Between 2004 and 2006, FDI to the continent doubled, reaching US$35.5 billion by 2006 (UNCTAD 2007b), but the growth is not distributed equally among investors. While most FDI stock in Africa originates from Europe, the United States and South Africa, Asian countries have recently emerged as powerful investors on the continent. Not only do they account for the majority of global inward FDI, they also increasingly dominate global outward FDI (OFDI).

Even though Chinese OFDI is still small on a global scale, its importance in most African economies is growing rapidly, and today China ranks fourth among the Asian investors in Africa in terms of FDI stock (after Singapore, India and Malaysia) (UNCTAD 2007a). Table 1 demonstrates the growing importance of Chinese companies on the African continent. First, it shows that the number of Chinese companies has increased tenfold in less than two decades and almost doubled in the first six years of this century. Second, it indicates the growing importance of smaller (private) Chinese investments in Africa: while the average size of investments in 2000 was almost $2 million, this figure decreased to approximately $1.4 million in 2006. Hence, even though Chinese investments in the oil sector receive the lion’s share of public and academic coverage (Klare and Volman 2006), Chinese FDI increasingly dominates investments in all sectors in many African countries.

This is also the case in Zambia, where Chinese FDI now target all sectors of the economy. However, these investments are of relatively recent origin. In fact, they only became noticeable in Zambia following the acquisition by China Nonferrous Metal Mining (Group) Co., Ltd. (CNMC) of the majority share of Chambishi mine in Zambia’s Copperbelt region in June 1998, and its subsequent setting up of the BIGRIMM Explosives, the Chambishi Copper Smelter, and the Sino-Metals Leach and Acid Products Zambia Ltd – all related to Chambishi’s mining activities.

However, by 2007 China became the third largest investor in terms of FDI stock in Zambia, only surpassed by Great Britain and South Africa. Nevertheless, looking at the most recent FDI flows, China will become even more important in the near future.

**Table 1. Chinese companies in Africa, 1988–2006**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of companies</th>
<th>FDI stock (US$ million)</th>
<th>Average size of investment (US$ million)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>&gt;80</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>1.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>872</td>
<td>&lt;1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>872</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>1,250</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>1,250</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

future. In 2007, for example, China was by far the biggest foreign investor in Zambia, investing more than ten times the amount of the number two, three and four foreign investors – South Africa, Singapore and Great Britain respectively. In relation to domestic companies too, the importance of Chinese companies is growing. While companies with Zambian majority ownership ranked first in 2005 (investing $63.4 million), they only ranked third in 2006 ($91.3 million), and second in 2007 ($184.1 million). Meanwhile, China moved from being the third most important investor ($40.8 million in 2005) to being the most important ($209 and $284.1 million in 2006 and 2007, respectively).³

Based on news bulletins in Zambia and elsewhere, it could be assumed that China only invested in resource-extraction activities, but this is not the case. All the major mines are owned by TNCs originating in countries other than China (Lungu 2008). Indeed, only eight Chinese companies are directly involved in mining activities in Zambia, with the other Chinese companies investing in other sectors of the economy. However, because of the politicised nature of Chinese investments, poor data quality and overlapping institutional responsibilities, it is difficult to obtain a clear picture of the scope and magnitude of Chinese investments in Zambia.

Nevertheless, Table 2 provides an estimate of the distribution and magnitude of Chinese investments in Zambia as at 31 December 2006. It has been drawn up using investment pledges from Zambia Development Agency (ZDA) and membership lists from the Association of Chinese Companies in Zambia (ACCZ). Column one lists the number of Chinese companies that are listed by either ZDA or by ACCZ (or both), while columns two and three list the number of Chinese companies registered by ZDA and ACCZ respectively. Column four logs the companies that are still active in Zambia, even though ZDA has not registered them, as they are members of ACCZ, while column five provides an account of the Chinese investments in each sector (based on investment pledges from ZDA). In as much as ZDA is not the only Zambian institution allowed to license FDI, and because some investments may be reclassified for the sake of completeness, columns six and seven provide a revised breakdown of Chinese FDI.

First, Table 2 underlines the fact that Chinese investment in Zambia is something more than the popular perception of Chinese investors seeking raw materials abroad: less than 5 per cent of Chinese companies in Zambia have invested (directly) in the mining sector; the rest have invested in manufacturing (43 per cent), services (21 per cent), construction (16 per cent), agriculture (13 per cent) and timber (2 per cent). Concealed in the ZDA categorisation, however, is the fact that the majority of investments in the manufacturing sector are mining-related. For example, the BGRIMM Explosives ($5.6 million), Chambishi Copper Smelter ($199 million) and Sino-Metals Leaching Plant ($12 million) investments are all registered as manufacturing investments, even though they are clearly related to the mining industry. In fact, they are all subsidiaries of CNMC. In total, $220 million of the just under $300 million in manufacturing investment pledges are more accurately represented as mining investments.

In Zambia, both line ministries and local governments are also allowed to license investments. To the present author’s knowledge, however, only the Ministry of Mines and Minerals has availed itself of this right. Nonetheless, this right radically changes the distribution of investments in terms of dollars, as the Ministry of Mines and Minerals licensed the $150 million of investments in the Chambishi mine. In
### Table 2. Sectoral distribution of Chinese companies in Zambia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Number of companies</th>
<th>ZDA-certified companies</th>
<th>ACCZ members</th>
<th>Non-ZDA-certified ACCZ members</th>
<th>ZDA investment pledges (US$ million)</th>
<th>Revised breakdown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Investments (US$ million)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>299.0</td>
<td>79.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>392.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timber</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>378.6</td>
<td>528.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: based on data from ACCZ (2006), ZDA and fieldwork data.
total, therefore, mining-related activities make up approximately three-quarters of the value of all registered Chinese investments in Zambia, as shown in the last column of Table 2.

Not all Chinese companies are registered by the ZDA, the ACCZ or the line ministries. Numerous Zambian-run shops, especially in and around the large markets, are in fact owned by Chinese businessmen. Although the owners are only to be seen in and around the shops in the early morning and late afternoon, their activities are coordinated in a small office located on the outskirts of the Kamwala Market. Furthermore, the Table fails to include the small manufacturing and construction companies set up by former employees of Chinese large-scale companies that have only registered their activities at the Registrar General’s office. Finally, some companies, especially in the construction sector, are de jure Zambian, that is, a Zambian citizen owns more than 51 per cent of the company’s shares, but in fact the Zambian partner is only used as a front in order to win tenders specifically targeted at Zambian small- and medium-sized enterprises. Hence, these companies are de facto Chinese (cf. Kragelund 2009, forthcoming).

Catalysing investments at home and abroad: Chinese investment policies towards Africa

The spread of Chinese companies throughout Africa is rendered possible by the support and guidance of the Chinese state, both at home and in the African economies, and at different levels.

Chinese OFDI was virtually non-existent until Deng Xiaoping initiated political and economic reforms in the late 1970s. Overseas investments were only made as part of government-sponsored development-assistance projects or were intended to facilitate trade. However, as a consequence of the changing political discourse in China regarding the outside world, in August 1979 the Chinese State Council allowed certain state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to invest overseas. This political change became the starting point for emerging Chinese OFDI, and together with the sustained economic growth of the past three decades it provided the basis for both the emergence and growth of Chinese OFDI.

However, the reforms, did not immediately lead to growth in OFDI. Rather, Chinese OFDI was an insignificant foreign economic activity for many years. Only from the mid-1980s, when the government initiated a liberalisation process, did Chinese OFDI take off. Although some Chinese OFDI did take place in the 1990s, when the government initiated a liberalisation process, did Chinese OFDI take off. Although some Chinese OFDI did take place in the 1990s, the determining factor for its growing importance worldwide was the so-called ‘Go Out’ policy (zou chu qu) implemented by the Chinese Government in 2001 to turn Chinese enterprises into internationally competitive players. On the whole, this policy reduced red tape to make procedures more OFDI-friendly. It entitled certain firms to tax incentives, cheap loans, direct or indirect subsidies and various types of support from state institutions in China and in host-country contexts (Wu and Chen 2001, Buckley et al., 2007).

Chinese ODFI originates in the context of a home economy with a high degree of political control and a long tradition of central planning. Hence, it comes as no surprise that SOEs dominate Chinese ODFI, although not exclusively. Of late, both provincial and private companies have benefited from the ‘Go Out’ policy. Notwithstanding their ownership structure, these companies are instruments of Chinese foreign
policy. The central government plays a determining role in directing the FDI activities of the SOEs, because their transnational activities provide access to natural resources for industrial production as well as to new markets, as outlined in the first section above.

China’s ‘Go out’ policy is by no means the only way in which the Chinese state supports its TNCs. China has set a whole series of initiatives in motion to persuade and support them to invest in Africa. First and foremost, China dubbed 2006 its ‘Year of Africa’, which marked the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the first Sino–African diplomatic relations (with Egypt). Second, the launch in January 2006 of the Africa Policy, which sets the framework for current and future Sino–African relations, kick-started the Year of Africa. This policy, among other things, points to the importance of economic cooperation between China and Africa, and states: ‘The Chinese Government encourages and supports Chinese enterprises’ investment and business in Africa, and will continue to provide preferential loans and buyer credits to this end’ (Government of China 2006). Third, in November 2006 China hosted the third Forum on China–Africa Cooperation, which brought together African and Chinese heads of state. This forum led to the Beijing Action Plan (2007–2009), which lays down the principles of Sino–African development, trade and investment cooperation, and specifies how the Chinese state will pave the way for future investments in Africa through development aid and soft loans. In particular, the Action Plan states that the Chinese Government will support Chinese banks in setting up a development fund to support well-established and reputable Chinese companies in investing in Africa, and encourage Chinese companies to set up three to five overseas economic and trade cooperation zones in African countries. Finally, the Chinese state facilitates Chinese OFDI by offering low-interest loans both directly and indirectly to Chinese enterprises: directly via the Bank of China (BOC), and indirectly via non-commercial banks such as the Export-Import Bank of China, the State Development Bank and the Agricultural Development Bank. All of these banks, but in particular the non-commercial banks, are related closely to the Chinese state’s large infrastructural development projects in African countries.

However, the Chinese state does not confine itself to these general types of support in order to facilitate the further growth and expansion of Chinese companies in Africa; it also establishes institutions in the host economies aimed specifically at guiding and helping Chinese TNCs.

In Zambia, the most important institution is the Chinese Embassy, in particular the Economic Counsellor’s Office, which, through diplomatic attention and development aid to prestige projects, facilitates a positive attitude towards Chinese investments among the political elite. Moreover, it provides investors with investment opportunities, maintains essential contacts with the Zambian authorities and makes inter-Chinese cooperation in Zambia possible. In spite of this, neither the embassy nor the Economic Counsellor’s Office have full knowledge of the Chinese engagement in Zambia, as the majority of small Chinese companies approach the Zambian authorities directly, thereby bypassing these two central institutions. The big companies, in contrast, are well known by these institutions.

Also of importance is the Chinese Centre for Investment Promotion and Trade (CCIPT) and ACCZ, established as a result of the implementation of the ‘Go Out’ policy. Both have been established by political decree, and both seek to smooth the progress of Chinese companies in Zambia. While currently CCIPT mostly identifies suitable
investment projects and provides practical support to newly established Chinese companies, ACCZ essentially functions as the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Zambia, taking care of the interests of Chinese companies, communicating and promoting the cause of Chinese investors, and instructing its members in Zambia’s rules and regulations.

Similarly, by political decree, BOC set up one of its two African branches in Zambia in 1997. BOC is instrumental in facilitating China’s political and corporate interests in Africa (and elsewhere). It helps to pave the way for Chinese large-scale investments in Zambia, especially in the mining and construction sectors, by offering cheap loans for capital investments, but also by easing the day-to-day banking operations for the great majority of medium- and large-scale Chinese companies in Zambia.

Finally, the establishment of the $900 million Zambia–China Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone (ZCCZ) a stone’s throw from the Chinese-owned Chambishi mine in the Zambian Copperbelt, with an expected 50–60 Chinese companies, and the January 2009 inauguration of a Lusaka-based ZCCZ sub-zone ($500 million) chiefly for light manufacturing and services, are manifestations of the support that the Chinese state gives to Chinese companies in Zambia. In the words of the President of the ACCZ:

Without this project, if you tell someone in China that they should invest in Zambia he’ll think twice. Nothing is here when he comes. And he has to erect the buildings before he can even start. So we explained the problem to the economic counsellor. We told him, why don’t you build structures to attract investors? So far we have failed to attract industry and manufacture because of this. So we persuaded the government to set up this industrial zone and build the structures.

As stated in the fifth section below, both the (Copperbelt) ZCCZ and the Lusaka sub-zone fit well into the Government of Zambia’s plans to attract FDI. The overall aim of the 4,100-hectare economic and trade cooperation zone 25 km outside Kitwe is to build an export hub for locally produced goods: when all the investments in the zone have been finalised, the Chinese state – through mostly state-owned Chinese companies – will control the full copper value chain, from crushing the rock and floating it in acids to producing copper concentrate, drying and smelting the concentrate to producing copper cathodes, to manufactured copper products. In order to fulfil this aim, the Chinese state constructs the essential infrastructure and erects the required buildings within the zones financed by Chinese development aid and carried out by Chinese companies. Moreover, it provides cheap loans via BOC (or any of the other three main banks in China) to potential investors in the zones. The Lusaka-sub zone will, when fully operating in 2011, be an integrated part of the ZCCZ, and should be perceived as an effort to extent the business sphere of ZCCZ beyond the processing of raw materials.

Western donors and the room for autonomous government policies in Zambia

In terms of governing FDI, the ultimate goal of government policies is to minimise negative effects and maximise positive effects of the FDI. As stated in the second section above, te Velde (2003) distinguishes between three levels of policies, namely policies outside the realm of the host government, macroeconomic policies, and
industrial policies (both in principle within the realm of the host government). These policies (and issues, in the case of the former) may affect potential investors determining whether or not to invest (‘determinants’), the willingness of already established TNCs to upgrade (‘upgrading’), and/or the response of domestic firms (‘linkages’).

Inspired by this categorisation of government policies, Table 3 presents a matrix of important policies regarding FDI governance in Zambia. Column two lists major external policies and factors impacting on government policies. It categorises them according to their focus, i.e. determinants for FDI, upgrading of FDI, and linkages with TNCs. Columns three and four then categorise Zambia’s most important macroeconomic and industrial policies in terms of governing FDI – again according to their focus.

Mining, and especially copper, has always been Zambia’s main economic attraction. It began when Zambia became a business venture for the British South Africa Company in 1889, and since then copper prices have determined the attractiveness of the Zambian economy. It therefore comes as no surprise that the end of the copper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External policies / factors</th>
<th>Macroeconomic policies</th>
<th>Industrial policies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Determinants</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of 1st Copper boom</td>
<td>Mulungushi reforms</td>
<td>Import substitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF Agreements</td>
<td>Privatisation (1992–)</td>
<td>Investment Acts (1986,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Recovery Programs (ERP)</td>
<td>Exchange rate liberalisation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTO membership</td>
<td>Fiscal and monetary reforms (1992–)</td>
<td>1995 Mines &amp; Minerals Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1995–)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Zambia Development Agency (ZDA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Sector Development Reform Programme (PSDRP)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2004–)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booming commodity prices (2004–2008)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Upgrading</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSDRP (2004–)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Linkages</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Sector Development Reform Programme (PSDRP)</td>
<td>Citizen Economic Empowerment Act</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2004–)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(2006–)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: this Table is a schematic presentation of the information in the fifth section and derives from the references cited there.
boom in the mid-1970s had a devastating impact on the Zambian economy. This immediately resulted in a slowdown of the Zambian economy, which was soon to turn into a major financial crisis and then a long-standing relationship with the International Financial Institutions (IFIs).

This particular relationship, although characterised by its on/off nature, was to revise the role of external institutions vis-à-vis Zambia’s policy space. Facing widespread popular protest against the effects of the liberalisation programme, in 1987 the Zambian Government chose to discard the externally imposed programme, change the debt-service conditions and instigate an internal recovery programme. Zambia’s refusal to maintain repayments to the IMF, however, meant that just about every donor decided to cut Zambia out of their list of aid recipients (Simutanyi 1996). In the words of Fraser and Lungu, ‘Zambia learned the hard way not to try to resist [World Bank and IMF policies]’ (Fraser and Lungu 2007, p. 9).

The policies imposed by the IFIs marked a shift in development thinking. Led by the IFIs, Africa embarked on a series of Economic Recovery Programmes (ERPs)12 with the ultimate aim of increasing economic growth by correcting imbalances between government spending and government revenues, thus raising the productive capacity of African economies. The most widespread measures used included trade liberalisation, exchange-rate liberalisation (devaluation), fiscal and monetary reforms, public enterprise reforms, and the deregulation of investments, labour and prices.

A critical aspiration of the ERP model was to stimulate the interest of foreign investors in investing in African economies and thus bring about the expansion of production capacity, increase foreign-exchange earnings and create employment. Much emphasis therefore was placed on providing an environment conducive to FDI. Although ERPs differed slightly from country to country, as did implementation of such policies, in most cases the IFIs were successful in liberalising the investment codes of African economies to accommodate a catalysing role for FDI in the transformation process (Hutchful 2002).

The ERPs were not the only external policies affecting Zambia’s governance of FDI. Of importance is also Zambia’s 1 January 1995 membership of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which has made it difficult for Zambia to pursue its own (protectionist) trade, industrial and investment policies. Although the international system still lacks an agreed regulatory framework for all aspects of FDI, the WTO covers many aspects of FDI. Most importantly, the Trade-Related Investment Measures (TRIM) Agreement governs global FDI flows. Thus, although the WTO allows Least Developed Countries to deviate from the general rules (at least for a time), the end goal remains the same: the TRIMs Agreement bans certain performance requirements related to local content, mandatory technology transfer and export requirements. The membership of WTO therefore has direct impact upon the possibilities of increasing positive spillovers via for instance (mandatory) subcontracting schemes (cf. Gibbon 2002).

Recently, the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative signed by Zambia in 2000 and the affiliated Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)13 reinforce the policies set in motion by the IFIs in the 1990s, in as much as countries requesting HIPC must be on track with an IMF Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility programme, which in the Zambian case entails continuation and deepening of the liberalisation and privatisation policies. This programme is the guiding principle for other donors. In the words of Ciara Gaynor (2005, p. 76):
The inordinate power and control the IMF exerts over Zambian national policy is reinforced by the signalling role it performs for the bilateral donors. In 2003 when Zambia went off track in meeting one of the HIPC conditionalities, not only did IMF funding cease, but so did the support from all the major bilateral donors.

In 2004, the Zambian Government, in line with the PRSP, embarked upon the Private Sector Development Reform Programme (PSDRP), which aims to improve the investment climate in order to pave the way for private-sector-led growth in Zambia. The PSDRP pays specific attention to decreasing red tape, improving the macroeconomic environment and the regulatory frameworks, and enhancing infrastructure.

Finally, the Zambian Government recently launched its Fifth National Development Plan (FNDP), 2006–2010, which on the one hand seeks to continue the existing macroeconomic policies by paying attention to macroeconomic stabilisation, reducing debt burdens, and monitoring public spending, thereby improving the competitiveness of the economy and strengthening the investment climate, and on the other hand seeks to pay more attention to social aspects in particular job creation and capacity building (Government of Zambia 2006). Although the FNDP officially departs from the PRSP (and its preference for the liberal policies imposed by the IFIs) and instead draws attention to the need for development planning and guiding in order to become a ‘prosperous middle-income country by the year 2030,’ the very process of designing the plan resembles that of the PRSP, hence it is indeed questionable to what extent the FNDP is autonomous (Fraser 2008).

Despite almost three decades of attempting to make the Zambian economy conducive to foreign investors by opening up and liberalising the investment codes (see also below), a large-scale survey undertaken by the turn of the millennium shows that investors in Zambia had mixed views on the effects of these externally imposed policies (Bank of Zambia 2004). What really mattered to them was the economic situation in general and the world market prices of primary commodities in particular. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the boom in foreign investments (including Chinese) to Zambia correlates roughly with the boom in copper prices – increasing from US$2,500 per tonne in the beginning of 2004 to US$9,000/tonne in July 2008 (before falling sharply again to just under US$3,000/tonne at the end of 2008).

The external policies to a large extent set the policy room for the Zambian Government to formulate autonomous macroeconomic policies (column 3) and industrial policies (column 4). This is especially the case since the start of the ERPs. However, it was not always like this in Zambia: Kaunda’s Mulungushi reforms of 1968 were not influenced by external agencies, but did have a large impact upon both potential and established foreign investors. Prior to these reforms, foreign investors in the Zambian economy could easily remit profits, and the Zambian state did not impose any constraints on imports from the sterling area. However, the 1968 reforms changed this altogether, putting fiscal and financial constraints on foreign investors and seeking to Zambianise the economy (Burdette 1988).

Even though it is debateable to what extent contemporary Zambian macroeconomic policies (column 3) are indeed autonomous, it does not change the importance of the general economic situation for potential investors (cf. Bank of Zambia 2004). Indeed, it seems that the underlying economic structures, as well as the availability of skills, physical infrastructure, labour market policy, ease of export and the development of
financial markets affect TNCs’ decisions to invest and upgrade, as well as the response of domestic companies (te Velde 2003).

This is also the case in Zambia, where the liberalisation policies set in motion during the 1980s aimed to give room for the private sector to kick-start the economy. However, the domestic private sector was either too weak and small or too enmeshed in politics to react positively to these measures (cf. Handley 2008), and foreign investors had lost faith in the Zambian economy. Hence, the incentives given to FDI as part of the restructuring programmes in the 1980s did not result in an increase in FDI to Zambia. In fact, liberalisation and years of economic mismanagement resulted in the closing down of several (parastatal) domestic companies due to increased competition from imports, and down-scaling of the few remaining TNCs in Zambia (Muuka 1997).

The Chiluba-led Government (1991–2002) perceived across-the-board liberalisation – the IMF way – as a means of attracting foreign investments. An important aspect of these policies was to deregulate and privatise the largely state-owned Zambian economy. In 1994, it opened the Lusaka Stock Exchange, which was seen as crucial by the IFIs in the Zambian privatisation process. More broadly, the development of (private) capital market was perceived as a key ingredient in facilitating economic growth (Marone 2003).

Nonetheless, the privatisation process was slow to take off, and at first only smaller, less important companies were privatised. Similarly, the stock exchange never really became the anticipated success. Almost a decade after its inauguration, trading activity was still low. However, this stood out against the original idea of privatising key parastatals, not least the Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM) (Lungu 2008). Therefore, privatisation also became a key issue of the HIPC, which obliged the Zambian state to privatise several strategically important state-owned enterprises, but it did not end there. Indeed, the current FNDP expands the privatisation process to include other strategic sectors such as energy and telecommunications.

Industrial policies (column 4) provide host governments with specific tools to direct TNCs’ decision-making processes as well as influencing the ability of domestic companies to capture the spillovers from TNCs. Like the macroeconomic policies described above, the industrial policies in Zambia are greatly influenced by the policies of the IFIs. Most importantly, Zambia has changed its Investment Act to reduce red tape and offer an increasing number of grants and special tax rates to potential investors. For example, the passing of the 1986 Investment Act allowed foreign investors to retain part of their foreign exchange earnings, gave them export incentives and preferential tax rates, and full exemption from tax on dividends for five years. The passing by parliament of the 1991 Investment Act allowed foreign investors to retain 100 per cent of foreign exchange earnings for three years, while simultaneously being exempt from company tax and customs duties for the same period. In 1996, as a condition for an extension of a World Bank loan, a new investment act came into being (Lungu 2008). This Act introduced minor restrictions on tax holidays and the duty-free import of capital goods, but, more importantly, established the Zambian Investment Centre in order to assist (foreign) companies to invest in the Zambian economy in the wake of the widespread privatisation programme.

By the same token, the IFIs, assisted by prospective investors, pressed the Zambian Government to pass the 1995 Mines and Minerals Act, which gave foreign investors particular incentives to invest in the mines. For example, the Act stipulated that
investors were exempt from custom duties on imported capital equipment, while at the same time they could reduce income taxes by deducting investments from profits. This Act also paved the way for confidential ‘Development Agreements’ between the Zambian state and investors. These agreements allowed the government to provide potential investors with even more incentives than those granted under the Act (Lungu 2008).

FDI in Zambia is currently governed by the ZDA Act, which still offers investors a very liberal investment climate, although it introduces stricter rules on the minimum investment and employment-creation requirements in order to obtain a Zambian resident’s permit (the minimum is now $250,000 and 200 employees, as opposed to $50,000 under the 1996 Act). For example, it does not stipulate any requirements regarding local content, technology transfer, equity, employment or use of subcontractors for foreign investors, even though foreign investors are encouraged to make a commitment to local participation. It also allows investors to repatriate any capital investments freely and to send home profits, dividends, interest, fees and royalties, as well as permitting foreign nationals to transfer abroad wages earned in Zambia.

The most recent instrument for attracting foreign investors has been the passing of the Multi-Facility Economic Zones (MFEZ) Regulations in late 2006. Companies located in these MFEZs enjoy special incentives, including duty-free importation of raw materials, capital goods and machinery for five years. So far five areas have been earmarked for MFEZs. Two have already been mentioned in the fourth section above, namely the ZCCZ in the Copperbelt and the ZCCZ sub-zone by Lusaka International Airport. They are both financed by the Chinese Government and administered with the support of NFC-A. The third area, in Lusaka South, is well under way. It is financed by the Japan International Cooperation Agency and is encouraging Malaysian and Indian companies to set up joint ventures with Zambian companies. According to Minister of Commerce Felix Mutati’s recent statement to the National Assembly, two more MFEZs, in Lumwana and Ndola, are also under way (Mutati 2009).

None of these industrial policies deal with the formation of linkages between TNCs and domestic companies. In contrast, such policies are put aside in favour of laissez-faire policies to attract FDI (and to a lesser extent also encourage TNCs to upgrade). The only policy that deals with this particular aspect of maximising the benefits of FDI is the Citizen Economic Empowerment Act (CEEA), which was born as one of six reform areas of the PSDRP and is a central part of the FNDP. The CEEA essentially refers back to the 1968-Mulungushi reforms, which officially sought to empower the Zambians but instead ended up empowering the state. The aim of the CEEA is to make Zambians participate in the economy again. In order to reach this aim, CEEA encourages new investors to find a local partner and existing TNCs to sell shares to Zambians. So far, however, the CEEA policies have not been enforced. Rather, they build on a voluntary commitment, and, as the CEEA has not yet been harmonised with other key industrial policies guiding FDI, the process of bringing ownership back to the Zambians is built on codes of conduct agreed upon by the main stakeholders in each sector of the economy.

In sum, Table 3 points to several important aspects concerning FDI governance in Zambia. First, governance is heavily influenced by the Western donor community. Indeed, all major policy changes have come about due to external pressure. Second, policy changes tend to follow the neoliberal trend of opening up, i.e. they pay attention to the determinants of FDI, not to upgrading or linkages. Third, and related to this, the
Zambian Government does not seem to have used the – albeit limited – policy space available for ensuring that domestic companies benefit from the FDI. Finally, only the most recent initiative, the CEEA, focuses on how domestic companies can enhance their ability to respond to FDI.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated the increasing importance of Chinese FDI for small African economies. In Zambia, Chinese companies come in all shapes and sizes, and even though some of them do seek resources, their engagement is not only based on securing access to Zambia under the ground. Indeed, the Zambian mining sector is still dominated by non-Chinese TNCs, even though the establishment of Chinese-led MFEZs will increase their relative power. However, the Chinese mining companies do not operate in a vacuum: alongside the arrival of mining-related Chinese companies, several private Chinese companies of all sizes have chosen to invest in Zambia. While some of them benefit from the large-scale investments of the SOEs, others are not related to these investments at all. Rather, they have been pushed out of China due to increasing demands for technological capabilities and lower profit margins in China. This article therefore also shows us that we must modify our general perception of these investments as comprising solely resource-seeking activities.

In order to gain access to these resources, make use of the large foreign exchange surpluses and benefit from the large untapped markets, the Chinese state has set a particular strategy in motion, which catalyses Chinese economic engagement both at home and in the host economies. Although the scale may be different, other countries also actively support their corporations operating in Africa (Alden and Davies 2006). Therefore, the Chinese method of catalysing investments in Africa is not exceptional. Moreover, neither the ‘Go Out’ policy nor support for Chinese TNCs in the host economies are confined to Africa. Rather, they are part of China’s global rise, and it is in this context that the acquisition of large international corporations by Chinese multinationals has triggered large headlines. However, consideration of the fuller picture calls into question the implicit one-sidedness in most of the current literature on Sino–African relations.

China also supports its companies in Zambia. According to Carmody (2009, forthcoming), such a strategy offers potential for enhanced development outcomes. This article has sought to qualify this by paying attention to how and to what extent the Zambian Government has governed FDI. Inspired by te Velde (2003), it argues that governance takes place at three different levels, namely to attract (certain) FDI, to encourage existing TNCs to upgrade, and to facilitate the building of linkages between TNCs and domestic companies. Only if attention is paid to all three levels using a combination of policies and strategies can the local benefits of FDI be enhanced.

This is not the situation in Zambia. In contrast, the focus has been on the first level: since the 1980s, one reform after another has been initiated to liberalise and open up to foreign investors, and until very recently policies paid attention neither to the long-term strategies of the TNCs, nor to the ability of the Zambian private sector to link up. Moreover, these policies have not been internally driven. Although the ideas and strategies of the political elite and parts of the business community in Zambia in the 1990s to a large degree mirrored those of the IFIs (cf. Handley 2008), this article has revealed how these policies were influenced by external agencies.
This externally driven quest for liberalisation and opening up to foreign investors has paved the way for many Chinese companies which did not necessarily choose Zambia per se, but found that investment codes were liberal and that the institutional set-up supported them. Thus, they aimed to benefit from the existing combination of liberal investment codes and a lack of local competition. A simple explanation based on the need for resources for the ‘factory of the world’, therefore is not sufficient to account for the rapid growth of Chinese TNCs in African economies, even though securing access to resources is indeed an important aspect of official Chinese OFDI policies.

The literature on ‘China in Africa’ tends to forget the role of the West – especially that of Western donors – in Chinese TNCs’ rise in Africa: without the very liberal investment climate in Africa, Chinese companies could not have pursued their grand policies of vertical integration to control full value chains. Instead, Chinese companies would have had to link up with other companies. Similarly, China could not have established exclusive investment and trade zones for Chinese companies throughout Africa (Davies 2008), but would have had to compete on equal terms with domestic (and other foreign) companies.

Consequently, ‘traditional’ explanations do not account sufficiently for the presence of Chinese companies in Africa in general, nor in Zambia in particular. In order to understand what is happening, we have to take both ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors into account. ‘Push’ factors include not only deliberate OFDI policies, but also fiercer competition and lower profit margins at home. Similarly, ‘pull’ factors not only include natural resources, large untapped markets and opportunities to learn how to internationalise, but also liberal investment codes and limited domestic competition.

Hence, if African development is indeed a priority for Western observers, they should stop pointing their finger at Chinese TNCs and instead assist African host economies to maximise the benefits of the current upward trend in Chinese investments. Rather than placing more emphasis on liberalising African economies, Western donors should help African governments make use of the admittedly small policy space in the form of temporary exemptions and longer implementation periods that exist for most African countries. An efficient use of this policy space to build local subcontracting schemes, combined with broad-based capacity building in the domestic private sector, could pave the way to more positive effects of Chinese (and other foreign) investments in Africa and thus curb Western criticism of Chinese interest in the continent.

Peter Kragelund is at the Department of Society and Globalisation, Roskilde University, Denmark. Email: jpk@ruc.dk

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Endnotes

1. All dollar figures in this article refer to US dollars.
2. CNMC bought Chambishi via its subsidiary NCF Africa Mining Plc (NFC-A).
3. All data refer to investment pledges to the Zambia Development Agency. Only 70 per cent of pledges are actually fulfilled, and actual investment figures may differ from the pledges (personal interview, ZDA, Lusaka, 27 Feb 2008).
4. Personal interviews, Hua Chang Infrastructure Engineering (Z) (30 Jan 2008) and ABCEC (20 Feb 2008), both Lusaka.
7. The ZCCZ is in fact located at the former industrial zone CNMC, which is by far the largest Chinese player in the Zambian mining sector owning approximately 60 per cent of the Chinese mining-related companies in Zambia.
9. At the time of the second period of fieldwork in the autumn of 2008, eight Chinese companies were registered in the ZCCZ, including the NFC-A, four subsidiaries of NFC-A and three other companies. The aim is, by 2011, to reach 50 to 60 companies in the ZCCZ that also aims to provide housing for Chinese as well as Zambian staff.
10. It is unclear to what extent non-Chinese companies will be able to benefit from these physical structures as well as the fiscal and financial incentives given by the Zambian state to companies located in this zone. Originally, ZCCZ was exclusively for Chinese companies and most observers stick to this view (see e.g. Davies 2008), but according to a recent statement by the Minister for Trade and Commerce, Mr. Felix Mutati, other companies are now welcome in the zone (Mutati 2009).
12. ERP here covers both the IMF-led stabilisation programmes, which aimed to resolve internal and external balance of payment problems in the short- to medium-term, and the World Bank-led adjustment proper, which sought to free up market forces and thereby promote long-term growth.
13. The PRSP is a prerequisite for all countries requesting debt relief under HIPC.

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Transnational Resource Flow and the Paradoxes of Belonging: Redirecting the Debate on Transnationalism, Remittances, State and Citizenship in Africa

Ebenezer Obadare & Wale Adebanwi

The rise in the volume of known global foreign worker remittances to countries of origin has sparked considerable academic and policy interest. Much attention has been paid to the assumed ‘development’ potential of these financial remittances, an approach which encapsulates the tendency to envisage the consequences of remittance flows in overwhelmingly economic terms. This article takes issue with such an approach, arguing for a refocusing of the debate on remittances in recipient societies on the crucially important, yet largely neglected, political realm. It posits that in formations where a significant aspect of the population relies on external grants for everyday provisioning, questions on the possible implications of their reliance for civic engagement, social citizenship and political allegiance become imperative. The article proposes a conceptual framework for interrogating the effects of the emergence of a discursive ‘remittance class’ for notions of citizenship, state–society relations, and the changing patterns and forms of identity in African and other remittance-dependent societies.

Preamble

In the age of networks, the relationship of the citizens to the body politic is in competition with the infinity of connections they establish outside it. (Guehenno 1995, p. 19)

In an era of increasingly transnational loyalties, regional politics and global economic regimes . . ., diasporic affiliations and mobile, media-linked communities of migrants are redrawing the relationship of location and affiliation. Sri Lankan Tamils, Kurds, Chinese emigrants, Indian techno-coolies, each in their own way, owe their allegiance to multiple forms of citizenship. Their mental geography is surely no longer Westphalian. (Appadurai 2002, p. 43)

Is migration unwittingly weakening the nation-state as a form of (socio-political) solidarity? When Benjamin Barber posed this question in 1995, the now seemingly ceaseless global South–North ‘flow’1 was incipient – although there was global migration in 1995, the volume was comparatively insignificant, particularly when seen in the light of the sudden explosion which took place at the turn of this
century. For example, by 2000, an estimated 175 million people lived outside their
countries of origin (up from 75 million in 1975), a figure which is projected to increase
annually by 2–3 per cent (Sander 2003). In the aftermath of this surge, academics have
started to ask critical questions about the implications of transnational migration for
the nation-state as a mode of organisation of sovereignty (Bayart 2007), a fact which
makes Barber’s 1995 poser all the more perspicacious.

Like that of Barber, such questions have, for the most part, arisen out of a totally under-
standable fascination with matters surrounding autochthony and citizenship
(Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000, Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005) in Western European
societies. They have been echoed amid intellectual, cultural and political anxiety about
the fate of Western societies apparently chafing under the weight of immigration,
mostly from the former colonies, but also from the not-so privileged Eastern
margins of Europe. Klumeyer admits that ‘one of the main reasons for current
debates about citizenship is a growing concern over finding new frameworks for inte-
gration amid our increasingly ethnically and racially diverse societies’ (2001. p. 11,
emphasis added). Clearly, then, issues of citizenship and belonging are never far
away when (transnational) migration is at issue, and in the case of a cross-section of
Western societies, it is not far-fetched to suggest that concerns about the possibility
of being overwhelmed by what is invariably labelled a ‘wave’ of immigrants is one
factor behind many individuals’ sudden rediscovery of their long lost sense of
‘ethnic identity.’

However, while the interest in this exploratory article is also on transnational
migration as it relates to citizenship, the target is not the destination societies of trans-
national migrants, or ‘those who leave’, but rather the societies that migrants have ‘left
behind’. The key question put forward in this article concerns the politico-civic impli-
cations of the dependence on remittances by an increasing segment of the population
in recipient countries, and while this and corollary questions are proposed in the
immediate context of Nigeria (Africa’s most populous country and its largest recipient
of workers’ remittances), the reverberations for many African countries cannot be
overemphasised. One aim is to facilitate a coincidence among three categories of litera-
ture: on transnational migration, on workers’ financial remittances and on citizenship.
This, it is assumed, will deepen scholarly understanding of the motivation for transna-
tional migration, the effects of financial remittances, the paradoxes and contradictions
of belonging in receiving societies, and the pressures on the nation-state as the
supreme form of human solidarity.

These concerns are particularly exigent in contemporary Africa, a continent still
associated with severe socio-political dysfunctionalities, including the so-called
‘sovereignty gap’ (Ghani and Lockhart 2008) and massive disaffection between the
‘state’ and ‘citizens’ (Taiwo 2004). While these problems have attracted growing schol-
larly interest, the role of transnational migration (especially the implications of the
dependence on ‘external grants’ by a rising proportion of the population) is absent
from most analyses.

One explanation for this is that although migration is a profoundly ‘social act’ (Castells
2000), research on it, especially in the African context, has been historically dominated
by demographers, statisticians and economists (Borjas 1995, Afolayan 2002) for whom
state–society relations are not always of primary research interest. Second, although
research into emigration from Africa has grown within the past decade, the research
landscape appears predictable in terms of the areas of interest and the types of
questions to which scholars are seeking answers. One example is the growing development-focused literature on financial remittances in recipient countries, which continues to be dominated by issues such as the relationship between senders and receivers (Suro 2003); remittances and expenditure (Taylor and Mora 2006); remittances and ‘poverty alleviation’ (Sumata 2002, Adams 2006, Bracking and Sachikonye 2006); remittances and fair financial access (Orozco and Millis 2007); the role of remittances during crises (Lindley 2006, Savage and Harvey 2007); the ‘economic impact’ of remittances (Kabki et al. 2004, Ghosh 2006); ‘tracking flows’ of remittances (Suro 2003); remittances and ‘community development’ (de la Garza and Lowell 2002); ‘evaluations, performance and implications of remittances’ (Keely and Tran 1989); and remittances and housing investments (Osili 2004).

Although there is nothing wrong in speculating on the ‘development’ potential of remittances, the article wishes to highlight the obvious failure to take the next logical step as far as the implications of continued reliance on remittances is concerned. The failure to make the ‘economic’ speak to the ‘political’ is itself apparently a legacy of the dualist imagination evident in early literature on the causes of (African) migration (Castells 1972, Baker and Aina 1995), a problem Ortiz (2000) summarises thus:

Many academics tend to take into consideration either the economic forces of migration or the social. The economic theories focus solely on the economic motives of why people migrate; ignoring completely social forces that may play a role as well. On the other hand, the socially oriented theories focus only on the transnational connections, leaving the economic forces out altogether. (Ortiz 2000, p. 10)

Therefore, the article proposes the following key questions: what becomes of the subject whose economic viability and survival are determined by financial resources outside the borders of the state? Do people who depend on remittances (what are described here as a ‘remittance class’) become more, or, less, civically engaged? What types of ambivalences (and socialities) are produced by the influx of financial remittances into African societies?

These, among other vital questions, have been overlooked by a literature seemingly obsessed with establishing correlations between remittances and development – itself an irony, given that the same literature admits routinely that remittances finance the reconstruction of urban neighbourhoods (in addition, it could be added, to transforming local power relations). What does this dynamic suggest about what Jean and John Comaroff (2006a) describe as the dwindling capacity of the nation-state to sustain its infrastructure?

Suffice to say then that the object in this article is political, and is predicated on the logic that while a focus on development may very well be inescapable, given Africa’s well documented throes, this might actually be redundant in societies where commentators legitimately fear the disappearance of both the state and citizenship as we have come to know and/or understand them. What type of development should we be talking about in contexts where the state has become little more than a shell, and its citizens may be resident but are, arguably, not actually present? Two decades ago, Ayoade (1988) speculated on what he saw at the time as an emergent phenomenon: the possibility of ‘states without citizens’ in Africa. His argument rested on what he called the ‘congenital dichotomy’ (1988, p. 104) between ‘the government’ and ‘the people’ in Africa, one that intensified as the majority of African states
languished in the grip of ‘postcolonial bureaupathyology’ (1988, p. 107). More recently, and writing about Nigeria in particular (but no doubt with the rest of Africa in mind), Daniel Bach (2006) had cause to fear the possible emergence of a related phenomenon: a country without a state. Bach’s thesis is that ‘decades of institutional decay and the erosion of territorial control point to the steady transformation of Nigeria into a country without a state’ (2006, p. 85).

As critical milestones, these analyses give a good indication of how deeply embedded the crisis in Africa is. This article seeks to build on their insight by introducing a dimension which these and similar literatures have largely ignored – the way in which transnational migration (specifically the reliance on remittances) complicates the socio-political reality in Nigeria and a growing number of African countries, particularly with regard to its implication for state-citizen relations. The analysis can be located within the rubric of transformations in citizenship in the era of transnationalism, globalisation and increasing cosmopolitanism (McKinley 2009).

In what follows, the article first discusses the rising importance of financial remittances in the context of the discourse on transnational migration. This part of the article is crucial as it provides a setting for the subsequent discussion on the connection between remittances and citizenship. It is shown how remittances are part and parcel of the contemporary migration complex, and how they are implicated in what Sassen (2004) describes as the ‘migra-exuberance’ of people from societies of the global South. Since this is ultimately meaningful against the background of an existing pattern of intercourse between state and citizens, the subsequent section puts state–citizen relations in Nigeria in socio-historical context. While situating the characteristics, contradictions and circumstances of social and political citizenship in Nigeria within the broader genealogy of the formation of the postcolonial state, it is argued that the steady dissipation of governmental influence across all levels of society (Sassen 2004) has given rise to a situation in which people have learnt to live simultaneously ‘within’ the state and ‘outside’ it. Reliance on foreign financial grants appears to deepen this antinomy. In endorsing Taiwo’s formulation that there are no citizens in Nigeria, but only citizens of Nigeria (Taiwo 2004, p. 58; see also Taiwo 1991; emphases added), it is shown here how the relationship between the ‘petro-state’ and citizens in Nigeria has led to a progressive devaluation of citizenship. The article concludes by summarising the argument and reflecting critically on the place of citizenship in the current transnational era.

Finally, a caveat on the nature and intention of this article. As a way of setting a concrete intellectual agenda for further research, the chief goal is to pose the critical, socio-logically interesting questions which, it is argued, have been largely marginalised from the literatures on transnational migration, remittances and citizenship. It is suggested that these questions are critical for apprehending the changing forms of belonging across African society.

**Transnational resource flow and transnational migration: refocusing the debate**

Interest in worker remittances to migrants’ countries of origin has intensified due to at least two sets of reasons. One is the phenomenal increase in the amount of money that migrants are known to be sending to their dependants (families, relatives and friends) in their countries of origin. This has made such monies hard to ignore as a
determinant factor in the lives of millions of individuals across the global South. Second, because of their volume, the fact that a growing number of households all over the world now appear to depend entirely on them for basic private provisioning, and the fact that in most of those countries remittances are indeed several times larger than both development aid and foreign direct investment, a debate has erupted over how or whether they might be the long sought-for solution to the conundrum of underdevelopment in these societies.

Fajnzylber and Lopez’s overview of the situation in Latin America neatly captures this scenario:

Workers’ remittances have become extremely important for many Latin American economies. Indeed, Latin America was the region that received the largest volume of remittances in 2006: more than US$50 billion. This amount multiplied by 25 over the past 25 years, and today represents about 70 per cent of foreign direct investment flows and is almost eight times larger than official development assistance flows to the region. The largest absolute amount goes to Mexico, where annual remittance flows are above US$20 billion, and the highest as a percentage of GDP goes to Haiti, where remittances represent about 50 per cent of GDP. In El Salvador, remittances are equivalent to US$400 per capita, and in the Dominican Republic, more than 20 per cent of the families report receiving remittances. (Fajnzylber and Lopez, 2008, p. xix)

The situation in Africa is similar. Between 2000 and 2005, remittances to the region increased by more than 55 per cent to nearly US$7 billion, and, relative to GDP, sub-Saharan Africa is the third largest recipient of global remittances. According to new data from the World Bank Migration and remittances factbook (2008), the top ten remittance recipient countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Côte-d’Ivoire, Ghana, South Africa, Nigeria, Tanzania, Burkina Faso, Sudan, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda) collectively accounted for nearly US$10 billion. Nigeria, the leading remittance recipient country, accounted for US$3.3 billion.

These figures have not only heightened academic and policy interest in remittances as a possible tool of economic development; they have also encouraged the tendency to reduce the entire process of transnational migration to workers’ remittances, something evident in official statements by political leaders in different African countries. For example, the Nigerian Government, hardly renowned for its attention to Nigerian ‘citizens’ within Nigeria, has suddenly become enamoured of Nigerians outside the borders of Nigeria, presumably because of the perceived potential benefits of the remittances that they send back home. The outbreak of official infatuation with ‘Nigerians in the diaspora’ has led to a range of rash pledges, such as a promise to regularly consult with them on political matters, and a commitment by the speaker of the House of Representatives, Mr Dimeji Bankole, to speed up the process by which Nigerians abroad will finally be able to vote in future elections, a ritual, it must be pointed out, that is nothing more than symbolic as far as respect for the sanctity of elections and the reality of its relationship with the enactment of actual citizenship are concerned. Arguably the most improbable of the proposals is the pledge by the government to build a ‘diaspora village’ in Abuja, the federal capital. Addressing the first Nigerians in Diaspora Organisation (NIDO) conference in Toronto in January 2007, the Minister then in charge of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Mallam Nasir El-Rufai, revealed the Nigerian Government’s plans to build a village that would serve as what the Minister ambiguously referred to as a ‘social development corridor’.
Development at all costs

The tendency to reduce the totality of transnational migration to remittance flows, and the largely unproven belief in their developmental impact, has led to the emergence of remittances as what Kapur (2003) calls ‘the new development mantra’. This has led to a quest to establish causal relationship between remittances and ‘development’ and to show how remittance flows enable development. The World Bank is one of the leading proponents of the remittance–poverty alleviation–development thinking, producing books, working papers and briefs, all of which fit broadly into this framework. There are several problems with this approach, most having to do with fairly well-established critiques of the development paradigm in general.

The search for ‘development through remittances’ is not limited to the World Bank. As is seen in the Nigerian example, much national state focus these days is on the assumed development impact of remittances. Another example, this time at the global policy level, is the Regional Consultation on Migration, Remittances and Development in Africa held in Accra, Ghana in September 2007. This consultation took place under the aegis of the (Sixth) Coordination Meeting on International Migration, organised by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. In a statement which encapsulates the point the article has been trying to articulate, the Consultation declared as its main objective the creation of ‘an intra-Africa dialogue including with the Diaspora to explore strategic options to maximise the developmental impact of remittances’. In seeking to ‘maximise’ the developmental impact of remittances, the Consultation basically assumed a consensus on the (positive) impact of remittances on development. This explains its subsequent focus on issues such as ‘how to channel remittances for investment and development’ (emphasis added); providing financial education for remittance users; generating gender-specific data on women-headed households and their investment choices; making the regulatory environment more favourable to senders and receivers; and reducing transaction costs of sending and receiving remittances.

How can this determination to see remittances as a development tool be explained, even when evidence on the relationship between the two remains inconclusive? Part of the explanation is that knowledge of the massive scale of migrant worker remittances has coincided with the exact moment in global history when the urge to find ‘a lasting cure’ for the malaise of underdevelopment in the so-called ‘Third World’ is arguably at its most intense. In addition, focusing on remittances has helped many African states to deflect attention from their own failings as far as intelligent and prudent management of their economies is concerned. Again, Nigeria is a good example. Much has been made of the fact that, with an official influx of over US$3 billion annually, Nigeria is the top recipient of remittances in sub-Saharan Africa. However, this ought to be set against the fact that in the 30-year period between 1970 and 2000, the Nigerian state earned more than US$400 billion, mostly from oil revenues, while, within the same period, the number of Nigerian ‘citizens’ subsisting on less than US$1 a day grew from 36 per cent to over 70 per cent, from 19 million people to a staggering 90 million (Watts 2004). Therefore, for states like Nigeria it is more beneficial for a kleptocratic political elite to focus on the US$3 billion worker remittances, rather than on the criminally mismanaged US$400 billion.

Third, speculations on the development capacity of remittances tend to ignore or downplay one of their salient characteristics: they are often ‘unbundled’ and distributed among several apparently ‘unrelated’ individuals (with contrasting pressing
needs) in the recipient country, a feature which makes them difficult to ‘aggregate’ or pool for strategic goals. Finally, the failure to see remittances outside this narrow tunnel of assumed economic ‘benefits’ is symptomatic of a failure to imagine and explore how apparently economic acts are situated within larger socio-political ambiances, how economic acts can and often produce political consequences, and how they are often direct and indirect products of political action.

From economics to politics

It is by no means being suggested that remittances have no economic consequences, whether for individuals or households, or even for the local economy, or that these are not important enough to arrest academic/policy attention. The argument is that in their seeming obsession with ‘trees’ – macroeconomic effects of remittances, tracking remittance volumes and flows, etc. – scholars appear to be neglecting the ‘forest’; that is, the political matrix within which the ‘remittance class’ is produced and reproduced, and the types of civic reflexes observable in dependants on remittances. The guiltiest in this regard are those who glibly promote remittances as a motor of development, seemingly oblivious of the fact that

... an archaeology of development demands a full grasp of location, situating it historically (in tracing its complex genealogy and meanings, particularly to the eighteenth century), geographically (in relation to sites of productions, routes of movement and patterns of reception), and culturally (in relation to the West’s self-representation, of reason and the Enlightenment). (Watts 2003, p. 8)

Furthermore, although it is necessary to insist on the need to explore the political ramifications of remittances, this is not the same thing as arguing that this is possible only in terms of the implications for citizenship and allegiance. Clearly, remittances can shape politics and political practice in a number of ways. Devesh Kapur has shown how, for example, the lu(c)re of remittances has led politicians in far-flung places like Mexico and India to ‘switch positions vis-à-vis their diaspora from benign neglect to active courtship’ (2003, p. 21). At the same time, regimes in socialist economies such as Cuba and North Korea have used remittances to ‘augment scarce hard currency resources to strengthen themselves’, Cuba with money from its US-based diaspora, and North Korea from Koreans in Japan. In the Dominican Republic (where remittances are 10 per cent of GDP), political aspirants are forced to campaign outside the country in the United States (ibid.). Other studies have explored the relationship between remittances and regime types (Biglaiser and DeRouen 2006), the impact of remittances on democratic transitions (Merino 2005), the relationships between remittances and political rights and freedoms (Donaghy 2006), and the potential of remittances in ’remittance-underwritten parallel markets’ to undermine ‘inclusive governance and democratic accountability in the long run’ (Bracking 2003).

There is therefore no doubt that remittances can impact on politics in different ways. However, in this article the focus is on citizenship because, as is argued, the civic arena is the logical and most important one to explore, given the emergent patterns of being and belonging produced by the dependence on remittances. In the case of African societies, a veritable ‘playground of citizenship’ (Ratna Kapur 2007), this task is especially pertinent for three related reasons.

A first reason is the history of remittances themselves. While current transnational resource flows may be distinguished by their sheer size and scale, they have
The key question then is how current patterns of remittances map (or do not) on to already existing layers, how the ‘old’ can help us come to a better knowledge of the ‘new’, and what effects this is having on people’s sense of identity.

A second reason why a focus on the civic arena is important is that ‘modern’ citizenship in post-colonial Africa was built on a socio-cultural foundation in which ethnic kinship networks provide(d) the all-important axis for social relations (Okonta 2008, see in particular discussion in the conclusion; also Lonsdale 1997, Bah 2005, and the collection of essays in Berman et al. 2004; for a critique of the politics of cultural identity in general, see Bayart 2005). A fall-out of this is that, even today, ‘effective network based on identification with community’ rather than ‘impersonal and informal institutions’ (Hyden 2006, p. 77; see also Clapham 1982, and Geschiere and Gugler 1998) continue to shape individual and collective identities.

There is no suggestion here that only Africans struggle to balance family, ethnic, religious and civic identifications, or, as John and Jean Comaroff have argued, that ‘cultures of heterodoxy bear within them the seeds of criminality, difference, disorder’ (2006b, p. 32). As Bridges (1997) reminds us, in every human society

\[ \ldots \text{the earliest and strongest identifications are shaped by family life and the broader, ethnic, class and religious community within which the family in turn gains its identification. These identifications are woven into the very fabric of human desire and only with great difficulty can distance from them be achieved. (p. 15)} \]

This economy of blood – Hyden’s ‘affective economy’ – appears to be the glue that holds African countries together.

But just how well is this glue holding? The question is urgent given the severe economic stress that Africa has experienced for the greater part of political independence, and particularly so in the aftermath of World Bank-championed structural adjustment in the 1980s (Olukoshi 1993, Beckman and Sachikonye 2001). A tentative answer is that, amid pervasive economic gloom, ‘people’s capacity to support others is diminishing to a point where affective networks break down’ (Morris MacLean 2003, p. 30). Given that such affective networks have ironically become more important to individual and collective survival as a result of the withdrawal of the state from

antecedents in those parts of Africa where remittances of some sort have always been integral to socio-economic negotiations between rural and urban households. Hyden (2006) describes that process as follows:

Rural households across Africa have always struggled to make ends meet working the land alone. Relying on a rudimentary manual technology and unpredictable climate, having someone earning an income from other sources is important... this orientation prevails to this day. With agriculture increasingly failing to generate income for rural households, off-farm sources of income have in fact grown in significance. Urban migrants may try to negotiate ways of ensuring that their burden of transferring money back home to family and community does not become too heavy, but they have great difficulty escaping these expectations and social pressures without losing their status in the eyes of those at home. For urban residents, therefore, life in town is very much tied to demands, both specific and general, from relatives and friends in the countryside who see themselves as having an entitlement to claim part of the money that their urban-based kin generate while away from the farm. (p. 75)
people’s lives, what are the immediate and long-term consequences of their diminution? If trafficking between informal institutions and kinship structures constitutes evidence that large numbers of people in Africa have always functioned in ‘multi-local spaces’, how is reliance on remittances (the trans-local) helping to redraw the social landscape across Africa?

The ways these questions are answered will ultimately rest on the comparative strength of the state in different formations, as that basically determines the character of social relations, especially the relative importance of kinship networks. There is thus a good opportunity to rigorously discuss state–society relations using evidence from a phenomenon which is still in a process of unfolding. First, there is an obvious conundrum: conventional citizenship scholarship presupposes a loyal relationship between the individual and his ancestral state, in return for which the state is supposed to provide for the citizen’s basic needs. When that contractual relationship is broken, a new type of citizenship can be said to have emerged. What, then, are the forms and parameters of this new type of citizenship in a situation where more Africans are showing a greater inclination to ‘seek benefits from increasingly distant sources’? (Hyden 2006, p. 89). How are remittances, to borrow the Durkheimian locution, ‘ruffling the social matter’ in Africa? What are the implications of this new type of citizenship for existing theoretical formulations on citizenship in Africa? To respond appropriately to these questions, some historical background is essential.

State and citizenship in Nigeria: the challenges and paradoxes of belonging

If the nation needs a state to become a democracy, where is the state in Africa? In addition, sub-Saharan Africa is, on this level, only an extreme case of a situation that is becoming the rule in many of the Third World’s countries in crisis. The legitimacy of the struggle for independence has disappeared and nothing has taken its place. All that survives in this landscape, devastated by economic crisis, is a plethora of governmental apparatuses, which function according to a patrimonial model of power that is increasingly being liberated from its national dimension. (Guehenno 1995, p. 3)

Bayart (2007) has noted the seeming irony that the expiration of the nation-state is often celebrated at the very moment of its triumph. However, it should be added that although talk of the ‘end of the nation-state’ may sometimes border on dramatisation, there is a genuine feeling of disappointment at this state’s scandalous score-sheet in the areas of social welfare, political legitimacy, social security and economic prosperity in Africa. This is the context for most of the ‘narratives of mortality’ about Africa (see Guehenno above). But the focus here is on a different aspect of the problem. Bayart’s argument has been that rather than diminishing, globalisation has strengthened the position of the state. This strengthening is what he calls the state’s ‘triumph’.

Therefore, the aim of this section is twofold: first, the focus is on the process through which the state has ‘triumphed’ in a place like Nigeria; second, there is a look at the social cost of this apparent triumph which, it is suggested, is the diminution of state ‘reach’ and the steady unravelling of the social compact. The section concludes by noting the possible effects of transnational migration and the emergence of a ‘remittance class’ on the situation. Although the focus is on the nation-state and the narrative
of its progressive loss of autonomy/authority, the account is of necessity an abbreviated one. It deliberately highlights what are considered to be the significant milestones in the process that has resulted in both the state and its ‘citizens’ no longer seeing eye to eye. It is shown that even though events associated with economic globalisation have played a role in the shrivelling of state influence over the past two decades, they have merely deepened, rather than instigated, the crisis of the state.

First, there is a note about the identity of the state in Africa as a product of Western colonialism. There is a reasonable consensus among Africanist scholars that this pedigree is to be blamed for many of the harsher features of the postcolonial state, including but not limited to its extractive predatoriness, its predilection for zero-sum politics, and virtual capture by a rapacious political elite. These features, it is argued, are by no means coincidental, but a powerful testament to the careful design of colonial powers to keep African countries permanently susceptible to international capitalist penetration and exploitation (Zack-Williams and Mohan 2002). However, while this thesis retains some currency despite critical rebuttals, calls for its revision have grown. Mbembe (2006), for example, has argued for seeing the postcolonial state both as a legacy of Western colonialism, as well as a creation of the African political elite. He argues that while the state may have been ‘handed down’ to African societies by colonial diktat, the subsequent process of its ‘indigenisation’ and/or ‘appropriation’ has involved and been executed by Africans. More important, this process has resulted in a transformation of social relations to such an extent that even those who otherwise reject its ethics are forced to find some sort of accommodation with the state – thus effectively becoming part of its everyday reinvention. The overall effect is that while Africans have arguably ended up with the type of state they did not bargain for, it is one whose transformation appears to continually elude them.

The fact that the state was ‘set up’ this way also has implications for its relationship with its ‘citizens’. As noted earlier, modern nation-states in Africa have rather treacherous primordial foundations, but this cannot totally explain the quite sensational way in which they have collectively foundered in the post-independence era. A probable explanation is the way in which the state itself has been managed, mostly as what Jean and John Comaroff call a ‘governance-by-franchise, and an institutional nexus for the distribution of public assets into private hands’ (2006b, p. x), in short, like colonial entities (Mbembe 2001, Quayson 2001). The consequence is that the state has continued to exist, largely, above society, estranged from the same ‘citizens’ whose interest, in theory at least, necessitated its creation.

Saddled with baggage right from inception, global developments in the post-independence period have been less than kind to many African states. For example, while still finding their feet in a new and Western-centric international environment, African states were soon caught in a strategic bind as far as the Cold War between the East and the West was concerned. Efforts targeted at satisfying both the United States and the former Soviet Union only ensured that the state was distracted from the more urgent task of providing for its citizens. The chasm that has opened up since the dawn of independence widened in the 1980s with the coming of the Washington Consensus and the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes which sapped the foundation of the state and further alienated it from the people. The imposition of an unpopular economic regime (trade liberalisation, state withdrawal from health and education, trimming of the public sector, resulting in increased unemployment rates) stiffened public resistance and led to mass protests. In its effort to contain
these protests, the state resorted to repression which further alienated it from the people. Nor has the apparent upsurge of democratisation resulted in any discernible change in this logic. More form than substance, democratisation has hardly dented Africa’s well-known carapace of authoritarianism, and it comes as no surprise that many African countries (Nigeria is on the list) have been implicated in the democratic roll-back which has been observed globally (Diamond 2008). In the specific case of Nigeria, as retired soldiers hijack the ‘democratic’ structures, elections (almost always rigged) have become ‘coups d’état’ by other means.

Despite apparent democratic reforms, therefore, the gulf between the state and society has continued to widen, further whetting the ‘appetite for Elsewhere’ seen especially among the younger aspect of the population. As a clear example of the ‘exit’ option, emigration is therefore one increasingly favoured response to declining state capacity, especially by university graduates who, relative to the rest of the population, possess significant human capital, and thus an attendant enhanced sense of entitlement. Furthermore, this aspect of the total population also appears to feel more acutely the pangs of socio-economic exclusion (the decline in job opportunities, for example) and are most likely to ‘vote with their feet’ because of the perception that ‘the state is not responsible’. A sense of civic disappointment cum betrayal is therefore an important driver of transnational migration.

Part of what is manifested here is the inherent exclusionary potential of citizenship in many postcolonial states. Mamdani (1996), to give a well-known example, has eloquently described how modern citizenship in Africa was effectively forged on the anvil of despotic colonialism and its rough demarcations between ‘rural subjects’ and ‘urban citizens’. This article wishes to go beyond this by posing questions about the inherent worth of the same citizenship, both rural and urban – a dichotomy which does not appear to mean much these days, given the nature of the crisis in the post-colony. While not necessarily rupturing the linkage between modern African citizenship and the colonial encounter, in which, as Kapur (2007, p. 567) reminds us, ‘gender, culture, race, and civilisational maturity determined who was entitled to benefits and recognition and who was not’, it is equally important to focus on its contemporary vagaries and explore how transnational migration dynamics may instruct us about its changing forms and instabilities.

Nigeria offers a perfect laboratory for this sort of inquiry. Nearly five decades after political independence in 1960, a genuine civic culture is yet to emerge in Africa’s most populous country, and the political culture continues to lack the fundamentals of actual citizenship. Thus, ‘loyalty to the nation is pitted against sectional loyalties such that it is a zero-sum game: every gain by each type of loyalty is purchased at the expense of the other type’ (Taiwo 2004, p. 64). Furthermore, the state, which is expected to foster a feeling of belonging, is held hostage by ethnically oriented neoclientelist elite networks (Clapham 1982, Obadare 2007). In its current formation, the state is thus an impediment to, rather than a facilitator of, a genuine sense of citizenship and civic culture. Paradoxically, the overall effect of policy measures (for example, the establishment of a Federal Character Commission) taken to ensure ‘ethnic balancing’ has been to reinforce sectional loyalties. This results from ‘the seizure of the state by an autocratic politico-military establishment, the resultant weakening of the capacity of the state to perform its duties and the consequent reliance on brute force to ensure and compel obedience’ (Adebanwi 2005, p. 23).
All this has, ironically, ‘helped to sharpen the questions of the relationship between the state and citizens and to direct attention to the need to redefine this relationship and possibly re-codify it’ (ibid, p. 25).

The Nigerian state’s overwhelming dependence on oil revenues deepens and complicates this dynamic: it is a classic rentier state, defined by Terry Lynn Karl (2007, p. 2) as ‘a state that lives from externally generated rents rather than the surplus production of the population’. This happens in at least two ways. First, reliance on oil revenue strengthens the state against the people in that the state sees itself as accountable to transnational oil corporations at the expense of its citizens (Karl 2007, Okonta 2008). A good illustration is the obvious severity and distinct lack of regard with which the Nigerian federal government treats ‘citizens’ in the oil ‘producing’ communities in the Nigerian Delta. Second, reliance on oil revenues (the state’s own ‘remittance’) means that the state can afford not to pursue or collect tax revenues from the people (a very important element in the state–citizen compact, on the basis of which citizens can make demands on the state). The state can actually afford to violate the human and socio-economic rights of its ‘citizens’ (including those in the oil ‘producing’ areas) with impunity (Gary and Karl 2003, Watts 2004, Karl 2005, 2007) without anticipating any serious fiscal consequences. For Watts (2003), in this sense oil is ‘a source of unearned income that detaches the state from the financial task of securing revenue from its citizens’ (2003, p. 25). The state therefore exists in a curious zone of ‘self-sufficiency’ in which responsibility towards the people is not a primary consideration. Indeed, the people are more or less superfluous (Apter 2002, Obadare 2008).

How does this logic structure citizenship and the people’s relationship with, and attitude toward, the state? Bayart has emphasised the need to be cautious in ascertaining whether the ‘withdrawal of faith (in the state) is actually real and whether the disconnection from the historical sites of political sovereignty or identification has been brought to completion’ (2007, p. 82). In this article the view is that while the disconnection may not have been brought to ‘completion’, it is definitely real, one of its manifestations being the widening of existing, and creation of new, ‘multi-local spaces’ and forms of sub-national identities. Remittances, it would seem, rigidify this process by producing subjects who may be said to be twice removed. This emergent situation provides a framework to rethink existing formulations on postcolonial citizenship.

Next, this is anchored within existing discourses on transnational migration and citizenship. It is shown that even though these new reconfigurations (people vacating, evacuating and recuperating different senses of belonging) are taking place, the literature has focused almost exclusively on the political allegiances of diasporic migrants, ignoring how the remittances that they send back to their societies of origin also generate important ripples in the social domain.

**Transnationalism, migration and citizenship: from home to abroad and back home again**

Literature on transnational migration is no stranger to citizenship. Kearney (1991), Basch et al. (1993), Ong (1999), Delanty (2000), Coutin (2000) and Sassen (2006, 1996a, 1998a, 1998b), among others, have attempted to show the various ways in which transnational migration is producing the ‘debordering’, ‘deconstructing’, ‘flexibilising’ and ‘repositioning’ of citizenship. In most of this literature, the overwhelming concern is with the travails of traditional forms of citizenship in Western societies,
given the rapid and persistent ‘peripheralisation of the core’ (Kearney 1991, p. 57) by former colonial subjects. Since the nation-state project in Western Europe can be said to have assumed a coincidence or coherence between race/ethnicity and territory (between culture and place), the influx of ethnic ‘others’ has forced critical and open questioning about both the formation and responsibilities of the state and also of its constituent subjects. It is difficult, for example, to see the gradual dismantling of the welfare state in Europe – interpreted by some as the ‘retreat of the state’ (van Creveld 1999) – as unconnected with this development. Scholarly discussions about the emergence of a post-nationalised or denationalised citizenship (Sassen 2006) capture this shift appropriately.

In the current transnational era, it is evident that the fates of those who are forced to export human capital, and those who receive it (again, often reluctantly), are inseparably intertwined. Therefore, tracking the civic footprints of transnational migration must address matters arising both in Western societies and ‘developing’ countries. In this vein, a focus on the nation-state and citizenship in the latter becomes at least as important as in the former.

The impetus for analysis in exporting countries is enhanced by three related factors. One is a desire to take forward and complicate earlier related work on the African diaspora and development. Important in this regard is this literature’s insight on how displacement, movement and re-placement generates new forms of political consciousness (Zack-Williams and Mohan 2002, p. 230, Adi 2002, Reynolds 2002). Second, a focus on citizenship clears the conceptual ground for analysis of different forms of political engagement, in particular new modes of civic activism that are best seen as outgrowths of the new transnationalism. Third, and arguably most important, there is an impetus to subject to closer scrutiny the changing nature of civic identity, community, and structures of fealty between the people and various poles of authority. This will necessarily include, although will not be limited to, what Chabal describes as the ‘real or imagined cultural nationalisms’ (2009, p. 59) unleashed by an apparently unstoppable process of globalisation.

That said, it is not as if the problems of citizenship in ‘peripheral’ formations are completely alien to the relevant literature; it is the circuitous way in which the latter has gone about apprehending the former that makes for interesting reflection. For example, discussions about the emergence of ‘fractals’ or ‘non-entire’ global borders have invariably particularly focused on the category of individuals (indeed, a tiny elite) who criss-cross the globe as representatives of powerful transnational firms and illustrate the increasing porosity of international borders. The broader discourse relates to the perceived emergence of a new form of ‘economic citizenship’ that is not located in individuals, but firms and markets, particularly the global financial markets, and a wide range of global economic actors (Sassen 1996b, p. 38). According to Hansen and Stepputat (2005):

These global players can demand concessions and protection from states, tax holidays, disciplined labor, macro-economic stability, and so on, in return for investment, jobs, and hard currency. The highly skilled labor, consultants, and professionals who accompany, work for, and facilitate the work of such large ‘corporate citizens’ have acquired unprecedented options in terms of mobility and flexibility of access to various nation-states. In this world of fast information flows, effective lobbying, and the ability to generate capital across the globe, the nation-state appears weak, eroded, and increasingly porous. (p. 33)
It is easy to see how this dynamic affects politics and creates social destabilisation in developing countries. ‘Corporate citizens’ (Moon et al. 2003) are a vital cog in the complex which sees transnational corporations act in cahoots with various African regimes (e.g. Shell BP in alliance with successive military and civilian regimes in Nigeria) to create the ‘right’ conditions for resource extraction. In short, they play an indirect role in the process by which the state is distanced from its ‘citizens’; and, in the notorious example of Shell BP supplying arms directly to law enforcement agents in Nigeria to assault environmental rights activists (Okonta 2008), there is clear evidence of how this involvement can change easily from benign to outright beligerent.

From the discussion thus far, it can be seen that even though transnational migration literature has addressed the problem of citizenship, its focus remains partial. There has been an interest in how ‘the modernist nation-state appears to be undergoing an epochal move away from the ideal of an imagined community founded on the fiction, often violently sustained, of cultural homogeneity, toward a nervous, xenophobically tainted sense of heterogeneity and heterodoxy’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006b, p. 32; emphasis in original). This article has pointed to how former colonial subjects are implicated in this process. However, increasingly, post-colonials are ‘citizens for whom polymorphous, labile identities coexist in uneasy ensembles of political subjectivity’ (ibid).

It is contended that dependence on remittances introduces interesting complications into this picture, especially in a country such as Nigeria, where ‘withdrawal of faith in the state’ is arguably closer to completion than in other postcolonial societies.

Conclusion

The increase in the scale and volume of known global migrant remittances has sparked massive academic and policy interest. Evidence that a growing number of households in the receiving societies are becoming reliant on these financial flows for various forms of provisioning, including education, health and housing, has raised expectations in some quarters that they could be the long sought-after motor of economic development in Africa. It has been argued that there are several problems with this view, including its arguably inadequate understanding of the nature of remittances, its simplistic and unproblematic conceptualisation of development, and its failure to embed the economics of remittances in a wider socio-political frame.

It is argued that although this literature has been correctly interested in the economic habits of remittance dependants (what are described here as a ‘remittance class’), and the supposed economic consequences of reliance on remittances, it has overlooked (or failed to emphasise) how economic and political agencies are mutually imbricated, and therefore does not interrogate what can be argued is the more salient issue – what becomes (politically) of subjects who are reliant on financial remittances. It appears that the question of the socio-civic implications of the dependence on remittances is absolutely critical and is inescapable, particularly in societies where withdrawal of faith in the state is already high. The significance of this question for Nigeria and other African societies currently implicated in the logic of remittance-dependence can hardly be over-emphasised.

More important, the emergence of a remittance class has very interesting implications for notions of citizenship, the relationship between ‘citizens’ and the state, and the
patterns of political allegiances. For example, how do those dependent on remittances define their moral obligations to the state? What expectations do they have of the state, and how do they put forward the case for the enjoyment of citizenship rights? At the same time, what duties would the state – that is marginal to their economic survival – expect them to perform? These are important theoretical questions, answers to which – depending on data from specific countries – will definitely enrich scholarly understanding in the following key areas: transnational migration, particularly as it affects citizenship; remittances; social and economic citizenship in African countries and other societies with a burgeoning ‘remittance class’; the state; and identity formation.

Some of the larger and universally relevant issues that are bound to come into view in this mode of inquiry – for example, the vagaries of membership in a changing world (Butler and Spivak 2007) and the emergence of alternative forms governance outside of the straitjacket of the nation (Little 2003) – are already being debated in other contexts. That being the case, exploring how transnational migration and remittances might speak to this debate is bound to open up new conceptual vistas.

Ebenezer Obadare is at the Department of Sociology, University of Kansas, USA. Email: obadare@ku.edu

Wale Adebanwi is at the Department of African American and African Studies, University of California, Davis, USA. Email: anadebanwi@ucdavis.edu.

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Endnotes

1. This is a concept used here with utmost reluctance, mindful of the many encumbrances that dog the path of the potential migrant. It is not denied that peoples and objects are in perpetual motion, just that the idea of ‘flows’ (and the smoothness inherent in it) tends to have the unwitting effect of obscuring the fact that delays, obstructions and ambushes are part and parcel of such ‘mobilities’ (Urry 2007).

2. Figures on the volume of remittances as a proportion of the GDPs of particular countries are a good indication of the rising importance of remittances for people in such societies. Counting only officially recorded receipts, remittances in 2002 represented 1.3 per cent of GDP in sub-Saharan Africa. The picture becomes clearer when figures for individual countries are considered. For example, remittances are 34.2 per cent of the share of GDP of Cape Verde; 48 per cent for Guinea-Bissau; 25.9 per cent for Liberia; 12.47 per cent for Mali; 4.71 per cent for Nigeria; and 16.99 per cent for the Gambia. For more on this, see World Bank Migration Factbook (2006–08). See also ‘The Global Scale of Migrant Money Flows’, New York Times, 17 November 2007.
3. Citizenship is a contested and hugely politicised notion. The authors’ understanding of citizenship is Rousseauian in the sense of conveying a ‘contract’ between the state and its subjects, a relationship in which rights and privileges are counterbalanced by duties and obligations.

4. Bearing in mind that a large percentage of such financial transfers sent via unofficial channels go largely unreported and/or undetected, the latest World Bank estimates of US$400 billion are still staggering (World Bank Remittance Factbook 2008). Other sources estimate that about 50 per cent of remittance flows in Africa is through informal channels.


6. Some scholars (e.g. Kearney 1991) have explained how the logic of the ‘previous’ modern/imperialist age effectively foreshadowed the current transnational age. For Kearney (1991) while the modern age, the age of imperialism, was driven ... by the exporting of surplus capital from developed to underdeveloped areas of the world with subsequent destruction of non-capitalist economies and societies, processes which created wage labor, much of which was absorbed in these peripheral areas ..., the current transnational age is, however, characterised by a gross incapacity of peripheral economies to absorb the labor that is created in the periphery, with the result that it inexorably “flows” to the cores of the global capitalist economy. (p. 57)

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Revolutionising Local Politics? Radical Experiments in Burkina Faso, Ghana and Uganda in the 1980s

J. Tyler Dickovick

This article compares three African countries whose attempts to transform local governance in the 1980s were among the most dramatic, particularly in rural areas: Burkina Faso under Thomas Sankara (1983–1987), Ghana in the early years of the Jerry Rawlings presidency (1981–1992), and Uganda under Yoweri Museveni (1985–present). Despite surface similarities, especially in the establishment of local ‘people’s defence councils’ or ‘resistance councils’, the three experiments had quite different outcomes, as a function both of antecedent conditions in state–society relations and of regimes’ choices. A structured comparative-historical argument highlights differing state strategies vis-à-vis important social forces, especially traditional chiefs. Regimes’ choices between confrontation, coexistence, and the construction of new relations with social forces resulted in different degrees of local political change. The ‘revolutionary’ local experiments provide insight into a general theory of African politics, in which states’ transformational powers in rural areas remain circumscribed by entrenched local forces.

Introduction

In recent years, the study of local government has garnered considerable attention from both the left and right of the ideological spectrum. On the one hand, left-leaning advocates of progressive and participatory governance argue that enhanced attention to local politics can better incorporate previously underrepresented actors and bring government closer to the people. At the same time, international financial institutions and industrialised-nation donors have touted the logic of economic efficiency resulting from the decentralisation of power from the failed central state. Africa, with its history of dysfunctional centralised states, has been a prime locus for much of the experimentation and research with respect to the elusive promise of improved local governance (cf. Crook and Manor 1998, Ouedraogo 2003, Smoke 2003, Wunsch and Olowu 1990, inter alia).

While policy debates about African decentralisation are robust, the lessons of historical experiments with varying patterns of local rule are too often overlooked. This article compares the three African countries whose attempts to transform local governance beginning in the 1980s – particularly in rural areas – were arguably the most dramatic. These were: the failed attempt at revolutionary governance in Burkina
Faso under Thomas Sankara (1983–1987); the similar effort in Ghana in the early years of the Jerry Rawlings presidency (1981–1992) which endured at the expense of fundamental change; and the more lasting and transformative local changes in Uganda under Yoweri Museveni (1985–present). All three regimes, each of which came to power at the head of a military force, attempted radical political transformations in politically ravaged countries. Each established some form of revolutionary governance at the local level, called ‘people’s defence’ or ‘resistance’ councils. All three plausibly claimed to offer a new modality of local governance that differed from the classic African stratagems of neopatrimonial rule or ‘decentralised despotism’. In Burkina Faso and Ghana, Marxist-inspired Presidents sought to radicalise local politics through the creation of ‘Committees for the Defence of the Revolution’, cells designed to mobilise civic action and ensure grassroots support for the regime. Uganda’s variation – in the form of ‘Resistance Councils’ – was less ideologically leftist, but also attempted to reconstruct local politics in the wake of that country’s civil wars.

Despite surface similarities, the three experiments differed considerably in their outcomes as a result of both antecedent conditions in state–society relations and of regimes’ choices. Burkina’s Thomas Sankara, undoubtedly the most charismatic figure in his country’s history, watched his experiment in local radicalism fail as a consequence of powerful opposition from traditional chiefs and powerful national trade unions; while the local project did not alone trigger the regime’s downfall, it antagonised the two sets of actors that were key to its failure. Ghana’s Jerry Rawlings initiated a more lasting process of local reform, but the predominance of the rivalry between state and chieftaincy in Ghana’s politics meant that the local experiment survived only by being subsumed into other structures. Meanwhile, in Uganda, Yoweri Museveni established a relatively stable regime whose ‘no-party democracy’ long drew support from the existence and flourishing of the once-revolutionary (now institutionalised) local councils he originally established while fighting a guerrilla war. A comparative-historical argument highlights the varying results that follow from differing state strategies vis-à-vis important social forces, especially traditional chiefs. Regimes’ choices between confrontation, coexistence and the construction of new relations with social forces resulted in quite different degrees of local political change. In this sense, the ‘revolutionary’ local experiments give a lens onto a general theory of African politics, in which states’ transformational powers remain circumscribed by entrenched social forces at the local level, especially in rural areas.

The article has five sections. The first analyses theoretical perspectives on African states’ efforts to govern the rural and the local. Three sections thereafter structure a comparison of the three cases in approximately chronological sequence. The second section highlights the varying antecedent conditions across the countries that conditioned attempts at revolutionising local governance. The third section assesses state strategies towards social forces: confrontation in Burkina Faso, coexistence (or accommodation) in Ghana, and construction of state–society relations in Uganda. The fourth section links these strategies to their respective aftermaths. The final section discusses the implications of the analysis for understanding the critical and comparative political economy of local rule.

The political economy of local governance: critical and comparative perspectives

Fundamental debates about power in sub-Saharan Africa reflect the tension between more generalised and more contextualised perspectives on the continent’s politics. In
general, Africanists have gravitated towards models of neopatrimonial and personalist rule – phenomena typically overlaid with an understanding of ethnic politics – to describe endemic patterns of state decay and weakness that have endured in many countries for much of the post-independence period (cf. Jackson and Rosberg 1982, Bayart 1993, *inter alia*). This perspective dominated much work on the African state for over two decades, including in single-country case studies, though perspectives differed on (among other topics) the impact of colonialism in shaping these trajectories (cf. Young 1994, Mamdani 1996, *inter alia*). More recently, however, general models of the African state have been complemented by ‘large-n’ comparisons that highlight cross-national variations, even as this literature often concurs that neopatrimonialism has been the modal form of rule (Bratton and van de Walle 1997, Herbst 2000, *inter alia*).

What holds for theorising about regimes at the macro level also applies to the governance at the micro level, especially in rural areas. Among those seeking a generalisable theory of African governance, Mahmood Mamdani’s (1996) work is seminal. While *Citizen and Subject* is attentive to variations across local contexts, Mamdani holds that broad patterns of colonial and post-colonial rule share fundamental characteristics across a wide range of African countries: African states opted for a form of rule that relied heavily on the cooptation of local agents. ‘Native Authorities’ and chieftaincies served essential functions of governance in patterns of indirect rule as they allowed otherwise weak states to establish rule over dispersed territories; a pattern of ‘decentralised despotism’ emerged across the continent.

While neopatrimonialism and decentralised despotism offer powerful theoretical frameworks, they tend to discount variations across countries and within countries, both across space and over time. Much as a comparative political economy of regime dynamics emerged that focuses on variations within Africa, so too has the study of local politics benefited from more contextualised comparisons. Most notably, recent work by Catherine Boone (2003) highlights the diversity of states’ institutional choices for the specific question of governance at the local level. For Boone, the ‘topography’ of the African state has complex contours, with states adopting different strategies from one another and even making distinct institutional choices for different sub-national regions, as a function of varying local contexts.

This article adopts a contextualised approach, not in opposition to grand theorising about African politics, but as a complement that aims to specify a deeper empirical fit across cases; in so doing, the fundamental similarities and differences of three local experiments are put into relief. At three periods in the historical trajectory of local change, the country cases were fundamentally comparable, but with crucial variations between them that affect the causal chain. The first is the set of *antecedent conditions*, the second was the moment of *institutional choice*, and the third was the political *heritage* of the changes (see Table 1).

With respect to *antecedent conditions*, regimes in Burkina Faso, Ghana and Uganda were each presented from the outset with a double-edged problem in their desire to transform local politics, especially in rural and peri-urban areas. The most feasible ways of stimulating collective action would be through local brokers, that is, through an entrenched political class of traditional leadership. This is the recipe for Mamdani’s ‘decentralised despotism’. Yet all three regimes explicitly sought dramatic breaks with pre-existing governing institutions that were perceived as failures. Sankara and Rawlings used Marxist rhetoric, while Museveni spoke of a complete overhaul of Uganda’s post-conflict politics.
Despite the commonalities found in the fundamental dilemmas of African governance, local politics in the three cases also differed from the outset, suggesting that structured comparison will prove useful in gaining leverage on the quite different outcomes. In general, the Upper Volta (former name for Burkina Faso) government had neglected rural areas, leaving them largely unincorporated except for the customary authority of chiefs, while the Ghanaian state put down local roots yet retained residual powers for the chieftaincy even after the attempts by Kwame Nkrumah to emasculate the institution. Uganda differed from both of these cases because the collapse of central authority in the wake of civil war had largely eliminated state hierarchies at local levels, although the chieftaincies retained historical, cultural and social resonance. These differences in background ultimately conditioned the outcomes of local experiments.

Institutional choices made by the three regimes also shared similarities, but with different modalities. As matters of institutional choice, regimes shared in common attempts to create new and revolutionary forms of local government, centred on local grassroots ‘cells’ that would feed upward hierarchically. The purported aim was to replace top-down centralised authority with an integrative set of bottom-up institutions that would channel participation in new ways, replacing state-centred corporatist arrangements or military hierarchies with local action. If the rhetoric alone did not constitute a threat to established elites, proposals to create alternate local bureaucracies surely did, since these were designed to counteract the perceived weakness of civil society and the existing state. Thus, from the early stages, Presidents in each case faced an extant ‘traditional’ political class as a primary obstacle in creating radical new forms of local governance.

At the same time, variations in institutional choice between cases are also fundamental. As Boone (2003) has noted, states have a richer menu of options than simple reliance on cooptation through neopatrimonialism or a uniform decentralised despotism. Boone’s diverse options include state usurpation of traditional power and state power sharing with traditional social forces, together with less dramatic forms of state intervention that include an ephemeral ‘administrative occupation’ of rural authority and the
option of mere neglect via the non-incorporation of rural areas into national politics. Among the revolutionary local endeavours, national leaders were not uniformly committed to coopting local traditional elites. Varying outcomes can be expected from contrasting strategies of confrontation with traditional sources of power, coexistence with these social actors, or the construction of state-society relations.

The political outcomes or heritages of the different experiments also differ dramatically, but again with common themes emerging. In brief, outcomes range from the collapse of the local experiment in Burkina Faso, to a partial success in Ghana in which revolutionary structures endured but at the expense of their dilution and integration into the larger state apparatus, to a more thoroughgoing success in Uganda in which the revolutionary cells eventually formed the basis of a new system of local government. Jointly, the cases point to a finding that success depends in large part on the extent to which national states incorporate traditional local chiefs into local governance structures, with the relative power of organised labour and other social forces creating more or less permissive conditions. A central lesson for African political economy is the persistence and salience of traditional authorities even in the wake of ‘revolutionary’ change.

Focusing on similarities between efforts at ‘local revolution’ offers a general trajectory that holds across cases. African regimes across the continent face alternate sources of local power outside the conventional boundaries of the state. Revolutionary attempts to displace local power structures will generally be constrained by the enduring strength of pre-existing social forces, including traditional authorities. Focusing on variations in historical–institutional trajectories, by contrast, highlights a combination of structural variables and individual agency. Pre-existing state–society relations represent a social structure that shapes political outcomes, yet these relations are mediated through choices made by state actors. Varied outcomes of revolutionary endeavours will follow from these institutional choices. This critical and comparative perspective aims to complement both Mamdani’s general theory on the basic institutional choice of regimes and Boone’s more contextualised focus on the local politics that shapes states’ variegated institutional choices. A comparative perspective on the consequences of local institutional choices that accounts for variations in outcomes across cases can still result in conclusions that contribute to theoretical accounts of African rule.

While regime politics have often been perceived as largely urban phenomena, Boone illustrates the causal significance of rural support in showing how it provided ‘ballast’ to post-independence regimes (2003, p. 318). It is also widely accepted that rural, traditional, and local relations (including kinship groups and customary authorities) have long permeated Africa’s ‘modern’ institutions, including states and political parties (cf. Bayart 1993, Chabal and Daloz 1999). To account for these in the recent era of modernisation and democratisation, Africanists have increasingly examined those institutions that operate in the interstices of formal and informal power structures, mutually conditioning state and society. Christian Lund (2006) terms these ‘twilight institutions’, while Dennis Galvan (2007) emphasises the ‘syncretic’ development of quasi-public organisations. One lesson to be taken from the recent return to the local has inevitably been that the particular (often hybrid) institutions that matter for public authority will vary from place to place.

This article does not intend to take a normative stance on the nature of local power. Rather, the aim here is comparative-historical and causal, with a set of implications
that informs the critical political economy of local politics: an assessment is made of the conditions under which regimes and local politics mutually transform one another.

**Antecedents: state, society and the chieftaincy**

**Burkina Faso: strong society and weak state penetration**

The social base of post-independence regimes in Upper Volta before Thomas Sankara was built on two pillars. The first of these was traditional elites in rural and peri-urban areas, in the form of chiefs (Otaxek 1986, p. 89). Alongside religious hierarchies, these were the essence of rural social organisation. The chiefs were the state’s official representatives in rural areas, which remained largely unincorporated by an underdeveloped central apparatus that could only scarcely broadcast power beyond the capital. Sankara’s decision to alienate these chiefs would eliminate the basis for rural support, the ‘ballast’ so essential to African regimes.

The other institutional kingmakers in Upper Volta up to 1983 were urban trade unions centred in Ouagadougou. Given the public sector’s weak penetration into rural areas, regime politics were centred in the capital. Despite very low levels of industrialisation, union strikes were generally responsible for the downfall of previous civilian and military regimes, from the coup d’état of 1966 through the 1980s (Engelbert 1986, p. 150). Indeed, union militancy had forced the preceding Ouedraogo government to release Sankara from prison early in 1983, which promptly led to Sankara’s commandos seizing power. Upon seizing power, Sankara envisioned a monumental transformation of power relations, with an attempt to substitute mass rural support for previous corporatist arrangements centred on urban unions or a ‘decentralised despotism’ operating through traditional authorities. Sankara adopted a revolutionary approach to problems such as public sanitation and health (while also famously riding an old bicycle to work), but the local experiment and regime ultimately failed to institutionalise the programme due to ruptures with traditional authorities and unions.

**Ghana: extensive state and entrenched chieftaincy**

The antecedent conditions in the early 1980s that faced Jerry Rawlings’ local experiment in Ghana differed dramatically from those in Upper Volta. Rawlings faced two parallel bureaucracies. On the one hand sat an extensive infrastructure of politically active chiefs on their symbolic stools, and on the other sat a bloated and extensive state with a history of local penetration and corruption. While national civic organisations such as unions were vulnerable to cooption and marginalisation due to the state’s domination of political life, Ghana’s history exhibited a long legacy of contestation between state and chieftaincy. Customary authority based on the chieftaincy dated back to the British colonial era, under the ‘Native Authorities’. When attempting to modernise the administrative structures of local governance, the colonial state recognised the socio-political implications of unseating the chiefs, and thus opted to establish a parallel hierarchy, leaving customary authority to chiefs while claiming civil authority for the colonial state. Independent Ghana’s first head of state, Kwame Nkrumah, later reined in the chiefs’ political roles in his drive for modernisation, but subsequent military and civilian governments restored many of these, such that the chieftaincy remained active in 1979. Alongside this customary hierarchy, equally entrenched modern local authorities dated back to two legislative assemblies in the 1950s which had established Local Councils for village government (Massing 1994, p. vii). These local councils formed the basis of a local government that was one of the most institutionalised in sub-Saharan Africa.
This dual system was characterised by the sharing of political functions and patronage, which had resulted in a famously inefficient structure. Whereas Sankara sought to revoke the unconditional local authority of chiefs, Rawlings began, as early as his III Republic Constitution in 1979, to lay the groundwork of further expanding some chiefs’ rights that Nkrumah had fought. Rawlings sought to eliminate government control over chieftaincy matters that dated back to the nineteenth century colonial state (Kludze 2000, p. 400). The 1979 Constitution saw the removal of parliamentary oversight of customary law, and the transfer of these powers to a national House of Chiefs (Ray and Dunham 1998, p. 595). At the same time, clientelistic state politics stretched down to the village level, and the state itself was a powerful local actor. On the other hand, the weakness and fragmentation of unions and other social forces left the state–chief nexus relatively uncontested in dominating politics.

**Uganda: collapsed state and social vacuum**

Uganda’s history presented Yoweri Museveni with a different set of initial conditions than either Sankara or Rawlings, as traditional rulers with powerful historical resonance languished in the ruins of a post-conflict state. On the institutional *tabula rasa* bequeathed to him by the disastrous regimes of Idi Amin and Milton Obote, Museveni created local Resistance Councils and used selective concessions to traditional rulers to reconstruct a failed state from the local level up. In Uganda, powerful and politically mobilised tribal kingdoms at independence included the Ankole, Bunyoro and Busoga, although it was the Buganda kingdom of southern Uganda (especially around Kampala) that was the prime source of the country’s elite; the Kabaka, the traditional king of Buganda and most important source of traditional power in the country, led continuing efforts to establish a separate and autonomous Buganda state, or (later) a federal constitution designed to empower the traditional leadership (Apter 1997, pp. xxxvi, lvii).

The state that Museveni inherited was ruinous. Under Amin and Obote, social organisation collapsed and the state ruptured the links with its component kingdoms. Obote abolished the various monarchies in his first government, and Amin uprooted and terrorised any potential sources of opposition. In this political hell, Museveni formed and led a rebel force that weakened and ultimately routed the national army. While liberating swaths of countryside, Museveni made his first attempts at political construction by establishing local Resistance Councils (RCs). These quasi-military watchdog units served as de facto local governments in liberated areas, and ultimately became the backbone of the regime once Museveni took power.

The prior collapse of civil authority gave Museveni greater latitude in creating institutions for governance, and his response was the expansion and elaboration of the RCs, while continuing to work with the entrenched chieftaincies. Despite the pathologies of Obote and Amin, the chieftaincies retained political saliency, due to the previous inability of the state to reach local levels. The deterioration of the once reputable Ugandan civil service had left the chiefs as the only effective means of local administration. The ambiguity of their role stretches at least as far back as 1900, when the colonial government removed political authority from the Kabaka, yet insisted on using the chiefs as a governing device (Ddungu 1994, p. 366). In addition, the very ruthlessness of attacks on the Kabaka by the colonial state (and the repressive ‘modernising’ regimes) was a source of unity behind traditional rule (Kayunga 1995).
Institutional choices: ‘revolutionary’ strategies of rural control

Burkina Faso: confronting the chiefs and ‘betting on the peasantry’

Thomas Sankara spared neither words nor time in antagonising traditional elites, although he faced relatively strong social forces as the head of a weak state. In a major ‘political orientation’ speech less than two months after taking power, Sankara characterised traditional rulers as ‘feudal’ and ‘reactionary’, and berated local chiefs and the bourgeoisie for acting as ‘imperialism’s lackeys and local allies’, a ‘retrograde’ bunch who revelled in the ‘decadent values of [Upper Volta’s] traditional culture’. Beyond rhetoric, Sankara eliminated traditional economic and political privileges. A first measure in 1984 abrogated the political rights of customary chiefs, removing their administrative sinecures (Otayek 1986, p. 90). Sankara also announced a more symbolic policy change: cutting off the free electricity enjoyed by the Mossi chief, the Mogho Naba (Jaglin 1995, p. 75). Later gestures, such as changing the name of the country from Upper Volta to Burkina Faso (‘country of noble men’ in Dioula and Mossi) scarcely compensated for this assault on the chieftaincy.

In his first radio address, Sankara named his regime the National Council of the Revolution (CNR) and called on the people to begin creating local revolutionary cells, to be called Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs). Sankara moved swiftly to replace traditional authorities with these cells. The rural CDRs were to be integrated from the village level through the intermediate level of government (departments) up to the regional level, with all these layers subordinated to the CNR over which Sankara presided. Rather than simply creating a parallel hierarchy alongside the traditional, as other African states had done, Sankara opted for direct confrontation with social forces and elimination of pre-existing power structures.

The development plan of Sankara’s regime self-consciously discarded the state–chief alliance in favour of a new alliance between the state and the peasantry, as mediated by the CDR organs. Economically and politically, one of the most divisive elements of the plan was a land reform scheme designed to break up chiefs’ estates into ‘one plot of land for one person or one household’ (Otayek 1986, p. 90). This ‘bet on the peasantry’ – to use Boone’s (2003, p. 173) term – generated irreconcilable tensions first with the chiefs, and soon thereafter with the urban trade unions directly responsible for bringing Sankara to power. While attempting to incorporate the peasantry through the CDR system, Sankara initially sought to incorporate unions and leftist organisations, with two of the largest leftist organisations holding the majority of cabinet portfolios in the first government. Most important among these was the Ligue patriotique pour le développement (LIPAD), a mass-based organisation that was not officially a political party, but nonetheless had party characteristics and a capacity to call for major strikes or civil unrest. Despite these early attempts at inclusion, Sankara fell out with the LIPAD within a year, with the latter accusing Sankara and military leaders of intolerance towards loyal dissent. Tensions spilled into the streets, as the influential teachers’ union called a strike which Sankara broke by reprimanding and firing the teachers (Jaffré 1989, p. 288). In what was to become an annual ritual, Sankara reshuffled the cabinet and arrested LIPAD leaders. Confrontations with chiefs and unions escalated, resulting in Sankara’s rapid decline.

Ghana: accommodating the chiefs and layering the local state

In the context of an entrenched state and heavy friction with chiefs, Rawlings sought to establish his own Committees for the Defence of the Revolution in the early 1980s.
Construed as local militant units of the regime, the CDRs aimed to consolidate support for the regime. A philosophy of non-party democratic centralism (from which Yoweri Museveni would later borrow in Uganda) was to be inculcated in the population through local CDR cells (whose name in turn was borrowed from Sankara’s in Burkina Faso), designed as a continuous chain of command up from the village to the central government.

However, as Rawlings wrestled with the Ghanaian state itself, a propensity for cautious local administration prevailed over revolutionary efforts. Local level action in the CDRs was channelled through a more conventional bureaucracy of local councils and indirectly elected regional bodies. By 1988, Rawlings overhauled the local government system, expanding it dramatically by increasing the number of districts, with each to be governed by a partially elected District Assembly, a third level of government below the national and regional levels modelled along the lines of the old colonial Local Councils. In the Assembly system, 30 per cent of the seats were guaranteed to the chiefs. Below the districts were other layers of government: the Town Council (or Urban or Area Council). At the lowest level, relatively independent from the state, came CDR base units.

Unlike Sankara, Rawlings did not face strong urban trade unions bent on opposing the regime. The Trades Union Congress (TUC), the main actor in Ghanaian labour politics, was unable to articulate a serious challenge to Rawlings’ revolution for several reasons. First, the workplace CDRs (originally Workers’ Defence Committees) were almost immediately adopted as a state substitute for independent labour militancy, due to the declining reputation of the TUC. Second, and related to this declining reputation of the TUC, was the standing relationship between union and state, in which Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) officials penetrated the bureaucracy and subverted the aims of militants. Third, and related to this cosiness of state–union relations, the TUC had a large number of public sector union members. Rawlings accommodated state employees to the exclusion of other union members, and thereby coopted and deflated labour unrest. The TUC was thus weakened even in the context of a deteriorating Ghanaian state. Rawlings needed to accommodate numerous actors to avoid the governmental collapse that befell Sankara, but organised labour was not principal among them. Rather, controlling the state and neutralising political opposition from the chiefs in rural areas was sufficient to perpetuate the local revolution. Since the state itself represented the principal locus of political power, Rawlings used bureaucratic tactics to ensure the perpetuation of his system, such as transferring to the District Assembly system a large percentage of property tax revenues and oversight for line ministry projects (Massing 1994, p. 93). In this way, Rawlings assured himself of strong intra-state alliances that cemented his support within the military government, while also incrementally democratising and decentralising the political establishment.

Uganda: restoring the chiefs and reconstructing state–society relations

In Uganda’s political vacuum, Museveni moved to consolidate his regime through partial integration of traditional rulers that ran parallel to efforts to build up the RCs. The initial effects of the RC system were to place limitations on abuses of power by the chiefs, who served as de facto tax collector, police, judge, juror and jailer. At the early stages, Museveni designed the lowest level councils as a partial substitute for traditional forms of local control (Ddungu 1994, pp. 374–375); accountability to the RCs destroyed chiefs’ arbitrary authority. However, to consolidate the regime, Museveni soon ensured the nominal restoration of customary privileges.
The pivotal year in Museveni’s local state-building efforts was 1993, when the regime strengthened the RCs and traditional rulers almost simultaneously. As the Constituent Assembly of 1994 (to draft a new constitution) loomed on the horizon, Museveni made the hugely popular move of restoring the legal status of the traditional kingdoms. The Traditional Rulers (Restoration of Assets) Statute reinstated the Kabakaship and other ceremonial and fiduciary benefits to traditional rulers. While the tactic clearly bought Museveni support, it also heightened hopes among the Baganda that Museveni would push for a federal state, with the concession of extensive powers to the kingdoms. However, in the same year Museveni circumscribed the power of the chieftaincies and consolidated his gains in the RC system by enacting the Local Governments (Resistance Councils) Statute. This statute dramatically increased levels of resource transfers to the local RCs, making them the most significant state organs, with block and equalisation grants the principal means for furthering the interests of local level administrators (Regan 1995, p. 289). This created a state–bureaucratic constituency for Museveni leading into the Constituent Assembly, which Museveni channelled towards a programme of decentralisation within a unitary government; traditional Buganda leaders saw this, correctly, as an attempt to temper federalist tendencies. Museveni then shrewdly picked the Baganda leader Bidandi Ssali as Local Government Minister, deepening Bugandan support for political decentralisation in a unitary framework (ori Amaza 1998, p. 188).

Regime opponents saw the coronation of the Kabaka as a ploy to buy votes and push the government programme through the Constituent Assembly (ori Amaza, 1998, p. 187); whether it was votes or a less formal show of compliance that Museveni wanted, it worked. Museveni reinforced the RCs, eventually renaming them ‘Local Councils’ (LCs) when he came to believe, as Rawlings had, that the phase of government-as-militarised-struggle was over. With the LCs, Museveni turned Uganda’s state structure on its head, inverting centralism and replacing it with bottom-up structures. The chiefs, still responsible for some aspects of local government, are now closely watched by the LCs. Districts of the former Buganda are partially under the political control of the Kabaka, who oversees tax collections and the control of Buganda’s fiscal resources via appointed chiefs (bakungu). This integration of the state with traditional authorities echoes the ‘institutional layering’ in Ghana, but went further in the extension of authority to traditional powers and the construction of relations between state and traditional authorities.

Political heritages: institutional choices and their aftermaths

Burkina Faso: the collapse of regime support

Thomas Sankara’s attempts to promote peasant organisation and undermine traditional actors collided with Burkina Faso’s political constraints, and conflict heightened between 1984 and 1987. Sankara attempted to link the population directly to government through new institutions, such as the ‘national budget conference’ of 1984, in which Sankara put the question of the national budget deficit to an inchoate assembly for resolution. Sankara mobilised a large group of supporters, who overwhelmed organised labour and scrapped proposals for increased wages. This increased Sankara’s appeal among the CDRs and among other groups largely incapable of collective action, and provided him with meaningful political support. By contrast, the well-organised and centrally located Ouagadougou trade federations became committed enemies. Conflict between the Sankarist backers of the peasantry and the unions came to a head in April and May of 1987, after a succession of cabinet shake-ups and
a string of union complaints. In response, Sankara summoned a ‘national peasant sym-
posium’ in Ouagadougou to demonstrate popular support for the CDR programme. Unions called a concurrent national meeting, cancelled it when the military menacingly
occupied the event site, and then began a wave of strikes in June.12 Throughout 1987,
Sankara tried to buy time by creating a Burkinabé National Peasant Union (UNPB), a
peak-level organisation designed to compensate for the politically dispersed nature
of the rural CDRs. However, the Burkinabé peasantry was insufficiently organised, at
least in the short term, to provide the pillar of support the President would need.

The sidelining of the chiefs, the traditional brokers in rural areas, had conjured opposi-
tion among powerful rural agents and dismantled possibilities for rural collective action. Having attacked village hierarchies at their roots, Sankara found no refuge in appeals to
rural forces. Nor could Sankara buttress himself by seeking effectively to restrict the
polity to the capital and its environs, since he had effectively lost power in Ouagado-
gou. The problem of traditional authority in the villages was compounded by the
Mossi chiefs in peripheral urban areas, especially around Ouagadougou, where they
still retained the ‘control of the mechanisms for social regulation’ (Jaglin 1995, p. 264).

Having alienated chiefs and unions, Sankara had no power base from which to
to control divisions within the military elite, as the CDRs proved weaker politically than
developmentally, too heterogeneous and dispersed to come to Sankara’s defence. The
failure of Sankara’s local experiment (and the regime itself) was simply dénouement.

The coup d’état by Blaise Compaoré led to a restructuring of the CDRs into new units
arranged along interest group lines on a corporatist basis, instead of a decentralised
geographic plan. This so-called ‘rectification of the revolution’ implied the
re-marginalisation of the local politics of rural areas under more conventional rule.

Compaoré’s willingness to endorse the coup against his old comrade can be traced
almost directly to the conflict that emerged between the two men over whether
political order should be established through CDRs at the vanguard of the revolution
or through a corporatist party with links to major social actors. Sankara’s insistence on
the former, and the associated alienation of major players, both motivated and facil-
tated the coup.

Aside from the military actors that executed the coup, the anti-Sankarist coalition that
stopped the institutionalisation of the CDRs was built on the two old pillars of Burki-
nabé politics: the traditional elite and urban trade unions. Attempts to overthrow the
traditional authorities and displace the unions beginning in 1983 reverberated
throughout Sankara’s tenure of office, and came back to him by 1987. In establishing
the CDRs, Sankara envisioned creating a rural and peripheral-urban constituency, but
this ultimately generated opposition in Burkina’s vibrant civil society and traditional
hierarchies that out muscled the support he garnered. In Ghana and Uganda, more
accommodating approaches to local power structures made for more lasting political
change.

Ghana: the endurance and dilution of the revolution

By 1992 in Ghana, the revolutionary rhetoric of Rawlings’ early years had evaporated,
replaced by structural adjustment, state reform, and piecemeal democratisation. In the
midst of change at the national level, Rawlings also began a comprehensive shuffle
(with both substantive and ornamental changes) in local governance. For Rawlings,
the manipulation of local politics was a key to constraining democratisation (see
Massing 1994, Crook and Manor 1998). At this time, the military Provisional National
Defence Council (PNDC) became the civilian/elected National Democratic Congress (NDC); more than symbolically, of course, the new NDC was simply an echo of the old PNDC. At the local level, CDR officials were quietly moved in to occupy seats on new Unit Committees, a new set of grassroots structures intended to feed directly into the state bureaucracy through the Town/Urban/Area Councils just above them in the hierarchy (Crook and Manor 1998, p. 209). While this entailed the replacement of some pre-existing local state structures (the old Town/Village Development Committees led by the chiefs), Rawlings accounted for the needs of those seated on these former structures in the creation of the Unit Committees. The CDRs continued to operate at the grassroots in promoting the regime’s rhetoric and organising local development projects, but any pretence that they might form the basis of a revolutionary government was dismissed. This CDR–Unit Committee hybrid represented a ‘rather cumbersome compromise’ between revolutionary and moderate democratic factions (Crook and Manor 1998, p. 209).

Increasingly open politics through the 1990s drove yet another shift in the CDRs, as Rawlings quietly extracted them from the state and converted them into a vehicle for his NDC party. As established grassroots institutions that had been effectively relieved of the tasks of civil management, the CDRs were ‘most obvious building blocks for a government party’ (Nugent 1995, p. 215). By the 1996 elections, the old CDR cells (by then no longer even referred to as such) ceased to serve as state organs, and became party organs (Crook and Manor 1998, p. 236). Meanwhile, Unit Committees exercised few functions, where they existed at all.

In the end, the local revolutionary organs of the Rawlings governments were merged into permanent institutional structures: first the state, and later the party. The CDRs were hijacked by more far-reaching political reforms, a phenomenon that would recur with Ghana’s subsequent decentralisation process over the longer term (cf. Crook and Manor 1998). Under pressure to tame a Ghanaian state built upon a bureaucracy in triplicate (with customary authority, state institutions and revolutionary cells), Rawlings permitted the absorption of his revolutionary plan into a more conventional process of state reform. The centre continued to exercise control over local politics, and the incorporation of local elites into politics stopped short of the full devolution of political power to them (cf. Olowu 1998, pp. 523–524). However, this does not imply a simple unidirectional transformation of local government along lines envisioned by the state. Both chiefs and Rawlings conformed to the structures of Ghana’s politics. Modifications of local politics through slow accretion and ‘institutional layering’ – to use Thelen’s (2003, pp. 227–228) term – have belied the rhetoric and impulse of revolutionary social change.13 Because Rawlings’ primary obstacle was the state itself, because he did not choose to alienate major political actors, and because social forces (in the form of urban labour unions) could not derail his programme, the Ghanaian CDRs outlasted those in Burkina Faso. On the other hand, precisely because Rawlings contended with an extensive state, the project was less transformational than that undertaken in Uganda’s political vacuum.

**Uganda: the chieftaincy, the state, and reconstruction of local authority**

The presence of traditional authority in the state apparatus belied Museveni’s oft-proclaimed insistence on eliminating tribalism in Ugandan politics. However, the RCs served complementary functions and represented a set of checks on customary power. Museveni navigated a delicate equilibrium between traditional authority and new local forces. He sought to return some nominal power to traditional elites
as part of an overall strategy of rule, and succeeded largely due to an ability to counter any concession to chiefs with a corresponding reinforcement of the council system. The dual system institutionalised and bureaucratised governance, and prevented abuses of customary power while restoring some political authority to the kingdoms.

The National Resistance Movement (NRM) established a set of relations between two forces – the councils and the chiefs – that are complex in practice, rather than simply adversarial. In some cases, village chiefs become council representatives at the lowest level, and council representatives have conversely been known to seek chieftaincies. Museveni’s willingness to defer to the Buganda chiefs on some issues, while challenging the fundamentals of their authority, backstopped the autonomy of the LCs, while enhancing regime legitimacy among traditional authorities. This effectively neutralised the possibility of civil unrest in Bugandan Kampala and elsewhere. While parts of Uganda remain unstable, the NRM also penetrated the countryside in other regions of the country; in eastern Uganda, Museveni’s success in repelling the millennial Holy Spirit Movement (later the Lord’s Resistance Army) meant the Busoga people ‘wholeheartedly embraced the movement’s politics’ and embraced Museveni’s NRM as ‘their government’ (ori Amaza 1998, p. 129). The contradictory message of overcoming tribal differences (the so-called ‘no party state’), while openly bringing ethnic leaders into politics, reflects the attention paid by the Museveni government to local realities.

From their establishment, the Resistance Councils functioned not only as Uganda’s local governments but as an integral part of the governance system, including the entire legislative branch (where the parliament, the National Assembly, was initially termed the National Resistance Council), and a set of popular tribunals. The RCs operated at five levels, with RC1 consisting of over 40,000 Village Resistance Councils. Above these, at increasingly higher levels, came parish (RC2), sub-county (RC3), county (RC4), and district (RC5) councils. Above the district came the NRC, or parliament. While elections to the RC1 were direct, elections at all levels above this were initially indirect, with a nine-person executive committee (EC) responsible for election of members to the next level. Like the Burkinabé and Ghanaian systems, the RC network was envisioned as a hierarchy, with the base being small units in villages or neighbourhoods. Unlike the Burkinabé and Ghanaian systems, the hierarchy persisted and formed the basis of a permanent sub-national government system.

Uganda prior to Museveni (and particularly under Amin) was an archetypal example of the ‘vacuousness of state power’ and a ‘shattered civil society’ (Chabal 1992, p. 92; 176). The Museveni regime, for all its shortcomings in promoting real democratic contestation, has reversed this. As Halfani (1997) notes in summarising Uganda’s experience with councils:

In Uganda, there has been an attempt to build an urban governance system within the framework of the Resistance Council (RC) system. This is essentially an attempt to bring about a fusion of the institutions of the civil society and those of the state through a hierarchy of community based on non-partisan organs of authority. In addition, the state has incorporated the cultural institutions of civil society, such as the monarchy, and created a consolidated regime at the national and local levels. This move has enhanced the social and political legitimacy within the governance process. (p. 123)

Museveni built new institutions from the chaos left by the Amin and Obote regimes. Surprisingly, the relative absence of both state and civil society in Uganda made
possible the creation of a regime whose foundations represent a new conception of local government.

The comparative political economy of local change: implications

African Presidents who wished to transform local politics faced a central dilemma: whether to defer to powerful domestic elites in constructing local politics, or to undertake a truly revolutionary displacement of these forces. Thomas Sankara’s confrontation of social forces offered the most genuine ‘revolution’ among the three attempts, but this ultimately undermined his rural strategy and his regime, although it would overstate the case to say regime collapse was rooted in the rural alone. By attempting to eradicate the chiefs and marginalise the trade unions, Sankara distanced himself from Burkina Faso’s most important (rural and urban) power bases. Ghana’s Jerry Rawlings sought coexistence between chiefs and the ‘revolutionary’ state, and took a more cautious route to the empowerment of local councils that resulted in a perpetuation and swelling of the political class. Uganda’s Yoweri Museveni, by contrast, amplified the power of the chiefs while empowering local councils, constructing new forms of state–society relations, and thus presided over an enduring decentralisation and relocation of power (Olowu 1998, p. 524). Uganda is the only example where the regime succeeded in building a new local constituency.14

It should ultimately be questioned whether any of the outcomes were revolutionary, given the failure and watering down in the cases where pre-existing political forces were strong, and the fact that the only transformational change came on an institutional tabula rasa. Nonetheless, these local schemes deepened state–society interactions for rural populations in all three cases, at least for a time. This is particularly true in Burkina and Uganda, where the state was absent in rural areas prior to Sankara and Museveni, although it also holds in Ghana where Rawlings layered participatory institutions on top of systems of district assemblies and councils. The legacies of ‘revolution’ varied, but the attempts were consequential in each case. Even for Burkina’s effort – the least successful of the three – fierce critics of Sankara’s anti-traditional and autocratic tendencies noted that ‘the bottom line is far from being negative’, and that ‘the CDRs, by imposing themselves legally upon the traditional chiefs, syndicates, party members, and the Church, created a new experience, albeit limited, in local administration’ (Augustin and Augustin 1994, pp. 66, 81).

While theories of neopatrimonialism and decentralised despotism provide powerful critical perspectives that unify African cases into overarching frameworks, these critical approaches must be complemented with understandings of two types of variations across Africa: cross-national and intertemporal. Boone’s (2003) work reminds us of the need to adapt the political-economic study of Africa’s rural power structures to specific local factors; these factors may vary across countries or within countries across local contexts. In a temporal sense, variations have emerged with the slow accretion of democratic practices over time (cf. Posner and Young 2007). Theorising about these variations will improve empirical fit. In short, the critical literatures can work symbiotically with comparative political economy to reach generalisable conclusions that remain specific to local historical contexts.

Outcomes are explained by two factors, with the first being the relative strength of pre-existing institutions at the local level. Uganda’s singular combination of a weak civil society and dysfunctional state facilitated the RCs’ assumption of responsibilities
and the completion of their mandates. Sankara’s experiment failed because existing social actors limited the latitude of revolutionary leadership. Between these poles, Jerry Rawlings faced and accommodated demands from within the state, and as a result his local governance system survived, but the revolutionary project blanched. Sandbrook and Oelbaum’s (1997, p. 606) observation holds, that ‘populist military interventions have proved notoriously ephemeral: in West Africa, their leaders have either succumbed to compromises with ingrained institutional practices (Jerry Rawlings of Ghana), or been assassinated (Murtala Mohammed of Nigeria and Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso) by those who would’.

The second factor, emerging sequentially, is the set of institutional choices made by the state in integrating traditional leaders with radical new forms of governance (cf. Ray and Dunham 1998, p. 585). Revolutionary attempts to supplant local power structures failed, whereas accommodating traditional brokers and social forces worked as a strategy of rural local control. Foremost among the socio-political actors that drove the comparative story are local chiefs, although in the broader context, urban actors such as trade unions also shaped the environments in which regimes operated. In Burkina Faso, failure to dialogue with prominent actors doomed the rural incorporation project, and ultimately contributed to (but did not determine) regime collapse. In Ghana, the state bureaucracy itself was the principal constraint on aims to transform the local order, and this resulted in the state ultimately absorbing the revolutionary cells. In Uganda, Museveni famously deemed the state itself the only party capable of representing all Ugandans, which satisfied the state bureaucracy while the integration of traditional rulers bought support in rural areas. The relative success of local projects is attributable to political choice and the historical backdrop on which institutions are created and state–society relationships forged.

As suggested at the outset, contextual comparisons that emphasise cross-national variations should not impede theorising that aims at understanding Africa’s fundamental patterns of governance. The general conclusion here – that the success of state actions will be conditioned upon responsiveness to other social forces – dovetails with recent historical-institutional work. African politics may be moving away from the near-universality of neopatrimonialism towards more chequered patterns of partially institutionalised governance. Yet this new phenomenon does not imply proto-Weberian rational-bureaucratic states. Rather, states are showing that partial transformations and partial institutionalisations may themselves be relatively stable, but only where powerful political forces are accommodated.

Beyond the pathologies of neopatrimonialism, African governance appears increasingly to be characterised by a new category of layered institutional arrangements that blend both constructive and dysfunctional elements of formal and informal power alike. As noted above, Galvan (2007) documents the localised emergence of syncretic, hybrid institutions in rural Senegal that straddle lines between state and society. Similarly, the ‘twilight institutions’ described by Lund (2006) operate in the penumbra between modern conventions of state authority and more traditional local practices. Examinations of these syncretic institutions should enhance our understanding of Africa’s local, rural politics, whether or not these institutions are founded on customary authority. Such syncretisms evoke the ‘institutional layering’ noted by Thelen (2003, pp. 227–228), an amalgamation of new institutions with pre-existing structures. In these layered arrangements, the historical inheritance is not simply ‘residual’: past legacies remain at the core of contemporary governance. Changes in local-level politics may thus serve as a microcosm that echoes macro-level changes: local politics can
modernise incompletely without eradicating historical legacies, much as African politics has seen a gradual elimination of overt authoritarian rule, yet an incomplete assumption of democratic practices.

Evaluating the ethical balance sheets of these regimes is beyond the scope of this article, but it may be said that the normative implications of findings about the three ‘revolutionary’ local government efforts are ambiguous. Each of the three regimes nominally sought to extend participation to large segments of rural society never before incorporated into political life, including youth and women. At the same time, all three regimes shared an ambivalent attitude (at best) towards electoral accountability for the national governing body, and a propensity towards repression, despite claims of enhanced participatory mechanisms. While the emphasis here has been on political outcomes, the logic could be extended into the socio-economic arena; outcomes for local populations correlate with the regime-level outcomes. Regime failure in Burkina meant that the *sine qua non* for pro-poor, pro-rural policies was unmet, while social needs were best met in post-conflict Uganda, where the local change was most enduring and transformational (cf. Ayee 1997, *inter alia*). Ghana again falls in the middle, with social outcomes only moderately enhanced at best, since the local structures were subordinated to the larger needs of regime politics, even as politics grew more democratic through the 1990s (cf. Crook and Manor 1998, Crook and Sverisson 2001). Such an interpretation might seem to suggest that a tyrannical legacy of institutional destruction (as in Uganda) facilitates local government reform. Yet such a conclusion would be quite incomplete.

More fitting is the conclusion that even in Uganda – which in 1985 would have been considered a ‘worst-case scenario’ for local reform – political change is possible, but relies upon existing social organisation and the political dialectic of regime interactions with important actors in the state–society matrix. Paradoxically, a basic principle of attempts to revolutionise local politics may be accommodation of existing traditional and social actors. Radical attempts to enhance local participation are likelier to succeed when regimes also ‘listen to’ forces of consequence in existing patterns of state–society interaction. In an age of support for decentralisation and local governance, such choices facilitate the political order that could have helped even Sankara’s revolutionary notions of participation to succeed.

J. Tyler Dickovick is Assistant Professor of Politics at Washington and Lee University. His work is on decentralisation, local governance and democratisation in Africa and Latin America. Email: DickovickT@wlu.edu

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Endnotes

1. Rawlings’ brief presidency at the head of a junta from 1979–1981 is not considered.
2. Museveni came to political prominence as a rebel leader.
3. A full translation of the *Discours d'orientation politique* is found in Markakis and Waller 1986.
4. CNR: Conseil National de la Révolution. CDR: Comités pour la Défense de la Révolution. Created in 1983, the Burkina CDRs pre-dated their namesakes (Committees for the Defence of the Revolution) in Ghana. Rawlings appears to have borrowed the name from Sankara.

5. The other major communist organisation in government, the Union des Luttes Communistes (ULC), remained in alliance with Sankara, sensing an opportunity to expand its power.

6. The CDRs were originally called People’s Defence Councils or Workers’ Defence Councils (depending on location). The name was changed in 1984.

7. DAs were called Councils or Municipal Councils in urban areas (Massing 1994, p. 92).

8. A particularly telling example of the importance of public sector employees relative to private sector workers is in Nugent (1995, pp. 151–152).

9. On civil society weakness in a declining state, see the conclusion in Herbst (1993).

10. Similarly, the RCs smashed the arbitrary authority of the military; as Apolo Nsibambi (1991, pp. 287–288) illustrates in his case study of the Makerere University RCs, the armed forces were subjected to the same oversight by RCs as the chiefs.

11. Ori Amaza (1998, p. 187). While Apter (1997, p. lxii) challenges the notion that Museveni has been responsive to the needs of the Baganda elite, noting the limitations placed on the exercise of traditional power by the Kabaka, he notes that Museveni has made major steps: ‘not only has he restored the Kabakaship, he has countenanced, albeit with some reluctance, the transition from a “cultural” to a “political” Kabakaship’.

12. A chronology of major events under the CNR can be found in Jaffré (1989, pp. 287–291).

13. Thelen notes that the phrase draws from Eric Schickler’s work on the US Congress.

14. As a thought exercise for cases beyond the scope of this empirical comparison, one could imagine a fourth possibility: regimes that neither accommodated social forces at local levels, nor attempted to empower local governing bodies. This could describe Africa’s more totalitarian escapades of the 1970s and 1980s, ranging from Sekou Touré’s Guinea to Idi Amin’s Uganda. Such regimes characteristically attempt strategies of repressive centralisation to substitute for the state’s inability to project power to all citizens and areas (cf. Herbst 2000). In these cases, local changes to incorporate rural actors through participatory institutions are not attempted.

15. Ayee (1997) offers a brief comparison of Ghana and Uganda, but contrasts Uganda’s RCs with Ghana’s District Assemblies rather than the CDRs. This choice is telling, since Uganda’s RCs and Ghana’s District Assemblies (and the Unit Committees below them) both now constitute the local state. A key difference is obvious in their names: Uganda has converted the revolutionary project (RCs) into the new state, whereas Ghana’s revolutionary project (CDRs) was subsumed into the state (DA). Ayee lauds the Ugandan experience, and pans Ghana’s efforts at decentralisation.

References


Do We Understand the Linkages between Economic Growth, Poverty Targets and Poverty Reduction?

Thorkil Casse & Stig Jensen

This article contributes to the debate on poverty trends in Africa, looking at the argument for a correspondence between economic growth and poverty reduction. It questions whether a link between economic growth and poverty reduction can be established. First there is a look at the general picture in Africa and no convincing evidence of this link is found, before the article turns to two countries, Burkina Faso and Madagascar, which on the surface seem to exemplify the link. However, in Burkina Faso the link exists only in a limited way and for only a short period (1998–2003), while in Madagascar, where the link appears more obvious, social and political unrest in 2009 casts doubt on the reliability of the data. Indeed, it is probable that an increase in poverty contributed to the crisis in Madagascar. Furthermore, there are signs that in both countries poverty strategies are increasingly giving way to Poverty Reduction Growth Facility programmes, closely related to former structural adjustment loans. It is concluded, first, that analysing poverty strategies through Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers does not help in resolving the uncertainty, since these strategies assume *a priori* the existence of a link between economic growth and poverty reduction; second, that collection and interpretation of poverty data could be biased, with the World Bank, for example, having an interest in showing improvements in poverty reduction in Africa; and, finally, that the paucity of data needs, at the very least, to be recognised as a major problem.

Introduction

We are more than half way to 2015, the target year for halving global poverty (as compared to 1990 figures) under the Millennium Development Goals adopted in 2000. The proportion of poor people, according to the $1 per day threshold definition, has dropped from 28 per cent of total world population in 1990 to 21 per cent in 2001 and 18 per cent in 2004 (World Bank 2005, p. 22, 2007, p. 40). By this same measure, the share of extreme poor might be as ‘low’ as 12 per cent in 2015 (World Bank 2007, p. 40). Nevertheless, the number of the absolute poor could well once again be on the increase. The financial crisis appears to be reversing the gains of poverty reduction, and the World Bank finds a ‘strong need to expand assistance to
low-income countries (LICs) to protect critical expenditures and prevent an erosion of progress in reducing poverty' (World Bank 2009, p. 1).

Africa is the only region in the world that, even in the optimistic forecasts of the World Bank, will fall short of expectations, and this before the onset of the financial crisis. For Africa, the headcount index of poor people (the relative share of poor people to total population) remained constant, with an insignificant change from 45 per cent to 44 per cent in the period 1990 to 2002 (World Bank 2005, p. 22, Table 2.1). A slight drop in 2003–2004 yields a percentage of 41 per cent in 2004 and a projection of 36 per cent for 2015 (as compared to a target of 23 per cent, see World Bank 2007, p. 41).

The aim of this article is to examine the link between economic growth and poverty reduction and what role, if any, poverty strategies play in the emergence of this link. Few doubt that during periods of economic downturn, negative economic growth spells an increase in the number of poor people. In periods of high economic growth, according to the World Bank, the number of poor people will decrease. The article takes a closer look at the validity of this hypothesis.

The initial assumption is that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) are two sides of the same coin, in the sense that PRSPs are the national poverty strategies implemented in developing countries in order to achieve the MDGs. The article starts with a short introduction to the background of the launch of the PRSP. Next, there is a discussion about the global trend in poverty rates and, more specifically, the basis of the formulation of the hypothesis of a positive link between economic growth and poverty reduction. There is then a closer look at trends in Africa and it is argued that among fast growing economies (at least until the financial crisis emerged) only a minority of countries demonstrate signs of poverty reduction. Two ‘success stories’ have been chosen for closer examination: Burkina Faso and Madagascar. Would it be correct to conclude that poverty reduction was a direct result of economic growth in these two countries, or do discussions within these countries raise questions about the reliability and accuracy of poverty figures?

**Linking MDGs and PRSPs**

In September 1999, the World Bank and the IMF launched their common strategy, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), to cut poverty by focusing on specific areas of country intervention:

> The … strategies need to focus on policy actions to increase growth and reduce poverty, all within a coherent macroeconomic framework … PRSPs are also expected to be clearly linked with agreed International Development Goals (IDGs) for poverty reduction, education, health and gender equality. (World Bank and IMF, 2000, p. 1)

Officially, MDG and PRSP objectives are not linked, as MDGs were conceived within the UN system while the PRSP was a Bretton Woods (IMF and World Bank) initiative. In practice, however, the World Bank reports annually on progress towards the MDGs (Global Monitoring Report), with its figures, primarily latest updates on poverty trends, feeding into the UN annual reporting system on MDGs, the Millennium Development Goals Report. Thus although not officially endorsed by the UN system, PRSPs are, in reality, national vehicles for country-specific strategies to achieve MDGs. As the
focus here is on national strategies on poverty reduction in Africa, the rest of this article will concentrate on the PRSP.

The origins of the PRSP lie in years of deliberation within the World Bank and the IMF on how to boost economic growth, not least in Africa, and as a response to increasing criticism from small OECD countries (such as the Netherlands and the Nordic countries) and other observers of structural adjustment loans (see Gautam 2003, pp. 10–11 for a World Bank perspective on this). For years, research had cast doubt on the efficiency of World Bank and IMF structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) (Killick 1995, Mosley et al. 1995). As neither poor programme implementation nor non-compliance with SAP conditionalities resulted routinely in a prolonged loss of access to credit, ‘conditionality relating to governance issues was thus particularly prone to be ineffectual’ (Killick 2004, p. 13). For the World Bank and IMF, therefore, PRSPs came to represent an alternative way of delivering the stabilisation and economic growth in poor countries which orthodox structural adjustment had failed to do.

A typical PRSP includes strategies for achieving MDGs and specifies indicators at sector and sub-sectoral level of the main components of each of these. Thus indicators like poverty incidence (number of poor people compared to the entire population), under-five mortality rate, and primary school completion rate relate to the achievement of, respectively, MDG 1 (halving the proportion of people in the developing world living on less than $1 a day by 2015), MDG 2 (achieving universal primary education), and MDG 3 (reducing child mortality). Among the 30–40 indicators mentioned in a typical PRSP are some, such as the time required to create a business and the number of inhabitants per policeman, which, while relevant to questions of good governance, are not directly related to MDGs.

Poverty reduction in global perspective

According to the UN and the World Bank, economic growth in China, India and, to a lesser extent, East Asia, home to the majority of poor people in 1990, is the main reason for the decline in the relative number of poor people in the world today (UN 2005, World Bank 2005). However, other analyses claim that the only significant reduction in world poverty has come from China, not India (Chen and Ravallion 2004). Edwards (2006, p. 1683), for example, uses consumption instead of headcount data to argue for the absence of a significant reduction in poverty in India where, according to World Bank calculations, the number of the absolutely poor declined by 21 million between 1993 and 2001. Indeed, for Edwards (2006), even if these World Bank estimates for India were accepted, they would still represent only some 17 per cent of the equivalent figure for China.

That available datasets are not necessarily comparable or compatible is not the only difficulty with measuring or tracking trends in poverty reduction. There are also, in economic policy terms, three means for reducing poverty: a high rate of growth in average income; a change in relative income in favour of the poor; and a change in the sensitivity/elasticity of poverty to growth. Using data collected in the 1990s from 285 household surveys covering 80 countries, Kraay (2006) concludes, first, that variation in changes in poverty is due first and foremost to growth in average incomes (i.e. economic growth), which is thought to explain 70 per cent of short-term, and 97 per cent of long-term variations in poverty; second, that changes in the relative income of the poor account for 30 per cent of variation in changes in the
incidence of poverty in the short term and 3 per cent in the long run; and, third, that the contribution of sensitivity/elasticity of poverty to growth is negligible (the elasticity of poverty differs when the economic growth in some countries is more than proportionally captured by the poor compared to other countries). Kraay (2006) also attempts to single out the main factors which demonstrate a correlation with economic growth and/or poverty reduction: a rule of law indicator is positively correlated with both growth and poverty reduction; openness to international trade is positively correlated with growth, but negatively correlated with poverty reduction; and government consumption is negatively correlated with growth, but positively correlated with poverty reduction. In contrast, investment in primary education is not correlated with either economic growth or poverty reduction.

The findings of Kraay (2006) are backed by other studies, including the World Bank Global Monitoring Report on progress with MDGs (World Bank 2005), which contains the graph reproduced as Figure 1 showing the relationship between change in per capita income and change in the proportion of poor people, and which also notes that, ‘consistent with other developing regions, most countries in sub-Saharan Africa are clustered in the top left quadrant (with negative growth and rising poverty) or bottom right quadrant (with positive growth and declining poverty)’ (p.18).

However, although countries experiencing high growth are also those exhibiting signs of reduction in the poverty rate (Gambia, Botswana, Mauritania and Uganda), whereas those countries with low economic growth display an increase in the poverty rate (Ethiopia, Côte d’Ivoire and Burundi), it is the case that in most countries, both economic growth and changes in poverty rates appear negligible. Even more significant, perhaps, are the cases of Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda, all three of which

![Figure 1. Relationship between increase/decrease in poverty rates and increase/decrease in economic growth in Africa, various time periods. Note: Sub-Saharan countries are labelled, including the years of the change in poverty. Regression line shown y = −1.15x − 0.01; R² = 0.54. Source: World Bank (2005, p. 18).](image)
experienced rates of growth of 1–2 per cent per annum from the late 1980s to mid-1990s, but recorded widely differing changes in poverty reduction: −8 per cent (Uganda), 0 per cent (Nigeria) and +2 per cent (Ghana); and those of Kenya and Burundi, which also show wildly differing rates of change in the incidence of poverty or the elasticity of poverty to growth for approximately equivalent rates of economic growth. Taken together, the data point to a conclusion that contradicts the World Bank claim, elaborated in the quote above from Kraay (2006), of a strong straightforward correlation between economic growth and poverty reduction.

While it may well be that some countries are simply better than others at achieving poverty reduction through economic growth, Page (2006) notes, based on cross-country study of 54 developing countries and a few eastern European countries, a lack of support for an a priori choice between growth-oriented and poverty-oriented strategies. Rather, strategies based on a mix of growth-oriented policies and policies intended to ensure that the benefits of growth are widely shared are likely to be most successful in achieving poverty reduction’ (p. 519).

Thus despite years of research and practical aid projects to reduce poverty, disagreement still reigns over the basic arguments in poverty reduction. It is not certain whether the observed decrease in world poverty rates is explained simply by China’s economic success alone, and the authors are doubtful of the argument that economic growth, by itself, will trigger a reduction in poverty. There are further complicating factors: the global financial crisis, for example, threatens to reverse the gains in poverty alleviation over the last 10–20 years. Similarly, updated World Bank figures for global poverty suggest that some 400 million more people than was previously thought lived below the poverty line in 2005, with more such people living in India than Africa, which may in turn indicate that only China’s major poverty reduction strategies have succeeded to any significant extent (Chen and Ravallion 2008).

Economic growth and poverty reduction in Africa

The focus in this article is the alleged positive impact of economic growth on the incidence of poverty. What is the true nature of the link between economic growth and poverty reduction? Does economic growth trigger a reduction in poverty? Each of these is addressed in turn. What is the link between economic growth and the achievement of PRSP targets? Do PRSPs actually reduce poverty?

Data on changes in poverty rates for 16 sub-Saharan African countries, which averaged economic growth rates of more than 5 per cent per annum for the period 2000–2005, and positive economic growth per capita in 2006–2007, are fairly rudimentary. In five of these countries (Burkina Faso, Madagascar, Mauritania, Mozambique and Senegal), the poverty rate, calculated as the percentage of the population living under the minimum subsistence level (headcount index), has declined, thus seeming to confirm a hypothesised link between changes in economic growth and changes in the poverty rate. However, in two others, Mali and Rwanda, the incidence of poverty increased; while there is no available poverty data for a further eight countries (Angola, Chad, Eritrea, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Tanzania), and only information dating to 2001 for Uganda, the remaining country making up the sample (IMF 2005).

Clearly, this overview of the poverty record in 16 fast-growing African countries does not provide confirmation of the generalised existence of an inverse relationship.
between economic growth and poverty reduction, even if such a link does seem to exist in the case of at least five of these countries. Thus the article takes Burkina Faso and Madagascar, two of the countries in the latter category, and explores, first, whether economic growth in these countries did trigger a decrease in poverty; and, second, how best to interpret the achievements of their PRSPs. It starts with a short overview of the economic and social history of the countries and the background to their PRSP processes.

The background to the PRSP process in Burkina Faso and Madagascar

Burkina Faso became independent in 1960, and has since then experienced continuing political instability, including military coups. In 1983, a military coup was orchestrated by Captain Thomas Sankara, who tried to remodel the country on the basis of a revolutionary programme. Much animosity was created when he ordered all public servants, including high-ranking officials, to work on farms for one day a month. In 1987, he was toppled and assassinated in a military coup led by Blaise Compaoré. The opposition boycotted presidential elections in 1991, and during the 1990s the regime was constantly challenged. The 2002 legislative elections were won by the ruling party, but only with a very small parliamentary majority. Indeed, to some observers, the President exploited the unique opportunity presented by the crisis in Côte d’Ivoire, calling for national unity and rallying the public to the national flag and its custodian, the ruling party. Compaoré was re-elected President in 2005, securing 80 per cent of votes cast, with the ruling party again winning legislative elections in 2007, this time with a greater majority (and 60 per cent of the votes).

With a much-divided opposition and increasingly apathetic electorate, Burkina Faso has become a de facto single party state (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2008a) which, despite a relatively high degree of ethnic diversity, has remained free from ethnic conflict even if not from farmer–herder clashes over access to increasingly scarce productive land (Hagberg 2006). The Burkinabé Government, which is the beneficiary of development support from a number of donors, has taken steps to privatise the country’s natural resources, notably minerals, by allocating mining concessions to international enterprises and, in the process, marginalising local artisan miners (Luning 2008).

Despite the impact of changes in international cotton prices and American agricultural subsidy policy, the Burkinabé economy grew at an average annual rate of 5.2 per cent between 2000 and 2007. The country was one of the first (in 2000) to implement a PRSP, and is widely praised by donors for its ability to fulfil PRSP targets. However, although it ought to have finalised its second PRSP covering the years 2004–2006, the programme implementation period was extended into 2007/2008.

Madagascar also became independent in 1960. However, compared to Burkina Faso, it is rich in natural resources, but has been plagued by ethnic conflicts, both before and since independence. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Merina (25 per cent of the total population, but 60 per cent of the population in the highlands) conquered the entire island; and, particularly in the North, fighting was fierce and violent, leaving lasting distrust between the highland Merina and the coastal population. In the 1970s, a revolutionary socialist movement took root in Madagascar and a nationalisation process reduced the influence of the French. As in Burkina Faso, a soldier, General Ratsiraka, ousted another military leadership in 1975 and,
apart from a period of great instability between 1991 and 1996, remained in power until 2002, presiding over, successively, an initial national socialist and, later, a liberal market-based system. Toward the latter part of his presidency, Ratsiraka introduced decentralisation and good governance reforms that were designed primarily to strengthen his influence and power at the expense of the National Assembly (Daylife 2009, Helwege & Birch 2007).

Ratsiraka was challenged during the 2002 presidential elections by Marc Ravalomanana, a long-time rival and the mayor of the national capital, Antananarivo, who based his campaign on an anti-corruption and economic reform agenda. Although there was no outright winner, and a second round of voting was scheduled, Ravalomanana declared himself winner before the run-off elections could take place. Following months of social unrest, he succeeded in securing his claim to the presidency, with Ratsiraka going into self-imposed exile. Like Ratsiraka before him, Ravalomanana embarked on an overhaul of Malagasy society in a bid to accelerate development, promoting institution building, combating corruption, and encouraging foreign investment (Pryor 1990, Bertelsmann Stiftung 2008b). Unfortunately, the proceeds of strong post-2002 economic growth were not widely or equally distributed, and although Ravalomanana was re-elected in 2006, by the end of 2008, a new mayor of the capital, Rajoelina, was calling for the President to step down in the wake of corruption allegations and accusations of high-handedness and abuse of office. In 2009, following widespread and bloody unrest in the wake of the power struggle between the President and mayor (Assidu 2009), the President gave in and resigned from office.

Madagascar is ranked lower in terms of economic development than Burkina Faso, with a per capita GDP of US$320 in 2007, compared to US$430 for Burkina Faso (World Bank 2008). During the period 2003–2007, economic growth averaged 6.2 per cent and in the process regained pre-2002 crisis levels. Indeed, as the 2002 crisis saw the economy contract by almost 13 per cent, it is likely that 2009, another crisis year, will witness a slowdown in economic growth. Not surprisingly, Madagascar demonstrates a somewhat erratic economic growth pattern.

The PRSP process in Madagascar was initiated in late 2000. Due to the political crisis in 2002, however, the first PRSP could not reach completion point before 2004, more than a year behind schedule. The new government which took office in late 2002 replaced a previous close focus on poverty reduction with a firm commitment to economic growth, by adopting a broader strategy in 2007 called the Madagascar Action Plan (MAP). The plan identifies six priority areas, showing a much stronger pursuit of economic growth strategies, of which the main interventions included an increase in investment, promotion of a green revolution in agriculture and implementation of measures to reduce the fertility rate, combat AIDS and control malaria. In the eyes of the World Bank and the IMF, MAP represents an improvement on the PRSP, since in contrast to the latter, the plan is prioritised (although MAP indicators were never published, cf. IMF 2007b).

**Linking poverty reduction to economic growth in Burkina Faso and Madagascar**

In both Burkina Faso and Madagascar, economic growth appears to stimulate a reduction in poverty. However, figures on poverty are contested in both countries. In addition, even if the argument of such a link between economic growth and poverty alleviation was accepted or could be sustained, the value of implementing a
poverty strategy (PRSP) would still have to be explained if economic growth could do the job on its own.

Tables 1 and 2 below show exactly how economic growth and poverty reduction have gone hand in hand in both countries. They contain information on economic growth rates and poverty rates (the percentage of households living below the poverty line compared to the total population), together with the few PRSP indicators available. There are no other published PRSP time series indicators for either country.

In Burkina Faso economic growth was strong, with the poverty rate appearing to decline from 46.4 per cent in 2003 to 40.8 per cent in 2006. In reality, however, the poverty rate increased from 1999 to 2003, while the figures since then are no more than estimates derived from models. These figures do not therefore provide sufficient evidence that economic growth triggers an automatic reduction in poverty rates.

The link between poverty indicator accomplishment and poverty reduction may indeed be even weaker, given that doubts have been raised as to the impartiality of the monitoring of changes in poverty rates. The government of Burkina Faso and the World Bank disagree on how the incidence of poverty has developed over the period 1998–2003. The World Bank, having modified the original poverty incidence for 1998 on the grounds of a supposed underestimation, arrives at an improvement in the poverty incidence of 8 percentage points (World Bank 2004b, p. viii). According to the government of Burkina Faso, on the other hand, the poverty rate showed no signs of improvement between 1998 and 2003 (Ministry for the Economy and Development, Burkina Faso 2004, p. 15, IMF 2007d).1 So while the World Bank holds that economic growth in Burkina triggered a decrease in the poverty rate, this hypothesis is challenged by the Burkinabé national statistical office. In truth, behind the technicalities explained in endnote 1 lie questions of political credibility: while the World Bank is desperate to demonstrate that economic policies promoted as part of the framework of a PRSP encourage a lowering of poverty rates over time, the Burkinabé Government is more concerned to continue to attract significant levels of donor funding. From the point of view of the government, therefore, a lowering of the poverty rate could result

<table>
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<th>Indicator</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
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<tr>
<td>Gross primary school enrolment rate (%)</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>66.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary school enrolment rate for girls (%)</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immunisation rate (yellow fever) (%)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of provinces with more than 75% coverage of drinking water</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty incidence (%)</td>
<td>45.3*</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>44.4**</td>
<td>42.7**</td>
<td>40.8**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP growth (%)</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>6.4</td>
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Notes: *1998; ** based on macroeconomic model calibrations; see text.
in reluctance on the part of donors to continue to fund ongoing programmes or a desire to cancel new ones in the pipeline.

The World Bank calculations confirm that growth was actually pro-poor and solved the so-called ‘Burkinabé growth–poverty paradox’ (Grimm and Günther 2004, 2006), but only if the Bank’s modifications to the original official Burkinabé measures of poverty are accepted. Later macroeconomic calibrations of poverty rates after 2003 indicate a decline in the poverty incidence in Burkina Faso, supposedly to 42.6 per cent in 2007 (Sie 2008). The basic assumption in the Poverty Analysis Macroeconomic Simulator (PAMS) model is precisely that household revenues increase by a coefficient calculated as a proposition of the macroeconomic growth data. No proper poverty analysis has been conducted since 2003, implying an absence of any reliable information on poverty trends during the period when the second PRSP was implemented.

In the case of Madagascar (Table 2), the relationship between economic growth and poverty reduction is clearer, at least at first glance. It should be noted that the reform measures introduced in the wake of Ravalomanana’s accession to the presidency in 2002 coincided with a period of strong economic growth. Furthermore, the World Bank claims that the qualitative indicators of governance are moving in the right direction: in an index of property rights and rule-based governance rating, Madagascar scores relatively highly (four out of six possible points), as it does for the index of social inclusion (World Development Indicators). However, in view of the social unrest since late 2008, the question is whether these poverty measures reflect recent or current realities. After all, in his power struggle with Ravalomanana, Rajoelina was able to draw widespread support from a population whose poor had suffered badly from steep increases in the cost of living, and whose upper-middle class had complained of social exclusion and economic marginalisation (the latter as the President’s business enterprise, Tiko Holding Company, became an increasingly dominant economic force), while members of the lower middle class were becoming the ‘new poor’. In addition, the opposition claimed that an early (and unusual) World Bank investment in the privately-owned Tiko Holding had blinded the organisation to the shortcomings of Ravalomanana, the owner of Tiko, and his presidency.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Net primary school enrolment rate (%)</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>96.2</td>
<td>96.4*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary school completion rate (%)</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Immunisation rate (&lt;1 yr olds) (%)</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>87.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidence of tuberculosis (per 100,000 people)</td>
<td>215.1</td>
<td>226.2</td>
<td>233.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Households with access to drinking water (%)</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>61.0</td>
<td>61.0</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>61.0</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty incidence (%)</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>72.1</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP growth (%)</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>-12.7</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Note: *Not all sources agree on this figure.
Unlike the situation in Burkina Faso, data from the Statistical Office in Madagascar is not circulated and debated locally, and no scientific study has ever questioned the presumed downward trend in poverty rates in Madagascar. However, the assumption demands close scrutiny. For example, compared to its predecessors in the recent and more distant past, the last political conflict in the country did not appear to have its roots in inter-ethnic differences, as it was largely an intra-ethnic conflict, pitting different factions of the Merina political and economic elite against each other. It is thus a measure of the extent of social misery and discontent that significant numbers of ordinary Merina were willing to publicly demonstrate their disapproval at the policies and performance of Ravolomanana, a leader who was ‘one of their own’.

The IMF appears to raise questions about the quality of the data on poverty trends with its observation that the MAP progress report does not provide a detailed update on poverty trends (IMF 2009b). Indeed, an annex to an IMF review of the country’s economic policies contains only a single measure of poverty for the period 2000–2007 (cf. IMF 2008b). But while it appears that Madagascar has not yet put in place a proper monitoring system for assessing changes in the incidence of poverty, it is not possible yet to draw definitive conclusions regarding the quality of available poverty data. Consequently, although official data indicates the existence of a clear and positive link between economic growth and poverty reduction in Madagascar, the fact that political and social unrest in 2009 was fuelled by a popular perception that poverty had increased, and not only among the urban poor, does raise doubts about the reliability of the data.

At first glance, then, the Burkina Faso and Madagascar case studies appear to provide evidence in support of the notion that economic growth triggers a reduction in poverty rates. However, closer examination discloses a strong disagreement in Burkina Faso as to the direction of the poverty trend (it may be stagnating), and a strong impression among Madagascans that, government intervention notwithstanding, poverty is on the increase. Clearly, poverty data are not neutral; African governments and donors might share a mutual interest in displaying an improvement (Madagascar) or, in contrast, might have competing reasons for showing either an increase or a decrease in the incidence of poverty (Burkina Faso).

**PRSPs**

Tables 1 and 2 have already noted the paucity of PRSP indicators. In both countries, enrolment figures and immunisation rates are available, even if time series data do not exist and, in the case of Burkina Faso, there are gaps in the figures.

Taking Burkina Faso first, the development objective of the PRSP (increasing GDP per capita by 4 per cent and reducing the poverty incidence from 46.3 per cent in 2003 to 41 per cent in 2006) appears to be achievable through the successful completion of just one programme (consolidation of macroeconomic stability). This would in principle render the remaining 35 PRSP programmes obsolete. However, the implementation of the PRSP has been lagging further and further behind schedule. The programme for the second PRSP, due to be implemented from 2006 to 2008 and whose delivery had already been delayed, was only submitted to the IMF by the Burkinabé Government in June 2007, with the IMF publishing it a year later. One would be forgiven for thinking that the PRSP strategy does not excite enthusiasm from either the Burkinabé Government or the country’s most important donors. The IMF/World
Bank assessment of the latest PRSP (IMF 2008c) stresses that, according to model estimates, a downward poverty trend coincided with the sustained economic growth observed over the period under review. Significantly, whether or not the model estimated reflect reality is not considered. Neither is the existence or absence of a link between social sector improvements and poverty alleviation discussed anywhere in the report. We are thus witnessing a PRSP process becoming little more than window dressing to demonstrate that government is concerned with social sector development, but without any attempt by the World Bank or the IMF to link this to economic growth and/or poverty reduction. Poverty strategies are simply replaced by plans for new school and dispensary construction.

Turning to Madagascar, 31 target indicators in all were specified in the old PRSP. However, in 2002 the ‘new’ Malagasy Government decided to turn to MAP, itself a more traditional poverty approach, within which economic growth impacts positively on poverty through trickle-down. In effect, MAP is about increasing economic growth in the belief that poverty will eventually be reduced as a consequence, irrespective of the direction or pace of PRSP indicators.

In the absence of arguments linking improvements in PRSP indicators to a reduction in poverty, strategies for reducing poverty in both countries are informed by traditional trickle-down thinking. In neither country are improvements in social indicators, notably those associated with PRSPs, thought to have any effect on poverty reduction.

Is PRGF in Burkina Faso and Madagascar a solution?

If the Burkinabé and Madagascan Governments are likely to downplay the importance of their PRSPs and refrain from reaching a more detailed comprehension of their impact on poverty, other instruments for disciplining them (and other African countries) may emerge and, over time, replace the PRSP. Such an instrument is actually already being implemented with the assistance of the IMF and World Bank.

Low-income countries will, in addition to designing and seeking funding for PRSP programmes, have to accept an arrangement under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) of the IMF. During 2006 and 2007, the IMF insisted on five criteria for Burkina Faso and seven for Madagascar under the PRGF framework (IMF 2006a, IMF 2007a). The criteria are very alike in the two countries and quite similar to the loan criteria for structural adjustment loans. In Burkina Faso, the quantitative performance criteria include a ceiling on both cumulative change in net domestic financing to government and the accumulated amount of new non-concessional external debt (IMF 2006b, p. 36). In Madagascar, the performance criteria cover a ceiling on domestic financing of the central government and a floor on net foreign assets held by the Central Bank (IMF 2007a, p. 46). Insistence on the completion of the quantitative performance criteria under the PRGF arrangements is quite different to what is expected in terms of PRSP sub-programmes achievement. The concept employed in the PRSP is indicator not criteria.

In Burkina Faso, the 2004 implementation report enumerates 27 indicators monitored during the second PRSP (Ministry of Economy and Development 2005), while even more, 32 in total, indicators were monitored in the 2007 implementation report (IMF 2008a). In Madagascar, the equivalent list contained 31 indicators (Republic of
In none of the reports from the joint World Bank–IMF staff missions was the focus on the extent to which PRSP indicators are met. In contrast, the IMF noted that performance criteria under PRGF were (completely or mostly) met in both Burkina Faso (IMF 2006b, p. 4) and Madagascar (IMF 2008b). Clearly, the assessment of PRSPs is less comprehensive than that for the PRGF, whose arrangements and performance criteria increasingly preoccupy officialdom.

The consequences of non-completion of PRGF arrangements are not yet clear. A hypothesis, difficult to test in the short run, is that the IMF and World Bank on the one hand and African governments on the other will pay less and less attention to PRSP programmes and more and more to the PRGF arrangements and their macroeconomic criteria. Structural adjustment policies are ‘back on the table again’, albeit in a different guise (apparently insisting on poverty reduction and growth).

Initiatives such as Denmark’s Africa Commission, which benefits from the participation of several African leaders, provide evidence of this trend in privileging economic growth at the expense of new poverty reduction strategies. As with Blair’s Commission for Africa, the Danish Africa Commission held meetings and seminars around Africa with the ultimate aim of defining strategies for boosting economic growth. According to the report by the Danish Africa Commission, what is required in Africa revolves largely around:

- providing better access to investment finance and advisory services for small and medium-sized enterprises;
- boosting support to the private sector in order to add more value to commodities, especially in agriculture;
- providing support to young entrepreneurs in Africa through access to risk capital, skills training and advisory services;
- creating an index for African competitiveness to spur action on concrete measures to ensure private sector-led growth. (Africa Commission 2009)

In reality, we may be witnessing the beginnings of a slow trend away from attempts to connect poverty reduction to economic growth, as a combined emphasis on macroeconomic stability and economic growth takes centre stage, once again, in the formulation of economic policies in and for Africa.

Conclusion

This article has addressed the common hypothesis defended by donors, not least the World Bank, that economic growth automatically leads to poverty reduction. A World Bank regression study, covering data from various time series in the 1990s and comparing 20 African countries, was supposed to sustain the hypothesis. Closer examination of the data raises doubts regarding the true nature of the proposed correlation between economic growth and poverty reduction. This observation is the first core argument.

The second core argument in the article is that poverty data are scarce and/or could be biased. Data for Burkina Faso and Madagascar are used to illustrate this. In Burkina Faso the incidence of poverty decreased only if we accept the World Bank interpretation of the data, and this only for the period up to 2003. No genuine poverty study has been conducted since then, due to a disagreement between the Bank and the Burkinabé authorities. In Madagascar, both local (state) and international (multilateral)
partners agreed that poverty decreased in line with an increase in economic growth. However, following social unrest and the unwilling resignation of the President in 2009, doubts were expressed about the impartiality of the data. There was criticism of the World Bank’s unprecedented support for the then President, with non-Bank observers such as the American and French ambassadors noting long-running claims that available data did not accurately reflect reality.

The paucity of accurate data on the accomplishment of poverty reduction strategies (PRSP) makes it impossible to link progress in the achievement of PRSP indicators directly to figures on poverty reduction. Even if available indicators are accepted as representative of entire PRSPs, it is still difficult to provide evidence to link construction of new schools and dispensaries, say, with any reduction in poverty. Investment in education and health care has long-term effects that do not show up in short-term changes in poverty rates.

Frustrated at their own failure to devise an effective route to prosperity combining economic growth with poverty reduction, multilateral and other donors appear to have turned to reinventing structural adjustment programmes in the form of the PRGF. Other signs of this trend include initiatives like the Danish Africa Commission, which focuses solely on economic growth and promotion of the private sector. Yet not even recognition of the obstacles in the way of reducing poverty – however apparently insurmountable – can justify a ‘back to the future’ approach of balanced budgeting as an end in itself.

If African governments agree with international donors on the existence of an automatic link between economic growth and poverty, not as a theoretical argument for verification but as an assumption, few independent observers will be offered the chance to collect data and question the assumption. Governments and the international donor community, on the other hand, have all the means to control the process of data collection, interpretation and dissemination from start to finish. Political unrest or civil war becomes, in extremis, a rare means for casting doubt on the validity of such ‘official’ data. This is, for example, the case of Madagascar. A way forward might be to have organisations other than the World Bank in control of the collection and basic interpretation of poverty data.

Thorkil Casse is at the Department of Society and Globalisation, Roskilde University, Denmark. Email: casse@ruc.dk

Stig Jensen is at the Center for African Studies, University of Copenhagen, Denmark. Email: sti@teol.ku.dk

Endnote

1. According to the National Statistics Office (INSD), the poverty incidence increased marginally from 45 per cent to 46 per cent between 1998 and 2003. For the World Bank, poverty decreased from 54 per cent to 46 per cent during the same period. The disagreement boils down partly to a difference in statistical methodology. School fees were included in the 2003 household survey, but excluded in 1998. It thus appears that households had less income (that is, poverty was higher) in 1998 (using expenditure as a measure). In addition, a dispute exists about the correct distribution between rural and urban households in the final national poverty calculation. When more (fewer) rural households are included, the calculation tends to reduce (increase) poverty. The upward trend in cotton prices since 1998 has been translated into
higher rural income per household. For 1998, data was collected during the ‘hungry season’ (période de soudure) and, to make comparison possible with 2003 data, the consumption figure per person was increased by 12.5 per cent by the Statistical Office (World Bank 2004a, p. 9). The effect is opposite to the effects of school fees and the distribution between rural and urban households, which tend to lower the starting point in 1998 (non-inclusion of school fees in 1998 leads to high poverty incidence) and to show significant improvement from 1998 to 2003. Adding the different modifications, the World Bank argues for a decrease in the poverty incidence from 1998 to 2003.

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Violent Conflicts and Sustainable Development in Bayelsa State

Ibaba S. Ibaba

Although the literature on the Niger Delta has highlighted the impact of the violence raging in the region, the analysis appears to have under-emphasised the effects of violent conflicts on sustainable development in the region. This study sets out to fill this gap. To achieve this, an empirical investigation involving 30 communities was conducted. The study shows that violent conflicts have undermined environmental quality through pollution and unsustainable exploitation of resources. The destruction of lives and property, the stagnation of infrastructure and agricultural development, and the insecurity caused by violence are noted to have constrained productivity, wealth creation and poverty reduction. Governance based on accountability, transparency, and the pursuit of the public good or common interest is seen as the most likely means to end the violence and secure sustainable development in the state.

Introduction

The current literature on the Niger Delta has highlighted the consequences of the violence that has engulfed the region for nearly two decades. Concern focuses mainly on the armed dimension of the conflict, the disruptions in oil production and the internationalisation of oil theft that have endangered the economy and security of Nigeria and other parts of the world. For example, Watts (2007, p. 63) has noted that the country lost US$6.8 billion between 1994 and 2004 due to attacks on oil installations and infrastructure, and has incurred an annual loss of US$4.4 billion since 2004.

The conflict in the Niger Delta has also been noted as a threat to the energy security of the United States of America (Lubeck et al. 2007), and the Nigerian Government is concerned about this and other Western interests (Obi 2008, p. 428). The February 17 2009 attack on the presidential palace of Equatorial Guinea by Niger Delta militants (Akinsanmi 2009) has further heightened the security concerns of the conflict in the Delta.

However, the internecine conflict and its impact on sustainable development in the Niger Delta appear under-emphasised in the analysis. This study intends to fill this gap.

The Niger Delta region has been engulfed by a pattern of conflicts that have taken different forms: community–state (security operatives); community–oil company; intra-community; inter-community and inter-ethnic conflicts. The examples are
many: Umuechem and the state (1990); Obagi and the state (1993 and 1994); Odi and the state (1999); Ijaw and Itsekiri (1997–2003); Ogoni and Andoni (1993 and 1994); Ke and Bille (2001).

These conflicts share experiences similar to warfare and have caused destruction in varying dimensions. For example, Alapiki (2001, p. 185) writing about Umuechem stated that a total of 495 houses in the community were totally destroyed with blast grenades. The Umuechem community in (Rivers State) had mobilised its people in a protest against the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), alleging environmental damage and neglect. The Nigerian Mobile Police, a paramilitary arm of the police under the direct orders from the government, were drawn into the conflict, leading to the destruction of the community.

The Odi community in Bayelsa State shares a similar experience. In search of some militant youths who killed eight policemen, federal troops invaded the community in November 1999 and completely destroyed it. The Bayelsa Voice (25 November 1999, p. 10) reported that only two primary schools, the secondary school, the First Bank of Nigeria building and some churches were left as signs to indicate that a community once existed. Inter-ethnic, intra-community, inter-community and oil company – community conflicts have also caused destructions of the same kind in the region.

This study seeks to determine the impact of violence on the potential for sustainable development in Bayelsa State, in the centre of the Niger Delta (Alagoa 1999). It will examine questions such as: what impact does the violence have on the environment? What are the implications of violence on sustainable development? These questions necessitate the investigation of issues including: the interconnectedness between the environment and conflict; essential issues in sustainable development; and the determination of the impact of violence on sustainable development.

This last point shows the need for an empirical study, and such a study was carried out in 30 communities. Questionnaire and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were used to collect data. A total of 600 questionnaires were administered, while 30 FGDs were conducted, each bringing together ten persons. The data from these is presented below in the form of charts.

**Theoretical and conceptual analysis**

**Sustainable development**


Figure 1 demonstrates the relationships that ensure the attainment of sustainable development. The development of productive forces is fundamental to the attainment of sustainable development, given that wealth creation depends on it. However, the
development of productive forces involves the improvement of natural assets such as the irrigation of arid land (Ake 1981, p. 11), which can distort the environment. There is thus a dialectical unity between the environment and development. This explains one of the fundamental objectives of sustainable development, which seeks to balance the objectives of development with the environmental costs (Ucheghu 1998, p. 109).

The non-depletion of the natural resource base and maintenance or improvement in environmental quality constitutes the fundamentals of sustainable development. Pollution prevention and control, sustainable exploitation of natural resources and poverty reduction are therefore essential to sustainable development. However, there are a number of factors that constrain sustainable development. These include the widening wealth gap among people and countries, increasing conflicts, pressure on resources and over-consumption (International Institute for Sustainable Development – IISD).

This article focuses on the role of conflicts as a limiting factor to sustainable development. Conflict impedes sustainable development in five ways (see IISD website1):

1) it precludes the sustainable management of resources;
2) it undermines the fight against poverty;
3) it prevents foreign investment;
4) it destroys infrastructure; and
5) it inhibits planning for future generations.

This makes conflict prevention and control a fundamental requirement for the achievement of sustainable development.

**Violent conflict**

Conflict, the pursuit of incompatible goals and interests (Berelson and Steiner, cited in Anikpo 1998, p. 7, Otite 1999, p. 1) is a characteristic feature of society, given that people have varied interests that criss-cross each other. This suggests that conflict is either peaceful or violent, as societies are not always engulfed by violence. Violent conflict, the use of force or arms in the resolution of differences, is therefore not inevitable (Francis 2006, p. 20).

Why do conflicts turn violent? Psychologists have noted that conflict turns violent when the anger and worries that result from frustration (the source of conflict) are
not resolved (Ibaba 2001). Similarly, the avoidance or denial of conflict can render conflicts violent, as the ignored group seeks to redress the issue of contention (Albert 1999, Francis 2006).

Conflict in society is blamed on a number of factors: greed (Collier and Hoefler 1998, 2002); economic deprivation and social disorganisation (Ikporukpo 2003); grievance (Ikelegbe 2006, Ukiwo 2007); frustration and aggression (Faleti 2006); conflicting interpretations of rights and responsibilities resulting from different values and ethnic principles (Olokesusi 1996); exploitation resulting in domination and exploitation (Anele 1999, Ibaba 2001); and the failure of social contract (Murshed and Jadjoedin 2008).

It is a noteworthy fact that all the perspectives of conflict noted above capture the Niger Delta condition. The region is characterised by different conflict settings, and thus the use of a single conflict theory cannot adequately explain the total picture of conflict in the region.

However, it is certain that material contradictions and deprivations triggered the conflict. The oil multinational corporations (MNCs) and the people of the Niger Delta depend on the same environment for production. The lands, waters (creeks, lakes, etc.) and mangrove forests are used by the oil MNCs and the communities for production. However, the oil industry is associated with oil spillages and gas flaring that impact negatively on the environment (see Table 1).

Oil spills and gas flares have weakened those local economies based on fishing and farming. The nutrient value of affected farmlands has been reduced, leading to poor crop yields. Similarly, marine life has been destroyed, and this makes fishing a fruitless exercise (Ikein 1991, World Bank 1995, Adeyemo 2002, Ibaba 2005, UNDP 2006). Gas flaring destroys vegetation and reduces crop yield. A study of the Izombe flow station in Imo State revealed that crop yield reduces by 45 per cent at 600 metres and by 10 per cent 1 kilometre away from the flow station (Salau 1993, Adeyemo 2002).

Furthermore, land take for oil production activities also reduces available cultivable land. A study on Okrika Local Government Area in Rivers State shows that a total of 820 farmers lost 818.4 hectares of farmland to the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) of Nigeria (Adeyemo 2002, p. 73). Land take for oil industry activities induces the fragmentation of farmlands, which in turn leads to over-farming and poor nutrient value of the soil (see Table 2).

The implications for agriculture can be clearly appreciated when it is noted that the country has over 600 oilfields, 5284 oil wells, 7000 kilometres of pipelines, ten export terminals and 275 flow stations (Lubeck et al. 2007, p. 5).

The backlash of this includes occupational displacement, an increase in poverty due to reduced income or total loss of income, and forced migration contributing to population displacement (Opukri and Ibaba 2008). This suggests that the oil industry has not improved the material well-being of the people, made worse by the personalisation of the Nigerian state, and its subsequent use for the pursuit of private and sectional interests (Aaron 2006).

One of the fundamental outcomes of this is an oil politics which ensures the transfer of the oil wealth out of the Niger Delta for the benefit of the political elites of the ethnic
groups that control the Nigerian state. This is largely manifested in the manipulations of the derivation principle of revenue allocation. From 1960–1970, the derivation principle was 50 per cent. However, this was reduced to 45 per cent (1970–1975), 20 per cent (1975–1980), 2 per cent (1980–1983), 1.5 per cent (1984–1992), and then increased to 3 per cent in 1992 and 13 per cent in 2000 (Mbanefoh and Egwaikhide 1998, Ibaba 2005, Jega 2007).

The increase from 1.5 per cent to 3 per cent and later 13 per cent followed agitation and protests from the people. Paradoxically, this has become an incentive for violence, as it is expected that it will lead to further increase in the derivation component.

The other consequence of the personalisation of the state is the use of the state as instrument for primitive accumulation of wealth (Ekekwe 1986), leading to corruption. Between 1960 and 2006, the country received US$509.56 billion in oil revenues (Nafziger 2008), the trend of which can be seen in Figure 2.

Similarly, the Niger Delta States have received huge sums of money since the year 2000, when the 13 per cent oil derivation fund was implemented. For example, in 2007 alone the six Niger Delta States received US$4 billion out of the total of US$11 billion that was allocated to the 30 states of the federation (SPDC 2008). However,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>Destruction of vegetation, farmlands, human settlement; clearing agricultural land and damaging the soil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Geophysical investigation</td>
<td>Disturbance of fauna and flora habitat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Geology survey</td>
<td>Accumulation of toxic waste materials with the effect of:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Drilling</td>
<td>(i) oil pollution of the land, sea or beaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) pollution of underground water for plants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production process</td>
<td>Land pollution from long-term cumulative effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Flat and tank farms</td>
<td>Water and land pollution from solid waste:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Gas flaring</td>
<td>(i) air pollution from gas and oil processing evaporation and flaring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) killing of vegetation around the flare area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(iii) production of heat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(iv) suppressing the growth and flowering of some plants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(v) reduction and diminution of agricultural production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(vi) destruction of mangrove swamps and salt marsh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Tanker loading locations</td>
<td>Spillage during loading operations with all its accompanying effects on the fauna and flora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Storage depots</td>
<td>Land pollution from effluent waste and solid wastes of chemical cans and drums for the establishment of the storage depots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Transportation</td>
<td>Destruction of farmlands and environmentally sensitive areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) Refinery</td>
<td>Land pollution from effluent discharge which contains wide range of organic pollutants such as phenol hydrogen, sulphide, ammonia and gas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Cultivable land area lost to oil exploitation-related activities in Okrika LGA, Rivers State (all land areas given in hectares)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of persons affected</th>
<th>Name of oil field</th>
<th>No. of wells</th>
<th>Land area per well</th>
<th>Land area lost to oil wells</th>
<th>Land area for other Shell activities around the well</th>
<th>Helicopter landing area</th>
<th>Land area lost to flow station</th>
<th>Total land area lost to oil exploitation activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>Bolo</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>71.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>Iwokiriki</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>65.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Mbiriki</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>60.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>226</td>
<td>Agokien</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>214.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>225.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>Ele</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>69.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>80.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>141</td>
<td>Oraberekin</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>132.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>141.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>173</td>
<td>Wakama</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>163.8</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>172.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

these huge oil revenues have not benefited the people adequately; because of corruption, budgetary appropriations are often structured to enrich those who control state power (Enweremadu 2008, p. 450).

‘White elephant’ projects such as airports and new government lodges are given more importance than the social and economic infrastructure. Expenditures for travel and entertainment benefiting government functionaries receive huge allocations. For example, in 2006 the Rivers State Government budgeted US$21.6 million on transport and travel allocation to the office of the governor and US$5.4 million for travel expenses of the legislature. Similarly, the legislature received US$2.8 million as sitting allowances, excluding salaries (Enweremadu 2008, p. 453).

The experience of the Rivers State can also be seen in Bayelsa State, with the budgetary allocations in the 2008 budget set out in Table 3.

The consequence of this pattern of budgetary allocations and the corruption underlying it is that the ordinary citizens derive very few benefits, which manifests itself as limited access or unavailability of basic social amenities. For example, the UNDP reported in 2006 that only 24 per cent of the people have access to clean water.

This contradiction has raised political consciousness because hitherto dormant sections of the population develop critical attitudes towards the polity. Elements of this consciousness include an awareness that the oil industry has devastated the environment; that the local economies have been destroyed without the provision of viable alternatives; that the oil industry threatens the continued existence of the people; that the oil wealth has been transferred out of the Niger Delta for the benefit of other groups; that the political leadership of Nigeria and Niger Delta have squandered development funds through corruption; and that community chiefs, elites and youth leaders collaborate with state officials and the oil MNCs to cheat the

Fundamentally, it also includes the perception that the condition of the people can only improve through agitation and resistance. The Kaiama Declaration (1998)\textsuperscript{2} highlighted this consciousness when it made the following observations:

- that the quality of life of Ijaw people is deteriorating as a result of utter neglect, suppression and marginalisation brought to bear on the people by the alliance between the Nigerian State and oil MNCs;
- that the political crisis in Nigeria is mainly about the struggle for the control of oil mineral resources;
- that uncontrolled exploration of crude oil and natural gas has destroyed the environments and health of the people;
- that the degradation of the environment by the oil MNCs is attributable to state laws (Land Use Act, etc.) that have robbed the people of their land and natural resources;
- that the Principle of Derivation in revenue allocation has been whittled down by several regimes;
- that intra- and inter-ethnic conflicts in Ijaw land are sponsored by the Nigerian State and oil MNCs; and
- that the revelations of the looting of the national treasury by the Abacha regime is only a reflection of an existing and continuing trend of stealing by public office holders in Nigeria.

The conflict in the region has led to the loss of group control over the individual, which has resulted in deviant behaviour and criminality (Ikporukpo 2003), manifest as the sabotage of oil installations, hostage-taking for ransom and oil theft (bunkering, piracy and waterway robbery) (Ikelegbe 2006).

\begin{table}
\centering
\caption{Bayelsa State budgetary allocations 2008}
\begin{tabular}{lcc}
\hline
Government house & Amount US$ & Capital expenditure & Other Sectors & Amount US$ \\
\hline
Overhead cost & & & & \\
(i) Travel and transport & 250,000.00 & (i) Energy & 62,158,333.30 \\
(ii) Governor’s tour & 5,000,000.00 & (ii) Water & 3,633,333.30 \\
(iii) Utility services & 833,333.30 & (iii) Health & 84,229,166.70 \\
(iv) Telephone services & 250,000.00 & (vi) Commerce & 33,333,333.30 \\
& & and industry & \\
(v) Stationery & 166,666.70 & (v) Education & 78,433,333.30 \\
(vi) Maintenance of furniture and equipment & 166,666.70 & (vi) Works & 29,541,666.70 \\
(viii) Maintenance of vehicles/ & 833,333.30 & & \\
capital assets & & & \\
(ix) Consultancy service & 58,333.30 & & \\
(x) Training and staff development & 83,333.30 & & \\
(xi) Miscellaneous & 92,878,333.30 & & \\
Total & 100,853,333.20 & & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

Mapping the conflict: the dynamics of violence in the Niger Delta

This section of the article attempts to capture the trends and changes of the conflict in the Niger Delta. Using the criteria of non-violent and violent conflict, conflict in the region is categorised into four phases, which are set out in Table 4.

Pre-independence to 1965

In the period immediately preceding Nigerian independence, people in the Niger Delta, based on perceptions of domination by the major ethnic groups in Nigeria and the particular geographical terrain of the region, pushed for special development attention. The Willink Commission, set up to address the fears of minorities and propose means of allaying such fears, responded to the demand from the Ijaws, but not in its totality. The Ijaws, the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria (Ukeje and Adebanwi 2008) and the largest ethnic group in the Niger Delta (Willinks Report 1958), had demanded more state support for development. The report concluded that:

We cannot recommend political arrangements which would unite in one political unit the whole body of Ijaws; we do however consider that their belief that their problems are not understood could be largely met without the creation of a separate state, which we have rejected. ... The declaration of the Ijaw country as a Special Area would direct public attention to a neglected tract and give the Ijaws an opportunity of putting forward plans of their own for improvement.

The Federal Government established the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB) in 1961 without executive powers; it therefore had to recommend projects to the Federal, Western and Eastern regional governments. Given that the Niger Delta people did not control these governments, state officials had very little commitment to the ideals of the Board.

The Board was under-funded, thereby stifling its developmental objectives. In 1976, it was renamed the Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA) following the creation of the ten new River Basin Development Authorities (OMPADEC Report 1993, p. 82). With this proliferation, the funding problems became worse. The agency lost its relevance as a body established for the special development needs of the Niger Delta, and therefore was unable to have a positive impact on the development of the region.

The 1966 period

Militant insurgence engagement led by Adaka Boro characterised this period (Ikelegbe 2006). Under the auspices of the Niger Delta Volunteer Services (NDVS), Boro declared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period of conflict</th>
<th>Nature/type of conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-independence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Peaceful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Violent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967 to early 1990s</td>
<td>Peaceful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-1990s to 2009</td>
<td>Violent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: compiled by author.
the Niger Delta People’s Republic on 23 February 1966. The rebellion lasted 12 days, ending on 6 March (Tebekoami 1982). Even though this event jolted the nation (Okonta 2006), the Nigerian state avoided the fundamental issues of domination and deprivation that had triggered the rebellion.

The creation of Rivers State in 1967 did not meet the expectations of the people, as the Ijaw territory, located mainly in the wetlands, continued to experience neglect. Because they are mainly found in the wetlands, nearly all Ijaw communities are rural, and thus suffer from neglect, a consequence of urban bias in resource allocation. This difficult geographical terrain (that makes development expensive), together with corruption, makes Ijaw Land the least developed in the Niger Delta (Ibaba 2009) and partly explains the dominance of the Ijaw in the ‘militianisation’ (Simiyu 2008) of the Niger Delta conflict.

1967 to early 1990s period

This period was essentially characterised by oil company conflict with the communities. Communities demanded adequate compensation for damaged properties, including scholarships, employment and social amenities such as potable water, school buildings, health facilities and electricity (Okoko 1998). Litigation, peaceful demonstrations and occupation of oil production facilities were the means of engagement (Owugah 1999).

However, the oil MNCs sometimes called in security operatives (particularly anti-riot police and soldiers) to keep order. The brutality of the security forces, as earlier noted in the Umuchem case for example, led to the loss of lives and destruction of property. This repression led to the emergence of a plethora of civil, community, ethnic and regional groups that mobilised the people against the state and oil MNCs (Ikelegbe 2006). Examples include the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Ijaw National Congress (INC) and Federated Niger Delta Izon Communities (FNDIC).

Mid-1990s to 2009

At the end of the third phase discussed above, the state and oil MNCs responded to community protests with force, but without any response from the communities. In this fourth phase, however, the people responded. The period is thus characterised by civil mobilisation and militant action against the state and the oil MNCs (Ikelegbe 2006). The killing of MOSOP leader Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995, the violent response of the state to the 1998 Kaiama Declaration and the destruction of Odi town by federal troops in 1999 led to armed conflict against the state.

Several militia and cult groups emerged to challenge the Nigerian state. Some of these groups are listed in Table 5.

The emergence of these groups increased the use of violence in the Niger Delta, as violence is now seen as a necessary weapon to resolve the crisis. Asari Dokubo, leader of the Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force (NDPVF), one of the prominent militia groups in the region, alluded to this when he noted that:

I have always said that peaceful agitation would not achieve anything, but one gunshot is worthier than a thousand years of sermonizing, because the enemy you are going to confront is going to use all weapons at his disposal, all weapons
of coercion and oppression to come down. . . . Armed struggle is the only thing. (The Punch, 27 April 2009, p. 11)

Violence and sustainable development in Bayelsa State

The nature of conflict
The data collected highlights the widespread nature of conflicts in the state, as 90.6 per cent of the respondents in 27 of the 30 sample communities noted that their communities had been involved in conflicts. The conflicts in 21 (77.8 per cent) of these communities were violent.

Inter-community conflicts are more widespread, contrary to the dominant view that the conflicts are between the people, on the one hand, and the oil companies/federal government on the other hand. Inter-community conflicts ranks first with 44.3 per cent, followed by community–oil company conflicts (25.9 per cent), intra-community conflict (19.8 per cent) and community–state conflicts (9.9 per cent). The conflicts are caused by a number of factors:

Inter-community conflict: This is mainly caused by inter-community struggle over benefits from the oil industry, such as award of contracts, employment and payment of compensation for damage to property. Because of the high value placed on land due to oil industry activities, land disputes have featured as a dominant cause of inter-community conflicts.

Intra-community conflict: This is usually triggered by disagreement between community factions. The issues in contention include ownership of land and the equitable distribution of oil industry benefits such as scholarships, employment, contracts, and monies paid as compensation for damages. Okoko (1998) identified six intra-community factions and their role in intra-community conflict, as demonstrated by the study and shown in Figure 3.
Oil company–community conflict: This is blamed on a number of factors including oil spills and the associated ecological devastation; delays in the clean-up of areas impacted by oil spills; delay in the payment of compensation for damage to property; refusal to pay compensation for damage to property; payment of inadequate compensation; breach of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by the oil MNCs; and the patronage of community factions by the oil MNCs.

Community–state conflict: Perceived neglect and deprivation is central to this type of conflict. Whereas this started the conflict, the violent response of state security operatives and the insensitivity of the government has sustained the conflict.

The impact of violent conflicts on environment and the economy
The data indicates that violent conflicts in the state have impacted negatively on the environment (see Figure 4).

The pollution of land and water and unsustainable exploitation of resources are noted as the specific effects. One of the strategies of engagement in inter-community conflicts is the destruction of the fishing grounds (lakes, rivers, streams and ponds) of opposing communities. Dynamite and dangerous chemicals such as Gamalin-20 are used to pollute the water, with the intention of destroying marine, and consequently local, economies that are based on fishing. This is seen as a means of weakening the other communities. The destruction of marine life displaces those in the fishing sub-sector of the local economy, leading to loss in income and the aggravation of poverty. Similarly, the insecurity associated with such actions forces fishermen and women to concentrate their activities in fishing grounds that are near to their communities as a safety measure. However, this results in over-exploitation and diminishes fish yield.

Insecurity is one of the most pervasive problems created by violent conflicts in the communities, and is prolonged when the conflict is intra- or inter-communal.

![Figure 3. Community factions that trigger conflicts. Source: Field survey data by the author, 2006.](image-url)
However, it is short-lived with community–oil company or community–state conflicts. The feeling of insecurity ends once security operatives (police/army) withdraw from the community in the case of oil company conflict or community–state conflict. This is not so with intra-community or inter-community conflicts, as opposing factions and communities continue to hunt each other, thus sustaining insecurity.

Due to insecurity, farmers are forced to cultivate farmlands near to their communities, the effect of this being the abandonment of shifting cultivation which allows for a fallow period. The fallow period enables the soil to replenish its nutrient value, and this enhances crop yield. The abandonment of shifting cultivation therefore diminishes crop yield and the productivity of farmers. Significantly, bush fallow is a traditional system of environmental conservation that enhances sustainable exploitation of farmlands. Thus, the insecurity resulting from violence undermines the traditional systems of environmental conservation.

Displacements lead to the abandonment of farms and fishing ponds. Abandoned farms are not tended, and are consequently overtaken by weeds. This affects crop yield, particularly yam and cassava, which require intensive care. In some of the communities, farmers noted that before the conflicts the usual yield of yam was an average of three baskets per square metre. Following the displacements and the subsequent limited attention for the farms, the yield of yam declined by about one-and-a-half baskets per square metre. Similarly, abandoned fish ponds are not tended, thus leading to poor harvest. Related to this is forced migration caused by insecurity and the drifting away of the agricultural labour force to the urban areas.

Environmental quality is also affected by the sabotage and vandalisation of oil installations and the resultant oil spillages that add to the problems of environmental degradation. The sabotage of oil installations is an act of aggression against the oil MNCs, just as it is also used as a criminal means of acquiring wealth (Okoko 1998). The incidence of sabotage has increased as the conflict deepens. For example, out of a total of 1,243 oil incidents that were recorded in the Shell Petroleum Development Company’s (SPDC’s) area of operations between 2003 and 2007, 832

Figure 4. Impact of conflicts on environmental quality. Source: Field survey data by the author, 2006.
(66.2 per cent) were caused by sabotage (SPDC 2008, pp. 18–19). Figure 5 demonstrates the trend.

The resulting oil spills pollute land and water, destroy fauna and flora, and decrease the nutrient value of the soil. The effects are made worse by the refusal of communities to allow oil company personnel on their land, and the contractors abandon oil spill sites or locations as soon as conflict erupts; thus the spilt oil is left not dealt with, leading to the expansion of the area affected.

The impact of conflict on infrastructure and community development

A significant impact of conflict is the destruction of infrastructure, as noted by the respondents in Figure 6.

In the conflict between Odi community and the Nigerian soldiers in 1999 for example, the entire community was destroyed. Similarly, during the inter-community conflict between Nembe Ogbolomabiri and Nembe Bassambiri (1998), between Opuama and Ofonobiri (2002) and between Okpoama and Ewoama (1995), there was total or partial destruction of the communities involved. Residential buildings, schools,
hotels and bridges were among the properties destroyed. The insecurity associated with conflicts also scares contractors away from project sites, thus leading to the abandonment of development projects.

The destruction and displacements that follow conflicts, particularly intra-communal conflicts, have created social dislocation and the subsequent destruction of the social structure of affected communities. This impedes community development, as the self-help approach to community development is a major strategy for community development in the state. However, its success is predicated on social cohesion or unity.

The generation of funds is made easy when community members share common goals and destiny, but social disintegration undermines this. The most evident effect is the emerging trend where community members cannot sit together to plan their development, due to community factions and the underlying hatred.

**Most destructive type of conflict**

Inter-community conflict was identified by respondents as the most destructive type of conflict. This is followed by community–state conflict, intra-community conflict and community–oil company conflict (see Figure 7). Cross-tabulation and analysis of responses from communities that have experienced inter-community conflicts and other forms of conflicts show the same trend.

The responses of six communities that have experienced intra- or inter-community and community–oil company conflicts rank which they consider most destructive as follows: inter-community conflict (62.4 per cent); intra-community conflict (24.7 per cent) and community–oil company (12.9 per cent). Respondents from the only community involved in intra- and inter-community conflicts agree that inter-community conflicts are more destructive. This is also true of the communities that have experienced inter-community and community–oil company conflicts. Their

**Figure 7.** Types of conflict considered most destructive. Source: Field survey data by the author, 2006.
The ranking is as follows: inter-community conflict (58.4 per cent) and community–oil company (41.6 per cent). It is proper to conclude that inter-community conflicts are more destructive. This may be because conflicting communities see themselves as enemies and therefore seek to destroy each other.

Three reasons account for the destructive potential of inter-community conflict. First is the fact that this is the dominant form of conflict. Second, it prolongs insecurity. Third, conflicting communities may see themselves as enemies in a war-like situation, and therefore seek to destroy each other.

**Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated that violence endangers sustainable development in Bayelsa State. Although environmental protection and development attention are the goals of demonstrations, the resultant violence constrains their goals.

### Table 6. Summaries of adverse effects of violent conflict on sustainable development in Bayelsa State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure/indicator of sustainable development</th>
<th>Impact of violent conflicts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) Environmental protection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Pollution control/prevention</td>
<td>Pollution of land and water through oil spills caused by sabotage and vandalisation of oil equipment/installations. Use of dangerous chemicals such as dynamite and Gamalin-20 as instruments of aggression, leading to destruction of fishing grounds—stream, river, lake, creek, pond.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Sustainable exploitation of natural resources</td>
<td>Oil spills resulting from sabotage and vandalisation of oil installations destroy marine life and plants, and reduce nutrient value of affected soils. Insecurity associated with conflicts limits fishing and farming to particular areas, leading to overuse or exploitation of farmlands and fishing grounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Enhancement of production capabilities</td>
<td>Conflicts create insecurity, which limit trade and investment, undermine the viability of the means of production and stagnate the development of agriculture and aquaculture. Destruction of social and economic infrastructure. Unfavourable environment for teaching and learning; people are forced out of school, and others denied the right to enrol in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) Creation of wealth and poverty reduction</td>
<td>Destruction of local economies, lives and properties. Widening of the income inequality gap. Creation of insecurity, inhibiting access to means of production. Worsening of poverty and unemployment due to the destruction of lives and property; stagnation of infrastructural development and weakening of people’s main livelihoods—fishing and farming.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: compiled by the author.
The negative impact of violence on the environment and on human lives and property impedes the development of production capabilities, wealth creation and poverty reduction. Violent conflicts have undermined the growth of local economies in a number of ways – loss of working hours, loss of productive labour through forced migration, pollution of fishing grounds and farmlands and the disruption of farming and fishing. This constrains the development of present and future generations, and thus calls for peacebuilding to end the violence and secure sustainable development.

This means that the objective conditions of despair and frustration that triggered the conflict will need to be tackled. Governance based on accountability, transparency and the pursuit of public good or the common interest is the most likely means to end the violence.

Ibaba Samuel Ibaba is a lecturer in the Department of Political Science, Niger Delta University in the Bayelsa State of Nigeria. His research interests and previous publications are on poverty reduction, peace building and conflict resolution in the Niger Delta region. Email: eminoaibaba@yahoo.com

Endnotes

1. IISD website, available from: http://www.iisd.org/webmaster@issd.ca

2. Over 5,000 Ijaw youths drawn from about 500 communities and 40 clans of the Ijaw Nation held a Conference at Kaiama, Bayelsa State, on 11 December 1998 to discuss the plight of the Ijaw Nation in contemporary Nigeria. The ten-point resolution issued at the end of the conference is what is referred to as the Kaiama Declaration. It demanded Ijaw control of Ijaw resources, abolition of oppressive laws governing the oil industry and the immediate withdrawal of military forces deployed in Ijaw land.


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Jeremiah O. Arowosegbe

One element in the contradictions underpinning Nigeria’s development crisis is the marginalisation of the youth. This article examines the factors that influence youth restiveness in Nigeria’s Niger Delta region. It discusses the impact of conservative elite politics and the oil-centric political economy characterised by the impoverishment, neglect and the repression of the oil-producing communities on the youth in the region. The article raises pertinent questions on the violence–development dialectic, drawing upon the context, dynamics, explanations and impact of youth violence in Nigeria’s oil-rich Niger Delta. It examines the contradictions and injustices existing against the ethnic minorities of the oil-bearing communities in the region, from the centralisation of oil revenues by the federal centre and how these have generated marginalisation and violent conflict in the region. Detailing the repressive responses by the Nigerian state and the forms of violence that have occurred in the region between 1999 and 2007, the article discusses the implications of youth violence in the oil-rich Niger Delta for national development in Nigeria. It provides a context for understanding the connection between youth involvement in violent conflict and its deleterious impact on Nigeria’s development. Tapping into issues of ethnicity and high-stake elite politics, it locates violent youth behaviour in the politics of exclusion and proffers suggestions for restoring the trust of marginalised youth as a necessary step toward development and peace in Nigeria.

Introduction

Although studies on the youth in Nigeria point increasingly to the incidence and impact of oil-related conflicts in the Niger Delta, the systematic linkage between repressive state policies and the adoption of violent behaviour as a strategy for articulating group disaffections has been poorly accounted for. This article fills this gap and discusses the need to restore the trust of marginalised youth in the region as a necessary step toward development and peace in the country. Highlighting the impact of conservative elite politics and the oil-centric political economy, this article establishes the implications of youth violence in the region on national development in the country. In this regard, the specific histories of youth politics are matters that will not be treated here. Rather, the impact of conservative elite politics and the resort to violent behaviour by the youth in this region, as well as the implications of youth
violence in the region for national development in the country, are the focus of analysis in this article. Conservative elite politics is a distinct feature of Nigerian politics, which accelerates governance failure and fundamentally inhibits state capacity. It involves a cake-sharing psychosis and corruption of state officials, the determination of public policies based on the competition for sectional advantages, the misuse of state resources and lack of accountability in the democratic political process. Just like clientelism (Elischer 2008, pp. 175–201, Omobowale and Olutayo 2007, pp. 425–446, Omobowale 2008, pp. 203–224), neo-patrimonialism (Von Soest 2007, pp. 621–645) and other internal failings of the state in Africa, this feature of Nigerian politics is a debilitating element of the political culture with adverse impacts on development and the entire social structure. Hence the need for strategic policy interventions relevant for improving the operations of the Nigerian state.

The central argument of this article is that although the dimensions of the conflicts in the region are complex and varied, underlying most of these conflicts – especially those that have erupted within the last decade – are the marginalisation and neglect of the youth. These situations have engendered contradictions and tension in the public sphere. They have also underlined an almost pathological context in which allegations of domination and exclusion among individuals and groups have become ceaseless and widespread – leading to struggles and violent conflicts – over oil-based revenues in the region. This has especially been the case since the post-Cold War period.

Violence within this region has taken many forms including ‘attacks against oil firms and Nigerian military personnel protecting oil complexes’ (Ukiwo 2007, pp. 587–610), ‘abduction, hostage taking and hijacking of oil workers and foreign expatriates’ (Suberu 2004, p. 338), ‘the detonation of bombs and other deadly explosives at oil refineries and the premises of multinational oil companies’ (Obi 2008, pp. 417–434), political assassination, youth militancy, vandalisation of oil pipelines and other installations as well as state–ethnic, intra- and inter-ethnic communal clashes by criminal gangs and militant groups. What is the history of the violence in the region and how has violent conflict impacted on national development in the country? How has violence affected the fragile foundations of Nigeria’s fledgling democracy? These questions form the core concerns of this article.

Since the 1990s, fundamental changes have taken place within the state in Africa (Ellis 1996, pp. 1–28). The significance of this period for Africa lies in ‘the coincidence of the transformation in the international system with a profound internal crisis of the state in the continent’ (Clapham 1997, pp. 99–100), from which period ‘constructive interaction within African states has remained largely elusive’ (Cooper 2006, p. 184).

The debt crisis of the mid-1980s triggered an economic transformation in most parts of the continent with profound political and social repercussions. From this period, the state has become more and more repressive in the face of endemic economic collapse (Taylor 2007, pp. 7–8), while neoliberal policy prescriptions adopted during the 1980s and 1990s produced neither equitable prosperity nor widespread poverty reduction. This failure spurred the call for a second independence, especially given the disillusionment with deliberative democratic institutions, a development that some noted observers have linked with citizens’ belief that their voices are not being heard by the state and its officials (Hagopian 2005, Mkandawire 2005, Teichman 2009). The major feature characterising Africa from this period onward has been the explosion of internal conflicts and wars over its natural resources. This has undermined democratic development, especially given the forms of politics woven around
revenue allocation – a practice, which simultaneously defines development and underdevelopment for different regions of the world.

The consequences of violent conflicts in Africa have been deleterious to the continent’s development and security. In 1996, armed conflicts in Africa accounted for half of all the war-related deaths worldwide, and also resulted in more than 8 million displaced persons, refugees and returnees (Adejumobi 2001, p. 149). Economic growth has continued to elude the continent, while most of the least developed and heavily indebted countries are also located in Africa (World Bank 2000). These situations are not surprising, since countries engaged in war have generally had dismal records of socioeconomic growth compared with those at peace.

For virtually all countries in the region, there is either a potential threat of violent political explosion, a raging civil war, a process of negotiated peace and political order, or an immediate post-war rehabilitation process going on. (Adejumobi 2001, p. 149)

As Rotimi T. Suberu (2000) has observed:

Although these conflicts have long been a feature of the African political landscape, they have recently acquired a new visibility and stridency owing largely to the declining capacity and viability of the centralised African state, the collapse of the continent’s economies, the demonstration effect from the explosion of ethnic nationality passions in the former communist states, and growing external (donor) pressures for economic and political liberalisation. (p. 123)

Several contextual analyses of violent conflict in the Niger Delta have been undertaken by scholars. The dynamics of a political economy of youth politics as a form of collaboration and resistance have been critically examined (see Olurode 2000, pp. 1–7, Adejumobi 2003, pp. 227–260, Momoh 2003, pp. 200–226, Ya’u 2003, pp. 178–199, Christiansen et al. 2006, pp. 9–31, Obi 2006b, pp. 1–25). The operations of the youth, their organisation and descent from peaceful protests to violent resistance from the 1990s onward have also received extensive treatment in the literature. The complex question of how members of this region have utilised the 13 per cent of the revenue derived from oil exploration has been equally examined by scholars in other works (see Suberu 2004, Omotola 2007). In January 2006, militants belonging to the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) attacked naval officers protecting a Shell complex near Warri, a major oil city located in the western part of the volatile Niger Delta, and subsequently claimed responsibility for an explosion on a Shell pipeline around the same area (Ukiwo 2007, p. 587). On 29 April 2006, MEND detonated a car bomb close to the Warri oil refinery, and later abducted nine Chinese National Petroleum Company contract workers who were conducting seismic work for the Nigerian Agip Oil Corporation at Sagbama, Bayelsa State (Obi 2008, p. 418). MEND’s involvement in insurgent and pirate activities thus reflects the latest transformation of hitherto peaceful protests into volatile anti-state and anti-oil-company mobilisations in the region.

Resulting from a complex mix of economic and sociological factors, violent conflict in the Niger Delta has slowed down the pace of economic development in the region. It has crippled oil production and revenue generation in the country. It has legitimised previously marginalised armed groups as ‘a source of leverage in negotiating peace agreements’ (Ismail 2008, p. 259). It has also informed the development of sub-national conceptions of ethnic citizenship (Joseph 2003, pp. 159–170). The relationship between...
violence and development in the region thus needs to be carefully examined vis-à-vis the orientations and values of governance and their impact on state–society relations, especially citizenship. This helps future studies in uplifting the discourse on the historiography and political economy of violence in Nigeria. This article is an initiative in this direction. It begins with a conceptual note on ethnic minorities and the youths in Nigeria. This is given the foreground of a discussion of the historical origins of their marginalisation in Nigeria, particularly given the context of a skewed federal structure in the country. Analyses of the elite origins of youth violence in the Niger Delta and an assessment of the impact of violence in the region on national development in the country are followed by the conclusion, which summarises the findings of the article.

Ethnic minorities in Nigerian history and politics: a conceptual note

Minorities have been defined as culturally and relatively cohesive groups that occupy positions of numerical inferiority and actual or potential socio-political subordination vis-à-vis other cultural sections in a political community. Based on socio-economic and other considerations, Rotimi T. Suberu (1999, p. 118) and Ted R. Gurr (1993, pp. 15–23) have classified and cross-classified minorities into ethno-nationalists, indigenous peoples, ethno-classes, militants, politicised sects and communal contenders.

In Africa, minority conflicts have often been animated by resource competition because ethno-territorial constituencies have been the key beneficiaries of state allocational decisions, especially since such sectionally-based local or regional administrations constitute important agencies for distributing economic benefits, and also because rival sectional elites find it expedient to mobilise ethnic solidarities in their competition for power and privileges. Related to this, expanded educational opportunities and socio-economic mobility facilitate the rise of new minority elites who are astute at giving corresponding expressions to communal grievances and mobilising their communities in response to changing political situations. Finally, minority tensions are sometimes inflamed by the sheer incapacity of political institutions to adjust to peculiar historical factors which have shaped the evolution of such political systems. Nigeria’s history no doubt confirms these postulations (Arowosegbe 2007, pp. 7–12).

One perspective on minority politics emphasises the disadvantages that minorities suffer in the hands of a majority group that controls the instruments of power, enabled by the political process through which both majority and minority groups are governed. Another underlines the monopoly of power by a dominant minority, which it achieves either by subverting democratic processes or more usually by cultivating aristocratic principles of governance (Ekeh 1996, p. 33). Clearly, Nigerian history has been confronted by both types of relationships between majority and minority groups in the exercise of power.

While dominance by majority ethnic groups over minority ethnic groups has had special resonance since about 1951 to 1954, the period marking the onset of the democratic processes that accompanied decolonisation, Nigeria’s earlier history across several centuries was distinguished by examples of dominant minorities that exploited and ruled majorities over whom they exercised substantial power. Such dominance by minority ethnic groups over majorities has also left behind a bitter residue for modern politics and has besmirched the relations between the former dominant minorities and the groups they ruled in the past. There is therefore an
active relationship between the two forms of the distribution of power among the minority and majority groups in Nigerian history and politics (Ekeh 1996, p. 34). On this relationship, Eghosa E. Osaghae (2002) stresses that:

Emergent Nigerian realities transformed powerful pre-colonial groups such as the Bini and Ijaw (who in fact lorded it over several Ibo sub-groups under King Jaja) into minority groups. Such transformations changed the complexion of the national question in important ways. (p. 223)

This article does not intend to analyse instances of political domination and exploitation of majority ethnic groups by minority ethnic groups in Nigerian history; nevertheless, it is contended, following Osaghae (2002) and Ekeh (1996), that the eventual emergence and description of certain ethnic groups as minorities in the present times in Nigeria are a creation of the British colonialists. By locating the argument within this historical context, it is possible to establish how modern political exigencies in terms of complex power relations were shaped and influenced by the legacies of the colonial past. For example, the term ‘minorities’ was used in Nigeria for the first time in the 1950s to refer to newly disadvantaged entities and groups that emerged from the country’s constitutional reforms, and it emerged from the political processes that prepared Nigeria for independence from British imperial rule in the tense years between 1952 and 1960. During the constitutional changes that began between 1951 and 1954, the existing political culture was challenged by the regrouping of Nigeria’s 24 provinces into three political regions, the North, East and West, each with central powers over the provinces placed under it. This centralisation of political power impacted significantly on the ensuing political participation (Osadolor 2002, pp. 31–45). The most serious impacts were the emergence of ethnic power blocs based exclusively on the dominance of the three major ethnic groups, namely the Hausa-Fulani in the North, the Igbo in the East and the Yoruba in the West, with allegations of majority domination by the minority ethnic groups within each region and the differentiation of ethnic groups based in each case on their access to power.

Consequently, given their demographic advantage, the Igbo and Yoruba became formidable political power holders in southern Nigeria while other ethnic groups, including the historically dominant Benin, became minority ethnic groups. In the North, these developments coincided with the astutely firm determination of the Fulani aristocracy to expand its control beyond the territories of the conquered Hausa, Nupe and Yoruba–Ilorin to the Tiv and other ethnic groups. The resulting resentments from the disadvantaged political minorities and the abrasive dominance by the newly empowered majorities fuelled the turbulence of southern politics. It also led to considerable turmoil in the North. This is the context of emergence of ethnic minorities in Nigerian history and politics (see also Ezera 1960).

Understanding the youth in Nigeria

Ranging between 15 and 40 years, Nigeria’s population is largely youthful. The youth is a social category of early adulthood, but also shaped and limited by societal values, levels of dependency and agency (Durham 2000, pp. 115–116). Given the influences of social institutions and values, the physical, psychological and socio-cultural attributes of the youths develop into specific cultural orientations and behavioural patterns, which reflect the prevalent values obtainable in the society. The most evident feature of youth culture in this regard is their struggle for identity, inclusion and survival as they negotiate their way into adulthood (Wyn and White 1996). As will be
argued, Nigeria’s youth policy and the questions of citizenship, ‘federal character’ and the redistribution of resources from the centre to the states have all added to the feelings of alienation and social exclusion on the part of the nation’s youth.

The economic devastation and deindustrialisation that resulted from the structural adjustment programmes and endemic state crisis of the 1980s and 1990s contributed immensely to the transformation of the youth in the Niger Delta. This has also been compounded by the distributive pressures, repressive and other practices among state officials that valorised pillage and banalised violence in the region. For the youths, the impacts of such developments have been dire, particularly in terms of poverty and unemployment, and have predisposed many of them to violent political action against the perceived sources of their deprivation.

Several transformations have also taken place in youth culture in the region. First, popular struggles by civil society groups against multinational oil companies have been extended and have taken the forms of anti-state mobilisations. Second, agitations previously limited to developmental issues now include political demands for restructuring, resource control and the resolution of the national question through the convocation of national conferences based on ethno-regional representations. Third is the emergence of youth militancy with volatile demands and ultimatums that have elevated the scale of confrontation and violence against multinational oil companies and the Nigerian state (Ikelegbe 2006, pp. 83–122). In most of these situations, civil and communal conflicts in the region have been mismanaged by the state, and have been transformed into armed struggles conducted by alienated and desperate youths. They have also been associated with economic crimes such as sea piracy, pipeline vandalisation and oil pilferage. The conflict in the region has thus worsened, given the neglect and repressive dispositions by the state to the plight of the youths. Therefore, this emphasises the need to examine the changing role of the elite in predatory rule in Nigeria as well as conflict management in the region. This is examined in the next section.

**Elite origins of youth violence in the Niger Delta**

Nigeria’s elite politics

Three elements underpin conservative elite politics in Nigeria. First, the values that drive elite politics conflict with the demands of national development. This is clear enough in (1) the choice of federal designs; (2) the interpretation and use of basic federal institutions and principles such as federal character, the creation of new localities or states; and (3) the rotation or zoning of major political appointments or offices. The federal character principle, for example, was first introduced in the 1979 Constitution as a form of affirmative action to ensure that the composition of government and any of its agencies was not dominated by persons from a few states, or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups. It sought to ensure that the conduct of government business recognised the diversity of the peoples within any area of authority and the need to promote a sense of belonging and loyalty among all such peoples (Aiyede 2009, pp. 249–269). In practice, however, it has been hijacked and misinterpreted severally as a means of distributing federal amenities and opportunities such as industries, political appointments, public employment, public universities and so on. The misinterpretation of this edict has been demonstrated in the failures of virtually all major national industries, especially the steel industry, the rail system, telecommunications, electricity and the Nigerian airways (Aiyede 2009, p. 255).
Similarly, the policy of creating new localities and states was first initiated in 1962, when the Midwestern Region was carved out of the Western Region to allay minority fears of domination. It was also used to undermine the secessionist bid of Biafra, when General Yakubu Gowon created 12 states out of the existing four regions in 1967. Subsequently, the creation of states and local governments has become an instrument of patronage and political control. In these circumstances, the creation of new localities and states became a channel of advancement for regional elites who occupy, or at least determine the occupants of, expanded bureaucratic-political positions resulting from such exercises. This way, given the distributive pressures by the elites, institutions created to accommodate the country’s diversity have been hijacked and channelled towards corruption and waste, thereby undermining economic rationality in critical centres of decision-making (Aiyede 2009, p. 255).

Second, the structural root of conservative elite politics in Nigeria is the bifurcated citizenship that confounds commitment to government accountability by the citizens. This mode of citizenship promotes opportunism, which enables the elites to indulge in political corruption without concerted opposition from the people. Consequently federalism, adopted as a constitutional design for allaying the fears of domination and ensuring balanced representation in Nigeria’s polycentric society, has been converted into a means for sharing federal revenues, and also for distributing federal offices as political booties in the context of a rentier state.

The third element is that given the nature of politics in Nigeria, which is underscored by a high degree of corruption, low level of public accountability and poor service delivery, politics is not necessarily about the productive transformation of society, but rather about the accumulation of resources. It is no wonder then that Nigeria has always been poorly rated by Transparency International’s index on corruption. Nigeria’s Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) estimated that US$380 billion of public funds were stolen or squandered by public officials between 1960 and 1999 (Aiyede 2009, p. 256). Approximately US$12.2 billion in oil revenues were alleged to have disappeared during the administration of General Ibrahim B. Babangida between 1985 and 1993. His successor, the late General Sani Abacha, is believed to have personally stolen between one and three billion US dollars during his four-year rule (Human Rights Watch 2007, pp. 16–17). Recently, the House of Representatives Committee on Power and Steel revealed that US$16 billion invested in the National Integrated Power projects between 2006 and 2007 was squandered by the government of President Olusegun Obasanjo (Aiyede 2009, p. 256).

The Minister for Health, Professor Adenike Grange, was sacked by the Umaru Musa Yar’ Adua government in early 2008 for disobeying the directive of the President that all unspent budgetary allocations for the 2007 fiscal year be returned to the government treasury. This brought to public awareness the fact that unspent budgetary allocations had usually been shared by civil servants and politicians in the past. Approximately US$4 billion were returned as unspent budgetary allocation for the fiscal year 2007 alone (Oju 2008, p. 1). Most of the stolen funds end up in foreign banks as capital flight.

These values have defined a problematic context for state–society relations in the country. Consequently, indigeneity, originally meant for preserving the sanctity of cultural identities within various traditional institutions, is now a critical factor for accessing opportunities within the state, especially, at the individual level. An individual may be born and live all her or his life in a certain state, pay taxes to the state and speak the local language, yet may be barred from enjoying state opportunities
because s/he is not ethnically indigenous to that state. The more robust the opportunities in view, the more vehement the discrimination and opposition against the non-indigenes. Underlining this practice is the understanding that public offices in the context of the centralised resources received by the government of a locality or state constitute the share of the national cake accruing to the indigenes of that area, and are therefore reserved only for the indigenes of that state. Non-indigenous residents must thus return to their states of origin to access their own share of the national cake. As Emmanuel R. Aiyede (2009) has observed:

The practice of allocating a major chunk of the shared revenue on an equal basis among states serves as an incentive to state elites to mobilise and clamour for new states and localities in order to expand access to the attendant opportunities. Public resources in the states and localities are then squandered by the political elite indigenes of a state or locality. In the context of this mobilisation to support efforts to obtain more resources from the centre and preoccupation with efforts to ensure nonindigenes do not enjoy too great a share of state resources, public accountability and state effectiveness carry little importance among the general population of indigenes. Some individuals complain of general failures in public service provision, but many look forward to a chance to get into some position and take their own share of public resources. (p. 263)

For youth groups in the Niger Delta, this translates into a double basis for exploitation and marginalisation. On the one hand, oil revenue, largely generated from the region, is hijacked as ‘national revenue’, so that citizens from the region are not able to lay claims to those resources deposited in their localities, even as indigenes of the region. On the other hand, besides their disproportionate access to oil revenue, citizens from this region are denied the opportunities accruing to other states of the federation if they are not indigenous to those states. While these practices serve the acquisitive interests of the elites, they have been politically destructive. They also underline the basis for violent conflict in the Niger Delta. Of all the challenges confronting the Nigerian state since its return to civilian rule in May 1999, the Niger Delta crisis has been the most volatile. This crisis is linked with the character of the Nigerian state and its limited autonomy, especially given the context of governance failure and the cake-sharing psychosis of its elites (Ake 1985a, 1985b).

Although neither state collapse nor subversion has occurred in Nigeria since its post-colonial history, the Niger Delta offers an instance in which the legitimacy of the state is being challenged by anti-state mobilisations, which increasingly accuse the state of not adequately representing their interests. While such mobilisations appear to be similar to the country’s civil war experience, they are also fundamentally different, for, unlike the civil war, which was premised on a secessionist bid by the Igbo of south-eastern Nigeria, the Niger Delta struggle is anchored on agitations for ‘resource control’, ‘true federalism’, ‘self-determination’ and an end to decades of ‘economic exploitation’ and ‘internal colonialism’ by multinational capital and the majority ethnic groups through the operations of a skewed federal structure. The Niger Delta question is therefore best understood as having many dimensions. First, it feeds into the predatory and rentier character of the Nigerian state; second, it is related to the questions of rights, citizenship and the national question; third, it is linked to the politics of elite aggrandisement, which underlines the ‘non-developmental use of the country’s revenues’ through ‘the prebendal appropriation of public offices for private gains’ (Joseph 2003, p. 162).

Given the centrality of oil in Nigeria’s political economy, violent conflict in the region has serious implications for the country’s viability (Ake 1996b, p. 34). This perspective
explains the weaknesses in the country’s political economy, the imperatives of regime survival by self-seeking politicians, the pervasiveness of social injustices, the permeating of public institutions by endemic corruption, the fragmentation and breakdown of social trust, infrastructural and institutional decay, and the circulation of major political positions within a narrow spectrum of elites (Joseph 2003, pp. 162–163). They also underline the regressive dynamics of governance, institution-building, state-formation and economic performance in the country ‘running in reverse and handicapping development’ (Joseph 2003, p. 163, De Waal 2003). It is the politics woven around resource allocation in the country that engenders the legacy of conflict through the competition for oil revenues by ethnically-defined constituencies (Williams 1980, p. 69), together with ‘the politics of neglect and repression’ adopted by the state in its responses to agitations for redress by members of the region (Cooper 2006, p. 174). Claude Ake (1996b) captures the situation with disarming simplicity:

What is at issue is nothing less than the viability of Nigeria, as oil is the real power and the stuff of politics in Nigeria as well as what holds the country in a fragile dialectical unity of self-seeking. (p. 34)

The 1990s witnessed a renewal of violent uprising by the youths and ethnic minorities against the state and oil-prospecting companies in the region. Unlike the agitation by the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in the early 1990s, which was limited to the Ogoni, the present context signals the implosion of violent conflicts, which have been endemic throughout the region – almost on the scale of an insurgency – with telling effects on national development. The Niger Delta crisis is at present the greatest challenge to Nigerian federalism as a design for managing ethno-territorial cleavages and other fiscal challenges (Ejobowah 2000, pp. 29–47, David-West 1994, p. 33). The confirmations to this assertion have been cumulative and compelling in the country’s recent history.

Protest and violence

The foremost expression of protest by the ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta against the Nigerian state took place under colonial rule against the creation of the 1946 three-region structure by the British colonialists. The imbalances, which resulted from that historic arrangement, have been sources of controversy and crucial determinants of the structure of federal power that goes to the centre and the regions.5 In response, although the colonial government appointed a commission of enquiry in September 1957 to look into the protests and the means of allaying them, and although the commission confirmed the existence of what it called some genuine fears, the colonial state fell short of recommending any form of self-determination (Nigeria 1958). Similar responses have characterised the dispositions by the post-colonial state to minorities’ agitations in the post-colonial period. In the early 1990s, in response to MOSOP’s demands,6 the then military government in Nigeria crushed Ogoni resistance through the repression of Ogoni protest and the trial and hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other MOSOP activists in November 1995 (Obi 2006a, pp. 96–98). In doing this, it failed to stem the tide of protests and violence in the region, as the communities therein confronted oil companies and one another in bitter conflict. In December 1998, the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) released the Kaiama Declaration in which it claimed ownership of the oil in Ijawland and asked all oil companies’ contractors and staff to withdraw from Ijawland by 30 December 1998, pending the resolution of the question of ‘resource ownership’ and the control of the Ijaw area of the Niger Delta (Kaiama Declaration 1998).
In response, the federal government declared a state of emergency in the region and deployed thousands of soldiers, naval troops and anti-riot policemen to protect oil installations and investments, while also dispersing Ijaw protesters. During the violent exchanges which ensued, some of the protesters and others suspected of being IYC members or supporters were arrested, while a handful of individuals were killed (Obi 2006a, pp. 96–98).

In May 1999, Chevron Texaco allegedly transported Nigerian military personnel in its helicopters from which they shot and killed two protesters on Chevron Texaco’s Parabe oil platform (Obi 2006a, pp. 96–98; Chevron 2008). In addition, in November 1999, federal troops razed the oil-producing town of Odi to the ground for failing to produce a criminal gang suspected of murdering seven policemen. In the process, about 2,000 inhabitants of Odi lost their lives while several others were displaced. As Obi (2006a, p. 96) observed, ‘the operation at Odi fitted a regular pattern in which the Nigerian state deployed maximum force to deter and contain threats to oil interests and oil companies in the region’. Far from assuaging conflict, such responses have only militarised the region, with the escalation of violent conflict proceeding along communal lines. The consequences of all these have been grievous for the oil industry and also for national development.

**Violence and national development in Nigeria: an impact assessment**

From the 1970s, oil revenue replaced agricultural produce as the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. This has largely come from the oil-bearing states of the Niger Delta (Obi 2002, p. 102). Covering nine out of the 36 states, 185 out of the 774 local government areas and occupying a total land area of 75,000 square kilometres, Nigeria’s Niger Delta is the world’s third largest wetland. The 2006 population census shows that 30 million out of the country’s 140 million people reside in the region (Nigeria 2006). While oil and gas have accounted for about 40 per cent of Nigeria’s gross domestic product (GDP), nearly all of Nigeria’s oil and gas reserves are located in the region. Between 2000 and 2004, oil and gas accounted for 75 per cent of the total government revenues and 97 per cent of Nigeria’s foreign exchange earnings. The region is therefore very critical to Nigeria’s fiscal viability and the global energy sector (Ukiwo 2009, p. 1–4).

Unfortunately, the inflow of oil revenues was not used to further the necessary growth in other sectors. In spite of all such programmes as the ‘green revolution’, ‘back to land’, and the ‘structural adjustment programme’ introduced by the government to boost agricultural production in the 1970s and 1980s, the share of agriculture in GDP fell to 37 per cent in 1991 and 41 per cent in 1996 (Uche and Uche 2004). Nigeria continued to depend on imported plant and machinery in the manufacturing sector, while capacity utilisation remained below 60 per cent between the 1990s and 2000s (see Manufacturers’ Association of Nigeria 1999–2003).

Given its perpetual dependence on oil-based revenue, and the harsh impact of the structural adjustment programme, the Nigerian economy nose-dived into a deep crisis. There was de-industrialisation, excessive pilfering of public resources and a dependence on the petty commodity sector for social reproduction. The fiscal crisis and adjustment measures introduced to cope with the recession led to further repression, especially as the disaffected groups tried to resist them. The social contract came

Initially, as the federal government collected mining rents and royalties, it paid a sum equal to 50 per cent of the proceeds to each region from which the accruing royalties were derived. The Distributable Pool Account, shared among the regions, received 30 per cent of all such proceeds. The federal government collected customs duties on behalf of the regions, while each region paid the cost of collecting the duties proportionate to its share in the proceeds of those duties. However, between 1966 and 1979 and between 1984 and 1999, the periods marking endemic military presence in Nigerian politics, the revenue allocation formulas were changed several times on the initiative of the federal government, sometimes on the advice of a technical committee set up for that purpose. These changes reduced the size of the federally collected revenues going to the regions of origin and arbitrarily increased the share of revenue going into the Distributable Pool Account. The states were denied access to the revenue from the Distributable Pool Account on the basis of derivation. As Emmanuel R. Aiyede (2009, p. 258) has argued, this was possible since the major oil-producing communities were minority ethnic groups. This way, emergent and subsequent policy choices failed to favour the oil-producing communities, especially given their relative lack of strength in the ensuing political power game. This led to the political marginalisation of minority ethnic groups. It also led to their loss of ownership rights vis-à-vis the natural resources in their territories.

Although oil revenue has greatly increased Nigeria’s overall income since the 1970s, this has mostly been diverted into private pockets. With its dismal record of economic growth, Nigeria has moved from a promise of rapid development by the 1970s into one of the most debt-ridden countries in Africa by the end of the twentieth century. The World Bank’s Federal Public Expenditure Review published in 1995 claimed that approximately US$200 billion was invested in Nigeria between 1973 and 1993, with very little development to show for it (Aiyede 2009, p. 254). Oil revenue accruing to the country has only served to transform the Nigerian economy into a mono-mineral economy, the state into a rentier state, and the population into consumers rather than producers. With the expansion of the oil sector, the state in Nigeria has become more partisan than neutral – itself a focal point of very normless and ruthless competition. The resultant disillusionment thus informed the shift away from how to build the state’s capacity, to a perspective informed mainly by an increasing evidence of its incapacitations and imminent subversion (Agbaje 1991, pp. 723–727).

On balance, (1) the lopsidedness of Nigeria’s federal structure, (2) the contradictions and injustices inherent within its fiscal operations, together with (3) the destructive disposition of elite politics in the country have defined marginalisation for the oil-rich region. This is, no doubt, the major basis for the agitation by the youth and other groups in the region. Marginalisation thus explains the disposition to militancy, restiveness and violent conflict by the youths in the region.

Being a most flexible category, the youth have mobilised to contest power and pose an alternate moral platform representing those marginalised by the existing dominant power relations. In this connection, the role of Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro, a former student activist and Niger Delta revolutionary leader against the Nigerian state and Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria (SPDC) in February 1966, is a useful case in understanding the involvement of the youth in the region.
in resource-based agitations. The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) led by the martyred Ken Saro-Wiwa in the 1990s was also a call for resource control. The struggles by the Ijaw National Congress (INC), led by Chris Ekiyor (who recently replaced Kimse Okoko) and the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) were central in proclaiming the Kaiama Declaration in 1998. There is also the Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force (NDPVF). Threatening to go to war if its demands were not granted, its struggle represents one of the latest calls by members of the region on the federal government for self-determination and the reconstruction of a just federation.

The Niger Delta’s immersion into violent conflict has had harsh consequences for the Nigerian state. As at 2003, approximately 100,000 barrels of oil, estimated at a value of about US$2.8 million, were reported to have been stolen on a daily basis from the region (Ikelegbe 2004). These amounted to approximately 36.5 million barrels of oil throughout the year, which would also have yielded an estimated US$1.022 billion. Apart from bunkering and other crime-related activities, the Nigerian state lost about US$6.8 billion in 2004 in oil and gas due to the disruptive and perennial crisis in the region. Oil exploration and production have also stagnated, leading to distortions and instabilities in national economic planning. This is because violence within the region since 1997 has taken the form of seizure, occupation and stoppage of oil facilities and operations (Ikelegbe 2004, p. 11). Although seizures by militant Ijaw, Ikwerre, Egi and Isoko youths have occurred repeatedly since 1998, they have been more difficult to control since 2003. In December 1998, youths organised by Isoko National Youth Movement shut down five oil flow stations. Between December 1998 and January 1999, the Ijaw Youth Council led other youth militias in a massive shutdown of oil facilities throughout the Ijaw region of Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers States. In July 1999, the Egi Youth Federation disrupted the 58 Elf Petroleum Company facilities, while in October 1999 the Ikwerre Convention occupied the Wilbross premises in Port Harcourt.

Militant youths from Ijaw, Ilaje and other ethnic groups in Delta and Rivers States have seized, occupied and disrupted oil production in numerous incidents (Abigu 2000, p. 7). Often, staff of such facilities are held hostage, while their facilities are occupied for several weeks, with disruptions lasting for months, especially in Warri. In recent times, even offshore oil facilities have become accessible to militant youths. In April 2002, militant youths in Ondo State seized an offshore oil rig at Ilaje and held 88 oil workers hostage (Bello 2002). In Akwa Ibom State, it took the intervention of the Nigerian navy to foil the attempts by militant youths to seize and blow up all the oil wells and offshore oil platforms. At different times in 2003, ethnic militias captured and occupied most of the facilities belonging to Chevron, Elf, Shell and Texaco in the Warri areas. Ijaw militias severely threatened to destroy facilities seized during their confrontations with the military in pursuance of resource demands (Okafor 2003).

Kidnapping and hostage taking of oil workers and state security personnel are some of the dimensions assumed by violence in the region. More than a dozen British nationals were kidnapped in 2002 and later released unharmed (Osamgbi 2003). In June 2000, 24 Chevron staff, including two expatriates, were kidnapped by armed youths in the Escravos area of the Benin River in Delta State, only to be released with the intervention of community leaders (Abigu and Amorighoye 2000). Even though there was no demand for any ransom, these youths took away one barge, two speedboats and a tugboat (Abigu and Amorighoye 2000).
Abduction and kidnapping have also become rampant since 2003. In November 2003, militant youths seized several oil barges and crew members together with their military escorts, while in February 2004, a naval officer, three Nigerian oil workers and a barge belonging to Shell were abducted by militant youths (Omonobi and Okhonmina 2003a, Okhonmina 2004). In addition, in November 2003, during some of the confrontational encounters with members of the security agencies in the communities and waterways, 15 military personnel of the Joint Security Task Force were dispossessed of their AK-47 rifles by Ijaw youths around the Burutu River in Delta State while guarding oil barges (Omonobi and Okhonmina 2003a, Okhonmina 2004).

The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) indicated that there were 114 line breaks in the Port Harcourt and Warri areas of the distribution network between April and May 2000. In 2003, militant youths seized, occupied and vandalised several of Shell’s flow stations. In April 2003, militant Ijaw youths blew up the Escravos pipelines that supplied crude oil to the Warri Refining Petrochemicals Company. In the process, they disrupted oil production for several months (Nzeshi 2003). In 2004, about 13 armed youths were arrested for vandalising Agip’s crude oil pipelines (Ighodaro 2004).

In Delta State, there were kidnappings by militant youths in July 2003 and November 2003 in which ransom demands were made (Okpowo 2003, p. 21 and Okhonmina 2003). Such kidnappings for ransom demands have also been extended to offshore oil facilities. In April 2002, a group of militant youths from Ekeremor Local Government Area in Bayelsa State invaded an oil-service boat, Gulf Fleet (GF)-102 servicing the Trident-6 oilrigs on the EA offshore field of Shell, and took hostage ten crew members from whom they asked for a ransom of N3.1 m (Nzeshi 2002). On Friday 23 April 2003, seven local and expatriate workers and security personnel were kidnapped and murdered by militant youths at the Chevron swamp location along the Benin Rivers (Ahiuna-Young 2004). The increasing trend of these phenomena confirms the existence of kidnapping syndicates and warlords to which some militias are loyal. Some such syndicates were implicated in the kidnap of seven expatriate staff of an oil-servicing company at Bedero, along the Udu River in November 2003 (Omonobi and Okhonmina 2003b).

There have also been records of pirate activities. For example, all the waterways in the region have, sadly, become dens of bandits and sea pirates. This is particularly so in Bayelsa and Delta States, as well as the River Nun, Forcados River and Tungbo Creek. Passenger boats are attacked, occupants are robbed and sometimes killed or maimed. While their targets are usually the traders that ply the waterways, some of these pirates even dress in military fatigues as camouflage to ease their ambush of travellers’ boats. These incidents are too numerous to be mentioned in detail. However, as many as 25 pirate groups have been known to attack passenger boats up to 2004 (Okhonmina 2004). These include groups between Sapele and Obaghoro in 2000 (Abugu and Amorighoye 2000), between Burutu and Ogbe Ijaw in the Warri-South waterways in 2003, and groups around Pere-Otugbene (Abia 2003). The communal-ethnic clashes which occurred in these areas in the period under review have also swollen the numbers of the pirate groups who, apart from criminal reasons, parade and attack ethnic indigenes and militias that they perceive as hostile in the waterways (Ikelegbe 2004, p. 15).

Bunkering and armed confrontations are other negative occurrences in the region. Militant youths and pirate groups armed and paid by illegal oil syndicates operate
as escorts, guards and sometimes collaborators in illegal oil trading. There are various estimates on the quantity of theft of crude oil stolen with the aid of these armed gangs and militant youths. Pirates and militias have been known to attack military personnel, police and armed forces’ boats with many fatalities and casualties (Nzeshi 2003). Militant youths and the state’s security agencies have sometimes fought for several days on the streets of Warri, in Ijaw and Itsekiri communities, and in the waterways of the western Niger Delta. In June 2004, hundreds of security forces personnel were reported to have clashed with rival ethnic militias in the Ogbakiri, Buguma and Tobia communities in Rivers State with casualties on all sides (Ikelegbe 2004, p. 16). These situations have made security the biggest problem in the region. As Oronto Douglass (2004) observes:

Security is the biggest issue in the Niger Delta after oil and gas. It is an issue that has dominated the political, social and economic spaces of the region and Nigeria especially these past twelve years, and the domination is likely to continue for ten or more years before a near-acceptable solution is found. (p. 1)

No one who has followed the fortunes and misfortunes of the Niger Delta will deny that all is not well in this region of promise that had an average of 20 deaths per day through oil violence in 1999, and approximately 50 deaths a day in 2004. It should be added that the casualties do not include deaths occasioned by poverty, old age, industrial, vehicular or motor-boat accidents and, very recently, politically inspired gang and cult wars of supremacy.

Regrettably, responses by multinational oil-prospecting corporations and the Nigerian state to youth violence and agitation by minorities in the region have not helped matters. As indicated, far from quelling the conflicts, such repressive responses have rather often compounded them. Repression has therefore led to anger, resentment and ultimately, violent conflicts, in the form of endemic armed revolt in the region.

Conclusion

As the article has tried to show, the Niger Delta crisis is a daunting challenge undermining nation-building and state-consolidation in Nigeria. This has particularly been the case since 1999, the period marking the country’s return to civil democratic rule, after 15 years of endemic military presence in its politics, from 1984 to 1999. Since this period, the country has been plagued by violent conflicts, litigations on fiscal over-centralisation and a plethora of constitutional crises, among other pathologies, that underwrite the constitutional and structural constraints of Nigerian federalism as a design for accommodating ethno-territorial cleavages in this notoriously complex and divided society.

In order to erase the historic feelings of exclusion by the youths and other groups in the region, the punitive plights of the people should be assuaged by both the federal government and the states in the region. Existing fiscal measures should be reconceptualised and redefined in order to adequately accommodate the interests of these aggrieved populations. There is the need to redefine state–society relations in a manner that links fiscal federal relations to citizenship duties, obligations and privileges, which in turn further positive leadership and political responsibility at all levels. The Nigerian state should resort to compromise and dialogue, on a
continuous and inclusive basis, with all stakeholders and representatives of these groups. It should also endeavour to avoid conflict by being routinely sensitive to the plights and rights of the youths and other groups who seem weak (Ake 1995).

The Nigerian state should work towards approving the recommendations of the region’s stakeholders, particularly the recommendations by the technical committee on the Niger Delta, on the increase of the derivation revenue allocation principle from 13 to a minimum of 25 per cent. Similarly, the federal government should review the corporate social responsibilities of all multinational corporations with a view to encouraging integrated and sustainable community development initiatives (Ukiwo 2009, p. 4). Governments at all levels should recognise and respect the communities and civic groups in the region as partners in the struggles against injustices and under-development. The rights of the youths in the region should also be respected and upheld by the state. The federal government, the states in the region and the oil companies should put in place concrete programmes for integrating alienated youths into the economic life of the region. Efforts should also be made to improve upon the resource-generating potentials of other states of the federation as a way of reducing the mono-cultural dependence on oil revenue in the country.

Needless to say, the successful implementation of these policy recommendations requires the existence of a strong, development-oriented, bureaucratic state. This underscores the need for the structural transformation of the Nigerian state as a prerequisite for sustainable democratic development in the country. Although institutionally viable, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and other recent initiatives introduced by the federal government cannot be a substitute for a consensual-deliberative democratic process, a judicious constitutional framework, institutionalised socio-cultural consensus, economic development and a system of rule of law that actually delivers justice and social progress to the ordinary people (Horowitz 2006, pp. 125–137, Suberu 2008, p. 483). These are critical components of the democratic legitimating process in the country. They also underline the significance of working towards the progressive transformation of governance and public administration in the country with a view to rekindling socio-economic progress for the ordinary people. These will go a long way to restoring the trust of marginalised youths and other disenchanted groups in the region to the Nigerian state.

As the region’s experience and struggles illustrate, nationalism and political obligations generally, can be neither compelling nor guaranteed, if the state remains – as it is in Nigeria – entirely insensitive to the social needs of its citizens. In this regard, the resource-based conflicts in Nigeria’s Niger Delta cannot be resolved outside the framework of a truly democratic state; they cannot be resolved without addressing the citizenship, indigeneity and nationality questions. Such conflicts also cannot be satisfactorily resolved without first resolving the knotty contradictions underlining the country’s lop-sided federal structure.

The actualisation of the Niger Delta expectation is a complex matter requiring a sustained political struggle, without which members of the region will hardly assert their interests effectively on the state’s agenda. This is obvious enough in Nigeria. After all, law making itself is a complex political struggle. Critical thinkers must not lose sight of this fact, for it is precisely through their involvement in such struggles – in the Niger Delta Environmental Survey (NDES) and other organs of the state – that Claude Ake, Kimse Okoko and other scholars acquired their organicity as socially relevant intellectuals in the region and beyond. For members of this region, the
struggle against internal economic domination through the operations of a skewed federal structure is a major part of the second independence struggle.

Jeremiah O. Arowosegbe is at the Department of Political Science, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. Email: jeremiaharowosegbe0373@yahoo.co.uk

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Endnotes

1. For a thought-provoking discussion of national development and the possible role of the Nigerian youth therein, see Olurode (2000). While development is actually a multi-faceted process, here reference is made to economic development. This article raises relevant questions on the violence–development dialectic in the region and assesses the impact of violent conflicts on the prospects for development both in the region and Nigeria at large. In doing this, the connection between violence – measured in terms of the disruptive impact of the volatile activities embarked upon by the youth in the region and development – measured in terms of the difference between the actual and potential access to basic social services, economic growth and human resource development on a sustainable basis, is critical. Attention is focused on the question of access to education and health care services, housing, motorable road networks, and the eradication of gender discrimination, inequalities, poverty and unemployment. For the region, sustainable development is defined in terms of its capacity for absorbing global changes while also seeking to institutionalise development programmes determined by local needs, and which respond to critical questions of long-term considerations that are people-centred, rather than merely catering for the interests of global capital. While not discountenancing the weight of external factors and forces, this article argues that the dimmed prospects for development in the region are fallouts of the cake-sharing psychosis of the elite, the skewed nature of Nigerian federalism, and the perpetual dependence on the global market – a practice which underlines the lack of control over the region’s resources by the citizens in the region. This perspective explains the marginalisation and resort to violence by the youth in the region.

2. The definition and specialisation of the youth as a demographic category are broad, culture-specific and situational. The categorisation here is based on my observation of the age bracket of the youths involved in the violent conflict in Nigeria’s Niger Delta. By ‘violence’, it means neither structural violence, which is a property of social institutions and which denies the individual the possibility of self-realisation, nor psychological violence, which seeks to debase the self. Rather, it refers to ‘direct violence’, which, directed against authority, is variously described as rebellion, revolt or even revolution, as modalities of protest against repressive structures of the state. As a modality of action, violence neither enjoys a peculiar logical status, nor a sacrosanct or superior status. It is also not self-justificatory. The resort to its deployment in the particular example in the Niger Delta is understood against the backdrop of the exhaustion of other peaceful avenues of addressing historic and continuing injustices in the region. The fast emerging dialectics in the region is thus one of dissent, protest and change, or, to use Dudley’s (1975, p. 15) terms, ‘scepticism, anomaly and paradigm elaboration’. By ‘dialectics’, I do not have in mind a doctrine of logico-historical inevitability. Rather, ‘dialectics’ is used in its older and more ordinary sense in which the word simply means a process of doubt and confirmation, of trial and error, of change and interchange, of anomaly and elaboration.
3. Recent works, which speak to the differences between the two struggles, include Harneit-Sievers (2006) and Uche (2008).

4. The construction and nature of the state in Nigeria, rooted in the colonial pedigree, as elsewhere in Africa, tend toward the institutionalisation of ethnic entitlements, rights and privileges, so that rather than providing a common bond for the people through the tie of citizenship – with equal rights, privileges and obligations, both in precept and in practice – the state furthers their bifurcation. For elaboration on this position, see Adejumobi (2001).

5. Each of the three regions was based on the dominance of one of the three ethnically-dominant groups while other ethnic groups within the regions were treated as minorities, a situation which posed the fear of perpetual domination after independence. Consequently, such minority groups agitated for reforms including the creation of more administrative units in the forms of regions and later states. For an analysis of the protests by the Niger Delta minorities and the responses by the colonial state, see Mustapha (2003) and Osaghae (1991).

6. Contained in the Ogoni Bill of Rights (OBR) in 1990 and its Addendum in 1991, the major demand by the Ogoni was for the right to control and use a fair proportion of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni development.

7. For a comprehensive account of the state’s responses to the Niger Delta crisis and its failings in that regard, see Obi (2006a) and Ukiwo (2007).

8. Witness the contradictory securitisation, tension and fragile peace in the region. Several anti-state and anti-oil-company mobilisation groups have emerged. The Egbesu Boys, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Martyrs Brigade and the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) are examples of the militant groups that have emerged in the region, consequent upon the harsh responses by the Nigerian state, responses which have only steered violence in more dangerous directions rather than furthering the prospects for a peaceful negotiation of conflict.

9. Boro wanted all the resources in Ijawland to be controlled by his people.

10. The Ijaw regard themselves as the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria (following the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba), a claim sharply dismissed by the Tiv, who also claim to be the fourth largest ethnic group in the country. However, since Nigeria’s population censuses contain no information on the demography of ethnic groups, these claims are only matters of conjecture and counter-factual imagination.

11. Kimse Okoko is a Professor of Political Science at the University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

12. The Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force (NDPVF) was later transformed into the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), which came into prominence in late 2005 after the arrest on treason charges of its leader, Mujahid Asari Dokubo.

13. For an extensive treatment of the activity profiles, objectives and social bases of these militant groups and their operations see Ikelegbe (2006).

14. For probing analyses and politically suggestive critiques of the responses by multinational oil-prospecting companies and the Nigerian state to violent conflict and minorities’ ferments in this region, see Alemika (2000), Ikelegbe (2006), Obi (2006a) and Omotola (2007).

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Briefings

Removing Neocolonialism’s APRM Mask: A Critique of the African Peer Review Mechanism

Patrick Bond

The national middle class discovers its historic mission: that of intermediary . . . the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the mask of neocolonialism. (Fanon 1961, p. 163)

Introduction: talk left, walk right

Seen from Washington, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (Nepad) can be summed up in a frank description by the Bush administration’s leading State Department official for Africa, Walter Kansteiner: ‘philosophically spot-on’ .1 However, as the host institution of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), Nepad has faced a crippling problem in assisting Kansteiner and his ilk: the elites responsible for its implementation – and for legitimising neoliberalism more generally – are not democrats, and do not even seem to be committed to building their nations’ economies. Can the APRM help fix this, or is it just a vanity of politicians and middle-class NGOers but in reality a transmission line between Africa and neocolonialism?

Whichever it may be, promoting APRM is very hard work. Charles Manga Fombad and Zein Kebonang point out that starting from around 1990, Africa’s second wave of democratisation (the first being decolonisation) witnessed an increase not only in elections (albeit ‘a majority of the post-1990 elections have been marred by electoral fraud’), but also coups, especially from 1995–2001:

Many of the old dictators are still firmly entrenched, whilst some of the new leaders who have joined the ‘club’ have in recent years been devising ever more sophisticated ways to perpetuate their rule while using the democracy slogan as a convenient mask to disguise their despotic practices. (Fombad and Kebonang 2006, p. 19)

Ian Taylor (2005) adds:

With very few exceptions (Botswana, Mauritius, Senegal, South Africa), the majority of the heads of state involved in Nepad are quintessentially leaders of neo-patrimonial regimes and certainly do not regard their rule as ‘temporary’ nor that institutional law should constrain their pre-eminence or that their rule be transparent and accountable.

One example might be Meles Zenawi, Prime Minister of Ethiopia. Zenawi conspired with George W. Bush to invade Somalia in 2007 with the connivance of Mbeki – this after the senseless war over a strip of sandy land on the Eritrean border between 1988 and 2000 had killed at least 70,000 combatants and civilians. According to the lobby group Ethiopian Americans for Justice, Zenawi’s government
hosted the ‘African Guantanamo’, participating in the illegal kidnapping, imprisonment and torture of Africans. In return for its services for the ‘war on terror’, the Bush administration rewarded the Zenawi group both financially and diplomatically. Most importantly, the Bush administration looked the other way when Ethiopia’s rulers stole elections, tortured and killed many innocent people. ... Mr Zenawi stole the 2005 elections, destroyed all opposition, muffled the press, banned advocacy for human rights and made a mockery out of the rule of law. Following the elections, his troops shot and killed 193 people who protested electoral fraud, massacred innocents in Gambella and the Ogaden. They had also bombed civilians in Somalia on many occasions. Mr Zenawi’s government has been one of the worst violators of human rights in Africa.²

However, Zenawi was unanimously chosen as Chairperson of Nepad in 2007 and also as Chairperson of the Committee of Heads of State and Government of Countries Participating in the APRM. At the same moment in early 2009 that his parliament was passing the Charities and Societies Proclamation Law – ‘designed to strictly control and monitor civil society in an atmosphere of intolerance of the work of human rights defenders and civil society organisations’, according to Amnesty International³ – Zenawi was writing in the APRM’s 2008 Annual Report of the mechanism’s ability to support ‘countries in improving their policy-making processes, adopt best practices from other countries, and comply with ratified standards and codes, while involving all stakeholders in the country’ (Zenawi 2009, p. v).

This may be the most extreme case of hypocrisy associated with the APRM, but is not surprising. Writing for a civil society lobby group, Partnership Africa Canada, Ousmane Dème recognised, with undue regret, Nepad’s morale rot: It increasingly appears that out-and-out criticism is replacing the strong enthusiasm that prevailed at its inception. In fact, the hopes originally raised by this ambitious programme are now beginning to dissolve. Criticism is emerging from all directions. Nepad’s biggest supporters, among them President Abdoulaye Wade, are starting to publicly voice their misgivings and censure. (Dème 2005, p. 1)

According to the Senegalese President in October 2004, ‘I am disappointed. I have great difficulties explaining what we have achieved when people at home and elsewhere ask me. ... We’re spending a lot of money and, above all, losing time with repetition and conferences that end and you’re not quite sure what they’ve achieved’.⁴ In June 2007, at the World Economic Forum meeting in Cape Town, Wade acknowledged that Nepad ‘had done nothing to help the lives of the continent’s poor’.⁵ Later that year, Wade was even more frank: ‘The redirection of the project has become inevitable, because nobody has yet understood anything from Nepad and nobody implemented Nepad’.⁶ As Mbeki himself confessed a few weeks after his ousting from power, in December 2008, ‘I am afraid that we have not made the progress we had hoped for. Indeed, and regretfully, I believe that we have lost some of the momentum which attended the launch and detailed elaboration of the Nepad programmes’.⁷

But this is unsatisfactory, and leads merely to a head-shaking about African implementation incapacity. A further-reaching structural critique is required, based neither on limited African elite agency nor Nepad’s failure to help poor Africans, as if this was a genuine goal in any case. Such were merely symptoms of a deeper problem, which is Africa’s insertion into the world economy in a manner that, as Frantz Fanon warned, would ‘inherently generate a failed development project’. Masking the neocolonial relationship during the period of the 2000s – in
the wake of two decades of rampant structural adjustment that demolished living standards except for newly empowered political, financial and commercial elites – was a new rhetoric: ‘good governance’.

That phrase is often deployed within an all too easy ‘blame Africa first’ narrative in which the machinations of outside forces simply evaporate. But the alleged corruption that led to South Africa’s Police Commissioner (and Interpol President) Jackie Selebi’s leaving – and apparent protection from prosecution by Mbeki – was thanks to mafia infiltration. And the alleged corruption that had Mbeki firing Jacob Zuma as Deputy President in 2005 was traced to a French arms company, Thint, as part of the vast, bribery-ridden, foreign-sourced arms deal that Mbeki himself pushed into the South African budget over the objections of many inside and outside the government. Or, in the wake of Mbeki, his successor Kgalema Motlanthe’s refusal of a visa to the Dalai Lama was almost certainly a result of the pressure that the Chinese Government – a major contributor to the African National Congress – concede they put on Pretoria.

How is it possible to disentangle such organic ‘good governance’ shortfalls fewer than 20 km away from Nepad headquarters from the exogenous forces? Can tearing off the APRM mask assist us in such a task?

An African governance mask

To understand the masking of neocolonial relations through the APRM requires us to remind ourselves of how much ideological damage has recently been done to neoliberalism, even before its 2008 financial meltdown in the North. Writing for the Institute for Democracy in South Africa, analyst Len Verwey concedes that amongst the sites surveyed by the Afrobarometer in 2002:

Mozambique is the only country where more people perceived government economic policies positively than negatively. Nigeria, Uganda, Zambia and Malawi demonstrate a particularly acute 70% perception of the negative impact of government economic policies on most people. (Verwey 2006, p. 13)

If that is the case, and if international financial institutions and the ‘donor’ governments must continue to reproduce a neocolonial system widely understood as damaging to the interests of the masses, then the first requirement is for elites to adopt good governance rhetoric.

Verwey (2006, p. 7) here provides the conventional wisdom:

Nepad differs from previous African development initiatives, and this difference has contributed to its positive reception in the West, due to its adoption of the following pre-conditions for sustainable development:

• a shift from statism to markets and public–private partnerships as the drivers of growth and development;
• competitive integration into the global economy, which would include export-orientated domestic production, diminishing tariff- and non-tariff barriers to imports, and the soliciting of foreign direct investment;
• the foregrounding of governance issues in securing positive developmental outcomes.

Greg Masterson (2005, p. 2), of the Electoral Institute of South Africa, adds:

APRM lies at the heart of the AU drive for a broad vision of African rejuvenation and renewal that seeks to generate more goodwill from foreign trade partners and donors by proving good political and economic governance and accountability. … Arguably the most unique and original aspect
of the NEPAD initiative, the APRM is largely responsible for thrusting African development into the international development spotlight at a time of chronic global donor fatigue and a slump in the global economy. ... The APRM’s central philosophy of African states taking responsibility for their own development and compliance has been greeted enthusiastically by the donor community.

In the same spirit, Ross Herbert and Steven Gruzd claim that the APRM is ‘arguably the continent’s most innovative and challenging experiment to date’ (Herbert and Gruzd 2007), perhaps forgetting the rise of nationalism, successful anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggles, aids-drugs access, debt and climate campaigning and the like. Herbert and Gruzd are representatives of Africa’s explicitly pro-capital South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA). Gruzd posits that SAIIA and similar ‘think tanks’ staffed by exceptionally persuasive ‘experts’ are crucial to APRM: ‘their reputation for objectivity, integrity and expertise has, in most instances, managed to convince sceptical citizens that the APRM is not just another government project designed to celebrate mediocrity and whitewash inadequacies’ (Gruzd 2009, p. 2).

However, as Herbert and Gruzd (2007, p. 8) argue, APRM is ‘designed to be more palatable and consensus-oriented than conditionalities imposed by debt-relief or aid-driven processes’, the neocolonial direction is essentially the same as that imposed by the IMF, the US State Department and Brussels. What was apparently required, by the early 2000s, was adoption of a rather more sly approach, one capable of teaching ‘democracy’ talk to tyrants and of adding a certain fraction of civilised society (‘think tanks’) to give legitimacy to the standard conditionality menu.

But the results of APRM are not encouraging even seen through these partisans’ eyes. In addition to two typical grievances present in most of the APRM case studies, namely lack of financial resources and an over-ambitious timeframe, Herbert and Gruzd (2007, p. 24) add some important caveats about the APRM technical process worth noting:

The rules and regulations governing the process are loose. Later documents contradict earlier ones, without revoking or revising them. The wide-ranging flexibility afforded to countries in developing their national APRM structures — particularly their national governing council or national commission and local APRM secretariat — has spawned a variety of different institutional models. This permissive approach has mollified some nations apprehensive about the process but it has also undermined the ability of the system to establish governance norms or bring about genuinely improved dialogue around governance reform. The Panel has been reluctant to publicly challenge governments even when their APRM plans are contrary to the written and verbal guidelines.

Nor would one expect the APRM Panel to break ranks with other elites and to side with civil society. Indeed, the South African representative to the APRM Panel was Chris Stals. His prior job was as Reserve Bank governor, when he initiated extreme monetarist policies that shifted resources to financial-sector instead of productive-sector economic activities, from poor to rich.

The case of South Africa

The most revealing APRM case study is surely South Africa’s, given the home-based context. Herbert and Gruzd served on the South African APRM civil society team, which led a long process that eventually persuaded the final panel on the need for 182 formal recommendations (of varying politico-ideological orientations). However, the July 2007
programme of action agreed upon with peers ignored most of these and diverted from internal APRM procedure. According to Herbert and Gruzd (2007, p. 17):

The Panel called for action on crime, regulation of political party finances (called for in the UN and African Union anti-corruption codes), action on racism and xenophobia, reconsideration of South Africa’s electoral system, efforts to strengthen parliament, and actions to fight corruption, among other high-profile recommendations. These are addressed [by Pretoria] with varying degrees of clarity, but are in many instances ignored or dealt with superficially. In this, South Africa has demonstrated very real limits to the ability or willingness of the system to press unwilling nations toward particular reforms.

As Paul Graham from Idasa observed, Pretoria’s APRM document ‘shows substantial alteration from the report discussed in Kliptown (in front of 1,700 delegates) and, as a result, a substantial amount of the texture of the debates has been lost’. Another SAIIA report noted that SA’s APRM report ‘was crafted without significant civil society input and the media were largely ignored’ (Boyle 2008).

What does the power of South Africa over the entire APRM process teach Herbert and Gruzd?

Despite the strong recommendations, the system declined to take action or publicly comment when South Africa ignored a large portion of the recommendations in its action programme. The process highlighted the limits of the Panel’s ability to stand up to a powerful nation that might resist its advice (Herbert and Gruzd 2007).

One specific point deserves mention. A well-known feature of Mbeki’s management style, arrogant denialism, was evident, as Business Day wrote in an editorial in relation to an important APRM Panel finding:

Several months before the recent xenophobic attacks, Mbeki disputed the findings of a report warning of SA’s ‘brutality and detention’ of foreigners from other African countries. . . . He cannot have missed the APRM’s cautionary note. Its SA country report concluded that ‘xenophobia against other Africans is currently on the rise and must be nipped in the bud’. In his response to the report last year, Mbeki denied that xenophobic tendencies existed in SA, pointing out that the country did not even have refugee camps. To illustrate the friendly environment, Mbeki alluded to a state visit by Congolese President Joseph Kabila when illegal immigrants from that country openly requested that the two presidents to regularise their status. In Mbeki’s view, the fact that illegal immigrants were able to address the two leaders showed how comfortable they felt in SA. Yet a few months later, 62 people were killed in anti-foreigner attacks that erupted in Alexandra on 11 May.

Put simply, the APRM was not treated seriously in Pretoria. Six months after taking office as Minister of Public Service and Administration, in March 2009, Masenyani Baloyi had not tackled even the much diluted tasks he inherited from his predecessor Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi: ‘At a conference to reveal what the government was doing about the problems cited, Baloyi was slammed for convening yet another “talk shop”. Johannesburg ANC Woman’s League organiser Bontle Setshogoe said: “On the ground, nothing concrete has been done”. Baloyi said that time was needed for “reflection”’.

Other cases

Herbert and Gruzd (2007, p. 17) praise the Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda reviews, but
do concede that the reports ‘also suffer from lack of specificity, measurability and the extreme brevity used to describe commitments, using terms such as “monitoring and enforcement” and “improved human resource management”’. Gruzd (2009) makes specific claims about APRM progress in other countries (regrettably, not documented), such as that ‘Rwanda is in the midst of fundamental reforms to its business environment. Kenya points out laws passed, for example on witness protection and public procurement, new funds to foster youth and women’s development, and a draft national land policy created through consultation. In South Africa, issues flagged in the APRM, such as unregulated private funding to political parties and floor crossing in parliament, have been slated for reform’.

To what extent can the APRM be credited for such changes? We cannot tell from the information provided and in any case there are multiple power vectors at work in any given context. For example, the political party floor-crossing fiasco in South Africa had to come to an end because of the ludicrous way deals were being done, undermining the system from the standpoint of the majority and minority parties; the minor APRM input on floor crossing can hardly be given credit for this. However, it appears that there are no reforms contemplated on private funding of political parties, notwithstanding the extent to which the Chinese financial grip on the ruling party caused acute embarrassment during the recent Dalai Lama visa affair.

The Rwanda ‘reforms’ appear neoliberal in orientation, not at all inconsistent with standard Washington Consensus conditionalities. Moreover, the 2005 Rwanda APRM report was excessively ‘rosy’, and, according to Eduard Jordaan, the final document:

inadequately addresses a number of serious political problems in Rwanda, such as Rwanda’s involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the inadequate separation of powers in the Rwandan political system, tensions in Rwandan society, and the flawed presidential and parliamentary elections of 2003. (Jordaan 2006, p. 420)

Moving to Kenya, prior to the December 2007 ethnicised electoral catastrophe, the APRM process went smoothly, according to Herbert and Gruzd (2009). But consider what the APRM failed to do. The report, according to Bronwen Manby (from the London-based AfriMAP project):

does not identify the issues relating to the independence of the Electoral Commission of Kenya that were so critical on election day and in the following period. … But the biggest concern is the issue of political will. Was the Kenyan government ready to try to fix what was broken? Were the APRM eminent persons and secretariat willing to hold them to account? And were other African heads of state who had signed up for the APRM process – to whom the APRM eminent persons and secretariat report – ready to urge remedies for poor performance, or would their own glass houses discourage the throwing of stones? (Manby 2008, p. 1)

Conclusions

The arguments made above should suggest a rethink by any community-based organisation, social movement, non-governmental organisation and other progressive body if they are currently legitimating Nepad policies, Bretton Woods Institution mandates, donor conditionalities and local elites via the APRM. The merits of participating are few, and the damage done to progressive politics appears very high in some cases, not merely in terms of institutional frustration.

The main point is to not forget the context, which is neocolonialism’s need for a
mask. As Dème of Partnership Africa Canada explains:

The launch of the APRM is not neutral in that it coincides with the first difficulties of Nepad’s initiators to persuade the foreign private sector to invest massively in Africa. Africa’s poor image in the international community, the result of its reputation for bad governance, is in some minds one of the main obstacles to attracting foreign private investment. (Dème 2005, p. 50)

As a result, Dème and others in similar donor agencies and donor-funded liberal ‘think tanks’ have a huge difficulty in their task of relegalitimising the APRM:

The APRM represents a major challenge for African civil society. It needs to seize this opportunity to parlay its extensive experience into improved governance in African countries. (Dème 2005, p. 50)

In contrast, Charles Manga Fombad and Zein Kebonang (2006) argue:

Either carefully selected pro-government NGOs and CBOs are involved, or those brought in are given so little information that they are unable to play a constructive role in the process. In the final analysis, the NEPAD APRM will remain a closed state-to-state process with no room for non-state, independent critical voices who could contribute constructively to making the process more productive, effective and credible. (p. 53)

Herbert and Gruzd (2007, p. 25) conclude that ‘the system as a whole is beneficial and opens space for meaningful national dialogue’. Yet this is apparently only true for those institutions – such as SAIIA – which have impressive clout in their own terms, e.g. elite connections and a high media profile. As for ordinary citizens, they concede, the meaningfulness of the dialogue is open to question:

Civil society members have participated in public meetings during country support missions, but these encounters have only discussed the APRM process in the most general terms, have not provided detailed information on process and governance requirements or lessons on how other countries have managed public consultations, used surveys or managed research institutions. Notably, the memorandums of understanding between the continental authorities and participating governments have not been made public. (Herbert and Gruzd 2007, p. 27)

Finally, Manby offers quite a sobering reflection on the APRM’s distracting capacity, based not only on Kenya but the other cases as well:

Although each country that has undergone the APRM process is supposed to report back to the APR Forum on its progress, there is no serious monitoring exercise of how effectively this is done. Nor any sanctions for failure to act. Nor, apparently, is there any real system to ensure that the commitments the government makes address the most important problems highlighted in the APRM review. Certainly, no individual or institution at the African level, least of all the APR Forum, raised the implementation of the APRM commitments as critical issues during the recent Kenyan crisis – or, perhaps more importantly, during the lead-up to the election, when such a focus could perhaps have averted the near-catastrophe into which Kenya was drawn. (Manby 2008, p. 1)

Meanwhile, at the national level, the implementation of the APRM programme of action is also left entirely to the executive, with no formalised role for parliamentarians or civil society to hold the government’s feet to the fire should it fail to perform. As in other countries, the APRM process has not been well
integrated into other national development planning processes – a problem recognised by the APRM secretariat in South Africa – and it does not appear to have informed other important reform programmes under way at the same time.

Moreover, the systems in place to monitor the implementation of other national policies (however imperfect) are also not mobilised to engage with the implementation of the APRM programme of action. President Kibaki did not report back to parliament on the APR Forum meeting and on the actions he had committed to take, nor was the report tabled for debate. Although there was some coverage in the media of the APR Forum discussion of Kenya, it did not generate a real national debate on the report and programme of action and their implications. The conclusions and recommendations were not widely disseminated throughout the country by the NEPAD-Kenya secretariat or other means. Although a meeting hosted by the NEPAD-Kenya secretariat in mid-February 2008 encouragingly aimed to involve civil society in the process of preparing the country’s progress report to the next APR Forum, the report of the meeting is surreal in its lack of any suggestion that this review might be relevant to, or affected by, the national political crisis.

Even the continental APRM secretariat failed to engage in any serious way with national institutions, such as the Electoral Commission of Kenya or the Kenya National Human Rights Commission, in order to brief them on the conclusions relevant to them and the follow-up role they might play.

Without this sort of integration into other national planning systems, debates and oversight mechanisms, the APRM process seems doomed to become little more than a cosmetic exercise without effect in the real world of policy and decision making. (Manby 2008)

To close, recall how Nepad has indisputably failed: the global elites who demanded it as a mask for the continuation of 2000s neoliberalism in a home-grown variant did not, ultimately, want to give Nepad’s African elites the resources required to do the job they promised. Not even the likes of Bono, Geldof, Make Poverty History and white-banded Global Call for Action Against Poverty civil societians could compel global capital to be slightly less brutal to Africa, notwithstanding heady promises at Gleneagles. Since 2005, there has been demonstrably less North–South money for aid, and much more military spending. This is not disputed, and hence it would appear that Nepad’s functionality to neocolonialism – once considered important – is rather irrelevant.

Does the same pessimism apply to the APRM’s functionality to Nepad, as neocolonialism’s governance mask? Yes, it should by now be crystal clear – especially from the South African APRM case but also more generally – that elite APRM processes chock-full of civil society ‘experts’ from ‘think tanks’ have generated not a fruitful consultation process that helps change society but, on the contrary, disrespect from state actors amidst business-as-usual. Led by the likes of Zenawi, the APRM is not even a very effective cosmetic exercise for the sake of neocolonial legitimation.

Alternative strategies entail that Africa’s social justice, environment, women’s, labour, youth and so many other movements increase and interrelate the work they already do now, and pressure their national states to adopt post-neoliberal public policies (Bond 2009). If such activists are distracted into neoliberally grounded work with the APRM or Nepad or the next generation of IMF PRSPs or the UN MDG bureaucracy (Bond 2006) or similar elite gimmicks, this probably represents a tragic waste of time, and will delay genuine breakthroughs against injustice.
Patrick Bond, author of *Looting Africa* (Zed Books 2006), is director of the University of KwaZulu-Natal Centre for Civil Society, South Africa. Email: pbond@mail.ngo.za

Endnotes


References


Durable Solution, Help or Hindrance? The Failings and Unintended Implications of Relief and Recovery Efforts for Kenya’s Post-election IDPs

Gabrielle Lynch

Kenya’s contested general election of 27 December 2007 prompted a mass movement of people through threats, fear, and, more commonly, physical attacks and destruction of property. According to early statistics 350,000 people were displaced. However, in July 2009, the government readjusted this figure to 663,921 internally displaced persons (IDPs), or 140,459 families; 350,000 of these IDPs sought refuge in camps, while the remainder were integrated into local communities (Office of the President 2009, p. 1).

The new figure is more realistic, but exact numbers will never be known, as many IDPs who did not own land and/or did not seek shelter at camps will forever be omitted. Nevertheless, in practical terms, a number of 660,000-plus clearly presented a grave and unprecedented humanitarian challenge. This article will briefly outline the parallel processes of return and relocation, and some new sites of grievance, to reveal how – while much has been achieved – processes of emergency response and recovery have been far from perfect, and a number of developments have rendered future episodes of violence and displacement more (rather than less) likely.

The geography of displacement and response

The vast majority of IDPs (see Table 1) hailed from Rift Valley Province, the epicentre of post-election violence. The Rift Valley was home to 169 of 296 Red Cross camps (KHRC 2008, p. 17), while the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and USAIDS, to name but a few, opened regional offices in Eldoret and/or Nakuru. In July 2009, the province was home to the only remaining IDP camp (at Eldoret showground), 43 ‘transitional camps’, and 18 of 20 ‘relocation sites’ nationwide. The province also accounted for 72 per cent of all initial start-up payments made by the government, 98 per cent of support given for reconstruction of houses, and 96 per cent of houses constructed by non-government actors and a similar percentage of houses pledged (Office of the President 2009). The Rift has thus demanded, and absorbed, the majority of response and recovery efforts.

However, displacement did not only occur in the Rift Valley. Consequently, a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Households</th>
<th>No. of individuals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nyanza</td>
<td>24,981</td>
<td>118,547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>12,385</td>
<td>58,677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rift Valley</td>
<td>84,947</td>
<td>408,631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>10,092</td>
<td>46,959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>1,438</td>
<td>6,769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coast</td>
<td>1,241</td>
<td>4,774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Eastern</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nairobi</td>
<td>5,349</td>
<td>19,416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>140,459</td>
<td>663,921</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Office of the President (2009, p. 2).
geographic concentration of attention and limited resources in the area has largely ignored the significant number of IDPs outside the province. Government and non-government agencies have also tended to focus on IDPs in camps. Visible and much in need, the corollary is that little attention has been given to those who sought shelter with friends and families, who ‘missed out on humanitarian assistance and have had limited support for return and for re-starting their lives’ (OCHA 2008, p. 3). Buffered in the short term, many are finding life increasingly difficult as the capacity of hosts becomes stretched and as some face criticism and even hostility from kinsmen for having ‘abandoned’ their community and for having ‘suffered less’.

The story of displacement and response is also one that has become closely equated with Kikuyu residents of the Rift Valley who comprised the majority of local camp dwellers. One consequence, and a potential point of conflict, is a strong perception (particularly among Kalenjin in the Rift Valley) that all communities were affected by the violence, but while ‘their’ culture – and the culture of the Luo – did not let them go to camps and encouraged absorption by friends and relatives, the Kikuyu went and ‘cried’ in the open. Unfortunately, this narrative has further enhanced a sense that the state and civil society is biased towards the needs and interests of a particular community, and thus unintentionally added new layers to a popular discursive repertoire of grievance that lay at the heart of post-election attacks on Kikuyu communities (Lynch 2008).

Operation Rudi Nyumbani and the realities of repatriation
At the onset of post-election violence, victims flocked to trading centres, churches, police stations and chiefs’ camps. However, it soon became clear that these impromptu settlements were inadequate in size and difficult to secure, and a number of open spaces were identified and transportation arranged. These official camps were managed by the Kenya Red Cross (KRC), with support from the Kenyan Government and an array of local churches, NGOs and international organisations. Secure from their erstwhile attackers, IDPs were provided with emergency food and non-food items, temporary shelters, and (with time) some psychosocial support, sanitation, health and educational facilities. The short-term response was thus fairly successful at meeting basic needs under difficult circumstances. However, conditions were poor and allegations of rape and sexual exploitation drew heavy criticism; particularly grievous were reports that some women had to pay IDP workers ‘in kind’ ‘to access basic commodities such as food, tents, medicines and beddings’ (Kenya 2008, p. 60).

In terms of camp closure and recovery, the available options (or ‘durable solutions’) included return, relocation or local integration. Official preference was for return, and on 4 May 2008 the government launched Operation Rudi Nyumbani or ‘Operation Return Home’ (ORN), which was linked to Operation Tujenge Pamoja or ‘Operation Build Together’ (to reconstruct houses and support livelihood recovery) and Operation Ujirani Mwema or ‘Operation Good Neighbourhoods’ (to foster peace and reconciliation). The aim was to return all IDPs to their homes and farms. By September 2008, all but five camps were closed (home to 12,658 IDPs), while a year later only one camp remained (home to 2,200 IDPs or 422 families) (interview, Permanent Secretary for Resettlement, 3 August 2009). The operation therefore succeeded in moving people, but nevertheless attracted heavy criticism, most notably from the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC), which has spoken of ‘repatriation, but not resettlement’ and of ‘a circus of failed promises, unmitigated force and lies’ (KHRC 2008, pp. 19, 40).
Initially, the operation was fundamentally undermined by the implicit assumption that IDPs had a home (if not a shelter) to return to and by its focus on camps. This focus ignored former tenants and squatters, as well as those who had become ‘integrated’ within local communities, i.e. those who had sought refuge with friends and families or rented houses. Due to the geographic concentration of camps and ethnicity of inhabitants, ORN also concentrated largely on the Rift Valley area and Kikuyu community.

Next, undue pressure and intimidation was clearly applied to ‘encourage’ IDPs to return to their home areas, in contravention of internationally accepted guiding principles. Many returnees were extremely apprehensive, especially since many had been displaced on no less than three or four occasions since 1992. A common refrain was that the operation was premature and rushed, and that psychosocial work should have been completed first, with social protection and peace building initiated and dialogue established. In the immediate term, some IDPs were forced to briefly return to camps following threats of further violence (KHRC 2008, pp. 26–28), while in the longer term return is proving much easier than reconciliation. Security has been established, but many IDPs have not interacted with their neighbours and clearly harbour deep anger and resentment towards their ‘enemies’. Just as some are able to forgive, others remember previous cycles of displacement, return and ‘reconciliation’ and are duly suspicious. In turn, many Kalenjin neighbours still view their neighbours as ‘outsiders’ who should act like ‘guests’ and are increasingly concerned by reports and rumours that the Kikuyu will stand and fight ‘next time’ and/or are preparing to launch ‘revenge attacks’. The truths behind and details of these perceptions – and related rumours of a proliferation of small arms and organisation on both sides – are beyond the scope of this briefing, however, given a history of election-related displacement and a stalled reform agenda, they clearly do not bode well for the country’s future. There is therefore a pressing need not only for reconciliation efforts that bring communities together to talk, play sport and engage in business (as is currently under way in many areas), but also for a concerted effort to address underlying issues, most notably the mode of political mobilisation, land and need for institutional reforms.

ORN did not herald return in the full sense. A lack of shelter, delays in compensation payments, and fears of future attacks meant that many IDPs did not return to their own plots. Instead, some families shared properties that were still intact, while others opted to rent houses and visit plots during the day. More visibly, ORN led to a relocation of at least 54,000 IDPs to 161 transitional or satellite camps in the Rift Valley (OCHA 2008, p. 1). Usually situated next to a chief’s compound equipped with administrative police, or a new administrative police post constructed in preparation for their return, transitional camps offered official protection and security in numbers. Residents could till their land during the day and harvest crops, and until May 2009, the KRC supplied relief food. The Kenyan Government and other actors have also initiated livelihood, shelter, and peace and reconciliation programmes in these areas, through which some IDPs have received food and basic non-food items, new tarpaulins, psychosocial support and agricultural inputs and non-agricultural assets to kick-start local livelihoods. Ethnically mixed groups are also being encouraged to form and submit business proposals, and by the beginning of August 2009, 18,000 ‘shelter units’ had been built, 7,700 by the government and the remainder by local and international agencies (Interview, Permanent Secretary for Resettlement, 3 August 2009). Moreover, as time has passed, transitional camps have slowly closed as residents take
tents to their plots or move into new shelters, and by July 2009 there were 43 recognised sites home to 7,249 IDPs (Office of the President, 2009, p. 3).

Transitional camps have also had their downsides. Populations have ranged from 50 to over 80,000 people (OCHA 2008, p. 1), and assistance has been limited and logistically difficult. A needs assessment of transit sites in Uasin Gishu recorded that many water points were contaminated, destroyed or needed repairs; latrines were full; tents were worn out and leaking; and many children had been taken out of school so that they could help the family to source food (OCHA 2009e). These day-to-day conditions have not been helped by failed rains, power shortages, increased prices and extremely high levels of un- and under-employment. However, the most pressing need of the people and the principal reason why many are still in transitional camps, is a lack of shelter. There is therefore much that still needs to be done to assist returnees with basic needs and recovery of livelihoods.

In theory, ORN was linked to a compensation scheme through which each household was to receive KSHS10,000 ‘start-up fund’ to replace basic household items, and KSHS25,000 as ‘support for reconstruction’ for those whose homes had been destroyed. However, funding has been a problem and grants have been released very slowly. By July 2009, 24,709 of 158,328 listed beneficiaries were yet to receive the start-up grant, while 55,725 of 78,254 had not received reconstruction support (Office of the President 2009, pp. 3–4). In addition, many IDPs deny receipt of either grant, and allegations abound of corrupt administrative officials who request payments for registration, make partial or double payments, compensate outsiders, and collude with IDP leaders. These delays and illegalities are a source of great resentment, if not surprise. People feel that the government has reneged on its promises, that they are unlikely ever to receive payments, and that authorities simply wanted them out of camps and out of sight and have now abandoned them to the uncertain ebbs and flows of charitable donations.

Indeed, the whole experience of return often proved disorganised and traumatic. Transport to transitional camps was often delayed, with IDPs returned to sites that lacked the necessary facilities, to be confronted with the scale of loss and destruction and severity of their situation. The plan was for IDPs to leave the camps with one month’s food rations and KSHS10,000, but more often than not this did not occur. Return was thus often accompanied by fear, a realisation of loss, sense of abandonment and despair. As one psychosocial counsellor summarised, the operation was ‘quite inhuman’ and was often more psychologically difficult than the terror of initial displacement.

Unfortunately, the visibility of these camps and assistance given, especially the new police posts and shelters with their tell-tale shiny roofs, has unintentionally helped foster a sense that it is one community that is receiving all the assistance. The significance of such complaints is recognised by government, civil society and international agencies, which are all making increasing efforts to reach out to ‘host communities’ and give ‘balanced assistance’. Thus in some areas, the KRC has built houses 50:50 for Kikuyu and Kalenjin, while in others they have purposefully trained and hired members of different communities as labourers. Similarly, many of the livelihoods programmes have a policy of supporting both communities, while there is a common requirement for all group proposals, sports teams and dialogue processes to be ethnically mixed. Unfortunately however, perceptions often lag behind realities, and the fact that many IDPs face significant hardships is often divorced from Kalenjin communal narratives of loss, marginalisation and demonisation, which have burgeoned since the
2005 constitutional referendum to produce a clear ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality (Lynch 2006, 2008).

A positive development? The innovation of self-help groups in the Central Rift

Return is not the only option. Many Kikuyu IDPs in the Rift have bought land and/or sought employment in other areas, most notably in Nakuru, Naivasha, Central Province and Nairobi. Initially, this option was more readily available to the better educated and wealthier members of society, but increasingly became the choice of IDPs who fled to camps in the Central Rift. Lacking a home to return to, or with no desire to return to volatile areas and hostile neighbours, these IDPs have formed self-help groups and purchased land as a collective. By May 2009, there were 20 ‘relocation sites’ in Naivasha, Nakuru, Molo, Nyandarua and Ol Kalau Districts. Home to 7,545 families (OCHA 2009b, p. 2), populations range from 3,469 households (or 14,660 individuals) at Mawingu, Nyandarua District, to a mere handful (OCHA 2009c, p. 4).

In the eyes of the Ministry for Special Programmes this is a positive development or ‘durable solution’ through which IDPs (many of whom did not previously own land) can utilise their right not to return, and start a new life where they feel secure. Assistance has been offered, and in May 2009 the Minister for Finance, Uhuru Kenyatta, made a KSHS200 million supplement to the national budget for this purpose. In addition, China has donated iron sheets for shelters in Pipeline and Minto sites, Nakuru District, and a number of organisations, including the UNHCR, have distributed tents, tarpaulins and other non-food items (such as mosquito nets, water bottles, soap and sanitary pads) to some of the sites.

Yet these self-help groups are also the subject of growing concern. Sites tend to be of an extremely small acreage, especially given the number of residents: 403 families (1,660 individuals) have bought 3 acres in Gilgil (OCHA 2009a, p. 4), while 1,200 families (4,000 individuals) are camped on 16 acres at Pipeline, Nakuru District (OCHA, 2009d, p. 3). Plots also tend to be dry, barren and/or infertile. At Zea Farm in Kwanza, 42 families have bought half an acre that is ‘completely waterlogged, insufficient for them to build shelters or latrines, and over 6 kilometres from a potable water source or public services’ (OCHA 2008, p. 2). Residents also lack adequate shelter and are extremely impoverished. In April 2009, 89.7 per cent of residents lived in tents, there was an average of one toilet for 83 people, relief accounted for 53 per cent of food consumed, 43 per cent of expenditure was used to buy food, 39 per cent had not received KSHS10,000, and 81 per cent of expected beneficiaries had not been given housing support (OCHA 2009c, pp. 5–10).

The obvious question is how these communities will manage to survive and residents earn a living? Already, one group, ALKO in Nakuru District, has been threatened with eviction for defaulting on the purchase price after members failed to contribute KSHS10,000 each. Leadership wrangles and claims of collusion are also rife. To date, 80 families have left Mawingu, citing harassment ‘by the chairman for questioning how the group’s accounts were being managed’ (OCHA 2009b, p. 5), while it is alleged that leaders at Pipeline colluded with local administrators to buy land at an inflated price. One concern is that many may turn to crime and/or be recruited into Mungiki. A much-feared Kikuyu militia, Mungiki was mobilised to cause havoc in Nakuru and Naivasha towns towards the end of January 2008 (Kenya 2008, pp. 97–112) and is increasingly seen as a way to earn money and defend community interests. Security is certainly a problem, and the forced circumcision of six girls at Mawingu (OCHA 2009c, p. 9)
is evidence of a particularly violent form of Kikuyu patriotism.

Finally, given the fact that local and international approaches to peace and reconciliation efforts usually follow a pattern of intra-community followed by inter-community dialogue meetings, there is also a danger that residents of relocation sites will never talk with those who enforced their displacement, because they are no longer neighbours. The potential for these extremely poor, compact and disgruntled communities to subsequently develop a discourse of neglected victims and of revenge seems to be fairly high. Moreover, even if this is not the case, the fact that these camps are often seen as dens of vice and Mungiki activity has encouraged a discourse of concern among the Kalenjin community, who increasingly view them as a potential launch pad for revenge attacks, and even future genocide.

Conclusions

Given the scale of displacement, praise is clearly due to an array of administrators, politicians, agency staff, church leaders and ordinary citizens who have volunteered their time and resources to relieve conditions on the ground. Nevertheless, assessment should not just take account of effort and counterfactuals, but also oversights, inefficiencies, unintended consequences, broader pictures and the extent to which actions are supported, contradicted and/or undermined by developments in other areas.

One concern is that both IDPs who have ‘returned’ to farms or satellite camps, and those that became ‘integrated’ or ‘relocated’ are still in desperate need of assistance. In addition, a common concentration on displacement as a post-election issue has conspicuously ignored the plight of the 380,000 IDPs who existed prior to the 2007 election (FIDH 2007, p. 5), and thousands displaced since. Displacement is an ongoing issue which requires a coherent policy (as demanded by the IDPs Protocols of the International Conference Great Lakes Region, to which Kenya is a signatory) and strong political commitment, both of which the country currently lacks.

The second major concern is that local perceptions of emergency and recovery responses to post-election displacement have actually rendered new examples of violence and eviction more, rather than less, likely. In 2007, violence was triggered by a contested election. However, underlying causes included a highly centralised power structure, a culture of impunity and normalisation of violence, high levels of poverty and underemployment, and perceptions of state bias and community marginalisation (Lynch 2008, Mueller 2008, Branch and Cheeseman 2009). Of particular importance in the Rift Valley were Kalenjin narratives of marginalisation and historical injustice that burgeoned during and after the 2005 constitutional referendum to produce an increasingly heightened sense of inter-communal difference that fed into targeted attacks on ethnic ‘others’. Unfortunately, this narrative has coloured people’s readings of current events and subsequently been reinforced by stories of how, while Kalenjin IDPs are neglected, their counterparts have been built houses, support Mungiki and so forth. The result is that a new layer or point of communal grievance has emerged that further strengthens a sense of injustice, marginalisation, neglect, inter-communal competition and conflict. Therefore, it is critical that while relief and recovery efforts do not simply become hostage to the grievances and politicking of disgruntled communities, they are conflict-sensitive and are seen to be balanced and unbiased, otherwise they simply add new layers to debates about the ‘other’.

Finally, the possibility that this new discursive layer of ‘IDP treatment’ will become part of future narratives of
conflict is heightened by the near-total absence of any concerted effort to address the other underlying causes of post-election violence. Taken together with local declarations that communities will stand and fight ‘next time’ and stories that all communities may be better organised and armed, this combination of inaction and new layers of grievance has produced an extremely volatile situation in which future violence seems both probable, and likely to be worse. Therefore, the current and pressing need is for politicians, civil society and citizenry to tackle the underlying causes of the post-election violence head-on, before a cycle of conflict, resentment and revenge gains further momentum.

Gabrielle Lynch is a lecturer in Africa and the Politics of Development in the School of Politics and International Studies at the University of Leeds. Email: g.lynch@leeds.ac.uk

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Questioning Pro-poor Responses to the Global Economic Slump

Peter Jacobs

Introduction

The global economic crisis is bound to reverse gains made in the war on poverty and frustrate the efficacy of ongoing pro-poor programmes. This assessment flows from the bleak picture of global trends in unemployment, poverty and inequality presented in the latest International Labour Organisation (ILO) report and forecasts (ILO 2009). What is even more alarming is that this dismal trend was initially concentrated in the ‘heartland of global capitalism’ (Gowan 2009) but is rapidly spreading to poorer economies on the periphery. In South Africa the impact of a prolonged economic slump is likely to be severe, given its jobless rate of about 25 per cent and the fact that close to 50 per cent of its population is trapped below the R462 per month poverty line (The Presidency 2008). It is commonly accepted that a recession works against the poor through two main routes. First, it is inevitable that the slump in economic activity will trigger a surge in job losses, with almost all the suffering inflicted on workers in low-paid and precarious employment. Second, the resource curtailment that results from an economic meltdown of this magnitude is likely to further cut already strained fiscal resources available for pro-poor social programmes. South African policy makers and their counterparts in business and trade unions appear to be acutely aware of how the recession is set to hurt the poor.¹

The exigency of the situation has become inescapable and is prominent on the agendas of policy makers and grassroots activists. For example, a G20 communique issued on 14 March 2009 in the lead-up to its London Summit resolves to ‘take all necessary actions to ensure the soundness of systemically important institutions’. Global responses to the economic crisis vary from emergency actions to avert immediate systemic damages, to talks about radical systemic change. Examples of the immediate actions include stimulus packages (fiscal deficits to finance corporate criminals?) as well as rolling out plans to give the ‘global financial architecture’ a makeover. Proposals to structurally overhaul the economic system range from the nationalisation of financial institutions to consideration of how to rid the world of neoliberalism. Despite the profound questioning of the capitalist socio-economic model (Wolf 2009, Eichengreen and O’Rourke 2009, Friedman 2009), all the popular mainstream anti-crisis proposals are restricted to trying to salvage capitalism rather than transcend it. This coincides with spot-on, scathing critiques of award-winning economists (Soros 2008, Friedman 2009, Wolf 2009), for their textbooks and abstract models of made-up stories about isolated virtues of the system fail to credibly explain what is going on, and remain at a loss as to how to permanently cure capitalism of this type of destructive instability. Moreover, genuine and sustainable solutions to counter the effects of the slump on millions of its impoverished victims are not forthcoming.

Against the backdrop of these global events, how has the South African ruling elite responded to the economic crisis? Initially, key policy makers downplayed the possibility of the domestic economy sliding into recession. This position now stands exposed as ludicrous. For without radical interventions, a peripheral
economy dependent on mining exports cannot simply decouple from the wild fluctuations of global capitalism. Nevertheless, as the local economic downturn started deepening, the state reacted by adopting a minimal set of anti-crisis responses favoured by the global elite. It is, for example, willing to expand its corporate welfare system (through fiscal deficits and other counter-cyclical measures). But it refuses to openly debate policies (even ‘partial nationalisation’) that point in the direction of a radical break with a system that imprisons the poor in abject misery so long after the end of apartheid. Yet at the same time, it is virtually impossible to encounter official responses to the global economic slump not expressed in pro-poor rhetoric. Two interesting questions arise: how pro-poor is the deep-seated economic logic of these responses to the economic slump? And what benefits exist for poor working people from restored growth within a systemically unequal and anarchic political economy? This brief analytical narrative explores these core questions.

The goal is not to repeat the well documented and exhaustive analyses of how the economic crisis started and evolved. Instead, this briefing exposes the different ways in which the costs of the downturn and recovery will be downloaded onto the poor. It argues for and invites critical thinking about pro-poor socio-economic alternatives that go beyond mainstream measures that are structured against the poor. Towards this end the second section gives a snapshot of how government’s thinking about the crisis has gradually shifted over time. The third section shows how the global stimulus framework sets the parameters for the local interventions. A critique of the touted pro-poor measures to drag the economy out of recession is presented in the fourth section. The conclusion stimulates some thinking about ‘anti-capitalist transitional alternatives’ for the poor.

A system-wide economic downturn

How has the South African government’s perception of the global economic crisis evolved in recent months? A document spelling out the official viewpoint, entitled Framework for South Africa’s response to the international economic crisis, appeared on 19 February 2009 (RSA 2009). During the preceding year, key state officials had joined the global political and corporate elite in forums convened to figure out the nature of the economic collapse and appropriate strategies to salvage the system. South African policy makers generally downplayed the possibility of any local recession, investing their energies in talking up the economy. Then, on 3 April 2009, the South African Cabinet issued a media brief in support of the resolutions of the G20 summit in London. The G20 summit had concluded the previous day with a firm commitment and time-bound action plans to tackle and solve the global economic crisis (or more precisely the ‘financial crisis’, as they prefer to characterise it). Following the lead of commentators around the world, the state lamented the fact that the global system had been plunged into its worst economic crisis in almost 80 years. However, it stopped short of saying that the world was approaching, or exhibiting compelling signs of, another Great Depression, presumably to avoid spreading or fanning the flames of the panic and despair which become so contagious in typical crisis situations.

Globally, influential commentators locate the origin of the global slump in rival causes, or a mix of interactive causes: the complacent mindset of economic policy makers like Alan Greenspan, because they failed to create proper financial markets (Financial Times 2009, p. 10), the consumerism of low-income individuals (workers) living beyond their means, etc. Despite the nuanced differences in these rival explanations for the
global downturn, a few common themes cut across the mainstream arguments. First, there is a compulsion to pin down a particular cause in the hope of finding ready-made solutions and thus averting broader systemic damage. The inherent danger in this reasoning and strategy is that it risks ignoring plausible alternative, or more fundamental, causal factors. For in an economic system based on the ruthless hunt to sustain and raise the rate of profits, a general chaotic tendency to over-accumulate and overproduce is constantly present. Second, human agency is blamed (albeit an asocial agent outside a systemic framework) (Friedman 2009), rather than traditional sources of economic crises usually described in terms of some form of arcane calamity. In this instance, the blame was pinned on finance capitalists (or sections of this group) simply because it became impossible to conceal their avarice and flagrant crimes.3

Local neoliberal experts only offer superficial and contradictory clues as to why the economic crisis managed to spread so fast. Commentators are generally silent on why the crisis moved so swiftly from a housing bubble fuelled by vulgar financial speculation to all other sectors of the American economy. More importantly, government spokespersons fail to logically explain why and how this recession crossed the borders of the major imperialist countries to drag even South Africa into the slump.4 Yet in the not-too-distant past we were reassured of the robustness of the country’s financial institutions and regulations. When the Minister of Finance delivered his Medium Term Budget Policy Statement in October 2008, this is how he reflected on the economic crisis:

The thunder will pass. We can say to our people: our finances are in order, our banks are sound, our investment plans are in place, our course is firmly directed at our long-term growth and development challenges, and we will ride out this storm, whatever it takes, together, on the strength of a vision and a plan of action that we share. (Manuel 2008, p. 4)

This contentious assertion does not spell out the criteria used to test the soundness of the financial system. Indeed, neo-classical economics has proven to be incapable of generating reliable information on the operations of finance capital. Moreover, as a result of the blurring of the class interests involved, it is not possible to judge whether the country’s financial system is sound in terms of the interests of the poor or of rich financiers. Even if we presume that the financial system is robust, we are left to wonder why the economy has slipped into a recession.

Locked inside the global rescue framework

Towards the end of 2008, approximately a year after the start of the worsening slump of the American economy and the implosion of other imperialist economies, the South African economy started to nose-dive at a breathtaking speed. The hyped-up (fictitious) boom of recent years, based on the extravagant consumerism of the old and nouveau rich (the black elite) and the mining export bonanza, simply became unsustainable. At the same time the ‘sudden downturn’ exposed the hollowness of the boom, its heavy dependence on foreign capital, and the enduring lopsided structure of capitalism in South Africa.

Popular concern now turned to the severity and duration of the local recession. In fact, throughout 2008 social pressure had started mounting on the state to counter the rising costs of food and energy. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) launched its typical one-day stay-at home campaigns in July and August before its leaders entered the National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac) bargaining
chambers with government and business partners (Mail and Guardian, 6 August 2008). Voices on the margins of this protest movement rightly connected the threads of local struggles to lower the cost of living with the globalising economic crisis. This deteriorating reality forced the economic spin-doctors to adapt their measured responses to the economic crisis.

Although the state’s response to the recession is decorated in pro-poor rhetoric, it remains firmly embedded within the capitalist orthodoxy. Some of its anti-crisis measures indeed do appear to benefit the poor. However, any proper evaluation of the underlying logic of these measures must take into account the broader context and thinking that shape anti-recession plans. Before examining the most popular local responses, it is necessary to show briefly that the recovery plans of imperialism actually dictate the limits of local interventions.

First, the South African state has resolved to throw its support behind the G20, which is under the firm control of big imperialist powers. Second, in terms of the content of its anti-recession programme, the following elements feature most prominently: there is widespread deflection of attention to the need for social solidarity in this moment of economic distress, but without demonstrating that the full cost of this economic destruction will be offloaded onto working people; and it advocates fixing the global financial architecture with measures such as tighter regulation and coordination of the financial system, more money being made available for developing countries through the IMF/World Bank, and bringing the guilty financial corporations to book. After maintaining a budget surplus in recent years, the state is now prepared to run budget deficits, but within the restrictions imposed by investors (foreign and local), global rating agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions. But who is likely to benefit from this tiny rise in the budget deficit: rich corporations or the poor? Almost all this money has been allocated to enrich construction monopolies renovating the country’s infrastructure for the 2010 world football extravaganza.

Finally, while the scandalous corporate bailouts fit neatly within the framework of capitalism, the nationalisation of collapsed financial institutions carries some radical undertones. In rich countries, scandals persist that corporate executives have used the bailout packages to award themselves lavish ‘bonuses for failure’. At any rate, taxpayers are unlikely to ever know what happened to their money thrown into these bailouts, because this entire system of competition and speculation thrives on business secrets. The partially nationalised firms, of course, will eventually be returned to full private ownership (The Economist, 2009); it is a scheme ‘to nationalise the corporate losses but to privatise the gains’. Despite the fact that this is a badly twisted form of nationalisation, it is worth asking how this idea has resonated with the South African governing party. Remember that during the liberation struggle era, even the ANC fought for nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy. Make no mistake, today a thoroughly democratic programme of nationalisation remains critical to the restructuring of the political economy in the interests of the poor majority. Unsurprisingly, and consistent with the market fundamentalist faith of the ANC, a deadly silence has prevailed on even this half-baked type of ‘nationalisation’. Without a doubt this serves to reassure investors that the party will never pursue any ‘leftwing utopian’ project.

Critical analysis of ‘pro-poor interventions’

The living and working conditions of poor black South Africans have seen little improvement since the end of apartheid in 1994. Terreblanche (2009) has consistently shown that a more careful analysis
of official statistics actually reveals a woeful deterioration in the conditions of the poor over more than a decade. For example, the standard measure of inequality for the country, the Gini coefficient, increased from 0.64 in 1995 to 0.69 in 2005. There has thus been a widening gap between the rich and the poor in the country, driven in part by policies designed to fast-track the creation of a black economic elite. Over the same period, the simple poverty headcount, based on a monthly poverty line pegged at R462 per person, shows a marginal fall in poverty from 53 per cent in 1995 to 48 per cent a decade later (The Presidency 2008). Narrowly defined unemployment only started dropping below 30 per cent in the last five years, due to the economic boom as well as a series of ‘revisions on how to define and count an unemployed worker’.

However, sceptics from conflicting ideological standpoints question the positive trends in the dubious official statistics. Critics underscore the argument that there has been manipulation of statistics to conceal extreme and deep-rooted misery in contemporary South Africa. A thorough analysis of these disputes falls outside the scope of this briefing. But a careful study of the facts raises key questions about the socio-economic policy framework institutionalised after 1994. The GEAR macroeconomic policy and the post-apartheid Constitution entrench a socio-economic model based on private accumulation of wealth and profits. GEAR is a free market fundamentalist doctrine which prescribes wholesale privatisation as well as labour market flexibility. The Constitution promotes and protects private property. Why have these policy instruments been so blunt, and so ineffective in dismantling the socio-economic edifice of apartheid and radically reconstructing a social system that benefits the poor majority? To what extent has the dogged implementation of neoliberalism in South Africa worsened the suffering of the poor?

Given the importance attached to the anti-crisis Framework issued on 19 February (RSA 2009), its pro-poor economic logic deserves proper analysis, albeit briefly due to limited space. This Framework basically outlines three mechanisms by which to alleviate the plight of the poor: reliance on the workings of the labour market, scaling up of social welfare programmes, and better access to basic social services for poor families. There is now a closer look at how, in practice, each mechanism is likely to work against the poor.

The notion of making private sector labour markets work for the poor is apparently at the heart of government’s response to the economic crisis. But this is far from any innovative proposal because the wage labour system is the engine of the existing political economy; the well being of working families is tied to their ability to work (Smith 2003). Core policies (such as GEAR) that entrench the wage labour system, designed to intensify the exploitation of working people, are definitely not being abolished. Even mild and ad hoc reforms to counter the increasingly egregious exploitation of workers for the profit of monopolies that control most of the economy are not on the agenda. On the contrary, the anti-crisis Framework document merely urges ‘companies to do everything in their power to avoid retrenchments as a result of the global economic crisis, and to instead invest in their people and modernise their productive capacity’ (RSA 2009, p. 15). It includes tax breaks and other measures to rescue ‘companies in distress’ (like the job-shedding textile industry) that pose no threat to the wage-capital relation. But it is silent on basic and workable pro-poor options, for example, restructuring failing and idle firms and placing them under the democratic management and control of self-organised workers.

Urging corporations to invest in technology and a skilled workforce is contradictory and deeply flawed. Typically, a
capitalist enterprise invests in technology to raise the rate of profit and beat its rivals. But this drives cycles of overproduction, financial speculation, fictitious growth (economic bubbles) and crises. When corporations do decide to invest in a few skilled workers, this tends to increase unemployment rather than reduce working hours for the sake of a sustainable expansion of decent jobs.

The state plans to upscale access to its vast menu of social welfare interventions – state social grants, public works, food relief schemes, etc. It is estimated that at least 12 million South Africans (or 25 per cent of the population) receive social grants, with the number of beneficiaries steadily increasing over the last decade. The old age, disability and child support grants certainly reach some of the poorest households, often being the sole source of household income. Periodically the state has increased the monetary value of social grants, but because increments have been below the inflation rate, the purchasing power of the social grants tends to fall due to the skyrocketing cost of living. At a more fundamental level, the capitalist socio-economic model restricts or undermines the sustainability of an extensive pro-poor social welfare system (Smith 2003). With more aggressive fiscal belt-tightening suddenly easier to justify in the context of the economic crisis, the move to drastically cut the size of the social welfare budget is likely to gain momentum. Moreover, neo-classical labour economists forcefully argue that social welfare grants pegged at high levels discourage the unemployed from seeking work and cultivate dependency on the state (Nattrass 2007). The premise of this policy advice is that the invisible hand of the market is the best regulator of social justice for the poor – a fallacious and unrealistic assumption. Furthermore, it builds on spurious abstractions about individual rationality and maximising behaviour.

The government’s Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), tasked with contributing massively to halving unemployment by 2014, has been critiqued on similar grounds. Notwithstanding such criticisms, the revised EPWP now guarantees beneficiaries full-time jobs for a year, a change from the earlier model of the programme which catered for short and irregular jobs of six months’ duration. But this scaled-up EPWP is hazy on the wage levels involved, and this raises doubts as to whether it is a genuine path out of working poverty. Furthermore, it fails to reflect on big political economy issues that an anti-capitalist public works programme could explore, for example, stimulating thinking about how to use public works as a transition to permanent and decent jobs. Another issue that could be examined is whether it is possible to use public works as a platform to dynamically restructure and transcend the badly discredited market-based model, in order to provide affordable, efficient and quality services to the poor.

The state has repeated promises to expand poor peoples’ access to basic social services, ranging from water and electricity to housing and roads. However, in practice it has been unable to deliver on these promises and this failure has sparked militant protests in townships across the country. It is true that poor families enjoy rations of free water and electricity. But as soon as they exhaust this ‘free quota’, access depends on their ability to pay charges dictated by private companies that control the water and electricity networks. Poor people are increasingly directed to financial corporations to gain access to houses. Local governments, correctly viewed as closer to the people on the ground, are in practice bankrupt, indebted and often dysfunctional points of service delivery (National Treasury 2008, SARS 2008). This is unsurprising, because all tiers and divisions of government function in line with the neoliberal framework of the post-apartheid state. This has meant that corporate welfare guides the operations of local governments, whilst
the social welfare of the community must rely on the magic of ‘trickle-down logic’.

**Conclusion**

This article has briefly analysed the economic logic of the pro-poor responses of the South African government to the global economic crisis. As the local economy started sliding into recession, the state echoed the global political and corporate elite in talking up the economy and its neoliberal fundamentalist policies. It pinned the cause for the crisis on a mix of factors connected to the activities of financial capitalists. Although sections of finance capital triggered the recession, this is basically a classic economic slump rooted in capitalist over-accumulation, falling profit rates and the expansion of fictitious credit. Integrated into the global economy as a mining exporter and heavily reliant on foreign capital inflows, South Africa has been unable to escape being pulled into a downturn on this huge scale.

It has been illustrated how the state is aligning its anti-recession interventions to the stimulus packages of the global elite. Within this framework, it has adopted a minimalist set of anti-crisis proposals that steer clear of threatening or transcending the reign of capital. Yet the cost of the slump is set to be downloaded onto the poor, the majority of whom are mired in chronic structural poverty. To counter this accelerated depression in their living standards, poor people have stepped up their social protests, thus intensifying pressure on the state for workable measures to relieve their suffering. In this situation the state has been compelled to adopt pro-poor rhetoric to articulate its interventions to salvage capitalism. The post-apartheid governing elite is well known for adopting this populist tone, while at the same time resolutely sticking to and implementing capitalist policies that inherently work against the poor. It is a form of neoliberal populism that helps to politically disorientate and disarm the trade unions and emerging popular movements. It shields the elite in their accumulation of power and wealth as they switch between political office and the corporate world.

Debating concrete alternatives to capitalist economic crises, radical left thinkers invite us to think through, formulate and advance realistic anti-capitalist measures (Callinicos 2003, Smith 2003, Blackburn 2009). For the moment, one could probably refer to these as anti-capitalist transitional alternatives. They are transitional in that the solutions are practicable actions to overcome economic crisis, but also seek to revive accumulation which serves as a bridge to move towards socialism. As a case in point, Blackburn (2009) introduces anti-capitalist transitional alternatives to restructure the financial system. The basic idea behind these is a network of social funds to serve the needs of the poor, financed through taxes on corporations. But this network of social funds must be placed under popular democratic control, an approach in sharp contrast to the temporary banking nationalisation under corporate management currently taking place.

**Peter T. Jacobs** is a research specialist in the Center for Poverty Employment and Growth, which is part of the Human Sciences Research Council in South Africa. Email: pjacobs@hsrc.ac.za

**Endnotes**

1. Evidence to support this observation can be found in a government document entitled *Framework for South Africa’s response to the international economic crisis* issued on 19 February 2009 (RSA 2009). It specifically states that ‘the duration and depth of the downturn cannot be forecast with certainty, but growth is likely to be lower than previously expected at least in 2009, and 2010. This has potential implications for incomes, employment, and investment; and on social programmes partly
through the slowdown’s effect on tax revenues for government’ (RSA 2009, p. 3).

2. In a recent paper provocatively entitled ‘A tale of two depressions’, two mainstream economists suggest that the present economic meltdown exhibits profound depression-like patterns. They show that the situation could be uglier than the 1929–1933 depression if the scale of the analysis is global, rather than being restricted to the USA (Eichengreen and O’Rourke 2009).

3. Gowan (2009, p. 6) offers an incisive and stimulating analysis of the ways in which finance capitalists create, inflate and burst ‘speculative bubbles of varying sizes in different economic sectors’. All sectors of the capitalist class and policy makers entrusted to manage the economy actively participate in such dangerous, high-risk gambling.

4. The vast body of long statements made by the Minister of Finance, Minister of Trade and Industry and Governor of the South African Reserve Bank merely recycle information, and offer even fewer insights into who will pay for the rescue plans and clean up the mess. It is worth noting that the recovery timeframe is likely to last at least another three to five years after the establishment of ‘relative stability’.

5. Eminent Marxist activist and scholar Martin Legassick eloquently captures this shameless massaging of statistics on the part of state agencies and pro-government pundits (Legassick 2007, pp. 112–113). A case in point is the persisting scandal relating to the country’s official employment statistics. Whilst the quarterly growth rate of economic output (GDP) for the final quarter in 2008 (fourth-quarter GDP) registered a drop into negative territory, Statistics South Africa reported an unexpected increase in job creation for this period. It remains to be seen when and how the impact of the recession is likely to reflect in employment data (Financial Mail 2009).

References


Removing Neocolonialism’s APRM Mask: A Critique of the African Peer Review Mechanism

Patrick Bond

The national middle class discovers its historic mission: that of intermediary ... the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the mask of neocolonialism. (Fanon 1961, p. 163)

Introduction: talk left, walk right

Seen from Washington, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (Nepad) can be summed up in a frank description by the Bush administration’s leading State Department official for Africa, Walter Kansteiner: ‘philosophically spot-on’. However, as the host institution of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), Nepad has faced a crippling problem in assisting Kansteiner and his ilk: the elites responsible for its implementation – and for legitimising neoliberalism more generally – are not democrats, and do not even seem to be committed to building their nations’ economies. Can the APRM help fix this, or is it just a vanity of politicians and middle-class NGOers but in reality a transmission line between Africa and neocolonialism?

Whichever it may be, promoting APRM is very hard work. Charles Manga Fombad and Zein Kebonang point out that starting from around 1990, Africa’s second wave of democratisation (the first being decolonisation) witnessed an increase not only in elections (albeit ‘a majority of the post-1990 elections have been marred by electoral fraud’), but also coups, especially from 1995–2001:

Many of the old dictators are still firmly entrenched, whilst some of the new leaders who have joined the ‘club’ have in recent years been devising ever more sophisticated ways to perpetuate their rule while using the democracy slogan as a convenient mask to disguise their despotic practices. (Fombad and Kebonang 2006, p. 19)

Ian Taylor (2005) adds:

With very few exceptions (Botswana, Mauritius, Senegal, South Africa), the majority of the heads of state involved in Nepad are quintessentially leaders of neo-patrimonial regimes and certainly do not regard their rule as ‘temporary’ nor that institutional law should constrain their pre-eminence or that their rule be transparent and accountable.

One example might be Meles Zenawi, Prime Minister of Ethiopia. Zenawi conspired with George W. Bush to invade Somalia in 2007 with the connivance of Mbeki – this after the senseless war over a strip of sandy land on the Eritrean border between 1988 and 2000 had killed at least 70,000 combatants and civilians. According to the lobby group Ethiopian Americans for Justice, Zenawi’s government...
hosted the ‘African Guantanamo’, participating in the illegal kidnapping, imprisonment and torture of Africans. In return for its services for the ‘war on terror’, the Bush administration rewarded the Zenawi group both financially and diplomatically. Most importantly, the Bush administration looked the other way when Ethiopia’s rulers stole elections, tortured and killed many innocent people. . . . Mr Zenawi stole the 2005 elections, destroyed all opposition, muffled the press, banned advocacy for human rights and made a mockery out of the rule of law. Following the elections, his troops shot and killed 193 people who protested electoral fraud, massacred innocents in Gambella and the Ogaden. They had also bombed civilians in Somalia on many occasions. Mr Zenawi’s government has been one of the worst violators of human rights in Africa.²

However, Zenawi was unanimously chosen as Chairperson of Nepad in 2007 and also as Chairperson of the Committee of Heads of State and Government of Countries Participating in the APRM. At the same moment in early 2009 that his parliament was passing the Charities and Societies Proclamation Law – ‘designed to strictly control and monitor civil society in an atmosphere of intolerance of the work of human rights defenders and civil society organisations’, according to Amnesty International³ – Zenawi was writing in the APRM’s 2008 Annual Report of the mechanism’s ability to support ‘countries in improving their policy-making processes, adopt best practices from other countries, and comply with ratified standards and codes, while involving all stakeholders in the country’ (Zenawi 2009, p. v).

It increasingly appears that out-and-out criticism is replacing the strong enthusiasm that prevailed at its inception. In fact, the hopes originally raised by this ambitious programme are now beginning to dissolve. Criticism is emerging from all directions. Nepad’s biggest supporters, among them President Abdoulaye Wade, are starting to publicly voice their misgivings and censure. (Dème 2005, p. 1)

According to the Senegalese President in October 2004, ‘I am disappointed. I have great difficulties explaining what we have achieved when people at home and elsewhere ask me. . . . We’re spending a lot of money and, above all, losing time with repetition and conferences that end and you’re not quite sure what they’ve achieved’.⁴ In June 2007, at the World Economic Forum meeting in Cape Town, Wade acknowledged that Nepad ‘had done nothing to help the lives of the continent’s poor’.⁵ Later that year, Wade was even more frank: ‘The redirection of the project has become inevitable, because nobody has yet understood anything from Nepad and nobody implemented Nepad’.⁶ As Mbeki himself confessed a few weeks after his ousting from power, in December 2008, ‘I am afraid that we have not made the progress we had hoped for. Indeed, and regretfully, I believe that we have lost some of the momentum which attended the launch and detailed elaboration of the Nepad programmes’.⁷

But this is unsatisfactory, and leads merely to a head-shaking about African implementation incapacity. A further-reaching structural critique is required, based neither on limited African elite agency nor Nepad’s failure to help poor Africans, as if this was a genuine goal in any case. Such were merely symptoms of a deeper problem, which is Africa’s insertion into the world economy in a manner that, as Frantz Fanon warned, would ‘inherently generate a failed development project’. Masking the neocolonial relationship during the period of the 2000s – in
the wake of two decades of rampant structural adjustment that demolished living standards except for newly empowered political, financial and commercial elites – was a new rhetoric: ‘good governance’.

That phrase is often deployed within an all too easy ‘blame Africa first’ narrative in which the machinations of outside forces simply evaporate. But the alleged corruption that led to South Africa’s Police Commissioner (and Interpol President) Jackie Selebi’s leaving – and apparent protection from prosecution by Mbeki – was thanks to mafia infiltration. And the alleged corruption that had Mbeki firing Jacob Zuma as Deputy President in 2005 was traced to a French arms company, Thint, as part of the vast, bribery-ridden, foreign-sourced arms deal that Mbeki himself pushed into the South African budget over the objections of many inside and outside the government. Or, in the wake of Mbeki, his successor Kgalema Motlanthe’s refusal of a visa to the Dalai Lama was almost certainly a result of the pressure that the Chinese Government – a major contributor to the African National Congress – concedes they put on Pretoria.

How is it possible to disentangle such organic ‘good governance’ shortfalls fewer than 20 km away from Nepad headquarters from the exogenous forces? Can tearing off the APRM mask assist us in such a task?

**An African governance mask**

To understand the masking of neocolonial relations through the APRM requires us to remind ourselves of how much ideological damage has recently been done to neoliberalism, even before its 2008 financial meltdown in the North. Writing for the Institute for Democracy in South Africa, analyst Len Verwey concedes that amongst the sites surveyed by the Afrobarometer in 2002:

Mozambique is the only country where more people perceived government economic policies positively than negatively. Nigeria, Uganda, Zambia and Malawi demonstrate a particularly acute 70% perception of the negative impact of government economic policies on most people. (Verwey 2006, p. 13)

If that is the case, and if international financial institutions and the ‘donor’ governments must continue to reproduce a neocolonial system widely understood as damaging to the interests of the masses, then the first requirement is for elites to adopt good governance rhetoric.

Verwey (2006, p. 7) here provides the conventional wisdom:

Nepad differs from previous African development initiatives, and this difference has contributed to its positive reception in the West, due to its adoption of the following pre-conditions for sustainable development:

- a shift from statism to markets and public–private partnerships as the drivers of growth and development;
- competitive integration into the global economy, which would include export-orientated domestic production, diminishing tariff- and non-tariff barriers to imports, and the soliciting of foreign direct investment;
- the foregrounding of governance issues in securing positive developmental outcomes.

Greg Masterson (2005, p. 2), of the Electoral Institute of South Africa, adds:

APRM lies at the heart of the AU drive for a broad vision of African rejuvenation and renewal that seeks to generate more goodwill from foreign trade partners and donors by proving good political and economic governance and accountability. ... Arguably the most unique and original aspect
of the NEPAD initiative, the APRM is largely responsible for thrusting African development into the international development spotlight at a time of chronic global donor fatigue and a slump in the global economy. ... The APRM’s central philosophy of African states taking responsibility for their own development and compliance has been greeted enthusiastically by the donor community.

In the same spirit, Ross Herbert and Steven Gruzd claim that the APRM is ‘arguably the continent’s most innovative and challenging experiment to date’ (Herbert and Gruzd 2007), perhaps forgetting the rise of nationalism, successful anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggles, AIDS-drugs access, debt and climate campaigning and the like. Herbert and Gruzd are representatives of Africa’s explicitly pro-capital South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA). Gruzd posits that SAIIA and similar ‘think tanks’ staffed by exceptionally persuasive ‘experts’ are crucial to APRM: ‘their reputation for objectivity, integrity and expertise has, in most instances, managed to convince sceptical citizens that the APRM is not just another government project designed to celebrate mediocrity and whitewash inadequacies’ (Gruzd 2009, p. 2).

However, as Herbert and Gruzd (2007, p. 8) argue, APRM is ‘designed to be more palatable and consensus-oriented than conditionality imposed by debt-relief or aid-driven processes’, the neocolonial direction is essentially the same as that imposed by the IMF, the US State Department and Brussels. What was apparently required, by the early 2000s, was adoption of a rather more sly approach, one capable of teaching ‘democracy’ talk to tyrants and of adding a certain fraction of civilised society (‘think tanks’) to give legitimacy to the standard conditionality menu.

But the results of APRM are not encouraging even seen through these partisans’ eyes. In addition to two typical grievances present in most of the APRM case studies, namely lack of financial resources and an over-ambitious timeframe, Herbert and Gruzd (2007, p. 24) add some important caveats about the APRM technical process worth noting:

The rules and regulations governing the process are loose. Later documents contradict earlier ones, without revoking or revising them. The wide-ranging flexibility afforded to countries in developing their national APRM structures — particularly their national governing council or national commission and local APRM secretariat — has spawned a variety of different institutional models. This permissive approach has mollified some nations apprehensive about the process but it has also undermined the ability of the system to establish governance norms or bring about genuinely improved dialogue around governance reform. The Panel has been reluctant to publicly challenge governments even when their APRM plans are contrary to the written and verbal guidelines.

Nor would one expect the APRM Panel to break ranks with other elites and to side with civil society. Indeed, the South African representative to the APRM Panel was Chris Stals. His prior job was as Reserve Bank governor, when he initiated extreme monetarist policies that shifted resources to financial-sector instead of productive-sector economic activities, from poor to rich.

The case of South Africa

The most revealing APRM case study is surely South Africa’s, given the home-based context. Herbert and Gruzd served on the South African APRM civil society team, which led a long process that eventually persuaded the final panel on the need for 182 formal recommendations (of varying politico-ideological orientations). However, the July 2007
programme of action agreed upon with peers ignored most of these and diverted from internal APRM procedure. According to Herbert and Gruzd (2007, p. 17):

The Panel called for action on crime, regulation of political party finances (called for in the UN and African Union anti-corruption codes), action on racism and xenophobia, reconsideration of South Africa’s electoral system, efforts to strengthen parliament, and actions to fight corruption, among other high-profile recommendations. These are addressed [by Pretoria] with varying degrees of clarity, but are in many instances ignored or dealt with superficially. In this, South Africa has demonstrated very real limits to the ability or willingness of the system to press unwilling nations toward particular reforms.

As Paul Graham from Idasa observed, Pretoria’s APRM document ‘shows substantial alteration from the report discussed in Kliptown (in front of 1,700 delegates) and, as a result, a substantial amount of the texture of the debates has been lost’.

Another SAIIA report noted that SA’s APRM report ‘was crafted without significant civil society input and the media were largely ignored’ (Boyle 2008).

What does the power of South Africa over the entire APRM process teach Herbert and Gruzd?

Despite the strong recommendations, the system declined to take action or publicly comment when South Africa ignored a large portion of the recommendations in its action programme. The process highlighted the limits of the Panel’s ability to stand up to a powerful nation that might resist its advice (Herbert and Gruzd 2007).

One specific point deserves mention. A well-known feature of Mbeki’s management style, arrogant denialism, was evident, as Business Day wrote in an editorial in relation to an important APRM Panel finding:

Several months before the recent xenophobic attacks, Mbeki disputed the findings of a report warning of SA’s ‘brutality and detention’ of foreigners from other African countries. … He cannot have missed the APRM’s cautionary note. Its SA country report concluded that ‘xenophobia against other Africans is currently on the rise and must be nipped in the bud’. In his response to the report last year, Mbeki denied that xenophobic tendencies existed in SA, pointing out that the country did not even have refugee camps. To illustrate the friendly environment, Mbeki alluded to a state visit by Congolese President Joseph Kabila when illegal immigrants from that country openly requested the two presidents to regularise their status. In Mbeki’s view, the fact that illegal immigrants were able to address the two leaders showed how comfortable they felt in SA. Yet a few months later, 62 people were killed in anti-foreigner attacks that erupted in Alexandra on 11 May.

Put simply, the APRM was not treated seriously in Pretoria. Six months after taking office as Minister of Public Service and Administration, in March 2009, Masenyani Baloyi had not tackled even the much diluted tasks he inherited from his predecessor Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi: ‘At a conference to reveal what the government was doing about the problems cited, Baloyi was slammed for convening yet another “talk shop”. Johannesburg ANC Woman’s League organiser Bontle Setshogoe said: “On the ground, nothing concrete has been done”. Baloyi said that time was needed for “reflection”’.

Other cases

Herbert and Gruzd (2007, p. 17) praise the Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda reviews, but
do concede that the reports ‘also suffer from lack of specificity, measurability and the extreme brevity used to describe commitments, using terms such as “monitoring and enforcement” and “improved human resource management”’. Gruzd (2009) makes specific claims about APRM progress in other countries (regrettably, not documented), such as that ‘Rwanda is in the midst of fundamental reforms to its business environment. Kenya points out laws passed, for example on witness protection and public procurement, new funds to foster youth and women’s development, and a draft national land policy created through consultation. In South Africa, issues flagged in the APRM, such as unregulated private funding to political parties and floor crossing in parliament, have been slated for reform’.

To what extent can the APRM be credited for such changes? We cannot tell from the information provided and in any case there are multiple power vectors at work in any given context. For example, the political party floor-crossing fiasco in South Africa had to come to an end because of the ludicrous way deals were being done, undermining the system from the standpoint of the majority and minority parties; the minor APRM input on floor crossing can hardly be given credit for this. However, it appears that there are no reforms contemplated on private funding of political parties, notwithstanding the extent to which the Chinese financial grip on the ruling party caused acute embarrassment during the recent Dalai Lama visa affair.

The Rwanda ‘reforms’ appear neoliberal in orientation, not at all inconsistent with standard Washington Consensus conditionalities. Moreover, the 2005 Rwanda APRM report was excessively ‘rosy’, and, according to Eduard Jordaan, the final document:

 inadequately addresses a number of serious political problems in Rwanda, such as Rwanda’s involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the inadequate separation of powers in the Rwandan political system, tensions in Rwandan society, and the flawed presidential and parliamentary elections of 2003. (Jordaan 2006, p. 420)

Moving to Kenya, prior to the December 2007 ethnicised electoral catastrophe, the APRM process went smoothly, according to Herbert and Gruzd (2009). But consider what the APRM failed to do. The report, according to Bronwen Manby (from the London-based AfriMAP project):

does not identify the issues relating to the independence of the Electoral Commission of Kenya that were so critical on election day and in the following period. … But the biggest concern is the issue of political will. Was the Kenyan government ready to try to fix what was broken? Were the APRM eminent persons and secretariat willing to hold them to account? And were other African heads of state who had signed up for the APRM process – to whom the APRM eminent persons and secretariat report – ready to urge remedies for poor performance, or would their own glass houses discourage the throwing of stones? (Manby 2008, p. 1)

Conclusions

The arguments made above should suggest a rethink by any community-based organisation, social movement, non-governmental organisation and other progressive body if they are currently legitimating Nepad policies, Bretton Woods Institution mandates, donor conditionalities and local elites via the APRM. The merits of participating are few, and the damage done to progressive politics appears very high in some cases, not merely in terms of institutional frustration.

The main point is to not forget the context, which is neocolonialism’s need for a
mask. As Dème of Partnership Africa Canada explains:

The launch of the APRM is not neutral in that it coincides with the first difficulties of Nepad’s initiators to persuade the foreign private sector to invest massively in Africa. Africa’s poor image in the international community, the result of its reputation for bad governance, is in some minds one of the main obstacles to attracting foreign private investment. (Dème 2005, p. 50)

As a result, Dème and others in similar donor agencies and donor-funded liberal ‘think tanks’ have a huge difficulty in their task of re legitimising the APRM:

The APRM represents a major challenge for African civil society. It needs to seize this opportunity to parlay its extensive experience into improved governance in African countries. (Dème 2005, p. 50)

In contrast, Charles Manga Fombad and Zein Kebonang (2006) argue:

Either carefully selected pro-government NGOs and CBOs are involved, or those brought in are given so little information that they are unable to play a constructive role in the process. In the final analysis, the NEPAD APRM will remain a closed state-to-state process with no room for non-state, independent critical voices who could contribute constructively to making the process more productive, effective and credible. (p. 53)

Herbert and Gruzd (2007, p. 25) conclude that ‘the system as a whole is beneficial and opens space for meaningful national dialogue’. Yet this is apparently only true for those institutions – such as SAIIA – which have impressive clout in their own terms, e.g. elite connections and a high media profile. As for ordinary citizens, they concede, the meaningfulness of the dialogue is open to question:

Civil society members have participated in public meetings during country support missions, but these encounters have only discussed the APRM process in the most general terms, have not provided detailed information on process and governance requirements or lessons on how other countries have managed public consultations, used surveys or managed research institutions. Notably, the memorandums of understanding between the continental authorities and participating governments have not been made public. (Herbert and Gruzd 2007, p. 27)

Finally, Manby offers quite a sobering reflection on the APRM’s distracting capacity, based not only on Kenya but the other cases as well:

Although each country that has undergone the APRM process is supposed to report back to the APR Forum on its progress, there is no serious monitoring exercise of how effectively this is done. Nor any sanctions for failure to act. Nor, apparently, is there any real system to ensure that the commitments the government makes address the most important problems highlighted in the APRM review. Certainly, no individual or institution at the African level, least of all the APR Forum, raised the implementation of the APRM commitments as critical issues during the recent Kenyan crisis – or, perhaps more importantly, during the lead-up to the election, when such a focus could perhaps have averted the near-catastrophe into which Kenya was drawn. (Manby 2008, p. 1)

Meanwhile, at the national level, the implementation of the APRM programme of action is also left entirely to the executive, with no formalised role for parliamentarians or civil society to hold the government’s feet to the fire should it fail to perform. As in other countries, the APRM process has not been well
integrated into other national development planning processes – a problem recognised by the APRM secretariat in South Africa – and it does not appear to have informed other important reform programmes under way at the same time.

Moreover, the systems in place to monitor the implementation of other national policies (however imperfect) are also not mobilised to engage with the implementation of the APRM programme of action. President Kibaki did not report back to parliament on the APR Forum meeting and on the actions he had committed to take, nor was the report tabled for debate. Although there was some coverage in the media of the APR Forum discussion of Kenya, it did not generate a real national debate on the report and programme of action and their implications. The conclusions and recommendations were not widely disseminated throughout the country by the NEPAD-Kenya secretariat or other means. Although a meeting hosted by the NEPAD-Kenya secretariat in mid-February 2008 encouragingly aimed to involve civil society in the process of preparing the country’s progress report to the next APR Forum, the report of the meeting is surreal in its lack of any suggestion that this review might be relevant to, or affected by, the national political crisis.

Even the continental APRM secretariat failed to engage in any serious way with national institutions, such as the Electoral Commission of Kenya or the Kenya National Human Rights Commission, in order to brief them on the conclusions relevant to them and the follow-up role they might play.

Without this sort of integration into other national planning systems, debates and oversight mechanisms, the APRM process seems doomed to become little more than a cosmetic exercise without effect in the real world of policy and decision making. (Manby 2008)

To close, recall how Nepad has indisputably failed: the global elites who demanded it as a mask for the continuation of 2000s neoliberalism in a home-grown variant did not, ultimately, want to give Nepad’s African elites the resources required to do the job they promised. Not even the likes of Bono, Geldof, Make Poverty History and white-banded Global Call for Action Against Poverty civil societians could compel global capital to be slightly less brutal to Africa, notwithstanding heady promises at Gleneagles. Since 2005, there has been demonstrably less North–South money for aid, and much more military spending. This is not disputed, and hence it would appear that Nepad’s functionality to neocolonialism – once considered important – is rather irrelevant.

Does the same pessimism apply to the APRM’s functionality to Nepad, as neocolonialism’s governance mask? Yes, it should by now be crystal clear – especially from the South African APRM case but also more generally – that elite APRM processes chock-full of civil society ‘experts’ from ‘think tanks’ have generated not a fruitful consultation process that helps change society but, on the contrary, disrespect from state actors amidst business-as-usual. Led by the likes of Zenawi, the APRM is not even a very effective cosmetic exercise for the sake of neocolonial legitimation.

Alternative strategies entail that Africa’s social justice, environment, women’s, labour, youth and so many other movements increase and interrelate the work they already do now, and pressure their national states to adopt post-neoliberal public policies (Bond 2009). If such activists are distracted into neoliberally grounded work with the APRM or Nepad or the next generation of IMF PRSPs or the UN MDG bureaucracy (Bond 2006) or similar elite gimmicks, this probably represents a tragic waste of time, and will delay genuine breakthroughs against injustice.
**Endnotes**


**References**


Durable Solution, Help or Hindrance? The Failings and Unintended Implications of Relief and Recovery Efforts for Kenya’s Post-election IDPs

Gabrielle Lynch

Kenya’s contested general election of 27 December 2007 prompted a mass movement of people through threats, fear, and, more commonly, physical attacks and destruction of property. According to early statistics 350,000 people were displaced. However, in July 2009, the government readjusted this figure to 663,921 internally displaced persons (IDPs), or 140,459 families; 350,000 of these IDPs sought refuge in camps, while the remainder were integrated into local communities (Office of the President 2009, p. 1). The new figure is more realistic, but exact numbers will never be known, as many IDPs who did not own land and/or did not seek shelter at camps will forever be omitted. Nevertheless, in practical terms, a number of 660,000-plus clearly presented a grave and unprecedented humanitarian challenge. This article will briefly outline the parallel processes of return and relocation, and some new sites of grievance, to reveal how – while much has been achieved – processes of emergency response and recovery have been far from perfect, and a number of developments have rendered future episodes of violence and displacement more (rather than less) likely.

The geography of displacement and response

The vast majority of IDPs (see Table 1) hailed from Rift Valley Province, the epicentre of post-election violence. The Rift Valley was home to 169 of 296 Red Cross camps (KHRC 2008, p. 17), while the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and USAIDS, to name but a few, opened regional offices in Eldoret and/or Nakuru. In July 2009, the province was home to the only remaining IDP camp (at Eldoret show-ground), 43 ‘transitional camps’, and 18 of 20 ‘relocation sites’ nationwide. The province also accounted for 72 per cent of all initial start-up payments made by the government, 98 per cent of support given for reconstruction of houses, and 96 per cent of houses constructed by non-government actors and a similar percentage of houses pledged (Office of the President 2009). The Rift has thus demanded, and absorbed, the majority of response and recovery efforts.

However, displacement did not only occur in the Rift Valley. Consequently, a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Households</th>
<th>No. of individuals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nyanza</td>
<td>24,981</td>
<td>118,547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>12,385</td>
<td>58,677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rift Valley</td>
<td>84,947</td>
<td>408,631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>10,092</td>
<td>46,959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>1,438</td>
<td>6,769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coast</td>
<td>1,241</td>
<td>4,774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Eastern</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nairobi</td>
<td>5,349</td>
<td>19,416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>140,459</td>
<td>663,921</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Office of the President (2009, p. 2).

DOI: 10.1080/03056240903346194
geographic concentration of attention and limited resources in the area has largely ignored the significant number of IDPs outside the province. Government and non-government agencies have also tended to focus on IDPs in camps. Visible and much in need, the corollary is that little attention has been given to those who sought shelter with friends and families, who ‘missed out on humanitarian assistance and have had limited support for return and for re-starting their lives’ (OCHA 2008, p. 3). Buffered in the short term, many are finding life increasingly difficult as the capacity of hosts becomes stretched and as some face criticism and even hostility from kinsmen for having ‘abandoned’ their community and for having ‘suffered less’.

The story of displacement and response is also one that has become closely equated with Kikuyu residents of the Rift Valley who comprised the majority of local camp dwellers. One consequence, and a potential point of conflict, is a strong perception (particularly among Kalenjin in the Rift Valley) that all communities were affected by the violence, but while ‘their’ culture – and the culture of the Luo – did not let them go to camps and encouraged absorption by friends and relatives, the Kikuyu went and ‘cried’ in the open. Unfortunately, this narrative has further enhanced a sense that the state and civil society is biased towards the needs and interests of a particular community, and thus unintentionally added new layers to a popular discursive repertoire of grievance that lay at the heart of post-election attacks on Kikuyu communities (Lynch 2008).

Operation Rudi Nyumbani and the realities of repatriation

At the onset of post-election violence, victims flocked to trading centres, churches, police stations and chiefs’ camps. However, it soon became clear that these impromptu settlements were inadequate in size and difficult to secure, and a number of open spaces were identified and transportation arranged. These official camps were managed by the Kenya Red Cross (KRC), with support from the Kenyan Government and an array of local churches, NGOs and international organisations. Secure from their erstwhile attackers, IDPs were provided with emergency food and non-food items, temporary shelters, and (with time) some psychosocial support, sanitation, health and educational facilities.

The short-term response was thus fairly successful at meeting basic needs under difficult circumstances. However, conditions were poor and allegations of rape and sexual exploitation drew heavy criticism; particularly grievous were reports that some women had to pay IDP workers ‘in kind’ ‘to access basic commodities such as food, tents, medicines and beddings’ (Kenya 2008, p. 60).

In terms of camp closure and recovery, the available options (or ‘durable solutions’) included return, relocation or local integration. Official preference was for return, and on 4 May 2008 the government launched Operation Rudi Nyumbani or ‘Operation Return Home’ (ORN), which was linked to Operation Tujenge Pamoja or ‘Operation Build Together’ (to reconstruct houses and support livelihood recovery) and Operation Ujirani Mwema or ‘Operation Good Neighbourhoods’ (to foster peace and reconciliation). The aim was to return all IDPs to their homes and farms. By September 2008, all but five camps were closed (home to 12,658 IDPs), while a year later only one camp remained (home to 2,200 IDPs or 422 families) (interview, Permanent Secretary for Resettlement, 3 August 2009). The operation therefore succeeded in moving people, but nevertheless attracted heavy criticism, most notably from the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC), which has spoken of ‘repatriation, but not resettlement’ and of ‘a circus of failed promises, unmitigated force and lies’ (KHRC 2008, pp. 19, 40).
Initially, the operation was fundamentally undermined by the implicit assumption that IDPs had a home (if not a shelter) to return to and by its focus on camps. This focus ignored former tenants and squatters, as well as those who had become ‘integrated’ within local communities, i.e. those who had sought refuge with friends and families or rented houses. Due to the geographic concentration of camps and ethnicity of inhabitants, ORN also concentrated largely on the Rift Valley area and Kikuyu community.

Next, undue pressure and intimidation was clearly applied to ‘encourage’ IDPs to return to their home areas, in contravention of internationally accepted guiding principles. Many returnees were extremely apprehensive, especially since many had been displaced on no less than three or four occasions since 1992. A common refrain was that the operation was premature and rushed, and that psychosocial work should have been completed first, with social protection and peace building initiated and dialogue established. In the immediate term, some IDPs were forced to briefly return to camps following threats of further violence (KHRC 2008, pp. 26–28), while in the longer term return is proving much easier than reconciliation. Security has been established, but many IDPs have not interacted with their neighbours and clearly harbour deep anger and resentment towards their ‘enemies’. Just as some are able to forgive, others remember previous cycles of displacement, return and ‘reconciliation’ and are duly suspicious. In turn, many Kalenjin neighbours still view their neighbours as ‘outsiders’ who should act like ‘guests’ and are increasingly concerned by reports and rumours that the Kikuyu will stand and fight ‘next time’ and/or are preparing to launch ‘revenge attacks’. The truths behind and details of these perceptions – and related rumours of a proliferation of small arms and organisation on both sides – are beyond the scope of this briefing, however, given a history of election-related displacement and a stalled reform agenda, they clearly do not bode well for the country’s future. There is therefore a pressing need not only for reconciliation efforts that bring communities together to talk, play sport and engage in business (as is currently under way in many areas), but also for a concerted effort to address underlying issues, most notably the mode of political mobilisation, land and need for institutional reforms.

ORN did not herald return in the full sense. A lack of shelter, delays in compensation payments, and fears of future attacks meant that many IDPs did not return to their own plots. Instead, some families shared properties that were still intact, while others opted to rent houses and visit plots during the day. More visibly, ORN led to a relocation of at least 54,000 IDPs to 161 transitional or satellite camps in the Rift Valley (OCHA 2008, p. 1). Usually situated next to a chief’s compound equipped with administrative police, or a new administrative police post constructed in preparation for their return, transitional camps offered official protection and security in numbers. Residents could till their land during the day and harvest crops, and until May 2009, the KRC supplied relief food. The Kenyan Government and other actors have also initiated livelihood, shelter, and peace and reconciliation programmes in these areas, through which some IDPs have received food and basic non-food items, new tarpaulins, psychosocial support and agricultural inputs and non-agricultural assets to kick-start local livelihoods. Ethnically mixed groups are also being encouraged to form and submit business proposals, and by the beginning of August 2009, 18,000 ‘shelter units’ had been built, 7,700 by the government and the remainder by local and international agencies (Interview, Permanent Secretary for Resettlement, 3 August 2009). Moreover, as time has passed, transitional camps have slowly closed as residents take
tents to their plots or move into new shelters, and by July 2009 there were 43 recognised sites home to 7,249 IDPs (Office of the President, 2009, p. 3).

Transitional camps have also had their downsides. Populations have ranged from 50 to over 80,000 people (OCHA 2008, p. 1), and assistance has been limited and logistically difficult. A needs assessment of transit sites in Uasin Gishu recorded that many water points were contaminated, destroyed or needed repairs; latrines were full; tents were worn out and leaking; and many children had been taken out of school so that they could help the family to source food (OCHA 2009e). These day-to-day conditions have not been helped by failed rains, power shortages, increased prices and extremely high levels of un- and under-employment. However, the most pressing need of the people and the principal reason why many are still in transitional camps, is a lack of shelter. There is therefore much that still needs to be done to assist returnees with basic needs and recovery of livelihoods.

In theory, ORN was linked to a compensation scheme through which each household was to receive KSHS10,000 ‘start-up fund’ to replace basic household items, and KSHS25,000 as ‘support for reconstruction’ for those whose homes had been destroyed. However, funding has been a problem and grants have been released very slowly. By July 2009, 24,709 of 158,328 listed beneficiaries were yet to receive the start-up grant, while 55,725 of 78,254 had not received reconstruction support (Office of the President 2009, pp. 3–4). In addition, many IDPs deny receipt of either grant, and allegations abound of corrupt administrative officials who request payments for registration, make partial or double payments, compensate outsiders, and collude with IDP leaders. These delays and illegalities are a source of great resentment, if not surprise. People feel that the government has reneged on its promises, that they are unlikely ever to receive payments, and that authorities simply wanted them out of camps and out of sight and have now abandoned them to the uncertain ebbs and flows of charitable donations.

Indeed, the whole experience of return often proved disorganised and traumatic. Transport to transitional camps was often delayed, with IDPs returned to sites that lacked the necessary facilities, to be confronted with the scale of loss and destruction and severity of their situation. The plan was for IDPs to leave the camps with one month’s food rations and KSHS10,000, but more often than not this did not occur. Return was thus often accompanied by fear, a realisation of loss, sense of abandonment and despair. As one psychosocial counsellor summarised, the operation was ‘quite inhuman’ and was often more psychologically difficult than the terror of initial displacement.

Unfortunately, the visibility of these camps and assistance given, especially the new police posts and shelters with their tell-tale shiny roofs, has unintentionally helped foster a sense that it is one community that is receiving all the assistance. The significance of such complaints is recognised by government, civil society and international agencies, which are all making increasing efforts to reach out to ‘host communities’ and give ‘balanced assistance’. Thus in some areas, the KRC has built houses 50:50 for Kikuyu and Kalenjin, while in others they have purposefully trained and hired members of different communities as labourers. Similarly, many of the livelihoods programmes have a policy of supporting both communities, while there is a common requirement for all group proposals, sports teams and dialogue processes to be ethnically mixed. Unfortunately however, perceptions often lag behind realities, and the fact that many IDPs face significant hardships is often divorced from Kalenjin communal narratives of loss, marginalisation and demonisation, which have burgeoned since the
2005 constitutional referendum to produce a clear ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality (Lynch 2006, 2008).

**A positive development? The innovation of self-help groups in the Central Rift**

Return is not the only option. Many Kikuyu IDPs in the Rift have bought land and/or sought employment in other areas, most notably in Nakuru, Naivasha, Central Province and Nairobi. Initially, this option was more readily available to the better educated and wealthier members of society, but increasingly became the choice of IDPs who fled to camps in the Central Rift. Lacking a home to return to, or with no desire to return to volatile areas and hostile neighbours, these IDPs have formed self-help groups and purchased land as a collective. By May 2009, there were 20 ‘relocation sites’ in Naivasha, Nakuru, Molo, Nyandarua and Ol Kalau Districts. Home to 7,545 families (OCHA 2009b, p. 2), populations range from 3,469 households (or 14,660 individuals) at Mawingu, Nyandarua District, to a mere handful (OCHA 2009c, p. 4).

In the eyes of the Ministry for Special Programmes this is a positive development or ‘durable solution’ through which IDPs (many of whom did not previously own land) can utilise their right not to return, and start a new life where they feel secure. Assistance has been offered, and in May 2009 the Minister for Finance, Uhuru Kenyatta, made a KSHS200 million supplement to the national budget for this purpose. In addition, China has donated iron sheets for shelters in Pipeline and Minto sites, Nakuru District, and a number of organisations, including the UNHCR, have distributed tents, tarpaulins and other non-food items (such as mosquito nets, water bottles, soap and sanitary pads) to some of the sites.

Yet these self-help groups are also the subject of growing concern. Sites tend to be of an extremely small acreage, especially given the number of residents: 403 families (1,660 individuals) have bought 3 acres in Gilgil (OCHA 2009a, p. 4), while 1,200 families (4,000 individuals) are camped on 16 acres at Pipeline, Nakuru District (OCHA, 2009d, p. 3). Plots also tend to be dry, barren and/or infertile. At Zea Farm in Kwanza, 42 families have bought half an acre that is ‘completely waterlogged, insufficient for them to build shelters or latrines, and over 6 kilometres from a potable water source or public services’ (OCHA 2008, p. 2). Residents also lack adequate shelter and are extremely impoverished. In April 2009, 89.7 per cent of residents lived in tents, there was an average of one toilet for 83 people, relief accounted for 53 per cent of food consumed, 43 per cent of expenditure was used to buy food, 39 per cent had not received KSHS10,000, and 81 per cent of expected beneficiaries had not been given housing support (OCHA 2009c, pp. 5–10).

The obvious question is how these communities will manage to survive and residents earn a living? Already, one group, ALKO in Nakuru District, has been threatened with eviction for defaulting on the purchase price after members failed to contribute KSHS10,000 each. Leadership wrangles and claims of collusion are also rife. To date, 80 families have left Mawingu, citing harassment ‘by the chairman for questioning how the group’s accounts were being managed’ (OCHA 2009b, p. 5), while it is alleged that leaders at Pipeline colluded with local administrators to buy land at an inflated price. One concern is that many may turn to crime and/or be recruited into Mungiki. A much-feared Kikuyu militia, Mungiki was mobilised to cause havoc in Nakuru and Naivasha towns towards the end of January 2008 (Kenya 2008, pp. 97–112) and is increasingly seen as a way to earn money and defend community interests. Security is certainly a problem, and the forced circumcision of six girls at Mawingu (OCHA 2009c, p. 9)
is evidence of a particularly violent form of Kikuyu patriotism.

Finally, given the fact that local and international approaches to peace and reconciliation efforts usually follow a pattern of intra-community followed by inter-community dialogue meetings, there is also a danger that residents of relocation sites will never talk with those who enforced their displacement, because they are no longer neighbours. The potential for these extremely poor, compact and disgruntled communities to subsequently develop a discourse of neglected victims and of revenge seems to be fairly high. Moreover, even if this is not the case, the fact that these camps are often seen as dens of vice and Mungiki activity has encouraged a discourse of concern among the Kalenjin community, who increasingly view them as a potential launch pad for revenge attacks, and even future genocide.

Conclusions

Given the scale of displacement, praise is clearly due to an array of administrators, politicians, agency staff, church leaders and ordinary citizens who have volunteered their time and resources to relieve conditions on the ground. Nevertheless, assessment should not just take account of effort and counterfactuals, but also oversights, inefficiencies, unintended consequences, broader pictures and the extent to which actions are supported, contradicted and/or undermined by developments in other areas.

One concern is that both IDPs who have ‘returned’ to farms or satellite camps, and those that became ‘integrated’ or ‘relocated’ are still in desperate need of assistance. In addition, a common concentration on displacement as a post-election issue has conspicuously ignored the plight of the 380,000 IDPs who existed prior to the 2007 election (FIDH 2007, p. 5), and thousands displaced since.

Displacement is an ongoing issue which requires a coherent policy (as demanded by the IDPs Protocols of the International Conference Great Lakes Region, to which Kenya is a signatory) and strong political commitment, both of which the country currently lacks.

The second major concern is that local perceptions of emergency and recovery responses to post-election displacement have actually rendered new examples of violence and eviction more, rather than less, likely. In 2007, violence was triggered by a contested election. However, underlying causes included a highly centralised power structure, a culture of impunity and normalisation of violence, high levels of poverty and underemployment, and perceptions of state bias and community marginalisation (Lynch 2008, Mueller 2008, Branch and Cheeseman 2009). Of particular importance in the Rift Valley were Kalenjin narratives of marginalisation and historical injustice that burgeoned during and after the 2005 constitutional referendum to produce an increasingly heightened sense of inter-communal difference that fed into targeted attacks on ethnic ‘others’. Unfortunately, this narrative has coloured people’s readings of current events and subsequently been reinforced by stories of how, while Kalenjin IDPs are neglected, their counterparts have been built houses, support Mungiki and so forth. The result is that a new layer or point of communal grievance has emerged that further strengthens a sense of injustice, marginalisation, neglect, inter-communal competition and conflict. Therefore, it is critical that while relief and recovery efforts do not simply become hostage to the grievances and politicking of disgruntled communities, they are conflict-sensitive and are seen to be balanced and unbiased, otherwise they simply add new layers to debates about the ‘other’.

Finally, the possibility that this new discursive layer of ‘IDP treatment’ will become part of future narratives of
conflict is heightened by the near-total absence of any concerted effort to address the other underlying causes of post-election violence. Taken together with local declarations that communities will stand and fight ‘next time’ and stories that all communities may be better organised and armed, this combination of inaction and new layers of grievance has produced an extremely volatile situation in which future violence seems both probable, and likely to be worse. Therefore, the current and pressing need is for politicians, civil society and citizenry to tackle the underlying causes of the post-election violence head-on, before a cycle of conflict, resentment and revenge gains further momentum.

Gabrielle Lynch is a lecturer in Africa and the Politics of Development in the School of Politics and International Studies at the University of Leeds. Email: g.lynch@leeds.ac.uk

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Questioning Pro-poor Responses to the Global Economic Slump

Peter Jacobs

Introduction

The global economic crisis is bound to reverse gains made in the war on poverty and frustrate the efficacy of ongoing pro-poor programmes. This assessment flows from the bleak picture of global trends in unemployment, poverty and inequality presented in the latest International Labour Organisation (ILO) report and forecasts (ILO 2009). What is even more alarming is that this dismal trend was initially concentrated in the ‘heartland of global capitalism’ (Gowan 2009) but is rapidly spreading to poorer economies on the periphery. In South Africa the impact of a prolonged economic slump is likely to be severe, given its jobless rate of about 25 per cent and the fact that close to 50 per cent of its population is trapped below the R462 per month poverty line (The Presidency 2008). It is commonly accepted that a recession works against the poor through two main routes. First, it is inevitable that the slump in economic activity will trigger a surge in job losses, with almost all the suffering inflicted on workers in low-paid and precarious employment. Second, the resource curtailment that results from an economic meltdown of this magnitude is likely to further cut already strained fiscal resources available for pro-poor social programmes. South African policy makers and their counterparts in business and trade unions appear to be acutely aware of how the recession is set to hurt the poor.¹

The exigency of the situation has become inescapable and is prominent on the agendas of policy makers and grassroots activists. For example, a G20 communique issued on 14 March 2009 in the lead-up to its London Summit resolves to ‘take all necessary actions to ensure the soundness of systemically important institutions’. Global responses to the economic crisis vary from emergency actions to avert immediate systemic damages, to talks about radical systemic change. Examples of the immediate actions include stimulus packages (fiscal deficits to finance corporate criminals?) as well as rolling out plans to give the ‘global financial architecture’ a makeover. Proposals to structurally overhaul the economic system range from the nationalisation of financial institutions to consideration of how to rid the world of neoliberalism. Despite the profound questioning of the capitalist socio-economic model (Wolf 2009, Eichengreen and O’Rourke 2009, Friedman 2009), all the popular mainstream anti-crisis proposals are restricted to trying to salvage capitalism rather than transcend it. This coincides with spot-on, scathing critiques of award-winning economists (Soros 2008, Friedman 2009, Wolf 2009), for their textbooks and abstract models of made-up stories about isolated virtues of the system fail to credibly explain what is going on, and remain at a loss as to how to permanently cure capitalism of this type of destructive instability. Moreover, genuine and sustainable solutions to counter the effects of the slump on millions of its impoverished victims are not forthcoming.

Against the backdrop of these global events, how has the South African ruling elite responded to the economic crisis? Initially, key policy makers downplayed the possibility of the domestic economy sliding into recession. This position now stands exposed as ludicrous. For without radical interventions, a peripheral
economy dependent on mining exports cannot simply decouple from the wild fluctuations of global capitalism. Nevertheless, as the local economic downturn started deepening, the state reacted by adopting a minimal set of anti-crisis responses favoured by the global elite. It is, for example, willing to expand its corporate welfare system (through fiscal deficits and other counter-cyclical measures). But it refuses to openly debate policies (even ‘partial nationalisation’) that point in the direction of a radical break with a system that imprisons the poor in abject misery so long after the end of apartheid. Yet at the same time, it is virtually impossible to encounter official responses to the global economic slump not expressed in pro-poor rhetoric. Two interesting questions arise: how pro-poor is the deeply-seated economic logic of these responses to the economic slump? And what benefits exist for poor working people from restored growth within a systemically unequal and anarchic political economy? This brief analytical narrative explores these core questions.

The goal is not to repeat the well-documented and exhaustive analyses of how the economic crisis started and evolved. Instead, this briefing exposes the different ways in which the costs of the downturn and recovery will be downloaded onto the poor. It argues for and invites critical thinking about pro-poor socio-economic alternatives that go beyond mainstream measures that are structured against the poor. Towards this end the second section gives a snapshot of how government’s thinking about the crisis has gradually shifted over time. The third section shows how the global stimulus framework sets the parameters for the local interventions. A critique of the touted pro-poor measures to drag the economy out of recession is presented in the fourth section. The conclusion stimulates some thinking about ‘anti-capitalist transitional alternatives’ for the poor.

A system-wide economic downturn

How has the South African government’s perception of the global economic crisis evolved in recent months? A document spelling out the official viewpoint, entitled Framework for South Africa’s response to the international economic crisis, appeared on 19 February 2009 (RSA 2009). During the preceding year, key state officials had joined the global political and corporate elite in forums convened to figure out the nature of the economic collapse and appropriate strategies to salvage the system. South African policy makers generally downplayed the possibility of any local recession, investing their energies in talking up the economy. Then, on 3 April 2009, the South African Cabinet issued a media brief in support of the resolutions of the G20 summit in London. The G20 summit had concluded the previous day with a firm commitment and time-bound action plans to tackle and solve the global economic crisis (or more precisely the ‘financial crisis’, as they prefer to characterise it). Following the lead of commentators around the world, the state lamented the fact that the global system had been plunged into its worst economic crisis in almost 80 years. However, it stopped short of saying that the world was approaching, or exhibiting compelling signs of, another Great Depression, presumably to avoid spreading or fanning the flames of the panic and despair which become so contagious in typical crisis situations.

Globally, influential commentators locate the origin of the global slump in rival causes, or a mix of interactive causes: the complacent mindset of economic policy makers like Alan Greenspan, because they failed to create proper financial markets (Financial Times 2009, p. 10), the consumerism of low-income individuals (workers) living beyond their means, etc. Despite the nuanced differences in these rival explanations for the
global downturn, a few common themes cut across the mainstream arguments. First, there is a compulsion to pin down a particular cause in the hope of finding ready-made solutions and thus averting broader systemic damage. The inherent danger in this reasoning and strategy is that it risks ignoring plausible alternative, or more fundamental, causal factors. For in an economic system based on the ruthless hunt to sustain and raise the rate of profits, a general chaotic tendency to over-accumulate and overproduce is constantly present. Second, human agency is blamed (albeit an asocial agent outside a systemic framework) (Friedman 2009), rather than traditional sources of economic crises usually described in terms of some form of arcane calamity. In this instance, the blame was pinned on finance capitalists (or sections of this group) simply because it became impossible to conceal their avarice and flagrant crimes.

Local neoliberal experts only offer superficial and contradictory clues as to why the economic crisis managed to spread so fast. Commentators are generally silent on why the crisis moved so swiftly from a housing bubble fuelled by vulgar financial speculation to all other sectors of the American economy. More importantly, government spokespersons fail to logically explain why and how this recession crossed the borders of the major imperialist countries to drag even South Africa into the slump. Yet in the not-too-distant past we were reassured of the robustness of the country’s financial institutions and regulations. When the Minister of Finance delivered his Medium Term Budget Policy Statement in October 2008, this is how he reflected on the economic crisis:

The thunder will pass. We can say to our people: our finances are in order, our banks are sound, our investment plans are in place, our course is firmly directed at our long-term growth and development challenges, and we will ride out this storm, whatever it takes, together, on the strength of a vision and a plan of action that we share. (Manuel 2008, p. 4)

This contentious assertion does not spell out the criteria used to test the soundness of the financial system. Indeed, neo-classical economics has proven to be incapable of generating reliable information on the operations of finance capital. Moreover, as a result of the blurring of the class interests involved, it is not possible to judge whether the country’s financial system is sound in terms of the interests of the poor or of rich financiers. Even if we presume that the financial system is robust, we are left to wonder why the economy has slipped into a recession.

Locked inside the global rescue framework

Towards the end of 2008, approximately a year after the start of the worsening slump of the American economy and the implosion of other imperialist economies, the South African economy started to nose-dive at a breathtaking speed. The hyped-up (fictitious) boom of recent years, based on the extravagant consumerism of the old and nouveau rich (the black elite) and the mining export bonanza, simply became unsustainable. At the same time the ‘sudden downturn’ exposed the hollowness of the boom, its heavy dependence on foreign capital, and the enduring lopsided structure of capitalism in South Africa.

Popular concern now turned to the severity and duration of the local recession. In fact, throughout 2008 social pressure had started mounting on the state to counter the rising costs of food and energy. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) launched its typical one-day stay-at home campaigns in July and August before its leaders entered the National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac) bargaining
chambers with government and business partners (Mail and Guardian, 6 August 2008). Voices on the margins of this protest movement rightly connected the threads of local struggles to lower the cost of living with the globalising economic crisis. This deteriorating reality forced the economic spin-doctors to adapt their measured responses to the economic crisis.

Although the state’s response to the recession is decorated in pro-poor rhetoric, it remains firmly embedded within the capitalist orthodoxy. Some of its anti-crisis measures indeed do appear to benefit the poor. However, any proper evaluation of the underlying logic of these measures must take into account the broader context and thinking that shape anti-recession plans. Before examining the most popular local responses, it is necessary to show briefly that the recovery plans of imperialism actually dictate the limits of local interventions.

First, the South African state has resolved to throw its support behind the G20, which is under the firm control of big imperialist powers. Second, in terms of the content of its anti-recession programme, the following elements feature most prominently: there is widespread deflection of attention to the need for social solidarity in this moment of economic distress, but without demonstrating that the full cost of this economic destruction will be offloaded onto working people; and it advocates fixing the global financial architecture with measures such as tighter regulation and coordination of the financial system, more money being made available for developing countries through the IMF/World Bank, and bringing the guilty financial corporations to book. After maintaining a budget surplus in recent years, the state is now prepared to run budget deficits, but within the restrictions imposed by investors (foreign and local), global rating agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions. But who is likely to benefit from this tiny rise in the budget deficit: rich corporations or the poor? Almost all this money has been allocated to enrich construction monopolies renovating the country’s infrastructure for the 2010 world football extravaganza.

Finally, while the scandalous corporate bailouts fit neatly within the framework of capitalism, the nationalisation of collapsed financial institutions carries some radical undertones. In rich countries, scandals persist that corporate executives have used the bailout packages to award themselves lavish ‘bonuses for failure’. At any rate, taxpayers are unlikely to ever know what happened to their money thrown into these bailouts, because this entire system of competition and speculation thrives on business secrets. The partially nationalised firms, of course, will eventually be returned to full private ownership (The Economist, 2009); it is a scheme ‘to nationalise the corporate losses but to privatise the gains’. Despite the fact that this is a badly twisted form of nationalisation, it is worth asking how this idea has resonated with the South African governing party. Remember that during the liberation struggle era, even the ANC fought for nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy. Make no mistake, today a thoroughly democratic programme of nationalisation remains critical to the restructuring of the political economy in the interests of the poor majority. Unsurprisingly, and consistent with the market fundamentalist faith of the ANC, a deadly silence has prevailed on even this half-baked type of ‘nationalisation’. Without a doubt this serves to reassure investors that the party will never pursue any ‘leftwing utopian’ project.

Critical analysis of ‘pro-poor interventions’

The living and working conditions of poor black South Africans have seen little improvement since the end of apartheid in 1994. Terreblanche (2009) has consistently shown that a more careful analysis
of official statistics actually reveals a woeful deterioration in the conditions of the poor over more than a decade. For example, the standard measure of inequality for the country, the Gini coefficient, increased from 0.64 in 1995 to 0.69 in 2005. There has thus been a widening gap between the rich and the poor in the country, driven in part by policies designed to fast-track the creation of a black economic elite. Over the same period, the simple poverty headcount, based on a monthly poverty line pegged at R462 per person, shows a marginal fall in poverty from 53 per cent in 1995 to 48 per cent a decade later (The Presidency 2008). Narrowly defined unemployment only started dropping below 30 per cent in the last five years, due to the economic boom as well as a series of ‘revisions on how to define and count an unemployed worker’.

However, sceptics from conflicting ideological standpoints question the positive trends in the dubious official statistics. Critics underscore the argument that there has been manipulation of statistics to conceal extreme and deep-rooted misery in contemporary South Africa. A thorough analysis of these disputes falls outside the scope of this briefing. Given the importance attached to the anti-crisis Framework issued on 19 February (RSA 2009), its pro-poor economic logic deserves proper analysis, albeit briefly due to limited space. This Framework basically outlines three mechanisms by which to alleviate the plight of the poor: reliance on the workings of the labour market, scaling up of social welfare programmes, and better access to basic social services for poor families. There is now a closer look at how, in practice, each mechanism is likely to work against the poor.

The notion of making private sector labour markets work for the poor is apparently at the heart of government’s response to the economic crisis. But this is far from any innovative proposal because the wage labour system is the engine of the existing political economy; the well being of working families is tied to their ability to work (Smith 2003). Core policies (such as GEAR) that entrench the wage labour system, designed to intensify the exploitation of working people, are definitely not being abolished. Even mild and ad hoc reforms to counter the increasingly egregious exploitation of workers for the profit of monopolies that control most of the economy are not on the agenda. On the contrary, the anti-crisis Framework document merely urges ‘companies to do everything in their power to avoid retrenchments as a result of the global economic crisis, and to instead invest in their people and modernise their productive capacity’ (RSA 2009, p. 15). It includes tax breaks and other measures to rescue ‘companies in distress’ (like the job-shedding textile industry) that pose no threat to the wage-capital relation. But it is silent on basic and workable pro-poor options, for example, restructuring failing and idle firms and placing them under the democratic management and control of self-organised workers.

Urging corporations to invest in technology and a skilled workforce is contradictory and deeply flawed. Typically, a
capitalist enterprise invests in technology to raise the rate of profit and beat its rivals. But this drives cycles of overproduction, financial speculation, fictitious growth (economic bubbles) and crises. When corporations do decide to invest in a few skilled workers, this tends to increase unemployment rather than reduce working hours for the sake of a sustainable expansion of decent jobs.

The state plans to upscale access to its vast menu of social welfare interventions – state social grants, public works, food relief schemes, etc. It is estimated that at least 12 million South Africans (or 25 per cent of the population) receive social grants, with the number of beneficiaries steadily increasing over the last decade. The old age, disability and child support grants certainly reach some of the poorest households, often being the sole source of household income. Periodically the state has increased the monetary value of social grants, but because increments have been below the inflation rate, the purchasing power of the social grants tends to fall due to the skyrocketing cost of living. At a more fundamental level, the capitalist socio-economic model restricts or undermines the sustainability of an extensive pro-poor social welfare system (Smith 2003). With more aggressive fiscal belt-tightening suddenly easier to justify in the context of the economic crisis, the move to drastically cut the size of the social welfare budget is likely to gain momentum. Moreover, neo-classical labour economists forcefully argue that social welfare grants pegged at high levels discourage the unemployed from seeking work and cultivate dependency on the state (Nattrass 2007). The premise of this policy advice is that the invisible hand of the market is the best regulator of social justice for the poor – a fallacious and unrealistic assumption. Furthermore, it builds on spurious abstractions about individual rationality and maximising behaviour.

The government’s Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), tasked with contributing massively to halving unemployment by 2014, has been critiqued on similar grounds. Notwithstanding such criticisms, the revised EPWP now guarantees beneficiaries full-time jobs for a year, a change from the earlier model of the programme which catered for short and irregular jobs of six months’ duration. But this scaled-up EPWP is hazy on the wage levels involved, and this raises doubts as to whether it is a genuine path out of working poverty. Furthermore, it fails to reflect on big political economy issues that an anti-capitalist public works programme could explore, for example, stimulating thinking about how to use public works as a transition to permanent and decent jobs. Another issue that could be examined is whether it is possible to use public works as a platform to dynamically restructure and transcend the badly discredited market-based model, in order to provide affordable, efficient and quality services to the poor.

The state has repeated promises to expand poor peoples’ access to basic social services, ranging from water and electricity to housing and roads. However, in practice it has been unable to deliver on these promises and this failure has sparked militant protests in townships across the country. It is true that poor families enjoy rations of free water and electricity. But as soon as they exhaust this ‘free quota’, access depends on their ability to pay charges dictated by private companies that control the water and electricity networks. Poor people are increasingly directed to financial corporations to gain access to houses. Local governments, correctly viewed as closer to the people on the ground, are in practice bankrupt, indebted and often dysfunctional points of service delivery (National Treasury 2008, SARS 2008). This is unsurprising, because all tiers and divisions of government function in line with the neoliberal framework of the post-apartheid state. This has meant that corporate welfare guides the operations of local governments, whilst
the social welfare of the community must rely on the magic of ‘trickle-down logic’.

Conclusion
This article has briefly analysed the economic logic of the pro-poor responses of the South African government to the global economic crisis. As the local economy started sliding into recession, the state echoed the global political and corporate elite in talking up the economy and its neoliberal fundamentalist policies. It pinned the cause for the crisis on a mix of factors connected to the activities of financial capitalists. Although sections of finance capital triggered the recession, this is basically a classic economic slump rooted in capitalist over-accumulation, falling profit rates and the expansion of fictitious credit. Integrated into the global economy as a mining exporter and heavily reliant on foreign capital inflows, South Africa has been unable to escape being pulled into a downturn on this huge scale.

It has been illustrated how the state is aligning its anti-recession interventions to the stimulus packages of the global elite. Within this framework, it has adopted a minimalist set of anti-crisis proposals that steer clear of threatening or transcending the reign of capital. Yet the cost of the slump is set to be downloaded onto the poor, the majority of whom are mired in chronic structural poverty. To counter this accelerated depression in their living standards, poor people have stepped up their social protests, thus intensifying pressure on the state for workable measures to relieve their suffering. In this situation the state has been compelled to adopt pro-poor rhetoric to articulate its interventions to salvage capitalism. The post-apartheid governing elite is well known for adopting this populist tone, while at the same time resolutely sticking to and implementing capitalist policies that inherently work against the poor. It is a form of neoliberal populism that helps to politically disorientate and disarm the trade unions and emerging popular movements. It shields the elite in their accumulation of power and wealth as they switch between political office and the corporate world.

Debating concrete alternatives to capitalist economic crises, radical left thinkers invite us to think through, formulate and advance realistic anti-capitalist measures (Callinicos 2003, Smith 2003, Blackburn 2009). For the moment, one could probably refer to these as anti-capitalist transitional alternatives. They are transitional in that the solutions are practicable actions to overcome economic crisis, but also seek to revive accumulation which serves as a bridge to move towards socialism. As a case in point, Blackburn (2009) introduces anti-capitalist transitional alternatives to restructure the financial system. The basic idea behind these is a network of social funds to serve the needs of the poor, financed through taxes on corporations. But this network of social funds must be placed under popular democratic control, an approach in sharp contrast to the temporary banking nationalisation under corporate management currently taking place.

Peter T. Jacobs is a research specialist in the Center for Poverty Employment and Growth, which is part of the Human Sciences Research Council in South Africa. Email: pjacobs@hsrc.ac.za

Endnotes
1. Evidence to support this observation can be found in a government document entitled Framework for South Africa’s response to the international economic crisis issued on 19 February 2009 (RSA 2009). It specifically states that ‘the duration and depth of the downturn cannot be forecast with certainty, but growth is likely to be lower than previously expected at least in 2009, and 2010. This has potential implications for incomes, employment, and investment; and on social programmes partly
through the slowdown’s effect on tax revenues for government’ (RSA 2009, p. 3).

2. In a recent paper provocatively entitled ‘A tale of two depressions’, two mainstream economists suggest that the present economic meltdown exhibits profound depression-like patterns. They show that the situation could be uglier than the 1929–1933 depression if the scale of the analysis is global, rather than being restricted to the USA (Eichengreen and O’Rourke 2009).

3. Gowan (2009, p. 6) offers an incisive and stimulating analysis of the ways in which finance capitalists create, inflate and burst ‘speculative bubbles of varying sizes in different economic sectors’. All sectors of the capitalist class and policy makers entrusted to manage the economy actively participate in such dangerous, high-risk gambling.

4. The vast body of long statements made by the Minister of Finance, Minister of Trade and Industry and Governor of the South African Reserve Bank merely recycle information, and offer even fewer insights into who will pay for the rescue plans and clean up the mess. It is worth noting that the recovery timeframe is likely to last at least another three to five years after the establishment of ‘relative stability’.

5. Eminent Marxist activist and scholar Martin Legassick eloquently captures this shameless massaging of statistics on the part of state agencies and pro-government pundits (Legassick 2007, pp. 112–113). A case in point is the persisting scandal relating to the country’s official employment statistics. Whilst the quarterly growth rate of economic output (GDP) for the final quarter in 2008 (fourth-quarter GDP) registered a drop into negative territory, Statistics South Africa reported an unexpected increase in job creation for this period. It remains to be seen when and how the impact of the recession is likely to reflect in employment data (Financial Mail 2009).

References


Removing Neocolonialism’s APRM Mask: A Critique of the African Peer Review Mechanism

Patrick Bond

The national middle class discovers its historic mission: that of intermediary . . . the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the mask of neocolonialism. (Fanon 1961, p. 163)

Introduction: talk left, walk right

Seen from Washington, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (Nepad) can be summed up in a frank description by the Bush administration’s leading State Department official for Africa, Walter Kansteiner: ‘philosophically spot-on’.1 However, as the host institution of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), Nepad has faced a crippling problem in assisting Kansteiner and his ilk: the elites responsible for its implementation – and for legitimising neoliberalism more generally – are not democrats, and do not even seem to be committed to building their nations’ economies. Can the APRM help fix this, or is it just a vanity of politicians and middle-class NGOers but in reality a transmission line between Africa and neocolonialism?

Whichever it may be, promoting APRM is very hard work. Charles Manga Fombad and Zein Kebonang point out that starting from around 1990, Africa’s second wave of democratisation (the first being decolonisation) witnessed an increase not only in elections (albeit ‘a majority of the post-1990 elections have been marred by electoral fraud’), but also coups, especially from 1995–2001:

Many of the old dictators are still firmly entrenched, whilst some of the new leaders who have joined the ‘club’ have in recent years been devising ever more sophisticated ways to perpetuate their rule while using the democracy slogan as a convenient mask to disguise their despotic practices. (Fombad and Kebonang 2006, p. 19)

Ian Taylor (2005) adds:

With very few exceptions (Botswana, Mauritius, Senegal, South Africa), the majority of the heads of state involved in Nepad are quintessentially leaders of neo-patrimonial regimes and certainly do not regard their rule as ‘temporary’ nor that institutional law should constrain their pre-eminence or that their rule be transparent and accountable.

One example might be Meles Zenawi, Prime Minister of Ethiopia. Zenawi conspired with George W. Bush to invade Somalia in 2007 with the connivance of Mbeki – this after the senseless war over a strip of sandy land on the Eritrean border between 1988 and 2000 had killed at least 70,000 combatants and civilians. According to the lobby group Ethiopian Americans for Justice, Zenawi’s government...
hosted the ‘African Guantanamo’, participating in the illegal kidnapping, imprisonment and torture of Africans. In return for its services for the ‘war on terror’, the Bush administration rewarded the Zenawi group both financially and diplomatically. Most importantly, the Bush administration looked the other way when Ethiopia’s rulers stole elections, tortured and killed many innocent people. . . . Mr Zenawi stole the 2005 elections, destroyed all opposition, muffled the press, banned advocacy for human rights and made a mockery out of the rule of law. Following the elections, his troops shot and killed 193 people who protested electoral fraud, massacred innocents in Gambella and the Ogaden. They had also bombed civilians in Somalia on many occasions. Mr Zenawi’s government has been one of the worst violators of human rights in Africa.²

However, Zenawi was unanimously chosen as Chairperson of Nepad in 2007 and also as Chairperson of the Committee of Heads of State and Government of Countries Participating in the APRM. At the same moment in early 2009 that his parliament was passing the Charities and Societies Proclamation Law – ‘designed to strictly control and monitor civil society in an atmosphere of intolerance of the work of human rights defenders and civil society organisations’, according to Amnesty International³ – Zenawi was writing in the APRM’s 2008 Annual Report of the mechanism’s ability to support ‘countries in improving their policy-making processes, adopt best practices from other countries, and comply with ratified standards and codes, while involving all stakeholders in the country’ (Zenawi 2009, p. v).

This may be the most extreme case of hypocrisy associated with the APRM, but is not surprising. Writing for a civil society lobby group, Partnership Africa Canada, Ousmane Dème recognised, with undue regret, Nepad’s morale rot:

It increasingly appears that out-and-out criticism is replacing the strong enthusiasm that prevailed at its inception. In fact, the hopes originally raised by this ambitious programme are now beginning to dissolve. Criticism is emerging from all directions. Nepad’s biggest supporters, among them President Abdoulaye Wade, are starting to publicly voice their misgivings and censure. (Dème 2005, p. 1)

According to the Senegalese President in October 2004, ‘I am disappointed. I have great difficulties explaining what we have achieved when people at home and elsewhere ask me. . . . We’re spending a lot of money and, above all, losing time with repetition and conferences that end and you’re not quite sure what they’ve achieved’.⁴ In June 2007, at the World Economic Forum meeting in Cape Town, Wade acknowledged that Nepad ‘had done nothing to help the lives of the continent’s poor’.⁵ Later that year, Wade was even more frank: ‘The redirection of the project has become inevitable, because nobody has yet understood anything from Nepad and nobody implemented Nepad’.⁶ As Mbeki himself confessed a few weeks after his ousting from power, in December 2008, ‘I am afraid that we have not made the progress we had hoped for. Indeed, and regrettably, I believe that we have lost some of the momentum which attended the launch and detailed elaboration of the Nepad programmes’.⁷

But this is unsatisfactory, and leads merely to a head-shaking about African implementation incapacity. A further-reaching structural critique is required, based neither on limited African elite agency nor Nepad’s failure to help poor Africans, as if this was a genuine goal in any case. Such were merely symptoms of a deeper problem, which is Africa’s insertion into the world economy in a manner that, as Frantz Fanon warned, would ‘inherently generate a failed development project’. Masking the neocolonial relationship during the period of the 2000s – in
the wake of two decades of rampant structural adjustment that demolished living standards except for newly empowered political, financial and commercial elites – was a new rhetoric: ‘good governance’.

That phrase is often deployed within an all too easy ‘blame Africa first’ narrative in which the machinations of outside forces simply evaporate. But the alleged corruption that led to South Africa’s Police Commissioner (and Interpol President) Jackie Selebi’s leaving – and apparent protection from prosecution by Mbeki – was thanks to mafia infiltration. And the alleged corruption that had Mbeki firing Jacob Zuma as Deputy President in 2005 was traced to a French arms company, Thint, as part of the vast, bribery-ridden, foreign-sourced arms deal that Mbeki himself pushed into the South African budget over the objections of many inside and outside the government. Or, in the wake of Mbeki, his successor Kgalema Motlanthe’s refusal of a visa to the Dalai Lama was almost certainly a result of the pressure that the Chinese Government – a major contributor to the African National Congress – concedes they put on Pretoria.

How is it possible to disentangle such organic ‘good governance’ shortfalls fewer than 20 km away from Nepad headquarters from the exogenous forces? Can tearing off the APRM mask assist us in such a task?

An African governance mask

To understand the masking of neocolonial relations through the APRM requires us to remind ourselves of how much ideological damage has recently been done to neoliberalism, even before its 2008 financial meltdown in the North. Writing for the Institute for Democracy in South Africa, analyst Len Verwey concedes that amongst the sites surveyed by the Afrobarometer in 2002:

Mozambique is the only country where more people perceived government economic policies positively than negatively. Nigeria, Uganda, Zambia and Malawi demonstrate a particularly acute 70% perception of the negative impact of government economic policies on most people. (Verwey 2006, p. 13)

If that is the case, and if international financial institutions and the ‘donor’ governments must continue to reproduce a neocolonial system widely understood as damaging to the interests of the masses, then the first requirement is for elites to adopt good governance rhetoric.

Verwey (2006, p. 7) here provides the conventional wisdom:

Nepad differs from previous African development initiatives, and this difference has contributed to its positive reception in the West, due to its adoption of the following pre-conditions for sustainable development:

- a shift from statism to markets and public–private partnerships as the drivers of growth and development;
- competitive integration into the global economy, which would include export-orientated domestic production, diminishing tariff- and non-tariff barriers to imports, and the soliciting of foreign direct investment;
- the foregrounding of governance issues in securing positive developmental outcomes.

Greg Masterson (2005, p. 2), of the Electoral Institute of South Africa, adds:

APRM lies at the heart of the AU drive for a broad vision of African rejuvenation and renewal that seeks to generate more goodwill from foreign trade partners and donors by proving good political and economic governance and accountability. ... Arguably the most unique and original aspect
of the NEPAD initiative, the APRM is largely responsible for thrusting African development into the international development spotlight at a time of chronic global donor fatigue and a slump in the global economy. ... The APRM’s central philosophy of African states taking responsibility for their own development and compliance has been greeted enthusiastically by the donor community.

In the same spirit, Ross Herbert and Steven Gruzd claim that the APRM is ‘arguably the continent’s most innovative and challenging experiment to date’ (Herbert and Gruzd 2007), perhaps forgetting the rise of nationalism, successful anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggles, aids-drugs access, debt and climate campaigning and the like. Herbert and Gruzd are representatives of Africa’s explicitly pro-capital South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA). Gruzd posits that SAIIA and similar ‘think tanks’ staffed by exceptionally persuasive ‘experts’ are crucial to APRM: ‘their reputation for objectivity, integrity and expertise has, in most instances, managed to convince sceptical citizens that the APRM is not just another government project designed to celebrate mediocrity and whitewash inadequacies’ (Gruzd 2009, p. 2).

However, as Herbert and Gruzd (2007, p. 8) argue, APRM is ‘designed to be more palatable and consensus-oriented than conditionalities imposed by debt-relief or aid-driven processes’, the neocolonial direction is essentially the same as that imposed by the IMF, the US State Department and Brussels. What was apparently required, by the early 2000s, was adoption of a rather more sly approach, one capable of teaching ‘democracy’ talk to tyrants and of adding a certain fraction of civilised society ‘think tanks’ to give legitimacy to the standard conditionality menu.

But the results of APRM are not encouraging even seen through these partisans’ eyes. In addition to two typical grievances present in most of the APRM case studies, namely lack of financial resources and an over-ambitious timeframe, Herbert and Gruzd (2007, p. 24) add some important caveats about the APRM technical process worth noting:

The rules and regulations governing the process are loose. Later documents contradict earlier ones, without revoking or revising them. The wide-ranging flexibility afforded to countries in developing their national APRM structures — particularly their national governing council or national commission and local APRM secretariat — has spawned a variety of different institutional models. This permissive approach has mollified some nations apprehensive about the process but it has also undermined the ability of the system to establish governance norms or bring about genuinely improved dialogue around governance reform. The Panel has been reluctant to publicly challenge governments even when their APRM plans are contrary to the written and verbal guidelines.

Nor would one expect the APRM Panel to break ranks with other elites and to side with civil society. Indeed, the South African representative to the APRM Panel was Chris Stals. His prior job was as Reserve Bank governor, when he initiated extreme monetarist policies that shifted resources to financial-sector instead of productive-sector economic activities, from poor to rich.

The case of South Africa

The most revealing APRM case study is surely South Africa’s, given the home-based context. Herbert and Gruzd served on the South African APRM civil society team, which led a long process that eventually persuaded the final panel on the need for 182 formal recommendations (of varying politico-ideological orientations). However, the July 2007
programme of action agreed upon with peers ignored most of these and diverted from internal APRM procedure. According to Herbert and Gruzd (2007, p. 17):

The Panel called for action on crime, regulation of political party finances (called for in the UN and African Union anti-corruption codes), action on racism and xenophobia, reconsideration of South Africa’s electoral system, efforts to strengthen parliament, and actions to fight corruption, among other high-profile recommendations. These are addressed [by Pretoria] with varying degrees of clarity, but are in many instances ignored or dealt with superficially. In this, South Africa has demonstrated very real limits to the ability or willingness of the system to press unwilling nations toward particular reforms.

As Paul Graham from Idasa observed, Pretoria’s APRM document ‘shows substantial alteration from the report discussed in Kliptown (in front of 1,700 delegates) and, as a result, a substantial amount of the texture of the debates has been lost’.8 Another SAIIA report noted that SA’s APRM report ‘was crafted without significant civil society input and the media were largely ignored’ (Boyle 2008).

What does the power of South Africa over the entire APRM process teach Herbert and Gruzd?

Despite the strong recommendations, the system declined to take action or publicly comment when South Africa ignored a large portion of the recommendations in its action programme. The process highlighted the limits of the Panel’s ability to stand up to a powerful nation that might resist its advice (Herbert and Gruzd 2007).

One specific point deserves mention. A well-known feature of Mbeki’s management style, arrogant denialism, was evident, as Business Day wrote in an editorial in relation to an important APRM Panel finding:

Several months before the recent xenophobic attacks, Mbeki disputed the findings of a report warning of SA’s ‘brutality and detention’ of foreigners from other African countries. . . . He cannot have missed the APRM’s cautionary note. Its SA country report concluded that ‘xenophobia against other Africans is currently on the rise and must be nipped in the bud’. In his response to the report last year, Mbeki denied that xenophobic tendencies existed in SA, pointing out that the country did not even have refugee camps. To illustrate the friendly environment, Mbeki alluded to a state visit by Congolese President Joseph Kabila when illegal immigrants from that country openly requested the two presidents to regularise their status. In Mbeki’s view, the fact that illegal immigrants were able to address the two leaders showed how comfortable they felt in SA. Yet a few months later, 62 people were killed in anti-foreigner attacks that erupted in Alexandra on 11 May.9

Put simply, the APRM was not treated seriously in Pretoria. Six months after taking office as Minister of Public Service and Administration, in March 2009, Masenyani Baloyi had not tackled even the much diluted tasks he inherited from his predecessor Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi: ‘At a conference to reveal what the government was doing about the problems cited, Baloyi was slammed for convening yet another “talk shop”. Johannesburg ANC Woman’s League organiser Bontle Setshogoe said: “On the ground, nothing concrete has been done”. Baloyi said that time was needed for “reflection”’.10

Other cases

Herbert and Gruzd (2007, p. 17) praise the Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda reviews, but
do concede that the reports ‘also suffer
from lack of specificity, measurability
and the extreme brevity used to describe
commitments, using terms such as
“monitoring and enforcement” and
“improved human resource manage-
ment”. Grudz (2009) makes specific
claims about APRM progress in other
countries (regrettably, not documented),
such as that ‘Rwanda is in the midst of
fundamental reforms to its business
environment. Kenya points out laws
passed, for example on witness protection
and public procurement, new funds to
foster youth and women’s development,
and a draft national land policy created
through consultation. In South Africa,
issues flagged in the APRM, such as unreg-
ulated private funding to political
parties and floor crossing in parliament,
have been slated for reform’.

To what extent can the APRM be credited
for such changes? We cannot tell from the
information provided and in any case
there are multiple power vectors at work
in any given context. For example, the pol-
itical party floor-crossing fiasco in South
Africa had to come to an end because of
the ludicrous way deals were being
done, undermining the system from the
standpoint of the majority and minority
parties; the minor APRM input on floor
crossing can hardly be given credit for
this. However, it appears that there are
no reforms contemplated on private
funding of political parties, notwithstanding
the extent to which the Chinese finan-
cial grip on the ruling party caused acute
embarrassment during the recent Dalai
Lama visa affair.

The Rwanda ‘reforms’ appear neoliberal
in orientation, not at all inconsistent
with standard Washington Consensus
conditionalities. Moreover, the 2005
Rwanda APRM report was excessively
‘rosy’, and, according to Eduard
Jordaan, the final document:

 inadequately addresses a number of
serious political problems in Rwanda,
such as Rwanda’s involvement in the
Democratic Republic of Congo, the
inadequate separation of powers in the
Rwandan political system, tensions in
Rwandan society, and the flawed presi-
dential and parliamentary elections of
2003. (Jordaan 2006, p. 420)

Moving to Kenya, prior to the December
2007 ethnicised electoral catastrophe, the
APRM process went smoothly, according
to Herbert and Grudz (2009). But consider
what the APRM failed to do. The report,
according to Bronwen Manby (from the
London-based AfriMAP project):

 does not identify the issues relating to
the independence of the Electoral Com-
misson of Kenya that were so critical
on election day and in the following
period. … But the biggest concern is
the issue of political will. Was the
Kenyan government ready to try to fix
what was broken? Were the APRM
eminent persons and secretariat
willing to hold them to account? And
were other African heads of state who
had signed up for the APRM process
—to whom the APRM eminent
persons and secretariat report — ready
to urge remedies for poor performance,
or would their own glass houses dis-
courage the throwing of stones?
(Manby 2008, p. 1)

Conclusions

The arguments made above should
suggest a rethink by any community-
based organisation, social movement,
non-governmental organisation and other
progressive body if they are currently legit-
imating Nepad policies, Bretton Woods
Institution mandates, donor conditional-
ities and local elites via the APRM. The
merits of participating are few, and the
damage done to progressive politics
appears very high in some cases, not
merely in terms of institutional frustration.

The main point is to not forget the context,
which is neocolonialism’s need for a
mask. As Dème of Partnership Africa Canada explains:

The launch of the APRM is not neutral in that it coincides with the first difficulties of NEPAD’s initiators to persuade the foreign private sector to invest massively in Africa. Africa’s poor image in the international community, the result of its reputation for bad governance, is in some minds one of the main obstacles to attracting foreign private investment. (Dème 2005, p. 50)

As a result, Dème and others in similar donor agencies and donor-funded liberal ‘think tanks’ have a huge difficulty in their task of re-legitimising the APRM:

The APRM represents a major challenge for African civil society. It needs to seize this opportunity to parlay its extensive experience into improved governance in African countries. (Dème 2005, p. 50)

In contrast, Charles Manga Fombad and Zein Kebonang (2006) argue:

Either carefully selected pro-government NGOs and CBOs are involved, or those brought in are given so little information that they are unable to play a constructive role in the process. In the final analysis, the NEPAD APRM will remain a closed state-to-state process with no room for non-state, independent critical voices who could contribute constructively to making the process more productive, effective and credible. (p. 53)

Herbert and Gruzd (2007, p. 25) conclude that ‘the system as a whole is beneficial and opens space for meaningful national dialogue’. Yet this is apparently only true for those institutions – such as SAIIA – which have impressive clout in their own terms, e.g. elite connections and a high media profile. As for ordinary citizens, they concede, the meaningfulness of the dialogue is open to question:

Civil society members have participated in public meetings during country support missions, but these encounters have only discussed the APRM process in the most general terms, have not provided detailed information on process and governance requirements or lessons on how other countries have managed public consultations, used surveys or managed research institutions. Notably, the memorandums of understanding between the continental authorities and participating governments have not been made public. (Herbert and Gruzd 2007, p. 27)

Finally, Manby offers quite a sobering reflection on the APRM’s distracting capacity, based not only on Kenya but the other cases as well:

Although each country that has undergone the APRM process is supposed to report back to the APR Forum on its progress, there is no serious monitoring exercise of how effectively this is done. Nor any sanctions for failure to act. Nor, apparently, is there any real system to ensure that the commitments the government makes address the most important problems highlighted in the APRM review. Certainly, no individual or institution at the African level, least of all the APR Forum, raised the implementation of the APRM commitments as critical issues during the recent Kenyan crisis – or, perhaps more importantly, during the lead-up to the election, when such a focus could perhaps have averted the near-catastrophe into which Kenya was drawn. (Manby 2008, p. 1)

Meanwhile, at the national level, the implementation of the APRM programme of action is also left entirely to the executive, with no formalised role for parliamentarians or civil society to hold the government’s feet to the fire should it fail to perform. As in other countries, the APRM process has not been well
integrated into other national development planning processes – a problem recognised by the APRM secretariat in South Africa – and it does not appear to have informed other important reform programmes under way at the same time.

Moreover, the systems in place to monitor the implementation of other national policies (however imperfect) are also not mobilised to engage with the implementation of the APRM programme of action. President Kibaki did not report back to parliament on the APR Forum meeting and on the actions he had committed to take, nor was the report tabled for debate. Although there was some coverage in the media of the APR Forum discussion of Kenya, it did not generate a real national debate on the report and programme of action and their implications. The conclusions and recommendations were not widely disseminated throughout the country by the NEPAD-Kenya secretariat or other means. Although a meeting hosted by the NEPAD-Kenya secretariat in mid-February 2008 encouragingly aimed to involve civil society in the process of preparing the country’s progress report to the next APR Forum, the report of the meeting is surreal in its lack of any suggestion that this review might be relevant to, or affected by, the national political crisis.

Even the continental APRM secretariat failed to engage in any serious way with national institutions, such as the Electoral Commission of Kenya or the Kenya National Human Rights Commission, in order to brief them on the conclusions relevant to them and the follow-up role they might play.

Without this sort of integration into other national planning systems, debates and oversight mechanisms, the APRM process seems doomed to become little more than a cosmetic exercise without effect in the real world of policy and decision making. (Manby 2008)

To close, recall how Nepad has indisputably failed: the global elites who demanded it as a mask for the continuation of 2000s neoliberalism in a home-grown variant did not, ultimately, want to give Nepad’s African elites the resources required to do the job they promised. Not even the likes of Bono, Geldof, Make Poverty History and white-banded Global Call for Action Against Poverty civil societies could compel global capital to be slightly less brutal to Africa, notwithstanding heady promises at Gleneagles. Since 2005, there has been demonstrably less North–South money for aid, and much more military spending. This is not disputed, and hence it would appear that Nepad’s functionality to neocolonialism – once considered important – is rather irrelevant.

Does the same pessimism apply to the APRM’s functionality to Nepad, as neocolonialism’s governance mask? Yes, it should by now be crystal clear – especially from the South African APRM case but also more generally – that elite APRM processes chock-full of civil society ‘experts’ from ‘think tanks’ have generated not a fruitful consultation process that helps change society but, on the contrary, disrespect from state actors amidst business-as-usual. Led by the likes of Zenawi, the APRM is not even a very effective cosmetic exercise for the sake of neocolonial legitimation.

Alternative strategies entail that Africa’s social justice, environment, women’s, labour, youth and so many other movements increase and interrelate the work they already do now, and pressure their national states to adopt post-neoliberal public policies (Bond 2009). If such activists are distracted into neoliberally grounded work with the APRM or Nepad or the next generation of IMF PRSPs or the UN MDG bureaucracy (Bond 2006) or similar elite gimmicks, this probably represents a tragic waste of time, and will delay genuine breakthroughs against injustice.
Patrick Bond, author of Looting Africa (Zed Books 2006), is director of the University of KwaZulu-Natal Centre for Civil Society, South Africa. Email: pbond@mail.ngo.za

Endnotes


References


Durable Solution, Help or Hindrance? The Failings and Unintended Implications of Relief and Recovery Efforts for Kenya’s Post-election IDPs

Gabrielle Lynch

Kenya’s contested general election of 27 December 2007 prompted a mass movement of people through threats, fear, and, more commonly, physical attacks and destruction of property. According to early statistics 350,000 people were displaced. However, in July 2009, the government readjusted this figure to 663,921 internally displaced persons (IDPs), or 140,459 families; 350,000 of these IDPs sought refuge in camps, while the remainder were integrated into local communities (Office of the President 2009, p. 1).

The new figure is more realistic, but exact numbers will never be known, as many IDPs who did not own land and/or did not seek shelter at camps will forever be omitted. Nevertheless, in practical terms, a number of 660,000-plus clearly presented a grave and unprecedented humanitarian challenge. This article will briefly outline the parallel processes of return and relocation, and some new sites of grievance, to reveal how – while much has been achieved – processes of emergency response and recovery have been far from perfect, and a number of developments have rendered future episodes of violence and displacement more (rather than less) likely.

### The geography of displacement and response

The vast majority of IDPs (see Table 1) hailed from Rift Valley Province, the epicentre of post-election violence.

The Rift Valley was home to 169 of 296 Red Cross camps (KHRC 2008, p. 17), while the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and USAID, to name but a few, opened regional offices in Eldoret and/or Nakuru.

In July 2009, the province was home to the only remaining IDP camp (at Eldoret showground), 43 ‘transitional camps’, and 18 of 20 ‘relocation sites’ nationwide. The province also accounted for 72 per cent of all initial start-up payments made by the government, 98 per cent of support given for reconstruction of houses, and 96 per cent of houses constructed by non-government actors and a similar percentage of houses pledged (Office of the President 2009).

The Rift has thus demanded, and absorbed, the majority of response and recovery efforts.

However, displacement did not only occur in the Rift Valley. Consequently, a

### Table 1. IDPs per province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Households</th>
<th>No. of individuals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nyanza</td>
<td>24,981</td>
<td>118,547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>12,385</td>
<td>58,677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rift Valley</td>
<td>84,947</td>
<td>408,631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>10,092</td>
<td>46,959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>1,438</td>
<td>6,769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coast</td>
<td>1,241</td>
<td>4,774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Eastern</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nairobi</td>
<td>5,349</td>
<td>19,416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>140,459</td>
<td>663,921</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Office of the President (2009, p. 2).

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geographic concentration of attention and limited resources in the area has largely ignored the significant number of IDPs outside the province. Government and non-government agencies have also tended to focus on IDPs in camps. Visible and much in need, the corollary is that little attention has been given to those who sought shelter with friends and families, who ‘missed out on humanitarian assistance and have had limited support for return and for re-starting their lives’ (OCHA 2008, p. 3). Buffered in the short term, many are finding life increasingly difficult as the capacity of hosts becomes stretched and as some face criticism and even hostility from kinsmen for having ‘abandoned’ their community and for having ‘suffered less’.

The story of displacement and response is also one that has become closely equated with Kikuyu residents of the Rift Valley who comprised the majority of local camp dwellers. One consequence, and a potential point of conflict, is a strong perception (particularly among Kalenjin in the Rift Valley) that all communities were affected by the violence, but while ‘their’ culture – and the culture of the Luo – did not let them go to camps and encouraged absorption by friends and relatives, the Kikuyu went and ‘cried’ in the open. Unfortunately, this narrative has further enhanced a sense that the state and civil society is biased towards the needs and interests of a particular community, and thus unintentionally added new layers to a popular discursive repertoire of grievance that lay at the heart of post-election attacks on Kikuyu communities (Lynch 2008).

**Operation Rudi Nyumbani and the realities of repatriation**

At the onset of post-election violence, victims flocked to trading centres, churches, police stations and chiefs’ camps. However, it soon became clear that these impromptu settlements were inadequate in size and difficult to secure, and a number of open spaces were identified and transportation arranged. These official camps were managed by the Kenya Red Cross (KRC), with support from the Kenyan Government and an array of local churches, NGOs and international organisations. Secure from their erstwhile attackers, IDPs were provided with emergency food and non-food items, temporary shelters, and (with time) some psychosocial support, sanitation, health and educational facilities. The short-term response was thus fairly successful at meeting basic needs under difficult circumstances. However, conditions were poor and allegations of rape and sexual exploitation drew heavy criticism; particularly grievous were reports that some women had to pay IDP workers ‘in kind’ ‘to access basic commodities such as food, tents, medicines and beddings’ (Kenya 2008, p. 60).

In terms of camp closure and recovery, the available options (or ‘durable solutions’) included return, relocation or local integration. Official preference was for return, and on 4 May 2008 the government launched *Operation Rudi Nyumbani* or ‘Operation Return Home’ (ORN), which was linked to *Operation Tujenge Pamoja* or ‘Operation Build Together’ (to reconstruct houses and support livelihood recovery) and *Operation Ujirani Mwema* or ‘Operation Good Neighbourhoods’ (to foster peace and reconciliation). The aim was to return all IDPs to their homes and farms. By September 2008, all but five camps were closed (home to 12,658 IDPs), while a year later only one camp remained (home to 2,200 IDPs or 422 families) (interview, Permanent Secretary for Resettlement, 3 August 2009). The operation therefore succeeded in moving people, but nevertheless attracted heavy criticism, most notably from the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC), which has spoken of ‘repatriation, but not resettlement’ and of ‘a circus of failed promises, unmitigated force and lies’ (KHRC 2008, pp. 19, 40).
Initially, the operation was fundamentally undermined by the implicit assumption that IDPs had a home (if not a shelter) to return to and by its focus on camps. This focus ignored former tenants and squatters, as well as those who had become ‘integrated’ within local communities, i.e. those who had sought refuge with friends and families or rented houses. Due to the geographic concentration of camps and ethnicity of inhabitants, ORN also concentrated largely on the Rift Valley area and Kikuyu community.

Next, undue pressure and intimidation was clearly applied to ‘encourage’ IDPs to return to their home areas, in contravention of internationally accepted guiding principles. Many returnees were extremely apprehensive, especially since many had been displaced on no less than three or four occasions since 1992. A common refrain was that the operation was premature and rushed, and that psychosocial work should have been completed first, with social protection and peace building initiated and dialogue established. In the immediate term, some IDPs were forced to briefly return to camps following threats of further violence (KHRC 2008, pp. 26–28), while in the longer term return is proving much easier than reconciliation. Security has been established, but many IDPs have not interacted with their neighbours and clearly harbour deep anger and resentment towards their ‘enemies’. Just as some are able to forgive, others remember previous cycles of displacement, return and ‘reconciliation’ and are duly suspicious. In turn, many Kalenjin neighbours still view their neighbours as ‘outsiders’ who should act like ‘guests’ and are increasingly concerned by reports and rumours that the Kikuyu will stand and fight ‘next time’ and/or are preparing to launch ‘revenge attacks’. The truths behind and details of these perceptions – and related rumours of a proliferation of small arms and organisation on both sides – are beyond the scope of this briefing, however, given a history of election-related displacement and a stalled reform agenda, they clearly do not bode well for the country’s future. There is therefore a pressing need not only for reconciliation efforts that bring communities together to talk, play sport and engage in business (as is currently under way in many areas), but also for a concerted effort to address underlying issues, most notably the mode of political mobilisation, land and need for institutional reforms.

ORN did not herald return in the full sense. A lack of shelter, delays in compensation payments, and fears of future attacks meant that many IDPs did not return to their own plots. Instead, some families shared properties that were still intact, while others opted to rent houses and visit plots during the day. More visibly, ORN led to a relocation of at least 54,000 IDPs to 161 transitional or satellite camps in the Rift Valley (OCHA 2008, p. 1). Usually situated next to a chief’s compound equipped with administrative police, or a new administrative police post constructed in preparation for their return, transitional camps offered official protection and security in numbers. Residents could till their land during the day and harvest crops, and until May 2009, the KRC supplied relief food. The Kenyan Government and other actors have also initiated livelihood, shelter, and peace and reconciliation programmes in these areas, through which some IDPs have received food and basic non-food items, new tarpaulins, psychosocial support and agricultural inputs and non-agricultural assets to kick-start local livelihoods. Ethnically mixed groups are also being encouraged to form and submit business proposals, and by the beginning of August 2009, 18,000 ‘shelter units’ had been built, 7,700 by the government and the remainder by local and international agencies (Interview, Permanent Secretary for Resettlement, 3 August 2009). Moreover, as time has passed, transitional camps have slowly closed as residents take
tents to their plots or move into new shelters, and by July 2009 there were 43 recognised sites home to 7,249 IDPs (Office of the President, 2009, p. 3).

Transitional camps have also had their downsides. Populations have ranged from 50 to over 80,000 people (OCHA 2008, p. 1), and assistance has been limited and logistically difficult. A needs assessment of transit sites in Uasin Gishu recorded that many water points were contaminated, destroyed or needed repairs; latrines were full; tents were worn out and leaking; and many children had been taken out of school so that they could help the family to source food (OCHA 2009e). These day-to-day conditions have not been helped by failed rains, power shortages, increased prices and extremely high levels of un- and under-employment. However, the most pressing need of the people and the principal reason why many are still in transitional camps, is a lack of shelter. There is therefore much that still needs to be done to assist returnees with basic needs and recovery of livelihoods.

In theory, ORN was linked to a compensation scheme through which each household was to receive KSHS10,000 ‘start-up fund’ to replace basic household items, and KSHS25,000 as ‘support for reconstruction’ for those whose homes had been destroyed. However, funding has been a problem and grants have been released very slowly. By July 2009, 24,709 of 158,328 listed beneficiaries were yet to receive the start-up grant, while 55,725 of 78,254 had not received reconstruction support (Office of the President 2009, pp. 3–4). In addition, many IDPs deny receipt of either grant, and allegations abound of corrupt administrative officials who request payments for registration, make partial or double payments, compensate outsiders, and collude with IDP leaders. These delays and illegalities are a source of great resentment, if not surprise. People feel that the government has reneged on its promises, that they are unlikely ever to receive payments, and that authorities simply wanted them out of camps and out of sight and have now abandoned them to the uncertain ebbs and flows of charitable donations.

Indeed, the whole experience of return often proved disorganised and traumatic. Transport to transitional camps was often delayed, with IDPs returned to sites that lacked the necessary facilities, to be confronted with the scale of loss and destruction and severity of their situation. The plan was for IDPs to leave the camps with one month’s food rations and KSHS10,000, but more often than not this did not occur. Return was thus often accompanied by fear, a realisation of loss, sense of abandonment and despair. As one psychosocial counsellor summarised, the operation was ‘quite inhuman’ and was often more psychologically difficult than the terror of initial displacement.

Unfortunately, the visibility of these camps and assistance given, especially the new police posts and shelters with their tell-tale shiny roofs, has unintentionally helped foster a sense that it is one community that is receiving all the assistance. The significance of such complaints is recognised by government, civil society and international agencies, which are all making increasing efforts to reach out to ‘host communities’ and give ‘balanced assistance’. Thus in some areas, the KRC has built houses 50:50 for Kikuyu and Kalenjin, while in others they have purposefully trained and hired members of different communities as labourers. Similarly, many of the livelihoods programmes have a policy of supporting both communities, while there is a common requirement for all group proposals, sports teams and dialogue processes to be ethnically mixed. Unfortunately however, perceptions often lag behind realities, and the fact that many IDPs face significant hardships is often divorced from Kalenjin communal narratives of loss, marginalisation and demonisation, which have burgeoned since the
2005 constitutional referendum to produce a clear ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality (Lynch 2006, 2008).

A positive development? The innovation of self-help groups in the Central Rift

Return is not the only option. Many Kikuyu IDPs in the Rift have bought land and/or sought employment in other areas, most notably in Nakuru, Naivasha, Central Province and Nairobi. Initially, this option was more readily available to the better educated and wealthier members of society, but increasingly became the choice of IDPs who fled to camps in the Central Rift. Lacking a home to return to, or with no desire to return to volatile areas and hostile neighbours, these IDPs have formed self-help groups and purchased land as a collective. By May 2009, there were 20 ‘relocation sites’ in Naivasha, Nakuru, Molo, Nyandarua and Ol Kalau Districts. Home to 7,545 families (OCHA 2009b, p. 2), populations range from 3,469 households (or 14,660 individuals) at Mawingu, Nyandarua District, to a mere handful (OCHA 2009c, p. 4).

In the eyes of the Ministry for Special Programmes this is a positive development or ‘durable solution’ through which IDPs (many of whom did not previously own land) can utilise their right not to return, and start a new life where they feel secure. Assistance has been offered, and in May 2009 the Minister for Finance, Uhuru Kenyatta, made a KSHS200 million supplement to the national budget for this purpose. In addition, China has donated iron sheets for shelters in Pipeline and Minto sites, Nakuru District, and a number of organisations, including the UNHCR, have distributed tents, tarpaulins and other non-food items (such as mosquito nets, water bottles, soap and sanitary pads) to some of the sites.

Yet these self-help groups are also the subject of growing concern. Sites tend to be of an extremely small acreage, especially given the number of residents: 403 families (1,660 individuals) have bought 3 acres in Gilgil (OCHA 2009a, p. 4), while 1,200 families (4,000 individuals) are camped on 16 acres at Pipeline, Nakuru District (OCHA, 2009d, p. 3). Plots also tend to be dry, barren and/or infertile. At Zea Farm in Kwanza, 42 families have bought half an acre that is ‘completely waterlogged, insufficient for them to build shelters or latrines, and over 6 kilometres from a potable water source or public services’ (OCHA 2008, p. 2). Residents also lack adequate shelter and are extremely impoverished. In April 2009, 89.7 per cent of residents lived in tents, there was an average of one toilet for 83 people, relief accounted for 53 per cent of food consumed, 43 per cent of expenditure was used to buy food, 39 per cent had not received KSHS10,000, and 81 per cent of expected beneficiaries had not been given housing support (OCHA 2009c, pp. 5–10).

The obvious question is how these communities will manage to survive and residents earn a living? Already, one group, ALKO in Nakuru District, has been threatened with eviction for defaulting on the purchase price after members failed to contribute KSHS10,000 each. Leadership wrangles and claims of collusion are also rife. To date, 80 families have left Mawingu, citing harassment ‘by the chairman for questioning how the group’s accounts were being managed’ (OCHA 2009b, p. 5), while it is alleged that leaders at Pipeline colluded with local administrators to buy land at an inflated price. One concern is that many may turn to crime and/or be recruited into Mungiki. A much-feared Kikuyu militia, Mungiki was mobilised to cause havoc in Nakuru and Naivasha towns towards the end of January 2008 (Kenya 2008, pp. 97–112) and is increasingly seen as a way to earn money and defend community interests. Security is certainly a problem, and the forced circumcision of six girls at Mawingu (OCHA 2009c, p. 9)
is evidence of a particularly violent form of Kikuyu patriotism.

Finally, given the fact that local and international approaches to peace and reconciliation efforts usually follow a pattern of intra-community followed by inter-community dialogue meetings, there is also a danger that residents of relocation sites will never talk with those who enforced their displacement, because they are no longer neighbours. The potential for these extremely poor, compact and disgruntled communities to subsequently develop a discourse of neglected victims and of revenge seems to be fairly high. Moreover, even if this is not the case, the fact that these camps are often seen as dens of vice and Mungiki activity has encouraged a discourse of concern among the Kalenjin community, who increasingly view them as a potential launch pad for revenge attacks, and even future genocide.

Conclusions

Given the scale of displacement, praise is clearly due to an array of administrators, politicians, agency staff, church leaders and ordinary citizens who have volunteered their time and resources to relieve conditions on the ground. Nevertheless, assessment should not just take account of effort and counterfactuals, but also oversights, inefficiencies, unintended consequences, broader pictures and the extent to which actions are supported, contradicted and/or undermined by developments in other areas.

One concern is that both IDPs who have ‘returned’ to farms or satellite camps, and those that became ‘integrated’ or ‘relocated’ are still in desperate need of assistance. In addition, a common concentration on displacement as a post-election issue has conspicuously ignored the plight of the 380,000 IDPs who existed prior to the 2007 election (FIDH 2007, p. 5), and thousands displaced since.

Displacement is an ongoing issue which requires a coherent policy (as demanded by the IDPs Protocols of the International Conference Great Lakes Region, to which Kenya is a signatory) and strong political commitment, both of which the country currently lacks.

The second major concern is that local perceptions of emergency and recovery responses to post-election displacement have actually rendered new examples of violence and eviction more, rather than less, likely. In 2007, violence was triggered by a contested election. However, underlying causes included a highly centralised power structure, a culture of impunity and normalisation of violence, high levels of poverty and underemployment, and perceptions of state bias and community marginalisation (Lynch 2008, Mueller 2008, Branch and Cheeseman 2009). Of particular importance in the Rift Valley were Kalenjin narratives of marginalisation and historical injustice that burgeoned during and after the 2005 constitutional referendum to produce an increasingly heightened sense of inter-communal difference that fed into targeted attacks on ethnic ‘others’. Unfortunately, this narrative has coloured people’s readings of current events and subsequently been reinforced by stories of how, while Kalenjin IDPs are neglected, their counterparts have been built houses, support Mungiki and so forth. The result is that a new layer or point of communal grievance has emerged that further strengthens a sense of injustice, marginalisation, neglect, inter-communal competition and conflict. Therefore, it is critical that while relief and recovery efforts do not simply become hostage to the grievances and politicking of disgruntled communities, they are conflict-sensitive and are seen to be balanced and unbiased, otherwise they simply add new layers to debates about the ‘other’.

Finally, the possibility that this new discursive layer of ‘IDP treatment’ will become part of future narratives of
conflict is heightened by the near-total absence of any concerted effort to address the other underlying causes of post-election violence. Taken together with local declarations that communities will stand and fight ‘next time’ and stories that all communities may be better organised and armed, this combination of inaction and new layers of grievance has produced an extremely volatile situation in which future violence seems both probable, and likely to be worse. Therefore, the current and pressing need is for politicians, civil society and citizenry to tackle the underlying causes of the post-election violence head-on, before a cycle of conflict, resentment and revenge gains further momentum.

Gabrielle Lynch is a lecturer in Africa and the Politics of Development in the School of Politics and International Studies at the University of Leeds. Email: g.lynch@leeds.ac.uk

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Questioning Pro-poor Responses to the Global Economic Slump

Peter Jacobs

Introduction

The global economic crisis is bound to reverse gains made in the war on poverty and frustrate the efficacy of ongoing pro-poor programmes. This assessment flows from the bleak picture of global trends in unemployment, poverty and inequality presented in the latest International Labour Organisation (ILO) report and forecasts (ILO 2009). What is even more alarming is that this dismal trend was initially concentrated in the ‘heartland of global capitalism’ (Gowan 2009) but is rapidly spreading to poorer economies on the periphery. In South Africa the impact of a prolonged economic slump is likely to be severe, given its jobless rate of about 25 per cent and the fact that close to 50 per cent of its population is trapped below the R462 per month poverty line (The Presidency 2008). It is commonly accepted that a recession works against the poor through two main routes. First, it is inevitable that the slump in economic activity will trigger a surge in job losses, with almost all the suffering inflicted on workers in low-paid and precarious employment. Second, the resource curtailment that results from an economic meltdown of this magnitude is likely to further cut already strained fiscal resources available for pro-poor social programmes. South African policy makers and their counterparts in business and trade unions appear to be acutely aware of how the recession is set to hurt the poor.¹

The exigency of the situation has become inescapable and is prominent on the agendas of policy makers and grassroots activists. For example, a G20 communique issued on 14 March 2009 in the lead-up to its London Summit resolves to ‘take all necessary actions to ensure the soundness of systemically important institutions’. Global responses to the economic crisis vary from emergency actions to avert immediate systemic damages, to talks about radical systemic change. Examples of the immediate actions include stimulus packages (fiscal deficits to finance corporate criminals?) as well as rolling out plans to give the ‘global financial architecture’ a makeover. Proposals to structurally overhaul the economic system range from the nationalisation of financial institutions to consideration of how to rid the world of neoliberalism. Despite the profound questioning of the capitalist socio-economic model (Wolf 2009, Eichengreen and O’Rourke 2009, Friedman 2009), all the popular mainstream anti-crisis proposals are restricted to trying to salvage capitalism rather than transcend it. This coincides with spot-on, scathing critiques of award-winning economists (Soros 2008, Friedman 2009, Wolf 2009), for their textbooks and abstract models of made-up stories about isolated virtues of the system fail to credibly explain what is going on, and remain at a loss as to how to permanently cure capitalism of this type of destructive instability. Moreover, genuine and sustainable solutions to counter the effects of the slump on millions of its impoverished victims are not forthcoming.

Against the backdrop of these global events, how has the South African ruling elite responded to the economic crisis? Initially, key policy makers downplayed the possibility of the domestic economy sliding into recession. This position now stands exposed as ludicrous. For without radical interventions, a peripheral
economy dependent on mining exports cannot simply decouple from the wild fluctuations of global capitalism. Nevertheless, as the local economic downturn started deepening, the state reacted by adopting a minimal set of anti-crisis responses favoured by the global elite. It is, for example, willing to expand its corporate welfare system (through fiscal deficits and other counter-cyclical measures). But it refuses to openly debate policies (even ‘partial nationalisation’) that point in the direction of a radical break with a system that imprisons the poor in abject misery so long after the end of apartheid. Yet at the same time, it is virtually impossible to encounter official responses to the global economic slump not expressed in pro-poor rhetoric. Two interesting questions arise: how pro-poor is the deep-seated economic logic of these responses to the economic slump? And what benefits exist for poor working people from restored growth within a systemically unequal and anarchic political economy? This brief analytical narrative explores these core questions.

The goal is not to repeat the well documented and exhaustive analyses of how the economic crisis started and evolved. Instead, this briefing exposes the different ways in which the costs of the downturn and recovery will be downloaded onto the poor. It argues for and invites critical thinking about pro-poor socio-economic alternatives that go beyond mainstream measures that are structured against the poor. Towards this end the second section gives a snapshot of how government’s thinking about the crisis has gradually shifted over time. The third section shows how the global stimulus framework sets the parameters for the local interventions. A critique of the touted pro-poor measures to drag the economy out of recession is presented in the fourth section. The conclusion stimulates some thinking about ‘anti-capitalist transitional alternatives’ for the poor.

A system-wide economic downturn

How has the South African government’s perception of the global economic crisis evolved in recent months? A document spelling out the official viewpoint, entitled Framework for South Africa’s response to the international economic crisis, appeared on 19 February 2009 (RSA 2009). During the preceding year, key state officials had joined the global political and corporate elite in forums convened to figure out the nature of the economic collapse and appropriate strategies to salvage the system. South African policy makers generally downplayed the possibility of any local recession, investing their energies in talking up the economy. Then, on 3 April 2009, the South African Cabinet issued a media brief in support of the resolutions of the G20 summit in London. The G20 summit had concluded the previous day with a firm commitment and time-bound action plans to tackle and solve the global economic crisis (or more precisely the ‘financial crisis’, as they prefer to characterise it). Following the lead of commentators around the world, the state lamented the fact that the global system had been plunged into its worst economic crisis in almost 80 years. However, it stopped short of saying that the world was approaching, or exhibiting compelling signs of, another Great Depression, presumably to avoid spreading or fanning the flames of the panic and despair which become so contagious in typical crisis situations.

Globally, influential commentators locate the origin of the global slump in rival causes, or a mix of interactive causes: the complacent mindset of economic policy makers like Alan Greenspan, because they failed to create proper financial markets (Financial Times 2009, p. 10), the consumerism of low-income individuals (workers) living beyond their means, etc. Despite the nuanced differences in these rival explanations for the
global downturn, a few common themes cut across the mainstream arguments. First, there is a compulsion to pin down a particular cause in the hope of finding ready-made solutions and thus averting broader systemic damage. The inherent danger in this reasoning and strategy is that it risks ignoring plausible alternative, or more fundamental, causal factors. For in an economic system based on the ruthless hunt to sustain and raise the rate of profits, a general chaotic tendency to over-accumulate and overproduce is constantly present. Second, human agency is blamed (albeit an asocial agent outside a systemic framework) (Friedman 2009), rather than traditional sources of economic crises usually described in terms of some form of arcane calamity. In this instance, the blame was pinned on finance capitalists (or sections of this group) simply because it became impossible to conceal their avarice and flagrant crimes.3

Local neoliberal experts only offer superficial and contradictory clues as to why the economic crisis managed to spread so fast. Commentators are generally silent on why the crisis moved so swiftly from a housing bubble fuelled by vulgar financial speculation to all other sectors of the American economy. More importantly, government spokespersons fail to logically explain why and how this recession crossed the borders of the major imperialist countries to drag even South Africa into the slump.4 Yet in the not-too-distant past we were reassured of the robustness of the country’s financial institutions and regulations. When the Minister of Finance delivered his Medium Term Budget Policy Statement in October 2008, this is how he reflected on the economic crisis:

The thunder will pass. We can say to our people: our finances are in order, our banks are sound, our investment plans are in place, our course is firmly directed at our long-term growth and development challenges, and we will ride out this storm, whatever it takes, together, on the strength of a vision and a plan of action that we share. (Manuel 2008, p. 4)

This contentious assertion does not spell out the criteria used to test the soundness of the financial system. Indeed, neo-classical economics has proven to be incapable of generating reliable information on the operations of finance capital. Moreover, as a result of the blurring of the class interests involved, it is not possible to judge whether the country’s financial system is sound in terms of the interests of the poor or of rich financiers. Even if we presume that the financial system is robust, we are left to wonder why the economy has slipped into a recession.

**Locked inside the global rescue framework**

Towards the end of 2008, approximately a year after the start of the worsening slump of the American economy and the implosion of other imperialist economies, the South African economy started to nose-dive at a breathtaking speed. The hyped-up (fictitious) boom of recent years, based on the extravagant consumerism of the old and *nouveau* rich (the black elite) and the mining export bonanza, simply became unsustainable. At the same time the ‘sudden downturn’ exposed the hollowness of the boom, its heavy dependence on foreign capital, and the enduring lopsided structure of capitalism in South Africa.

Popular concern now turned to the severity and duration of the local recession. In fact, throughout 2008 social pressure had started mounting on the state to counter the rising costs of food and energy. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) launched its typical one-day stay-at home campaigns in July and August before its leaders entered the National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac) bargaining briefings.
chambers with government and business partners (Mail and Guardian, 6 August 2008). Voices on the margins of this protest movement rightly connected the threads of local struggles to lower the cost of living with the globalising economic crisis. This deteriorating reality forced the economic spin-doctors to adapt their measured responses to the economic crisis.

Although the state’s response to the recession is decorated in pro-poor rhetoric, it remains firmly embedded within the capitalist orthodoxy. Some of its anti-crisis measures indeed do appear to benefit the poor. However, any proper evaluation of the underlying logic of these measures must take into account the broader context and thinking that shape anti-recession plans. Before examining the most popular local responses, it is necessary to show briefly that the recovery plans of imperialism actually dictate the limits of local interventions.

First, the South African state has resolved to throw its support behind the G20, which is under the firm control of big imperialist powers. Second, in terms of the content of its anti-recession programme, the following elements feature most prominently: there is widespread deflection of attention to the need for social solidarity in this moment of economic distress, but without demonstrating that the full cost of this economic destruction will be offloaded onto working people; and it advocates fixing the global financial architecture with measures such as tighter regulation and coordination of the financial system, more money being made available for developing countries through the IMF/World Bank, and bringing the guilty financial corporations to book. After maintaining a budget surplus in recent years, the state is now prepared to run budget deficits, but within the restrictions imposed by investors (foreign and local), global rating agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions. But who is likely to benefit from this tiny rise in the budget deficit: rich corporations or the poor? Almost all this money has been allocated to enrich construction monopolies renovating the country’s infrastructure for the 2010 world football extravaganza.

Finally, while the scandalous corporate bailouts fit neatly within the framework of capitalism, the nationalisation of collapsed financial institutions carries some radical undertones. In rich countries, scandals persist that corporate executives have used the bailout packages to award themselves lavish ‘bonuses for failure’. At any rate, taxpayers are unlikely to ever know what happened to their money thrown into these bailouts, because this entire system of competition and speculation thrives on business secrets. The partially nationalised firms, of course, will eventually be returned to full private ownership (The Economist, 2009); it is a scheme ‘to nationalise the corporate losses but to privatise the gains’. Despite the fact that this is a badly twisted form of nationalisation, it is worth asking how this idea has resonated with the South African governing party. Remember that during the liberation struggle era, even the ANC fought for nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy. Make no mistake, today a thoroughly democratic programme of nationalisation remains critical to the restructuring of the political economy in the interests of the poor majority. Unsurprisingly, and consistent with the market fundamentalist faith of the ANC, a deadly silence has prevailed on even this half-baked type of ‘nationalisation’. Without a doubt this serves to reassure investors that the party will never pursue any ‘leftwing utopian’ project.

Critical analysis of ‘pro-poor interventions’

The living and working conditions of poor black South Africans have seen little improvement since the end of apartheid in 1994. Terreblanche (2009) has consistently shown that a more careful analysis
of official statistics actually reveals a woeful deterioration in the conditions of the poor over more than a decade. For example, the standard measure of inequality for the country, the Gini coefficient, increased from 0.64 in 1995 to 0.69 in 2005. There has thus been a widening gap between the rich and the poor in the country, driven in part by policies designed to fast-track the creation of a black economic elite. Over the same period, the simple poverty headcount, based on a monthly poverty line pegged at R462 per person, shows a marginal fall in poverty from 53 per cent in 1995 to 48 per cent a decade later (The Presidency 2008). Narrowly defined unemployment only started dropping below 30 per cent in the last five years, due to the economic boom as well as a series of ‘revisions on how to define and count an unemployed worker’.

However, sceptics from conflicting ideological standpoints question the positive trends in the dubious official statistics. Critics underscore the argument that there has been manipulation of statistics to conceal extreme and deep-rooted misery in contemporary South Africa. A thorough analysis of these disputes falls outside the scope of this briefing. But a careful study of the facts raises key questions about the socio-economic policy framework institutionalised after 1994. The GEAR macroeconomic policy and the post-apartheid Constitution entrench a socio-economic model based on private accumulation of wealth and profits. GEAR is a free market fundamentalist doctrine which prescribes wholesale privatisation as well as labour market flexibility. The Constitution promotes and protects private property. Why have these policy instruments been so blunt, and so ineffective in dismantling the socio-economic edifice of apartheid and radically reconstructing a social system that benefits the poor majority? To what extent has the dogged implementation of neoliberalism in South Africa worsened the suffering of the poor?

Given the importance attached to the anti-crisis Framework issued on 19 February (RSA 2009), its pro-poor economic logic deserves proper analysis, albeit briefly due to limited space. This Framework basically outlines three mechanisms by which to alleviate the plight of the poor: reliance on the workings of the labour market, scaling up of social welfare programmes, and better access to basic social services for poor families. There is now a closer look at how, in practice, each mechanism is likely to work against the poor.

The notion of making private sector labour markets work for the poor is apparently at the heart of government’s response to the economic crisis. But this is far from any innovative proposal because the wage labour system is the engine of the existing political economy; the well being of working families is tied to their ability to work (Smith 2003). Core policies (such as GEAR) that entrench the wage labour system, designed to intensify the exploitation of working people, are definitely not being abolished. Even mild and ad hoc reforms to counter the increasingly egregious exploitation of workers for the profit of monopolies that control most of the economy are not on the agenda. On the contrary, the anti-crisis Framework document merely urges ‘companies to do everything in their power to avoid retrenchments as a result of the global economic crisis, and to instead invest in their people and modernise their productive capacity’ (RSA 2009, p. 15). It includes tax breaks and other measures to rescue ‘companies in distress’ (like the job-shedding textile industry) that pose no threat to the wage-capital relation. But it is silent on basic and workable pro-poor options, for example, restructuring failing and idle firms and placing them under the democratic management and control of self-organised workers.

Urging corporations to invest in technology and a skilled workforce is contradictory and deeply flawed. Typically, a
capitalist enterprise invests in technology to raise the rate of profit and beat its rivals. But this drives cycles of overproduction, financial speculation, fictitious growth (economic bubbles) and crises. When corporations do decide to invest in a few skilled workers, this tends to increase unemployment rather than reduce working hours for the sake of a sustainable expansion of decent jobs.

The state plans to upscale access to its vast menu of social welfare interventions – state social grants, public works, food relief schemes, etc. It is estimated that at least 12 million South Africans (or 25 per cent of the population) receive social grants, with the number of beneficiaries steadily increasing over the last decade. The old age, disability and child support grants certainly reach some of the poorest households, often being the sole source of household income. Periodically the state has increased the monetary value of social grants, but because increments have been below the inflation rate, the purchasing power of the social grants tends to fall due to the skyrocketing cost of living. At a more fundamental level, the capitalist socio-economic model restricts or undermines the sustainability of an extensive pro-poor social welfare system (Smith 2003). With more aggressive fiscal belt-tightening suddenly easier to justify in the context of the economic crisis, the move to drastically cut the size of the social welfare budget is likely to gain momentum. Moreover, neo-classical labour economists forcefully argue that social welfare grants pegged at high levels discourage the unemployed from seeking work and cultivate dependency on the state (Nattrass 2007). The premise of this policy advice is that the invisible hand of the market is the best regulator of social justice for the poor – a fallacious and unrealistic assumption. Furthermore, it builds on spurious abstractions about individual rationality and maximising behaviour.

The government’s Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), tasked with contributing massively to halving unemployment by 2014, has been critiqued on similar grounds. Notwithstanding such criticisms, the revised EPWP now guarantees beneficiaries full-time jobs for a year, a change from the earlier model of the programme which catered for short and irregular jobs of six months’ duration. But this scaled-up EPWP is hazy on the wage levels involved, and this raises doubts as to whether it is a genuine path out of working poverty. Furthermore, it fails to reflect on big political economy issues that an anti-capitalist public works programme could explore, for example, stimulating thinking about how to use public works as a transition to permanent and decent jobs. Another issue that could be examined is whether it is possible to use public works as a platform to dynamically restructure and transcend the badly discredited market-based model, in order to provide affordable, efficient and quality services to the poor.

The state has repeated promises to expand poor peoples’ access to basic social services, ranging from water and electricity to housing and roads. However, in practice it has been unable to deliver on these promises and this failure has sparked militant protests in townships across the country. It is true that poor families enjoy rations of free water and electricity. But as soon as they exhaust this ‘free quota’, access depends on their ability to pay charges dictated by private companies that control the water and electricity networks. Poor people are increasingly directed to financial corporations to gain access to houses. Local governments, correctly viewed as closer to the people on the ground, are in practice bankrupt, indebted and often dysfunctional points of service delivery (National Treasury 2008, SARS 2008). This is unsurprising, because all tiers and divisions of government function in line with the neoliberal framework of the post-apartheid state. This has meant that corporate welfare guides the operations of local governments, whilst
the social welfare of the community must rely on the magic of ‘trickle-down logic’.

Conclusion

This article has briefly analysed the economic logic of the pro-poor responses of the South African government to the global economic crisis. As the local economy started sliding into recession, the state echoed the global political and corporate elite in talking up the economy and its neoliberal fundamentalist policies. It pinned the cause for the crisis on a mix of factors connected to the activities of financial capitalists. Although sections of finance capital triggered the recession, this is basically a classic economic slump rooted in capitalist over-accumulation, falling profit rates and the expansion of fictitious credit. Integrated into the global economy as a mining exporter and heavily reliant on foreign capital inflows, South Africa has been unable to escape being pulled into a downturn on this huge scale.

It has been illustrated how the state is aligning its anti-recession interventions to the stimulus packages of the global elite. Within this framework, it has adopted a minimalist set of anti-crisis proposals that steer clear of threatening or transcending the reign of capital. Yet the cost of the slump is set to be downloaded onto the poor, the majority of whom are mired in chronic structural poverty. To counter this accelerated depression in their living standards, poor people have stepped up their social protests, thus intensifying pressure on the state for workable measures to relieve their suffering. In this situation the state has been compelled to adopt pro-poor rhetoric to articulate its interventions to salvage capitalism. The post-apartheid governing elite is well known for adopting this populist tone, while at the same time resolutely sticking to and implementing capitalist policies that inherently work against the poor. It is a form of neoliberal populism that helps to politically disorientate and disarm the trade unions and emerging popular movements. It shields the elite in their accumulation of power and wealth as they switch between political office and the corporate world.

Debating concrete alternatives to capitalist economic crises, radical left thinkers invite us to think through, formulate and advance realistic anti-capitalist measures (Callinicos 2003, Smith 2003, Blackburn 2009). For the moment, one could probably refer to these as anti-capitalist transitional alternatives. They are transitional in that the solutions are practicable actions to overcome economic crisis, but also seek to revive accumulation which serves as a bridge to move towards socialism. As a case in point, Blackburn (2009) introduces anti-capitalist transitional alternatives to restructure the financial system. The basic idea behind these is a network of social funds to serve the needs of the poor, financed through taxes on corporations. But this network of social funds must be placed under popular democratic control, an approach in sharp contrast to the temporary banking nationalisation under corporate management currently taking place.

Peter T. Jacobs is a research specialist in the Center for Poverty Employment and Growth, which is part of the Human Sciences Research Council in South Africa. Email: pjacobs@hsrc.ac.za

Endnotes

1. Evidence to support this observation can be found in a government document entitled Framework for South Africa’s response to the international economic crisis issued on 19 February 2009 (RSA 2009). It specifically states that ‘the duration and depth of the downturn cannot be forecast with certainty, but growth is likely to be lower than previously expected at least in 2009, and 2010. This has potential implications for incomes, employment, and investment; and on social programmes partly
through the slowdown’s effect on tax revenues for government’ (RSA 2009, p. 3).

2. In a recent paper provocatively entitled ‘A tale of two depressions’, two mainstream economists suggest that the present economic meltdown exhibits profound depression-like patterns. They show that the situation could be uglier than the 1929–1933 depression if the scale of the analysis is global, rather than being restricted to the USA (Eichengreen and O’Rourke 2009).

3. Gowan (2009, p. 6) offers an incisive and stimulating analysis of the ways in which finance capitalists create, inflate and burst ‘speculative bubbles of varying sizes in different economic sectors’. All sectors of the capitalist class and policy makers entrusted to manage the economy actively participate in such dangerous, high-risk gambling.

4. The vast body of long statements made by the Minister of Finance, Minister of Trade and Industry and Governor of the South African Reserve Bank merely recycle information, and offer even fewer insights into who will pay for the rescue plans and clean up the mess. It is worth noting that the recovery timeframe is likely to last at least another three to five years after the establishment of ‘relative stability’.

5. Eminent Marxist activist and scholar Martin Legassick eloquently captures this shameless massaging of statistics on the part of state agencies and pro-government pundits (Legassick 2007, pp. 112–113). A case in point is the persisting scandal relating to the country’s official employment statistics. Whilst the quarterly growth rate of economic output (GDP) for the final quarter in 2008 (fourth-quarter GDP) registered a drop into negative territory, Statistics South Africa reported an unexpected increase in job creation for this period. It remains to be seen when and how the impact of the recession is likely to reflect in employment data (Financial Mail 2009).

References


Debates

Introduction

Lionel Cliffe

It had been hoped to include this Debates piece in ROAPE 120, Conflict & Peace in the Horn of Africa. While Mamdani’s overall argument about the West’s use of the ‘humanitarian intervention’ justification is still germane, obviously the specific context of the Sudan and the process of the International Criminal Court’s issuing a warrant against President Omar Hassan Al-Bashir has moved on. When this version of his piece was first published in 2008 in The Nation in the USA, the ICC Prosecutor had merely stated an intention to apply for a warrant. Since then, the African Union (AU) and the regional body, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) had suggested the process should be delayed whilst the prospect of a negotiated peace over Darfur was being sought. Eventually, however, the ICC’s Pre-Trial Chamber 1 did issue a warrant against Bashir and two other Sudanese on counts of alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity, although it concluded there was insufficient evidence to sustain the count of ‘genocide’ requested by Prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo. After much argument the AU Summit in July 2009 decided not to cooperate with ICC in serving the warrant, over protests by Botswana, South Africa and a few other countries. The Arab League also engaged with the issue, asking the UN Security Council to delay operationalising the warrant. Thus the issues of justice versus peace, and of intervention and African nations’ sovereignty have been dramatically joined in the last few months.

The New Humanitarian Order

Mahmood Mamdani

On 14 July, after much advance publicity and fanfare, the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) applied for an arrest warrant for the President of Sudan, Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir, on charges that included genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Important questions of fact arise from the application as presented by the prosecutor. But even more important is the light this case sheds on the politics of the ‘new humanitarian order’.

The conflict in Darfur began as a civil war in 1987–89, before Bashir and his group came to power. It was marked by
indiscriminate killing and mass slaughter on both sides. The language of genocide was first employed in that conflict. The Fur representative at the May 1989 reconciliation conference in El Fasher pointed to their adversaries and claimed that ‘the aim is a total holocaust and no less than the complete annihilation of the Fur people and all things Fur’. In response, the Arab representative traced the origin of the conflict to ‘the end of the ’70s when… the Arabs were depicted as foreigners who should be evicted from this area of Dar Fur’.

The ICC prosecutor, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, has uncritically taken on the point of view of one side in this conflict, a side that was speaking of a ‘holocaust’ before Bashir came to power, and he attributes far too much responsibility for the killing to Bashir alone. He goes on to speak of ‘new settlers’ in today’s Darfur, suggesting that he has internalised this partisan perspective.

At the same time, the prosecutor speaks in ignorance of history: ‘AL BASHIR … promoted the idea of a polarization between tribes aligned with him, whom he labeled “Arabs” and … the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa … derogatory [sic] referred to as “Zurgas” or “Africans”’. The racialisation of identities in Darfur has its roots in the British colonial period. As early as the late 1920s, the British tried to organise two confederations in Darfur: one Arab, the other black (Zurga). Racialised identities were incorporated into the census and provided the frame for government policy. It is not out of the blue that the two sides in the 1987–89 civil war described themselves as Arab and Zurga. If anything, the evidence shows that successive Sudanese governments – Bashir’s included – looked down on all Darfuris, non-Arab Zurga as well as Arab nomads.

Having falsely attributed the racialisation of the conflict to Bashir, Moreno-Ocampo focuses on two consequences of the conflict in Darfur: ethnic cleansing through land-grabbing and atrocities in the camps. He attributes both to Bashir. He is again wrong. The land-grabbing has been a consequence of three different, if related, causes. The first is the colonial system, which reorganised Darfur as a series of tribal homelands, designating the largest for settled peasant tribes and none for fully nomadic tribes. The second is environmental degradation: according to the United Nations Environment Programme, the Sahara expanded by 100 kilometres in four decades; this process reached a critical point in the mid-1980s, pushing all tribes of North Darfur, Arab and non-Arab, farther south, onto more fertile Fur and Masalit lands. This in turn led to a conflict between tribes with homelands and those without them. The imperative of sheer survival explains in part the unprecedented brutality of the violence in every successive war since 1987–89. The third cause came last: the brutal counterinsurgency unleashed by the Bashir regime in 2003–04 in response to an insurgency backed up by peasant tribes.

It is not just the early history of the conflict that the prosecutor is poorly informed about. In his eagerness to build a case, Moreno-Ocampo glosses over recent history as well. He charges Bashir with following up the mass slaughter of 2003–04 with attrition by other means in the camps: ‘He did not need bullets. He used other weapons: rape, hunger and fear’. This claim flies in the face of evidence from UN sources in Darfur, quoted by Julie Flint in the London Independent newspaper, that the death rate in the camps came down to around 200 a month from early 2005, less than in South Sudan or in the poor suburbs of Khartoum.

The point of the prosecutor’s case is to connect all consequences in Darfur to a single cause: Bashir. Moreno-Ocampo told journalists in The Hague, ‘What happened in Darfur is a consequence of Bashir’s will’. The prosecution of Bashir comes across as politicised justice. As
such, it will undermine the legitimacy of the ICC and almost certainly will not help solve the crisis in Darfur. It is perhaps understandable that a prosecutor in a rush would gloss over all evidence that might undermine his case. But we must not. A workable solution to the conflict requires that all its causes be understood in their full complexity.

Darfur was the site of mass deaths in 2003–04. World Health Organisation sources – still the most reliable available information on mortality levels of that time – trace these deaths to two major causes: approximately 80 per cent to drought-related diarrhoea and 20 per cent to direct violence. There is no doubt that the perpetrators of violence should be held accountable, but when and how are political decisions that cannot belong to the ICC prosecutor. More than the innocence or guilt of the President of Sudan, it is the relationship between law and politics – including the politicisation of the ICC – that poses a wider issue, one of greatest concern to African governments and peoples.

The new humanitarian order

When the Second World War broke out, the international order could be divided into two unequal parts: one privileged, the other subjugated; one a system of sovereign states in the Western Hemisphere, the other a colonial system in most of Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Post-war decolonisation recognised former colonies as states, thereby expanding state sovereignty as a global principle of relations between states. The end of the Cold War has led to another basic shift, heralding an international humanitarian order that promises to hold state sovereignty accountable to an international human rights standard. Many believe that we are in the throes of a systemic transition in international relations.

The standard of responsibility is no longer international law; it has shifted, fatefuly, from law to rights. As the Bush administration made patently clear at the time of the invasion of Iraq, humanitarian intervention does not need to abide by the law. Indeed, its defining characteristic is that it is beyond the law. It is this feature that makes humanitarian intervention the twin of the ‘war on terror’.

This new humanitarian order, officially adopted at the UN’s 2005 World Summit, claims ‘responsibility for the protection of vulnerable populations’. That responsibility is said to belong to ‘the international community’, to be exercised in practice by the UN, and in particular by the Security Council, whose permanent members are the great powers. This new order is sanctioned in a language that departs markedly from the older language of law and citizenship. It describes as ‘human’ the populations to be protected and as ‘humanitarian’ the crisis they suffer from, the intervention that promises to rescue them and the agencies that seek to carry out intervention. Whereas the language of sovereignty is profoundly political, that of humanitarian intervention is profoundly apolitical, and sometimes even anti-political. Looked at closely and critically, what we are witnessing is not a global but a partial transition. The transition from the old system of sovereignty to a new humanitarian order is confined to those states defined as ‘failed’ or ‘rogue’ states. The result is once again a bifurcated system, whereby state sovereignty obtains in large parts of the world but is suspended in more and more countries in Africa and the Middle East.

The Westphalian coin of state sovereignty is still the effective currency in the international system. It is worth looking at both sides of this coin: sovereignty and citizenship. If ‘sovereignty’ remains the password to enter the passageway of international relations, ‘citizenship’ still confers membership in the sovereign
national political (state) community. Sovereignty and citizenship are not opposites, they go together. The state, after all, embodies the key political right of citizens: the right of collective self-determination.

The international humanitarian order, in contrast, does not acknowledge citizenship. Instead, it turns citizens into wards. The language of humanitarian intervention has cut its ties with the language of citizen rights. To the extent that the global humanitarian order claims to stand for rights, these are residual rights of the human and not the full range of rights of the citizen. If the rights of the citizen are pointedly political, the rights of the human pertain to sheer survival; they are summed up in one word: protection. The new language refers to its subjects not as bearers of rights – and thus active agents in their emancipation – but as passive beneficiaries of an external ‘responsibility to protect’. Rather than rights-bearing citizens, beneficiaries of the humanitarian order are akin to recipients of charity. Humanitarianism does not claim to reinforce agency, only to sustain bare life. If anything, its tendency is to promote dependence. Humanitarianism heralds a system of trusteeship.

It takes no great intellectual effort to recognise that the responsibility to protect has always been the sovereign’s obligation. It is not that a new principle has been introduced; rather, its terms have been radically altered. To grasp this shift, we need to ask: who has the responsibility to protect whom, under what conditions and toward what end?

The era of the international humanitarian order is not entirely new. It draws on the history of modern Western colonialism. At the outset of colonial expansion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, leading Western powers – Britain, France, Russia – claimed to protect ‘vulnerable groups’. When it came to countries controlled by rival powers, such as the Ottoman Empire, Western powers claimed to protect populations they considered vulnerable, mainly religious minorities like specific Christian denominations and Jews. In lands not yet colonised by any power, such as South Asia and large parts of Africa, they highlighted local atrocities – such as female infanticide and suttee in India, and slavery in Africa – and pledged to protect victims from their rulers.

From this history was born the international regime of trusteeship exercised under the League of Nations. The League’s trust territories were mainly in Africa and the Middle East. They were created at the end of the First World War, when colonies of defeated imperial powers (the Ottoman Empire, Germany and Italy) were handed over to the victorious powers, who pledged to administer them as guardians would administer wards, under the watchful eye of the League of Nations.

One of these trust territories was Rwanda, administered as a trust of Belgium until the 1959 Hutu Revolution. It was under the benevolent eye of the League of Nations that Belgium hardened Hutu and Tutsi into racialised identities, using the force of law to institutionalise an official system of discrimination between them. Thereby, Belgian colonialism laid the institutional groundwork for the genocide that followed half a century later. The Western powers that constituted the League of Nations could not hold Belgium accountable for the way it exercised an international trust, for one simple reason: to do so would have been to hold a mirror up to their own colonial record. Belgian rule in Rwanda was but a harder version of the indirect rule in practice to one degree or another by all Western powers in Africa. This system did not simply deny sovereignty to its colonies; it redesigned the administrative and political life of colonies by bringing
each under a regime of group identity and rights. Belgian rule in Rwanda may have been an extreme version of colonialism, but it certainly was not exceptional.

Given the record of the League of Nations, it is worth asking how the new international regime of trusteeship would differ from the old one. What are the likely implications of the absence of citizenship rights at the core of this new system? Why would a regime of trusteeship not degenerate yet again into one of lack of accountability and responsibility?

On the face of it, these two systems – one defined by sovereignty and citizenship, the other by trusteeship and wardship – would seem to be contradictory rather than complementary. In practice, however, they are two parts of a bifurcated international system. One may ask how this bifurcated order is reproduced without the contradiction being flagrantly obvious, without it appearing like a contemporary version of the old colonial system of trusteeship. A part of the explanation lies in how power has managed to subvert the language of violence and war to serve its own claims.

Subverting the language of genocide

War has long ceased to be a direct confrontation between the armed forces of two states. As became clear during the confrontation between the Allied and the Axis powers in the Second World War, in America’s Indochina War in the 1960s and 1970s, its Gulf War in 1991 and then again in its 2003 invasion of Iraq, states do not just target the armed forces of adversary states; they target society itself: war-related industry and infrastructure, economy and work force, and sometimes, as in the aerial bombardment of cities, the civilian population in general. The trend is for political violence to become generalised and indiscriminate. Modern war is total war.

This development in the nature of modern war has tended to follow an earlier development of counterinsurgency in colonial contexts. Faced with insurgent guerrillas who were simply armed civilians, colonial powers targeted the populations of occupied territories. When Mao Zedong wrote that guerrillas must be as fish in water, American counterinsurgency theorist Samuel Huntington, writing during the Vietnam War, responded that the object of counterinsurgency must be to drain the water and isolate the fish. But the practice is older than post-Second World War counterinsurgency. It dates back to the earliest days of modernity, to settler-colonial wars against American Indians in the decades and centuries that followed 1492. Settler America pioneered the practice of interning civilian populations in what Americans called ‘reservations’ and the British called ‘reserves’, a technology the Nazis would later develop into an extreme form called concentration camps. Often thought of as a British innovation put into effect during the late-nineteenth-century Boer War in South Africa, the practice of concentrating and interning populations in colonial wars was in origin an American settler contribution to the development of modern war.

The regime identified with the international humanitarian order makes a sharp distinction between genocide and other types of mass violence. The tendency is to be permissive of insurgency (liberation war), counterinsurgency (suppression of civil war or of rebel/revolutionary movements) and inter-state war as integral to the exercise of national sovereignty. Increasingly, they are taken as an inevitable if regrettable part of defending or asserting national sovereignty, domestically or internationally – but not genocide.

What, then, is the distinguishing feature of genocide? It is clearly not extreme violence against civilians, for that is very
much a feature of both counterinsurgency and interstate war in these times. Only when extreme violence targets for annihilation a civilian population that is marked off as different 'on grounds of race, ethnicity or religion' is that violence termed 'genocide'. It is this aspect of the legal definition that has allowed 'genocide' to be instrumentalised by big powers so as to target those newly independent states that they find unruly and want to discipline. Increasingly, universal condemnation is reserved for only one form of mass violence – genocide – as the ultimate crime, so much so that counterinsurgency and war appear to be normal developments. It is genocide that is violence run amok, amoral, evil. The former are normal violence, but the latter is bad violence. Thus the tendency to call for 'humanitarian intervention' only where mass slaughter is named 'genocide'.

Given that the nature of twentieth-century 'indirect rule' colonialism shaped the nature of administrative power along 'tribal' (or ethnic) lines, it is not surprising that the exercise of power and responses to it tend to take 'tribal' forms in newly independent states. From this point of view, there is little to distinguish between mass violence unleashed against civilians in Congo, northern Uganda, Mozambique, Angola, Darfur, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire and so on. So which ones are to be named ‘genocide’ and which ones are not? Most important, who decides?

There is nothing new in legal concepts being used to serve the expedience of great powers. What is new about the 'war on terror' is that action against certain forms of violence is simultaneously being moralised and legally deregulated. Is it then surprising that these very developments have led to violence run amok, as in Iraq after 2003 or, indeed, in Bashir’s own little war on terror in Darfur in 2003–04? As the new humanitarian order does away with legal limits to pre-emptive war – thus, to the global war on terror – it should not be surprising that counterinsurgency defines itself as a local war on terror.

The year 2003 saw the unfolding of two counterinsurgencies. One was in Iraq, and it grew out of foreign invasion. The other was in Darfur, and it grew as a response to an internal insurgency. The former involved a liberation war against a foreign occupation; the latter, a civil war in an independent state. True, if you were an Iraqi or a Darfuri, there was little difference between the brutality of the violence unleashed in either instance. Yet much energy has been invested in how to define the brutality in each instance, whether as counterinsurgency or as genocide. We have the astonishing spectacle of the state that has perpetrated the violence in Iraq, the United States, branding an adversary state, Sudan, the one that has perpetrated genocidal violence in Darfur. Even more astonishing, we had a citizens’ movement in America calling for a humanitarian intervention in Darfur while keeping mum about the violence in Iraq.

**The International Criminal Court**

The emphasis on big powers as the protectors of rights internationally is increasingly being twinned with an emphasis on big powers as enforcers of justice internationally. This much is clear from a critical look at the short history of the International Criminal Court.

The ICC was set up by treaty in Rome in 1998 to try the world’s most heinous crimes: mass murder and other systemic abuses. The relationship between the ICC and successive US administrations is instructive: it began with Washington criticising the ICC and then turning it into a useful tool. The effort has been bipartisan: the first attempts to weaken the ICC and to create US exemptions
from an emerging regime of international justice were made by leading Democrats during the Clinton administration.

Washington’s concerns were spelled out in detail by a subsequent Republican ambassador to the UN, John Bolton: ‘Our main concern should be for our country’s top civilian and military leaders, those responsible for our defense and foreign policy’. Bolton went on to ask ‘whether the United States was guilty of war crimes for its aerial bombing campaigns over Germany and Japan in World War II’ and answered in the affirmative: ‘Indeed, if anything, a straightforward reading of the language probably indicates that the court would find the United States guilty. A fortiori, these provisions seem to imply that the United States would have been guilty of a war crime for dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This is intolerable and unacceptable’. He also aired the concerns of America’s principal ally in the Middle East, Israel: ‘Thus, Israel justifiably feared in Rome that its pre-emptive strike in the Six-Day War almost certainly would have provoked a proceeding against top Israeli officials. Moreover, there is no doubt that Israel will be the target of a complaint concerning conditions and practices by the Israeli military in the West Bank and Gaza’.

When it came to signing the treaty, Washington balked. Once it was clear that it would not be able to keep the ICC from becoming a reality, the Bush administration changed tactics and began signing bilateral agreements with countries whereby both signatories would pledge not to hand over each other’s nationals – even those accused of crimes against humanity – to the ICC. By mid-June 2003, the United States had signed such agreements with 27 countries, starting with Sierra Leone, a site of massive atrocities.

The Bush administration’s next move was accommodation, made possible by the type of pragmatism practised by the ICC’s leadership. The fact of mutual accommodation between the world’s only superpower and an international institution struggling to find its feet on the ground is clear if we take into account the four countries where the ICC has launched its investigations: Sudan, Uganda, Central African Republic and Congo. All are places where the United States has no major objection to the course charted by ICC investigations. Its name notwithstanding, the ICC is rapidly turning into a Western court to try African crimes against humanity. It has targeted governments that are US adversaries and ignored actions the United States does not oppose, such as those of Uganda and Rwanda in eastern Congo, effectively conferring impunity on them.

If the ICC is accountable, it is to the Security Council, not the General Assembly. It is this relationship that India objected to when it – like the United States, China and Sudan – refused to sign the Rome Statute. India’s primary objection was summed up by The Hindu, India’s leading political daily, which argued that ‘granting powers to the Security Council to refer cases to the ICC, or to block them, was unacceptable, especially if its members were not all signatories to the treaty’, for it ‘provided escape routes for those accused of serious crimes but with clout in the UN body’. At the same time, ‘giving the Security Council power to refer cases from a non-signatory country to the ICC was against the Law of Treaties under which no country can be bound by the provisions of a treaty it has not signed’.

The absence of formal political accountability has led to the informal politicisation of the ICC. No one should be surprised that the United States used its position as the leading power in the Security Council to advance its bid to capture the ICC. This is how The Hindu summed up the US relationship to the court: ‘The wheeling-dealing by which
the US has managed to maintain its exceptionalism to the ICC while assisting “to end the climate of impunity in Sudan” makes a complete mockery of the ideals that informed the setting up of a permanent international criminal court to try perpetrators of the gravest of crimes against humanity’.

Law and politics in transitional societies

Human rights fundamentalists argue for an international legal standard regardless of the political context of the country in question. Their point of view is bolstered by the widespread and understandable popular outrage, not just in the West but also throughout Africa, against the impunity with which a growing number of regimes have been resorting to slaughter to brutalise their populations into silence. The realisation that the ICC has tended to focus only on African crimes, and mainly on crimes committed by adversaries of the United States, has introduced a note of sobriety into the African discussion, raising concerns about a politicised justice and wider questions about the relationship between law and politics.

In no country is the distinction between legal and political issues self-evident. In a democracy, the domain of the legal is defined through the political process. What would happen if we privileged the legal over the political, regardless of context? The experience of a range of transitional societies – post-Soviet, post-apartheid and post-colonial – suggests that such a fundamentalism would call into question their political existence. Several post-Soviet societies of Eastern Europe with a history of extensive informing, spying and compromising have decided either not to fully open secret police and Communist Party files or to do so at a snail’s pace. Societies torn apart by civil war, such as post-Franco Spain, have chosen amnesia over truth, for the simple reason that they have prioritised the need to forge a future over agreeing on the past. The contrast is provided by Bosnia and Rwanda, where the administration of justice became an international responsibility and the decision to detach war crimes from the underlying political reality has turned justice into a regime for settling scores.

Those who face human rights as the language of an externally driven ‘humanitarian intervention’ have to contend with a legal regime where the content of human rights law is defined outside a political process – whether democratic or not – that includes them as formal participants. Particularly for those in Africa, the ICC heralds a regime of legal and political dependence, much as the post-war Bretton Woods institutions began to pioneer an international regime of economic dependence in the 1980s and 1990s. The real danger of detaching the legal from the political regime and handing it over to human rights fundamentalists is that it will turn the pursuit of justice into revenge-seeking, thereby obstructing the search for reconciliation and a durable peace. Does that mean that the very notion of justice must be postponed as disruptive of peace? No.

Survivors’ justice

If peace and justice are to be complementary rather than conflicting objectives, we must distinguish victors’ justice from survivors’ justice: if one insists on distinguishing right from wrong, the other seeks to reconcile different rights. In a situation where there is no winner and thus no possibility of victors’ justice, survivors’ justice may indeed be the only form of justice possible.

If Nuremberg is the paradigm for victors’ justice, South Africa’s post-apartheid transition is the paradigm for survivors’ justice. The end of apartheid was driven by a key principle: forgive but do not
forget. The first part of the compact was that the new power will forgive all past transgressions so long as they are publicly acknowledged as wrongs. There will be no prosecutions. The second was that there will be no forgetting and that henceforth rules of conduct must change, thereby ensuring a transition to a post-apartheid order. It was South Africa’s good fortune that its transition was in the main internally driven.

South Africa is not a solitary example but a prototype for conflicts raging across Africa about the shape of postcolonial political communities and the definition of membership in them. The agreement that ended the South Sudan war combined impunity for all participants with political reform. The same was true of the settlement ending Mozambique’s civil war. Had the ICC been involved in these conflicts in the way it is now in Darfur, it is doubtful there would be peace in either place.

Mahmood Mamdani is the Herbert Lehman Professor of Government at Columbia University. As well as teaching in Eastern and Southern Africa and founding the Centre for Basic Research in Kampala, Uganda, he has written extensively, including the influential and prize-winning *Citizen and Subject* (Princeton, 1996).

Endnote
1. This article is reprinted with permission of the Author from the September 29, 2008 issue of *The Nation* magazine. All rights reserved. For subscription information, call 1-800-333-8536. Portions of each week’s *Nation* magazine can be accessed at http://www.thenation.com. The article is an excerpt from the conclusion to Mahmood Mamdani’s book *Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics and the War on Terror* (Pantheon 2009), which is discussed in the following Debates article by Harry Verhoeven et al., pp. 630–635 in this issue, and reviewed by Bill Freund, 653–655 in this issue.
Understanding Sudan’s Saviors and Survivors: Darfur in the Crossfire between Humanitarian Fundamentalism and Khartoum’s Divide and Rule

Harry Verhoeven, Lydiah Kemunto Bosire & Sharath Srinivasan

Crises in African countries are too often given a media attention span of a couple of days. Millions of deaths in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia’s two decades of disorder and the famines in Ethiopia only capture the imagination when related to gorillas, pirates or rock stars before they return to their footnote status.

However, Darfur is different. A resource-poor region of Africa is at the centre of the most vibrant student activist campaign in a generation. In a unanimous vote in mid-2004, both the US House of Representatives and the Senate labelled it ‘genocide’ (before sending out a mission to inquire into whether it really was, but no matter). For five years since and counting, Darfur has topped the agenda for human rights activists, media outlets and the Western-led international community: aid organisations have set up the world’s largest humanitarian operation and more than 15,000 UN and AU peacekeepers now operate in western Sudan. In addition, the International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir and is appealing to add a charge of genocide. What is going on?

Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics and the War On Terror (Mamdani 2009) is Professor Mahmood Mamdani’s answer to this question. This is a book about the naming and framing of violence and its consequences; it explains why this war in particular has received such unusual publicity and become the object of international political and judicial activism. Through an investigation into the roots of the violence, Professor Mamdani challenges the moral, apolitical rendering of the conflict in the activist – consequently global – consciousness. Combining analytical strength and historical knowledge with a provocative tone, this book has unleashed one of the most heated discussions of an African conflict in recent times.

According to Mamdani, the ICC’s arrest warrants, the campaign of the Save Darfur Coalition (SDC) and the principle of the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ should be understood in the context of a wider emerging Western thinking and discourse epitomised by the ‘Global War on Terror’ (GWOT).

Saviors and Survivors does not try to tie a conspiratorial thread between the GWOT, the ICC and the SDC as some of its critics allege. Rather, it explicitly aims to highlight the problematic nature of the increasing tendency of the Western-led international community to remove the ‘political’ – the adversarial, the contestable – from key areas of public life and public decision making. The SDC, just like GWOT-theorists, depoliticises conflicts, preferring to cast them in intellectually easy, intuitively appealing and politically convenient terms of ‘good’ and ‘evil’. What is effectively a technocratic banner of ‘global justice’ and ‘universal values’ obscures quintessentially political questions about the who, what and why of ‘global’ interventionism and thereby also veils powerful interests and highly partisan decisions. In the GWOT zeitgeist, complex violent processes are radically simplified and packaged in catchy soundbites and emotionally charged messages. The contradictions and particular stakes of politics are
removed from the war setting and replaced by absolutist norms that leave us with only one ‘apolitical’ (and hence morally obvious) choice: military action. Just like the GWOT, the supporters of military intervention in Darfur cannot be bothered with local nuances, socio-historical processes and the messy nature of on-the-ground conflict realities that do not fit nice legal or ethical categories. There can be no discussion of how certain ‘perpetrators’ were once ‘victims’ and how the ‘victims’ are at risk of becoming ‘perpetrators’ due to outside intervention; or of how the ‘saviors’ of some continue to be the oppressors of others.

The reason for action is moral. Politics is to be kept at bay; it is too messy, and analysing and understanding it take too long – look where politics got us in Rwanda.

Rwanda is particularly emotive for the Darfur activists. As Mamdani notes:

The lesson is to rescue before it is too late, to act before seeking to understand. Though it is never explicitly stated, Rwanda is recalled as a time when we thought we needed to know more; we waited to find out, to learn the difference between Tutsi and Hutu, and why one was killing the other. ... What is new about Darfur, human rights interventionists will tell you, is the realisation that sometimes we must respond ethically and not wait. That time is when genocide is occurring.

In other words, prescribe the solution without understanding the problem. What *Saviors and Survivors* suggests is that an understanding of the problem would lead to a vastly different understanding of what solutions are necessary.

Mamdani perceptively contrasts the current wave of Darfur activism with the anti-war campaign regarding Vietnam, or the struggle against apartheid – SDC’s bottom-line is about military intervention: it mobilises for war, not for peace. The tactics used to influence public opinion too are very different – a particularly striking paragraph is Mamdani’s description of how the SDC, in its early days, distributed ‘action packets’ according to faith with a specific message tailored to religious stereotypes: if Christians were asked to lead (cf. the burden to save) and Jews were uniquely placed to bear witness (cf. the Holocaust), then Muslims, cast in the GWOT framework, were asked to fight oppressors in their midst and identify perpetrators.

SDC’s mischaracterisation of the Darfur conflict as being about ‘Arabs’ committing genocide against Darfur’s ‘African’ population was meant to appeal to a very broad, albeit only American, audience, uniting East Coast liberals, African-American churches and Deep South nativists behind Congress resolutions. Led by movie stars and campus activists who decried Darfur as an ‘African Auschwitz’, Mamdani rightly criticises this ad hoc coalition of right-wing conservatives and youthful Western progressives for turning Darfur into a place and an issue ‘to feel good about yourself because we’re doing the “right” thing and not engaging in politics’. Put differently, intervention in this brave new post-9/11 world claims to destroy evil, not to tackle a political problem. *Quod non*, of course: such claims are illusory.

The outcome? Humanitarian impunity. Here, Mamdani points out that Africa is the site of experimentation: the logic of societal experimentation in the form of Structural Adjustment Programmes that lead to collapse in the public sector continues in the work of the humanitarians. Today, in the messy situations of ongoing conflict, a new idea is being advocated, that of prosecutions at all cost, even when increased violence – as seen with the Lord’s Resistance Army now engaged in renewed atrocities in Congo – becomes a real outcome. What
are the implications for the institution of accountability itself and our hierarchies of principles when we embrace the dogma of unconditional, immediate justice – justice by force or through the suspension of peaceful negotiation if necessary? Who gets to decide which right trumps others? And before we say ‘the international community’, what legitimacy and accountability have those who constitute this group, assuming we can agree to the analytical content of this ‘international community’? In theory, prosecution and military intervention are elegant interventions. However, if they go wrong – and humanitarianism is littered with interventions gone wrong – the architects do not have to live with the consequences of their action.

Whereas *Saviors and Survivors* offers some excellent reflections on the ideological background of the international community’s role in the Darfur conflict, it is less good at analysing what has actually (not) happened. For all Mamdani’s claims about the extraordinary efficiency of the SDC and its Congress resolutions, the policy of Washington (and by extension, other Western countries) towards Sudan over the past years has been incoherent and deeply ineffective. Nor has the principle of the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ (RTP) and its definition of sovereignty transformed the will of interveners. In making a case for the concept, one of the RTP’s philosophical fathers, Gareth Evans said:

> While the primary responsibility to protect its own people properly lies with the sovereign state, if that responsibility is abdicated, through ill-will or incapacity, then it shifts to the international community collectively – who should respond with force if large-scale killing or ethnic cleansing is involved, and that is the only way to halt or avert the tragedy.

While Mamdani sees this discourse as thrusting open doors for the violation of African sovereignty, this outcome has not been forthcoming.

Instead, America has swung back and forth between long periods of silence, outright confrontation with al-Bashir, support for the former rebels of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army and attempts at normalising diplomatic relations with Khartoum. It initially supported African Union troops, then considered them to be inadequate, subsequently lobbying for a UN peacekeeping force, only to fail to seriously support it when it finally took over in January 2008; simultaneously the Bush administration invited Sudan’s intelligence chief to Langley, Virginia for collaboration in the context of the GWOT. Overall then, Washington and other stakeholders who have embraced the genocide label have struggled to manage competing interests – the Khartoum-SPLA peace agreement, terrorism, regional stability, Darfur – and have failed to develop a coherent long-term policy that really improves the human security of Sudanese civilians. It has been exactly this problem of inconsistency, confusion and the exigencies of realpolitik, rather than bellicose confrontationalism inspired by militant activism, that has dominated real-world Western actions.

This brings us to the second of three major shortcomings of the book: its own explanation of political violence in Darfur. While *Saviors and Survivors* does a masterful job of exposing the flaws in the orthodox ‘genocide’ narrative of the Darfur conflict, demanding that history and politics be injected into our understanding, it offers an account of its own that lacks engagement with critical parts of the historical context of violence in Sudan. In effect, Mamdani diminishes the importance of contemporary Sudanese politics that do matter in the understanding of Darfur.

For Mamdani, Darfur is, essentially, a two decades-old war over land, caused by the
nefarious interplay of prolonged drought, the colonial legacy of re-tribalisation and the Cold War’s negative impact. Building on earlier scholarship, he argues that Darfur’s history cannot be constructed as a simple settler (Arab) versus native (African) narrative, as the SDC does, with a bad ‘Arab’ government as spoiler-in-chief; we need a more sophisticated analysis in both space and time to understand the contemporary violence. While Darfur served as a launching pad for proxy warfare in neighbouring Chad between France, America and Libya, displacement through desertification in the 1980s unleashed a struggle over ever-shrinking quantities of land: as Darfurians responded by resorting to increasingly narrow racial–ethnic constructs, the Malthusian trap became ever more violent. For Mamdani then, the national government’s role in all of this has largely been one of poor efforts at land reform and failed attempts to broker negotiated settlements. By 2003, the violence had spiralled out of control and acquired broader national implications; the rise of two potent rebel movements led to a brutal counterinsurgency marked by gross human rights violations.

The problem is not so much that these claims are wrong (although some scholars have taken issue with the books reconstruction of the history of land and identity in Darfur), but that through their selectiveness, they could be seen as absolving the current regime in Khartoum from its devastating political, moral and legal responsibility for the atrocities and displacement in the region. Mamdani effectively diminishes the importance of recent deliberate political actions through an under-analysis of why Darfur is not exceptional and of why Sudan has been torn apart since independence by countless macro- and micro-conflicts: war in Sudan – whether in the East, in the South or in the West – is fundamentally not a ‘clash of (Islamic and Christian) civilisations’, nor a question of irreconcilable ‘Arab’ and ‘African’ cultures, but a result of the brutal exclusionary rule of a faction of Sudanese elite who control the country. *Saviors and Survivors* overlooks how since coming to power in 1989, a whole 14 years before full-scale rebellion in Darfur in 2003, the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) radicalised these core–periphery tendencies under the banner of militant Islam, rhetorically welcoming as equals all those from the peripheries who wanted to join its cause, but in reality deepening the political–economic realities of exclusion and wealth accumulation in Sudan. During the last decades, Darfur, like other ‘backward’ parts of Sudan, has been totally deprived of public goods such as security provision, decent health care and roads, while its people have been excluded from government jobs at the centre. Historically, Darfurians had a wide range of mechanisms to deal with both climatic changes and tribal–political upheaval and did so without falling into ethno–ecological conflicts; the intensification of violence from the mid-1980s onwards has thus less to do with creeping desertification and ‘unfortunate’ governmental misunderstanding, than with a context of structural exclusion that makes, and keeps, people vulnerable to disasters, whether natural or political. The ruling NCP did not merely fail to ‘think through’ the colonially crafted divide or make a ‘clumsy attempt to reform’ the land and governance system in Darfur, as Mamdani sees it, but it reinforced and exploited divisive ideas of race, identity and citizenship in order to manage patronage politics, as it has done elsewhere in Sudan.

In accounting for what led to the armed rebellion and ruthless counterinsurgency in 2003, Mamdani’s analysis of political developments after the NCP took power in mid-1989 runs to a paltry three pages. A truly anti-imperialist and emancipatory critique would not so shamelessly underweight the culpability of those elites hoarding and manipulating the
The post-colonial state’s claim to authority and a monopoly on violence to serve themselves.

The similarities between the tragedy in Darfur and wars elsewhere in the country go beyond their position in the Sudanese state and relate to the dynamics of the conflict itself: there is a vicious and deliberate interlocking of decentralised violence, forced migration, racialised language and ethnic divide and rule. The similarities include the scorched earth tactics in which displacement and terror are often more important than actual killing; the dehumanising discourse that stirs up hate and antagonises communities; the use of proxy militias, composed of groups marginalised in their own right, who are given total impunity to combat the enemy; the systematic transfer of assets (cattle, land, water holes, etc.) from those targeted by the government to those fighting for Khartoum; the aerial bombardment of civilians and the use of aid as a weapon against people; the false cease-fires and the relentless obstruction of humanitarian operations to wear down the international community and rebel opposition: the pattern of violence in Darfur eerily mimics that of war in the 1980s and 1990s in Southern Kordofan, Equatoria and Bahr al-Ghazal. Ahmed Haroun (who has been indicted by the ICC on charges of crimes against humanity) exemplifies how the horrors of Darfur are connected to massacres in other parts of Sudan – Haroun was not only one of the chief organisers of the Janjaweed in 2003–2004, he also led the government militias in their 1990s jihad in the Nuba Mountains, raping, pillaging and killing, to break the soul of the local communities.

None of this is to be found in Saviors and Survivors. While Mahmood Mamdani rightfully criticises the international community’s simplistic account of ‘genocide’ in Darfur, he engages in his own distortion through his downplay of the agency of those factions of the Sudanese elites in control of the state. War, exclusion, exploitation and underdevelopment in Sudan have a history that needs to be told. Darfur is now more than ever before an integral part of that history.

The third problem with the book is in its vision of the contents of accountable politics. For Mamdani, there are three types of justice possible – political, criminal and social. Quite apart from the problem of the ICC being an extension of the anti-political humanitarian zeitgeist – after all, the Court considers cases in accordance with technical specifications of gravity and applies the appropriate procedures, unencumbered by the politics that produced the violence – the ICC’s focus on criminal justice is inadequate. Seeking to deliver justice in accordance with the ‘Nuremberg model’, the court assumes it is possible to easily tell apart good and evil, perpetrators and victims. It also assumes that the survivors do not have to live together, that the violence has ended and that there is a winner. In Darfur, as in South Africa, Mamdani suggests, the situation is different. Right and wrong, perpetrator and victim are far more fluid. People have to live together, there are no winners and losers. Everyone is a survivor. The solution lies in the establishment of political change and inclusive institutions, with an acknowledgement that amnesty may be a price to be paid. Instead of criminal justice, the focus should be political justice based on what Mamdani calls the Kempton Park model that brought an end to apartheid in South Africa. There, the focus was on political justice, not criminal justice. The process focused on the political needs of the nation, privileging the sovereignty of the country over the principles of the amorphous international community.

What Mamdani does not address is that the ‘Kempton Park’ choices of apartheid South Africa, Mozambique and Southern Sudan were easier to make because the outside
world was not all mobilised behind one principle, right or wrong. Is Kempton Park still on the table now that the rules of peace negotiations – and of who should end up in parliament and who should be in jail – have been transformed? Might the activists be satisfied with delayed justice, where amnesty and political transformation are privileged, with the knowledge that later, whenever domestic politics allow it, prosecutions can take place? After all, many countries are recently revisiting their old amnesty provisions. Mamdani does not make this proposal but it might be one worth considering, including its moral hazard. Furthermore, South Africa has demonstrated that the Kempton Park model does not automatically address social justice, the other pillar of (in)justice that is often part of the root causes of violence. Where does this leave us? This is not addressed.

In conclusion, *Saviors and Survivors* demonstrates how the humanitarian project – with SDC and ICC being just two examples thereof – has shifted and continues to shift the vocabulary through which all local claims are made, how people understand their problems, and what solutions are made available to them and which excluded. This thought-provoking book leaves us with two existential questions: what are we to do with a humanitarianism which, instead of increasing the agency of those it hopes to support, removes from them possibilities of forging their own way out of their predicament, turning them into wards, passive subjects in need of saving? Second, what are we to do with intellectually stimulating criticisms that, in their eagerness to take on the would-be ‘saviors’, end up coming sometimes dangerously close to a form of moral relativism that almost negates the political and ethical responsibility of those who are undeniably planners and perpetrators of unacceptable violence?

**Harry Verhoeven** is a doctoral student at the Department of Politics & International Relations, Oxford University. Email: Harry.Verhoeven@politics.ox.ac.uk

**Lydiah Kemunto Bosire** is reading for her doctorate in politics at the University of Oxford, with a research focus on transitional justice in Kenya and Uganda. She is also the co-founder of Oxford Transitional Justice Research (OTJR). Email: lydiah-kemunto.bosire@politics.ox.ac.uk

**Sharath Srinivasan** is the David and Elaine Potter Lecturer in Governance and Human Rights in the Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Cambridge. Email: ss919@cam.ac.uk

**Reference**

Debates

Introduction

Lionel Cliffe

It had been hoped to include this Debates piece in ROAPE 120, Conflict & Peace in the Horn of Africa. While Mamdani’s overall argument about the West’s use of the ‘humanitarian intervention’ justification is still germane, obviously the specific context of the Sudan and the process of the International Criminal Court’s issuing a warrant against President Omar Hassan Al-Bashir has moved on. When this version of his piece was first published in 2008 in The Nation in the USA, the ICC Prosecutor had merely stated an intention to apply for a warrant. Since then, the African Union (AU) and the regional body, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) had suggested the process should be delayed whilst the prospect of a negotiated peace over Darfur was being sought. Eventually, however, the ICC’s Pre-Trial Chamber 1 did issue a warrant against Bashir and two other Sudanese on counts of alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity, although it concluded there was insufficient evidence to sustain the count of ‘genocide’ requested by Prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo. After much argument the AU Summit in July 2009 decided not to cooperate with ICC in serving the warrant, over protests by Botswana, South Africa and a few other countries. The Arab League also engaged with the issue, asking the UN Security Council to delay operationalising the warrant. Thus the issues of justice versus peace, and of intervention and African nations’ sovereignty have been dramatically joined in the last few months.

The New Humanitarian Order

Mahmood Mamdani

On 14 July, after much advance publicity and fanfare, the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) applied for an arrest warrant for the President of Sudan, Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir, on charges that included genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Important questions of fact arise from the application as presented by the prosecutor. But even more important is the light this case sheds on the politics of the ‘new humanitarian order’.

The conflict in Darfur began as a civil war in 1987–89, before Bashir and his group came to power. It was marked by
indiscriminate killing and mass slaughter on both sides. The language of genocide was first employed in that conflict. The Fur representative at the May 1989 reconciliation conference in El Fasher pointed to their adversaries and claimed that ‘the aim is a total holocaust and no less than the complete annihilation of the Fur people and all things Fur’. In response, the Arab representative traced the origin of the conflict to ‘the end of the ’70s when … the Arabs were depicted as foreigners who should be evicted from this area of Dar Fur’.

The ICC prosecutor, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, has uncritically taken on the point of view of one side in this conflict, a side that was speaking of a ‘holocaust’ before Bashir came to power, and he attributes far too much responsibility for the killing to Bashir alone. He goes on to speak of ‘new settlers’ in today’s Darfur, suggesting that he has internalised this partisan perspective.

At the same time, the prosecutor speaks in ignorance of history: ‘AL BASHIR … promoted the idea of a polarization between tribes aligned with him, whom he labeled “Arabs” and … the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa … derogatory [sic] referred to as “Zurgas” or “Africans”’. The racialisation of identities in Darfur has its roots in the British colonial period. As early as the late 1920s, the British tried to organise two confederations in Darfur: one Arab, the other black (Zurga). Racialised identities were incorporated into the census and provided the frame for government policy. It is not out of the blue that the two sides in the 1987–89 civil war described themselves as Arab and Zurga. If anything, the evidence shows that successive Sudanese governments — Bashir’s included — looked down on all Darfuris, non-Arab Zurga as well as Arab nomads.

Having falsely attributed the racialisation of the conflict to Bashir, Moreno-Ocampo focuses on two consequences of the conflict in Darfur: ethnic cleansing through land-grabbing and atrocities in the camps. He attributes both to Bashir. He is again wrong. The land-grabbing has been a consequence of three different, if related, causes. The first is the colonial system, which reorganised Darfur as a series of tribal homelands, designating the largest for settled peasant tribes and none for fully nomadic tribes. The second is environmental degradation: according to the United Nations Environment Programme, the Sahara expanded by 100 kilometres in four decades; this process reached a critical point in the mid-1980s, pushing all tribes of North Darfur, Arab and non-Arab, farther south, onto more fertile Fur and Masalit lands. This in turn led to a conflict between tribes with homelands and those without them. The imperative of sheer survival explains in part the unprecedented brutality of the violence in every successive war since 1987–89. The third cause came last: the brutal counterinsurgency unleashed by the Bashir regime in 2003–04 in response to an insurgency backed up by peasant tribes.

It is not just the early history of the conflict that the prosecutor is poorly informed about. In his eagerness to build a case, Moreno-Ocampo glosses over recent history as well. He charges Bashir with following up the mass slaughter of 2003–04 with attrition by other means in the camps: ‘He did not need bullets. He used other weapons: rape, hunger and fear’. This claim flies in the face of evidence from UN sources in Darfur, quoted by Julie Flint in the London Independent newspaper, that the death rate in the camps came down to around 200 a month from early 2005, less than in South Sudan or in the poor suburbs of Khartoum.

The point of the prosecutor’s case is to connect all consequences in Darfur to a single cause: Bashir. Moreno-Ocampo told journalists in The Hague, ‘What happened in Darfur is a consequence of Bashir’s will’. The prosecution of Bashir comes across as politicised justice. As
such, it will undermine the legitimacy of the ICC and almost certainly will not help solve the crisis in Darfur. It is perhaps understandable that a prosecutor in a rush would gloss over all evidence that might undermine his case. But we must not. A workable solution to the conflict requires that all its causes be understood in their full complexity.

Darfur was the site of mass deaths in 2003–04. World Health Organisation sources – still the most reliable available information on mortality levels of that time – trace these deaths to two major causes: approximately 80 per cent to drought-related diarrhoea and 20 per cent to direct violence. There is no doubt that the perpetrators of violence should be held accountable, but when and how are political decisions that cannot belong to the ICC prosecutor. More than the innocence or guilt of the President of Sudan, it is the relationship between law and politics – including the politicisation of the ICC – that poses a wider issue, one of greatest concern to African governments and peoples.

The new humanitarian order

When the Second World War broke out, the international order could be divided into two unequal parts: one privileged, the other subjugated; one a system of sovereign states in the Western Hemisphere, the other a colonial system in most of Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Post-war decolonisation recognised former colonies as states, thereby expanding state sovereignty as a global principle of relations between states. The end of the Cold War has led to another basic shift, heralding an international humanitarian order that promises to hold state sovereignty accountable to an international human rights standard. Many believe that we are in the throes of a systemic transition in international relations.

The standard of responsibility is no longer international law; it has shifted, fatefuly, from law to rights. As the Bush administration made patently clear at the time of the invasion of Iraq, humanitarian intervention does not need to abide by the law. Indeed, its defining characteristic is that it is beyond the law. It is this feature that makes humanitarian intervention the twin of the ‘war on terror’.

This new humanitarian order, officially adopted at the UN’s 2005 World Summit, claims ‘responsibility for the protection of vulnerable populations’. That responsibility is said to belong to ‘the international community’, to be exercised in practice by the UN, and in particular by the Security Council, whose permanent members are the great powers. This new order is sanctioned in a language that departs markedly from the older language of law and citizenship. It describes as ‘human’ the populations to be protected and as ‘humanitarian’ the crisis they suffer from, the intervention that promises to rescue them and the agencies that seek to carry out intervention. Whereas the language of sovereignty is profoundly political, that of humanitarian intervention is profoundly apolitical, and sometimes even anti-political. Looked at closely and critically, what we are witnessing is not a global but a partial transition. The transition from the old system of sovereignty to a new humanitarian order is confined to those states defined as ‘failed’ or ‘rogue’ states. The result is once again a bifurcated system, whereby state sovereignty obtains in large parts of the world but is suspended in more and more countries in Africa and the Middle East.

The Westphalian coin of state sovereignty is still the effective currency in the international system. It is worth looking at both sides of this coin: sovereignty and citizenship. If ‘sovereignty’ remains the password to enter the passageway of international relations, ‘citizenship’ still confers membership in the sovereign...
national political (state) community. Sovereignty and citizenship are not opposites, they go together. The state, after all, embodies the key political right of citizens: the right of collective self-determination.

The international humanitarian order, in contrast, does not acknowledge citizenship. Instead, it turns citizens into wards. The language of humanitarian intervention has cut its ties with the language of citizen rights. To the extent that the global humanitarian order claims to stand for rights, these are residual rights of the human and not the full range of rights of the citizen. If the rights of the citizen are pointedly political, the rights of the human pertain to sheer survival; they are summed up in one word: protection. The new language refers to its subjects not as bearers of rights – and thus active agents in their emancipation – but as passive beneficiaries of an external ‘responsibility to protect’. Rather than rights-bearing citizens, beneficiaries of the humanitarian order are akin to recipients of charity. Humanitarianism does not claim to reinforce agency, only to sustain bare life. If anything, its tendency is to promote dependence. Humanitarianism heralds a system of trusteeship.

It takes no great intellectual effort to recognise that the responsibility to protect has always been the sovereign’s obligation. It is not that a new principle has been introduced; rather, its terms have been radically altered. To grasp this shift, we need to ask: who has the responsibility to protect whom, under what conditions and toward what end?

The era of the international humanitarian order is not entirely new. It draws on the history of modern Western colonialism. At the outset of colonial expansion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, leading Western powers – Britain, France, Russia – claimed to protect ‘vulnerable groups’. When it came to countries controlled by rival powers, such as the Ottoman Empire, Western powers claimed to protect populations they considered vulnerable, mainly religious minorities like specific Christian denominations and Jews. In lands not yet colonised by any power, such as South Asia and large parts of Africa, they highlighted local atrocities – such as female infanticide and suttee in India, and slavery in Africa – and pledged to protect victims from their rulers.

From this history was born the international regime of trusteeship exercised under the League of Nations. The League’s trust territories were mainly in Africa and the Middle East. They were created at the end of the First World War, when colonies of defeated imperial powers (the Ottoman Empire, Germany and Italy) were handed over to the victorious powers, who pledged to administer them as guardians would administer wards, under the watchful eye of the League of Nations.

One of these trust territories was Rwanda, administered as a trust of Belgium until the 1959 Hutu Revolution. It was under the benevolent eye of the League of Nations that Belgium hardened Hutu and Tutsi into racialised identities, using the force of law to institutionalise an official system of discrimination between them. Thereby, Belgian colonialism laid the institutional groundwork for the genocide that followed half a century later. The Western powers that constituted the League of Nations could not hold Belgium accountable for the way it exercised an international trust, for one simple reason: to do so would have been to hold a mirror up to their own colonial record. Belgian rule in Rwanda was but a harder version of the indirect rule in practice to one degree or another by all Western powers in Africa. This system did not simply deny sovereignty to its colonies; it redesigned the administrative and political life of colonies by bringing
each under a regime of group identity and rights. Belgian rule in Rwanda may have been an extreme version of colonialism, but it certainly was not exceptional.

Given the record of the League of Nations, it is worth asking how the new international regime of trusteeship would differ from the old one. What are the likely implications of the absence of citizenship rights at the core of this new system? Why would a regime of trusteeship not degenerate yet again into one of lack of accountability and responsibility?

On the face of it, these two systems – one defined by sovereignty and citizenship, the other by trusteeship and wardship – would seem to be contradictory rather than complementary. In practice, however, they are two parts of a bifurcated international system. One may ask how this bifurcated order is reproduced without the contradiction being flagrantly obvious, without it appearing like a contemporary version of the old colonial system of trusteeship. A part of the explanation lies in how power has managed to subvert the language of violence and war to serve its own claims.

Subverting the language of genocide

War has long ceased to be a direct confrontation between the armed forces of two states. As became clear during the confrontation between the Allied and the Axis powers in the Second World War, in America’s Indochina War in the 1960s and 1970s, its Gulf War in 1991 and then again in its 2003 invasion of Iraq, states do not just target the armed forces of adversary states; they target society itself: war-related industry and infrastructure, economy and work force, and sometimes, as in the aerial bombardment of cities, the civilian population in general. The trend is for political violence to become generalised and indiscriminate. Modern war is total war.

This development in the nature of modern war has tended to follow an earlier development of counterinsurgency in colonial contexts. Faced with insurgent guerrillas who were simply armed civilians, colonial powers targeted the populations of occupied territories. When Mao Zedong wrote that guerrillas must be as fish in water, American counterinsurgency theorist Samuel Huntington, writing during the Vietnam War, responded that the object of counterinsurgency must be to drain the water and isolate the fish. But the practice is older than post-Second World War counterinsurgency. It dates back to the earliest days of modernity, to settler-colonial wars against American Indians in the decades and centuries that followed 1492. Settler America pioneered the practice of internment of civilian populations in what Americans called ‘reservations’ and the British called ‘reserves’, a technology the Nazis would later develop into an extreme form called concentration camps. Often thought of as a British innovation put into effect during the late-nineteenth-century Boer War in South Africa, the practice of concentrating and internment of populations in colonial wars was in origin an American settler contribution to the development of modern war.

The regime identified with the international humanitarian order makes a sharp distinction between genocide and other types of mass violence. The tendency is to be permissive of insurgency (liberation war), counterinsurgency (suppression of civil war or of rebel/revolutionary movements) and inter-state war as integral to the exercise of national sovereignty. Increasingly, they are taken as an inevitable if regrettable part of defending or asserting national sovereignty, domestically or internationally – but not genocide.

What, then, is the distinguishing feature of genocide? It is clearly not extreme violence against civilians, for that is very
much a feature of both counterinsurgency and interstate war in these times. Only when extreme violence targets for annihilation a civilian population that is marked off as different ‘on grounds of race, ethnicity or religion’ is that violence termed ‘genocide’. It is this aspect of the legal definition that has allowed ‘genocide’ to be instrumentalised by big powers so as to target those newly independent states that they find unruly and want to discipline. Increasingly, universal condemnation is reserved for only one form of mass violence – genocide – as the ultimate crime, so much so that counterinsurgency and war appear to be normal developments. It is genocide that is violence run amok, amoral, evil. The former are normal violence, but the latter is bad violence. Thus the tendency to call for ‘humanitarian intervention’ only where mass slaughter is named ‘genocide’.

Given that the nature of twentieth-century ‘indirect rule’ colonialism shaped the nature of administrative power along ‘tribal’ (or ethnic) lines, it is not surprising that the exercise of power and responses to it tend to take ‘tribal’ forms in newly independent states. From this point of view, there is little to distinguish between mass violence unleashed against civilians in Congo, northern Uganda, Mozambique, Angola, Darfur, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire and so on. So which ones are to be named ‘genocide’ and which ones are not? Most important, who decides?

There is nothing new in legal concepts being used to serve the expedience of great powers. What is new about the ‘war on terror’ is that action against certain forms of violence is simultaneously being moralised and legally deregulated. Is it then surprising that these very developments have led to violence run amok, as in Iraq after 2003 or, indeed, in Bashir’s own little war on terror in Darfur in 2003–04? As the new humanitarian order does away with legal limits to pre-emptive war – thus, to the global war on terror – it should not be surprising that counterinsurgency defines itself as a local war on terror.

The year 2003 saw the unfolding of two counterinsurgencies. One was in Iraq, and it grew out of foreign invasion. The other was in Darfur, and it grew as a response to an internal insurgency. The former involved a liberation war against a foreign occupation; the latter, a civil war in an independent state. True, if you were an Iraqi or a Darfuri, there was little difference between the brutality of the violence unleashed in either instance. Yet much energy has been invested in how to define the brutality in each instance, whether as counterinsurgency or as genocide. We have the astonishing spectacle of the state that has perpetrated the violence in Iraq, the United States, branding an adversary state, Sudan, the one that has perpetrated genocidal violence in Darfur. Even more astonishing, we had a citizens’ movement in America calling for a humanitarian intervention in Darfur while keeping mum about the violence in Iraq.

The International Criminal Court

The emphasis on big powers as the protectors of rights internationally is increasingly being twinned with an emphasis on big powers as enforcers of justice internationally. This much is clear from a critical look at the short history of the International Criminal Court.

The ICC was set up by treaty in Rome in 1998 to try the world’s most heinous crimes: mass murder and other systematic abuses. The relationship between the ICC and successive US administrations is instructive: it began with Washington criticising the ICC and then turning it into a useful tool. The effort has been bipartisan: the first attempts to weaken the ICC and to create US exemptions
from an emerging regime of international justice were made by leading Democrats during the Clinton administration.

Washington’s concerns were spelled out in detail by a subsequent Republican ambassador to the UN, John Bolton: ‘Our main concern should be for our country’s top civilian and military leaders, those responsible for our defense and foreign policy’. Bolton went on to ask ‘whether the United States was guilty of war crimes for its aerial bombing campaigns over Germany and Japan in World War II’ and answered in the affirmative: ‘Indeed, if anything, a straightforward reading of the language probably indicates that the court would find the United States guilty. A fortiori, these provisions seem to imply that the United States would have been guilty of a war crime for dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This is intolerable and unacceptable’. He also aired the concerns of America’s principal ally in the Middle East, Israel: ‘Thus, Israel justifiably feared in Rome that its preemptive strike in the Six-Day War almost certainly would have provoked a proceeding against top Israeli officials. Moreover, there is no doubt that Israel will be the target of a complaint concerning conditions and practices by the Israeli military in the West Bank and Gaza’.

When it came to signing the treaty, Washington balked. Once it was clear that it would not be able to keep the ICC from becoming a reality, the Bush administration changed tactics and began signing bilateral agreements with countries whereby both signatories would pledge not to hand over each other’s nationals – even those accused of crimes against humanity – to the ICC. By mid-June 2003, the United States had signed such agreements with 27 countries, starting with Sierra Leone, a site of massive atrocities.

The Bush administration’s next move was accommodation, made possible by the type of pragmatism practised by the ICC’s leadership. The fact of mutual accommodation between the world’s only superpower and an international institution struggling to find its feet on the ground is clear if we take into account the four countries where the ICC has launched its investigations: Sudan, Uganda, Central African Republic and Congo. All are places where the United States has no major objection to the course charted by ICC investigations. Its name notwithstanding, the ICC is rapidly turning into a Western court to try African crimes against humanity. It has targeted governments that are US adversaries and ignored actions the United States does not oppose, such as those of Uganda and Rwanda in eastern Congo, effectively conferring impunity on them.

If the ICC is accountable, it is to the Security Council, not the General Assembly. It is this relationship that India objected to when it – like the United States, China, and Sudan – refused to sign the Rome Statute. India’s primary objection was summed up by The Hindu, India’s leading political daily, which argued that ‘granting powers to the Security Council to refer cases to the ICC, or to block them, was unacceptable, especially if its members were not all signatories to the treaty’, for it ‘provided escape routes for those accused of serious crimes but with clout in the UN body’. At the same time, ‘giving the Security Council power to refer cases from a non-signatory country to the ICC was against the Law of Treaties under which no country can be bound by the provisions of a treaty it has not signed’.

The absence of formal political accountability has led to the informal politicisation of the ICC. No one should be surprised that the United States used its position as the leading power in the Security Council to advance its bid to capture the ICC. This is how The Hindu summed up the US relationship to the court: ‘The wheeling-dealing by which
the US has managed to maintain its exceptionalism to the ICC while assisting “to end the climate of impunity in Sudan” makes a complete mockery of the ideals that informed the setting up of a permanent international criminal court to try perpetrators of the gravest of crimes against humanity.

**Law and politics in transitional societies**

Human rights fundamentalists argue for an international legal standard regardless of the political context of the country in question. Their point of view is bolstered by the widespread and understandable popular outrage, not just in the West but also throughout Africa, against the impunity with which a growing number of regimes have been resorting to slaughter to brutalise their populations into silence. The realisation that the ICC has tended to focus only on African crimes, and mainly on crimes committed by adversaries of the United States, has introduced a note of sobriety into the African discussion, raising concerns about a politicised justice and wider questions about the relationship between law and politics.

In no country is the distinction between legal and political issues self-evident. In a democracy, the domain of the legal is defined through the political process. What would happen if we privileged the legal over the political, regardless of context? The experience of a range of transitional societies – post-Soviet, post-apartheid and post-colonial – suggests that such a fundamentalism would call into question their political existence. Several post-Soviet societies of Eastern Europe with a history of extensive informing, spying and compromising have decided either not to fully open secret police and Communist Party files or to do so at a snail’s pace. Societies torn apart by civil war, such as post-Franco Spain, have chosen amnesia over truth, for the simple reason that they have prioritised the need to forge a future over agreeing on the past. The contrast is provided by Bosnia and Rwanda, where the administration of justice became an international responsibility and the decision to detach war crimes from the underlying political reality has turned justice into a regime for settling scores.

Those who face human rights as the language of an externally driven ‘humanitarian intervention’ have to contend with a legal regime where the content of human rights law is defined outside a political process – whether democratic or not – that includes them as formal participants. Particularly for those in Africa, the ICC heralds a regime of legal and political dependence, much as the post-war Bretton Woods institutions began to pioneer an international regime of economic dependence in the 1980s and 1990s. The real danger of detaching the legal from the political regime and handing it over to human rights fundamentalists is that it will turn the pursuit of justice into revenge-seeking, thereby obstructing the search for reconciliation and a durable peace. Does that mean that the very notion of justice must be postponed as disruptive of peace? No.

**Survivors’ justice**

If peace and justice are to be complementary rather than conflicting objectives, we must distinguish victors’ justice from survivors’ justice: if one insists on distinguishing right from wrong, the other seeks to reconcile different rights. In a situation where there is no winner and thus no possibility of victors’ justice, survivors’ justice may indeed be the only form of justice possible.

If Nuremberg is the paradigm for victors’ justice, South Africa’s post-apartheid transition is the paradigm for survivors’ justice. The end of apartheid was driven by a key principle: forgive but do not
forget. The first part of the compact was that the new power will forgive all past transgressions so long as they are publicly acknowledged as wrongs. There will be no prosecutions. The second was that there will be no forgetting and that henceforth rules of conduct must change, thereby ensuring a transition to a post-apartheid order. It was South Africa’s good fortune that its transition was in the main internally driven.

South Africa is not a solitary example but a prototype for conflicts raging across Africa about the shape of postcolonial political communities and the definition of membership in them. The agreement that ended the South Sudan war combined impunity for all participants with political reform. The same was true of the settlement ending Mozambique’s civil war. Had the ICC been involved in these conflicts in the way it is now in Darfur, it is doubtful there would be peace in either place.

Mahmood Mamdani is the Herbert Lehman Professor of Government at Columbia University. As well as teaching in Eastern and Southern Africa and founding the Centre for Basic Research in Kampala, Uganda, he has written extensively, including the influential and prize-winning *Citizen and Subject* (Princeton, 1996).

Endnote

1. This article is reprinted with permission of the Author from the September 29, 2008 issue of *The Nation* magazine. All rights reserved. For subscription information, call 1-800-333-8536. Portions of each week’s *Nation* magazine can be accessed at http://www.thenation.com. The article is an excerpt from the conclusion to Mahmood Mamdani’s book *Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics and the War on Terror* (Pantheon 2009), which is discussed in the following Debates article by Harry Verhoeven *et al.*, pp. 630–635 in this issue, and reviewed by Bill Freund, 653–655 in this issue.
Understanding Sudan’s Saviors and Survivors: Darfur in the Crossfire between Humanitarian Fundamentalism and Khartoum’s Divide and Rule

Harry Verhoeven, Lydiah Kemunto Bosire & Sharath Srinivasan

Crises in African countries are too often given a media attention span of a couple of days. Millions of deaths in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia’s two decades of disorder and the famines in Ethiopia only capture the imagination when related to gorillas, pirates or rock stars before they return to their footnote status.

However, Darfur is different. A resource-poor region of Africa is at the centre of the most vibrant student activist campaign in a generation. In a unanimous vote in mid-2004, both the US House of Representatives and the Senate labelled it ‘genocide’ (before sending out a mission to inquire into whether it really was, but no matter). For five years since and counting, Darfur has topped the agenda for human rights activists, media outlets and the Western-led international community: aid organisations have set up the world’s largest humanitarian operation and more than 15,000 UN and AU peacekeepers now operate in western Sudan. In addition, the International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir and is appealing to add a charge of genocide. What is going on?

Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics and the War On Terror (Mamdani 2009) is Professor Mahmood Mamdani’s answer to this question. This is a book about the naming and framing of violence and its consequences: it explains why this war in particular has received such unusual publicity and become the object of international political and judicial activism. Through an investigation into the roots of the violence, Professor Mamdani challenges the moral, apolitical rendering of the conflict in the activist – consequently global – consciousness. Combining analytical strength and historical knowledge with a provocative tone, this book has unleashed one of the most heated discussions of an African conflict in recent times.

According to Mamdani, the ICC’s arrest warrants, the campaign of the Save Darfur Coalition (SDC) and the principle of the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ should be understood in the context of a wider emerging Western thinking and discourse epitomised by the ‘Global War on Terror’ (GWOT).

Saviors and Survivors does not try to tie a conspiratorial thread between the GWOT, the ICC and the SDC as some of its critics allege. Rather, it explicitly aims to highlight the problematic nature of the increasing tendency of the Western-led international community to remove the ‘political’ – the adversarial, the contestable – from key areas of public life and public decision making. The SDC, just like GWOT-theorists, depoliticises conflicts, preferring to cast them in intellectually easy, intuitively appealing and politically convenient terms of ‘good’ and ‘evil’. What is effectively a technocratic banner of ‘global justice’ and ‘universal values’ obscures quintessentially political questions about the who, what and why of ‘global’ interventionism and thereby also veils powerful interests and highly partisan decisions. In the GWOT zeitgeist, complex violent processes are radically simplified and packaged in catchy soundbites and emotionally charged messages. The contradictions and particular stakes of politics are
removed from the war setting and replaced by absolutist norms that leave us with only one ‘apolitical’ (and hence morally obvious) choice: military action. Just like the GWOT, the supporters of military intervention in Darfur cannot be bothered with local nuances, socio-historical processes and the messy nature of on-the-ground conflict realities that do not fit nice legal or ethical categories. There can be no discussion of how certain ‘perpetrators’ were once ‘victims’ and how the ‘victims’ are at risk of becoming ‘perpetrators’ due to outside intervention; or of how the ‘saviors’ of some continue to be the oppressors of others.

The reason for action is moral. Politics is to be kept at bay; it is too messy, and analysing and understanding it take too long – look where politics got us in Rwanda.

Rwanda is particularly emotive for the Darfur activists. As Mamdani notes:

The lesson is to rescue before it is too late, to act before seeking to understand. Though it is never explicitly stated, Rwanda is recalled as a time when we thought we needed to know more; we waited to find out, to learn the difference between Tutsi and Hutu, and why one was killing the other. ... What is new about Darfur, human rights interventionists will tell you, is the realisation that sometimes we must respond ethically and not wait. That time is when genocide is occurring.

In other words, prescribe the solution without understanding the problem. What Saviors and Survivors suggests is that an understanding of the problem would lead to a vastly different understanding of what solutions are necessary.

Mamdani perceptively contrasts the current wave of Darfur activism with the anti-war campaign regarding Vietnam, or the struggle against apartheid – SDC’s bottom-line is about military intervention: it mobilises for war, not for peace. The tactics used to influence public opinion too are very different – a particularly striking paragraph is Mamdani’s description of how the SDC, in its early days, distributed ‘action packets’ according to faith with a specific message tailored to religious stereotypes: if Christians were asked to lead (cf. the burden to save) and Jews were uniquely placed to bear witness (cf. the Holocaust), then Muslims, cast in the GWOT framework, were asked to fight oppressors in their midst and identify perpetrators.

SDC’s mischaracterisation of the Darfur conflict as being about ‘Arabs’ committing genocide against Darfur’s ‘African’ population was meant to appeal to a very broad, albeit only American, audience, uniting East Coast liberals, African-American churches and Deep South nativists behind Congress resolutions. Led by movie stars and campus activists who decried Darfur as an ‘African Auschwitz’, Mamdani rightly criticises this ad hoc coalition of right-wing conservatives and youthful Western progressives for turning Darfur into a place and an issue ‘to feel good about yourself because we’re doing the “right” thing and not engaging in politics’. Put differently, intervention in this brave new post-9/11 world claims to destroy evil, not to tackle a political problem. Quod non, of course: such claims are illusory.

The outcome? Humanitarian impunity. Here, Mamdani points out that Africa is the site of experimentation: the logic of societal experimentation in the form of Structural Adjustment Programmes that lead to collapse in the public sector continues in the work of the humanitarians. Today, in the messy situations of ongoing conflict, a new idea is being advocated, that of prosecutions at all cost, even when increased violence – as seen with the Lord’s Resistance Army now engaged in renewed atrocities in Congo – becomes a real outcome. What
are the implications for the institution of accountability itself and our hierarchies of principles when we embrace the dogma of unconditional, immediate justice – justice by force or through the suspension of peaceful negotiation if necessary? Who gets to decide which right trumps others? And before we say ‘the international community’, what legitimacy and accountability have those who constitute this group, assuming we can agree to the analytical content of this ‘international community’? In theory, prosecution and military intervention are elegant interventions. However, if they go wrong – and humanitarianism is littered with interventions gone wrong – the architects do not have to live with the consequences of their action.

Whereas Saviors and Survivors offers some excellent reflections on the ideological background of the international community’s role in the Darfur conflict, it is less good at analysing what has actually (not) happened. For all Mamdani’s claims about the extraordinary efficiency of the SDC and its Congress resolutions, the policy of Washington (and by extension, other Western countries) towards Sudan over the past years has been incoherent and deeply ineffective. Nor has the principle of the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ (RTP) and its definition of sovereignty transformed the will of intervéners. In making a case for the concept, one of the RTP’s philosophical fathers, Gareth Evans said:

While the primary responsibility to protect its own people properly lies with the sovereign state, if that responsibility is abdicated, through ill-will or incapacity, then it shifts to the international community collectively – who should respond with force if large-scale killing or ethnic cleansing is involved, and that is the only way to halt or avert the tragedy.

While Mamdani sees this discourse as thrusting open doors for the violation of African sovereignty, this outcome has not been forthcoming.

Instead, America has swung back and forth between long periods of silence, outright confrontation with al-Bashir, support for the former rebels of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army and attempts at normalising diplomatic relations with Khartoum. It initially supported African Union troops, then considered them to be inadequate, subsequently lobbying for a UN peacekeeping force, only to fail to seriously support it when it finally took over in January 2008; simultaneously the Bush administration invited Sudan’s intelligence chief to Langley, Virginia for collaboration in the context of the GWOT. Overall then, Washington and other stakeholders who have embraced the genocide label have struggled to manage competing interests – the Khartoum-SPLA peace agreement, terrorism, regional stability, Darfur – and have failed to develop a coherent long-term policy that really improves the human security of Sudanese civilians. It has been exactly this problem of inconsistency, confusion and the exigencies of realpolitik, rather than bellicose confrontationalism inspired by militant activism, that has dominated real-world Western actions.

This brings us to the second of three major shortcomings of the book: its own explanation of political violence in Darfur. While Saviors and Survivors does a masterful job of exposing the flaws in the orthodox ‘genocide’ narrative of the Darfur conflict, demanding that history and politics be injected into our understanding, it offers an account of its own that lacks engagement with critical parts of the historical context of violence in Sudan. In effect, Mamdani diminishes the importance of contemporary Sudanese politics that do matter in the understanding of Darfur.

For Mamdani, Darfur is, essentially, a two decades-old war over land, caused by the
nefarious interplay of prolonged drought, the colonial legacy of re-tribalisation and the Cold War’s negative impact. Building on earlier scholarship, he argues that Darfur’s history cannot be constructed as a simple settler (Arab) versus native (African) narrative, as the SDC does, with a bad ‘Arab’ government as spoiler-in-chief; we need a more sophisticated analysis in both space and time to understand the contemporary violence. While Darfur served as a launching pad for proxy warfare in neighbouring Chad between France, America and Libya, displacement through desertification in the 1980s unleashed a struggle over ever-shrinking quantities of land: as Darfurians responded by resorting to increasingly narrow racial–ethnic constructs, the Malthusian trap became ever more violent. For Mamdani then, the national government’s role in all of this has largely been one of poor efforts at land reform and failed attempts to broker negotiated settlements. By 2003, the violence had spiralled out of control and acquired broader national implications; the rise of two potent rebel movements led to a brutal counterinsurgency marked by gross human rights violations.

The problem is not so much that these claims are wrong (although some scholars have taken issue with the books reconstruction of the history of land and identity in Darfur), but that through their selectiveness, they could be seen as absolving the current regime in Khartoum from its devastating political, moral and legal responsibility for the atrocities and displacement in the region. Mamdani effectively diminishes the importance of recent deliberate political actions through an under-analysis of why Darfur is not exceptional and of why Sudan has been torn apart since independence by countless macro- and micro-conflicts: war in Sudan – whether in the East, in the South or in the West – is fundamentally not a ‘clash of (Islamic and Christian) civilisations’, nor a question of irreconcilable ‘Arab’ and ‘African’ cultures, but a result of the brutal exclusionary rule of a faction of Sudanese elite who control the country. Saviors and Survivors overlooks how since coming to power in 1989, a whole 14 years before full-scale rebellion in Darfur in 2003, the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) radicalised these core–periphery tendencies under the banner of militant Islam, rhetorically welcoming as equals all those from the peripheries who wanted to join its cause, but in reality deepening the political–economic realities of exclusion and wealth accumulation in Sudan. During the last decades, Darfur, like other ‘backward’ parts of Sudan, has been totally deprived of public goods such as security provision, decent health care and roads, while its people have been excluded from government jobs at the centre. Historically, Darfurians had a wide range of mechanisms to deal with both climatic changes and tribal–political upheaval and did so without falling into ethno–ecological conflicts; the intensification of violence from the mid-1980s onwards has thus less to do with creeping desertification and ‘unfortunate’ governmental misunderstanding, than with a context of structural exclusion that makes, and keeps, people vulnerable to disasters, whether natural or political. The ruling NCP did not merely fail to ‘think through’ the colonially crafted divide or make a ‘clumsy attempt to reform’ the land and governance system in Darfur, as Mamdani sees it, but it reinforced and exploited divisive ideas of race, identity and citizenship in order to manage patronage politics, as it has done elsewhere in Sudan.

In accounting for what led to the armed rebellion and ruthless counterinsurgency in 2003, Mamdani’s analysis of political developments after the NCP took power in mid-1989 runs to a paltry three pages. A truly anti-imperialist and emancipatory critique would not so shamelessly underweight the culpability of those elites hoarding and manipulating the
The similarities between the tragedy in Darfur and wars elsewhere in the country go beyond their position in the Sudanese state and relate to the dynamics of the conflict itself: there is a vicious and deliberate interlocking of decentralised violence, forced migration, racialised language and ethnic divide and rule. The similarities include the scorched earth tactics in which displacement and terror are often more important than actual killing; the dehumanising discourse that stirs up hate and antagonises communities; the use of proxy militias, composed of groups marginalised in their own right, who are given total impunity to combat the enemy; the systematic transfer of assets (cattle, land, water holes, etc.) from those targeted by the government to those fighting for Khartoum; the aerial bombardment of civilians and the use of aid as a weapon against people; the false cease-fires and the relentless obstruction of humanitarian operations to wear down the international community and rebel opposition: the pattern of violence in Darfur eerily mimics that of war in the 1980s and 1990s in Southern Kordofan, Equatoria and Bahr al-Ghazal. Ahmed Haroun (who has been indicted by the ICC on charges of crimes against humanity) exemplifies how the horrors of Darfur are connected to massacres in other parts of Sudan – Haroun was not only one of the chief organisers of the Janjaweed in 2003–2004, he also led the government militias in their 1990s jihad in the Nuba Mountains, raping, pillaging and killing, to break the soul of the local communities.

None of this is to be found in Saviors and Survivors. While Mahmood Mamdani rightfully criticises the international community’s simplistic account of ‘genocide’ in Darfur, he engages in his own distortion through his downplay of the agency of those factions of the Sudanese elites in control of the state. War, exclusion, exploitation and underdevelopment in Sudan have a history that needs to be told. Darfur is now more than ever before an integral part of that history.

The third problem with the book is in its vision of the contents of accountable politics. For Mamdani, there are three types of justice possible – political, criminal and social. Quite apart from the problem of the ICC being an extension of the anti-political humanitarian zeitgeist – after all, the Court considers cases in accordance with technical specifications of gravity and applies the appropriate procedures, unencumbered by the politics that produced the violence – the ICC’s focus on criminal justice is inadequate. Seeking to deliver justice in accordance with the ‘Nuremberg model’, the court assumes it is possible to easily tell apart good and evil, perpetrators and victims. It also assumes that the survivors do not have to live together, that the violence has ended and that there is a winner. In Darfur, as in South Africa, Mamdani suggests, the situation is different. Right and wrong, perpetrator and victim are far more fluid. People have to live together, there are no winners and losers. Everyone is a survivor. The solution lies in the establishment of political change and inclusive institutions, with an acknowledgement that amnesty may be a price to be paid. Instead of criminal justice, the focus should be political justice based on what Mamdani calls the Kempton Park model that brought an end to apartheid in South Africa. There, the focus was on political justice, not criminal justice. The process focused on the political needs of the nation, privileging the sovereignty of the country over the principles of the amorphous international community.

What Mamdani does not address is that the ‘Kempton Park’ choices of apartheid South Africa, Mozambique and Southern Sudan were easier to make because the outside
world was not all mobilised behind one principle, right or wrong. Is Kempton Park still on the table now that the rules of peace negotiations – and of who should end up in parliament and who should be in jail – have been transformed? Might the activists be satisfied with delayed justice, where amnesty and political transformation are privileged, with the knowledge that later, whenever domestic politics allow it, prosecutions can take place? After all, many countries are recently revisiting their old amnesty provisions. Mamdani does not make this proposal but it might be one worth considering, including its moral hazard. Furthermore, South Africa has demonstrated that the Kempton Park model does not automatically address social justice, the other pillar of (in)justice that is often part of the root causes of violence. Where does this leave us? This is not addressed.

In conclusion, *Saviors and Survivors* demonstrates how the humanitarian project – with SDC and ICC being just two examples thereof – has shifted and continues to shift the vocabulary through which all local claims are made, how people understand their problems, and what solutions are made available to them and which excluded. This thought-provoking book leaves us with two existential questions: what are we to do with a humanitarianism which, instead of increasing the agency of those it hopes to support, removes from them possibilities of forging their own way out of their predicament, turning them into wards, passive subjects in need of saving? Second, what are we to do with intellectually stimulating criticisms that, in their eagerness to take on the would-be ‘saviors’, end up coming sometimes dangerously close to a form of moral relativism that almost negates the political and ethical responsibility of those who are undeniably planners and perpetrators of unacceptable violence?

Harry Verhoeven is a doctoral student at the Department of Politics & International Relations, Oxford University. Email: Harry.Verhoeven@politics.ox.ac.uk

Lydiah Kemunto Bosire is reading for her doctorate in politics at the University of Oxford, with a research focus on transitional justice in Kenya and Uganda. She is also the co-founder of Oxford Transitional Justice Research (OTJR). Email: lydiah-kemunto.bosire@politics.ox.ac.uk

Sharath Srinivasan is the David and Elaine Potter Lecturer in Governance and Human Rights in the Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Cambridge. Email: ss919@cam.ac.uk

Reference

Dedications

Tributes to Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem (1961–2009)

I am proud to say that I taught Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem at Bayero University Kano. Indeed, whenever I was in his company I always expected the familiar introduction: “’AB Zack’” (as he liked to call me) was my tutor at Bayero. These guys taught me Marxism”. What does one say after that, coming from one of the brightest minds to emerge out of Africa in the latter part of the twentieth century? As a student, Taju was a gem: always seeking answers to questions; always asking for articles or books (no internet then you see) with clear ordering of the sequence of the reading materials. Students of this calibre are not just a joy to teach, but they also ensure lecturers are current with the debates.

Taju was born in Funtua, Katsina State, Northern Nigeria to parents who had migrated to this major northern agricultural district from Ogbomosho, Oyo State, Southwestern Nigeria. He was a true Nigerian, one who felt at home in Kano as in Onitsha or Lagos, appropriated by all sides of diverse Nigeria. On completion of his secondary education, Taju gained entrance to Bayero University Kano (BUK), where he obtained First Class Honours in Political Science, as well as a national merit award, and later proceeded to St Peter’s College Oxford as Rhodes Scholar to pursue his doctoral work. At Oxford he continued his political work (which he had started not only with the university students union, but also with the Nigerian Labour Congress) as President of the University African Students Union.

Intellectually and politically Taju was a vibrant person, a great orator and one with a passion for politics. He was an ardent Pan-Africanist, who later became Secretary General of the newly formed Pan-Africanist Movement on the recommendation of the late Mohamed Babu, former Minister in the Tanzanian Government of Julius Nyerere. Taju was also a development activist with the portfolio of Deputy Director (Africa) for the UN Millennium Campaign (UNMC) and until his death was Director of Justice Africa and Chair of Pan Africa Development Education and Advisory Programme. He was a fearless campaigner against injustice who had his brush with the Nigerian State Security Service on a visit to his homeland in 1989. He was very much aware of how the Left in his country has been depleted by intimidation and bullying and he felt he had to act to stem the tide. Fearlessly, he organised the triumphant return to Nigeria in 2005 of Dr Patrick Wilmot, the Left Caribbean academic who was deported from Nigeria by the Babaginda regime.

My last conversation with Taju was at the International Conference on Institutions, Culture and Corruption in Africa in October 2008 organised by UNECA. As usual I was introduced to the audience as his former tutor and as such he had to watch his ways. Taju went on to give an electrifying talk for well over the allocated time, without referring to his notes. At the end, he apologised that he had to leave to catch a plane to Kampala. I now cherish the picture he insisted we took. He is survived by his wife Munira and two daughters, Aida and Aishat.

Alfred B. Zack-Williams.
Email: abzw@blueyonder.co.uk
The Tajudeen Challenge

I met Comrade Tajudeen Abdulraheem 23 years ago in Oxford, through a Trinidadian comrade, David Johnson, a fellow historian. When I informed David that I would be travelling to Oxford to do research at Rhodes House Library, he suggested I contact Taju as a potential host. Our paths never crossed when I was resident in Nigeria, from 1977–1984, but Taju knew almost everyone that mattered on the Nigerian left. Our first meeting therefore turned out to be a Central Committee Indaba that took in more members, with the arrival of Adebayo Olukoshi the following day and other Nigerian Comrades. Our discussions principally revolved around the perennial question of la project Africain – what else to talk about? – the left in Nigeria; the struggle against Apartheid; the Africanists scholarly racket; neo-colonialism/imperialism and race but hardly Pan-Africanism. This is instructive partly because Taju came from a Marxist tradition that was shaped by the left experience in Nigeria, an experience that is strictly speaking rooted in the history of Nigerian intellectuals and their romance with the ‘progressive’ faction of the fractious Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC). It is not co-incidental that his first scholarly publication, co-authored with Adebayo Olukoshi, was about the left and the struggle for socialism in Nigeria.

Taju continued to struggle within this tradition when he took up a position as researcher-cum-activist at Ben Turok’s Institute of African Alternative (IAA). The debates then, our debates, if I can call it that, were shaped by an orthodox Marxist project that was informed by classical formulations about history, theory and society. The short-lived Journal of African Marxist (JAM) was anything but African; it published articles written by African intellectuals who professed Marxist ideas but were far removed from the day-to-day reality of those for whom they claimed to speak. This distance – not just literal and metaphorical – troubled Taju who was still bogged down with primary research – his dissertation. Time and again he would evoke Cabral as if to remind us all about the monumental task ahead.

By the time he finished his dissertation Taju had crossed the proverbial Rubicon; resolved to look from within, to explore linkages and potentials within the evolving African community of exiles particularly Ghanaians, and to return to the source a la Cabral. This was the context, indeed the moment of the African Research and Information Bureau (ARIB). Indeed, ARIB would become the symbolic signpost between Taju’s self-professed Marxism and his discovery of Pan-Africanism as the essential vehicle for the liberation of Africa.

Unlike IAA, ARIB was an African organisation, stitched together by Ghanaian comrades who had been forced into exile by Rawlings: Napoleon Abdulai, Zaya Ayeebo et al. I suspect ARIB gave Taju the intellectual space to think through the African condition in close proximity with battle-tested comrades fresh from the barricades with rich experiences to reflect upon. ARIB was praxis in ways that were unimaginable at IAA; it ministered to the needs of the swelling ranks of West Africans in the 1990s and was an intellectual rendezvous for both continental and diaspora Africans. These were extremely hard times when funding was hard to come by and several attempts to cross the Atlantic came to nothing.

ARIB was involved in community matters, with race and race relations. The network widened to include Diaspora Africans, principally Caribbeans; other Africans also came on board. Before long Taju’s network included the legendary John La Rose and Mzee Babu Abdurrahman, the Zanzibari revolutionary intellectual. Taju became Babu’s
protégé, for he would draft him to organise the Kampala Pan-African conference which catapulted him to the continental stage. Before long, Taju was confronted, a la Padmore, with an organisational as well as a theoretical question: Pan-Africanism or Communism? Did Taju (re)invent himself as a pan-Africanist to pursue his self-professed Marxist objective of capturing state power? Or did he use Marxism to advance the cause of Pan-Africanism?

These two related questions underline the seminal contribution of Comrade Tajudeen Abdulraheem. Like Padmore before him, Taju did not abandon the socialist project. Rather, he skillfully employed Pan-Africanism to advance the socialist project in ways that are not too easy to understand. Unlike Padmore, however, Taju did not make an *a priori* distinction between organisations on the basis of their alleged revolutionary potential, that is to say, ‘revolutionary’ versus ‘non-revolutionary’ binary.

Taju’s abiding concern was how to creatively pursue the revolutionary agenda even in situations/organisations that are outrightly reactionary or seemingly counter-revolutionary. This is why he was tirelessly involved in all types of disparate liberal activities that on the surface had no bearing to his ideology. Where comrades jettison NGO’s as advancing the cause of imperialism, Taju demonstrated that the reverse is possible if the ideal is solidly ground on a Pan-African platform. Where leftist traditions collectively indict multilateral organisations as imperialist outfits, Taju turned this on its head by making us rethink an alternative trajectory. His abiding faith in human propensity for change against all odds – privileging agency over structure – remains Taju’s seminal contribution to twenty-first century African history. He demonstrated, through tireless practice, that it is possible to humanise inhuman organizations, to neutralise liberal outfits as vehicles of change, and to sell the agenda of revolution without appearing to be revolutionary.

The challenge is how to deepen the privileging of agency over structure so as to advance the struggle for our collective emancipation. This is Taju’s legacy!

**Ibrahim Abdullah**
Freetown, Sierra Leone

May 2009

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**If you sent a postcard from heaven**

If indeed there is such a place, where all the stars before you went
I imagine that in your eloquent, earth-shaking, sensational way
You would convey to us, how you rendered a report of your time here –
The report of a messenger, who carried a vision of an Africa full of promise, which would thrive when its people, once viciously divided, unite in one purpose with one voice

And your new mates would marvel at the ‘new arrival’ from the other world
Who carries the fire of conviction in his belly, the power of his message in his eyes and the hope of his people in his words
Just like the time you were with us, your audience would never be indifferent
Your boisterous presence would leave no soul untouched . . .

*If you sent a postcard from heaven*

You would tell us how you unceremoniously but boldly sought an audience
With the ‘King of Kings’ – not Ghaddafi – but the *Rainmaker* in your new city
You would state your continent’s case and demand a turnaround in centuries of injustices against its peoples at
the hands of insiders and outsiders alike ...
You would plead the case of Africa’s peoples and ask for a break, for a new dawn ...

If you sent a postcard from heaven
It would be the last postcard you would send
For your passionate defence, charm and eloquence wouldn’t be lost on your Host A new mission for you will await – Another cause to champion
You will again deserve the pass of the city; you would tour its length and breadth

Like you traversed your continent, making a case for your people
If you sent that last postcard, you would assure us that the task at hand was simple – having accomplished your task before vacating this scene
Your simple yet powerful message of one continent, one people, was delivered from Cape to Cairo
And the rest would be up to us … to make the message count.

So long, dear brother

‘Funmi Olonisakin
We were saddened and shocked to hear of the early death of Professor Haroub Othman in Zanzibar on 28 June 2009. He was only 66 and had much more to give. Haroub had been Professor of Development Studies in the University of Dar es Salaam for many years, but was much more than this – he was an intellectual, a writer, a political activist, with a deep commitment to socialism, an intensely warm and decent man who never forgot those he had known many years earlier. When I last met him at the World Social Forum in Nairobi in 2007, he greeted me like a long-lost friend and comrade and we talked as if it were only yesterday we taught together at the University of Dar es Salaam (it was in the early 1970s). He leaves a wife, Professor Saida Yahya-Othman, and a son, Tahir.

In verses of tribute to ‘Professor Ho’ as he was fondly called, Issa Shivji recalls the days when Haroub became active, during the heady era of Tanzanian socialism and the struggles around it.

... Those were the days, Of the Vietnam war. Ho Chinh Minh was your uncle, My uncle, our uncle. Demos, sit-ins and boycotts, Petitions, pictures and panels, Unclothing war criminals. People’s courts sentenced, public opinion enforced.

Those were the days, Of Bertrand Russell and Stokely Carmichael, Sitting in Stockholm, Hearing napalmed men, women and children. The public gallery wept, students shouted, ‘Down with Uncle Sam, Long live Uncle Ho.’

... Moderate in language, Measured in tone. Civil in demeanour, Generous in kindness. Gentle in argument, Steadfast in disagreement. That was our Ho.

... Wherever there was oppression and injustice, Our Ho knew his side.

... Imperialism he condemned, Human rights he upheld …

Haroub was a teacher whose students, past and present, admired him greatly. Several have contacted us with their tributes to the impact he made on their lives. As one of them recalled:

I remember it was in 2001, the end of the third term for my second year, when I first saw this Professor at Nkrumah Hall ... He talked about Human Rights and Democracy. It is difficult to express in words the way I felt that day after the lecture. I had to tell my class mates who missed, so that they attend the next lecture. ... Thereafter he kept on inspiring [me]... If there is any burning issue I expected Mwalimu Haroub to humbly intervene either through his writings or public analysis ... Conversant with the issues on his fingertips, articulate in his arguments and most important, comfortable with his standpoint. We discussed many issues, and I still remember [him saying] ...’You young people are the ones to carry the Pan Africanism movement ahead’... His email signature [was] ‘Transform Justice into Passion’ and this is what I see as the everlasting memory of our comrade and our
great Mwalimu [teacher] who has moved on.

Another described him as ‘humble yet inspiring, there was never a hint of arrogance in his words. He was truly a very accomplished intellectual rooted in the service of mankind … He is going to be profoundly missed by those who love knowledge … a liberating intellectual’. One described him as ‘my hero…who demonstrated his academic ability beyond classroom teaching’. He was to another ‘without compare’, teaching him to seek out truth in his writing and to proclaim it publicly. Another said he always spoke the truth regardless of how bitter it was to swallow. Diligent, informed analyst and renowned Prof Ho! A treasure to Tanzania and Africa, with the wealth of thoughts, insights and scholarly works … International affairs, human rights and law, conflict resolution, democracy and above all, Pan Africanism … Always at the forefront in honouring those who have gone before us; Abdulrahman Babu, Mwalimu Nyerere, Walter Rodney, Seithy Chachage …

Even those who had not been taught by him had been inspired by his example. A journalist spoke of his fearlessness in opposing human rights violations in Zanzibar and how he was always ‘open in criticising politicians whenever they “misbehave”’. Unusually he seems to have been able to reach across the generational divide – as Chambi Chachage put it, Haroub was ‘passing the baton of his generation to our generation’ and Chambi responds ‘are we ready to seize the moment? Shall we make an end to injustice?’ Chambi also commented that he was always ready to be among ‘what is left of the left’, confronting neo-liberalism wherever he saw it. Even his car sticker spoke insistently ‘The leftists have rights too!’

An anonymous contributor to the Daily Nation summed up the general feeling of grief at the death of this good man. Haroub was ‘a voice of the voiceless gone silent’.

I am indebted to all those who contributed to this tribute: Chambi Chachage, Mkinga Mkinga of The Citizen, Lucy Shule, Vicensia Shule, Nicodemus Banyukwa, John Kitoka, Zainab Mwatawala and Professor Issa Shivji.

Janet Bujra, Chair of the Editorial Working Group of ROAPE. Email: j.m.bujra@bradford.ac.uk

Haroub Othman

Haroub was one of Tanzania’s most prominent intellectuals. He also commanded respect across the continent: more than just a presence on Pan-African networks, but as someone dedicated to an all-Africa knowledge and commitment. As one among many examples of how he was valued beyond his own country, he was asked to give the first Nyerere Memorial Lecture at the University of Cape Town in 2005.

Digging out a copy, I found the lecture repaid a rereading as it included some reminiscing on the role of intellectuals in Tanzania and the intellectual life at the University of Dar es Salaam, which had shaped Haroub himself and to which he had contributed so much. But it is when he turns to Julius Nyerere himself, that I realised that the qualities someone chooses to admire about a great leader like Mwalimu also says something about the writer’s own values. What Haroub picks out as well as the patriotism and Pan-African commitment are the integrity, the non-racism and internationalism, and his putting socialism on the African agenda. Those who knew Haroub will not be surprised that these were the qualities he picked out. His own work, teaching, writing and
reaching out to a broader constituency sought to generate understanding and debate about such ideas. That is the contribution for which he will be remembered.

What was more of a surprise in the lecture was Haroub flagging up the value of humour. He quotes approvingly Issa Shivji’s call that intellectuals should cultivate ‘the ability to laugh at ourselves’. Then he makes a similar reference to Nyerere’s characteristic style, ‘full of humour but deeply serious’, when recalling Mwalimu’s last appearance at the University of Dar es Salaam on his 75th birthday. All of which reminded me of Haroub’s own rich sense of fun, which came out when he was introducing me at a seminar in the University. He started by referring to my contributions to Development Studies there in the old days. Then before I could become too flattered, he added with a wicked little smile: ‘and the most important of these was that he hired me’!

Apart from poking gentle fun at both of us, he was remembering an event of almost 40 years ago. Coming back from USSR with a Masters degree in law, he found it was not recognised by the Law Faculty sufficiently for him to be given anything other than an administrative rather than an academic post. But when the interdisciplinary and socialist-oriented Development Studies course was launched across all faculties, he was one of those who responded with an offer to volunteer. The political economy training he had in the Soviet Union now allowed him to be taken on as a teaching assistant in the core team that was being built up. Once given the opportunity he responded with gusto, working his way up in seniority eventually to a Chair and the Directorship of the Institute for Development Studies, to which he devoted the whole of his career.

When I heard of his passing, I could not help recalling our long association, and comradeship – and his joke about me – a true word spoken in jest. On reflection I feel great pride that facilitating the start of such a life work turned out so productively. In remembering him we cannot do better than go back to the final words of his own tribute to Mwalimu Nyerere: ‘One should live so that in dying one can say “I gave all my strength for the liberation of humanity”’. A worthy guide to anyone, from a person who deserves that epitaph.

Lionel Cliffe, International Advisory Board, Review of African Political Economy

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Arrighi and Africa: Farewell Thoughts

John S. Saul

From 26 to 29 May of this year a group of us, convened by Carlos Prieto del Campo, came together in Madrid to celebrate the work of Giovanni Arrighi. The plan was that Giovanni himself, together with his wife and collaborator Beverly Silver, would also be at this workshop to actively engage in the exchange, to help us to clarify and expand points, and to generally add their stimulating presence to the event. Unfortunately, only the day before we were to assemble, Giovanni, seriously ill with cancer since last July, suffered an unexpected seizure and, it was announced, would have to spend the conference in the intensive care unit of a Baltimore hospital.

Although the workshop was now to be rather like ‘Hamlet without the prince’, those of us who were there managed to soldier on, with Beverly and to some degree Giovanni following our proceedings by Skype. The event certainly proved to be enlightening. Ideas and theories about global capitalism and its prospects echoed through our meeting chamber at the Reina Sofia complex in the centre of the city. These were ideas and theories very often inspired by Giovanni’s own writings, of course, with a full range of spirited opinions being presented, some supportively enthusiastic regarding his work and its implications, some more combative and sceptical. But all were there, in Giovanni’s spirit, to learn and to share. Indeed, even those of us most tempted to skulk off at various points to view Picasso’s Guernica (housed in a nearby room) or to visit the Prado tended to stay the fascinating course of such a workshop.

This was not surprising. Gathered together, after all, were a strong cadre of Giovanni’s colleagues, former students and diverse comrades from around the world – drawn by enthusiasm and respect both for Giovanni’s person and for his powerful writings. As noted, opinions were both enthusiastic and combative – a not too surprising juxtaposition of descriptors, perhaps, since Giovanni was both enthusiastic and combative in his own right, although always unfailingly warm and friendly. As it happens, and as indicated by the paper that I presented at the workshop (‘Africa in a New Global Order: A Critique of Giovanni Arrighi’s Changing Perspective on Africa’), I had found myself rather surprised at the direction his writings on Africa – where our own diverse intellectual journeys had begun together almost 45 years ago – had taken in recent years. I sought enlightenment about the precise weight and substance of our differences, writing the paper below with, I suppose, a combative enthusiasm of my own.

My intention was clear: to once again draw my old friend out on certain important issues and to debate them vigorously as we had done so often in the past (the paper, below, stands exactly as I wrote it for Madrid). I chose not to tiptoe around the issues, for I knew very well that Giovanni was more than able to take care of himself intellectually and that, in any case, he would not thank any fellow debater for patronising him or for pulling his or her punches. But of course, sadly, his riposte to my piece would not then come – and now never will. Instead, my wife and I found ourselves, a few weeks later in June, sitting a kind of post-modern form of northern Italian shiva with his wife, son and brother in Giovanni and Beverly’s Baltimore home. Now, in tribute to his
memory, and to our decades of ongoing debate, a debate that was invariably heated but one that never became testy, I offer my Madrid contribution here.

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I should, perhaps, begin by placing some of my credentials firmly on the table. I can lay claim, I think, to being one of Giovanni’s oldest living friends and comrades on both the social science and the political-activism fronts. For our friendship dates back to our days, in the mid-1960s, as colleagues (and next-door neighbours) on the campus of the University of Dar es Salaam. Giovanni arrived there after a brief and genuinely heroic interlude – about which more could easily be said – in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), that being his first academic home after leaving Lever Brothers and also, at least temporarily, his native Italy. On the campus we formed, almost immediately, an extremely warm friendship. In fact, I love the guy, a feeling that has not changed one iota despite our having come, ultimately, to hold somewhat different views both about Africa and about the world, differences to which I will also speak further in what follows.

But for the moment, let us stay in Dar es Salaam. For there, as members of the then notorious Committee of Nine Lecturers, we worked closely with such fellow faculty members as the remarkable Guyanese intellectual Walter Rodney, Catherine Hoskyns (then a leading scholar on the Congo), future Weatherman Jim Mellen, the Kenyan littérateur Grant Kamenju, and in consultation with Dennis Phombeah, a senior Tanzanian bureaucrat of firmly left persuasion, and Roger Murray, then an employee of TANU, the country’s dominant political party. Our intention: to articulate progressive proposals regarding the future shape of the University College and to present them vigorously at a ‘Conference on the Role of the University College, Dar es Salaam, in a Socialist Tanzania’, convened shortly after the promulgation of that country’s Arusha Declaration.

Exciting times certainly, about which much has been written. And here too more could easily be said. But I will merely pass on quickly to the fact that, during this same period, Giovanni and I managed to study, theorise and write a great deal together; indeed one of the very first books either of us published – entitled Essays on the Political Economy of Africa from Monthly Review Press – came directly out of the hot political atmosphere of the time and place: Dar es Salaam in the 1960s. Let me begin the main argument of this paper, that pertaining to the strengths and weaknesses of Giovanni’s shifting position about Africa and about the Global South more generally, by reiterating the thrust of that early book – with the reason for doing so soon to become apparent.

The very introduction to that book identified ‘the interaction of contemporary capitalism with patterns of domestic class formation’ as the main features of Africa’s underdevelopment. Moreover, the first chapter of that volume was entitled ‘Socialism and Economic Development in Tropical Africa’ in which we argued the need for a socialist development option, while the second chapter, ‘Nationalism and Revolution in Sub-Saharan Africa’, stated crisply that ‘socialism is, in fact, rapidly becoming a historical necessity in order to ensure the further development of the area’. We suggested the impossibility of a newly emergent post-colonial Africa realising either economic growth or (still less) a meaningful advance towards human development from within the then-present terms of its framing by global capitalism. Instead, we argued, ‘the key trend [is] towards increased subservience vis-à-vis a rationalising international capitalism’ – with development ‘effectively constrained by such a continental pattern’ and with, in consequence, a ‘Latin Americanization of independent Africa ... well underway’.
And it was on this basis that we then suggested the ‘necessity’ of a socialist break by Africa from the global capitalist system.

I was therefore surprised to find Arrighi, in the recent magisterial reflections on his intellectual trajectory over the years to be found in his New Left Review interview with David Harvey (NLR, March–April, 2009), stating of our period of work together:

There was also a difference between us that I think has persisted until this day, in that I was far less upset about [the failures of African progressive regimes] than John was. For me these movements were national liberation movements; they were not in any way socialist movements, even when they embraced the rhetoric of socialism. They were populist regimes, and therefore I didn’t expect much beyond national liberation, which we both saw as very important in itself. But whether there were possibilities for political development beyond this is something that John and I still quarrel about to this day, good-humoredly, whenever [including, I must add, here in Madrid!] we meet.

Well, yes and no: as Arrighi also acknowledges, we actually shared a similar degree of scepticism about many, if not most, of the nationalist and post-liberation-struggle regimes in the making that we saw about us in Africa, often repeating in our joint work Roger Murray’s own resonant warning of the time: do not confuse the historically possible with the historically necessary. Yet I never heard Giovanni state at the time – I’m sure he will correct me if I’m wrong [sic!] – that merely populist regimes were the best that Africans could hope for. Indeed, I thought we agreed that, in fact, ongoing class struggle in Africa might yet produce more valuable outcomes on that continent. But I now sense, in the wake of the Harvey interview, that something more profound than any different readings we may have had about the ‘socialist potential’ of this or that movement or regime was at stake (or at least: has now become so). For what we were actually disagreeing on, apparently, was the ‘socialist potential’ of Africa itself. This would become clearer as Giovanni, in later writings, came to move even further from what I had thought was our shared position of the time.

Moreover – whatever the subtlety of his position about Africa in those days may have been and however much unglimped by me – Giovanni’s more general position seemed to remain remarkably clear … and eminently consistent over many years. Thus, in his ongoing analyses at the global level, the overall structure of things did seem to render socialism a necessary step in the struggle for development (even, or so I thought, in Africa). Here the key text was a seminal paper in the New Left Review (‘World Income Inequalities and the Future of Socialism’ in the September–October 1991 issue) where, almost a quarter century after we had first written together, he articulated clearly a sophisticated perspective on the realities of the West’s oligarchic wealth and on the existence of ‘seemingly iron law of a global hierarchy of wealth’. In sum, he argued, ‘the standards of wealth enjoyed by the West correspond to what Roy Harrod once defined as “oligarchic wealth” in opposition to “democratic wealth”’, these two worlds being separated by an ‘unbridgeable gulf’.

What follows from such an analysis? In fact, his conclusions were equally clear and unequivocal. For he continued that 1991 article by arguing that only a process of global socialist emancipation could hope to permit the development game to start over with all players on the kind of equal footing that would permit the otherwise ‘wretched of the earth’ to stand a fair chance; only then, in short, could ‘a process that has developed to legitimate and enforce world
inequalities be turned into a means to the end of promoting greater world equality and solidarity’.

Imagine my surprise then to find Giovanni more or less rewriting that paper, now with two co-authors, a mere decade later (Arrighi et al. 2003). In fact (no surprise) the new article restates firmly, and at comparable length, much the same fine-tuned and carefully documented position as the previous one regarding the dominance of a capitalist induced, still largely geographically-defined (and Western-centric) global hierarchy. However – and here is the surprise – although the basic structure, the elaboration of the problem, is more or less exactly the same, the conclusion is now absolutely different. For now there is no mention, not even one, of ‘socialism’ as a possible antidote to a Western capitalist stranglehold on the global South. Instead, the sole hope for shaking Western economic hegemony (particularly that of the United States) and global white dominance now lies, for Giovanni and his co-authors, with the rise, on firmly capitalist foundations, of China – even though there is actually little sign, in his argument, of how the rest of the global South might benefit from the presumed rise of China (or at least the Chinese elite) within the ranks of the globally privileged!

And what about Africa as viewed within this new optic? Perhaps it is also worth noting here that at about this same time (the beginning of the present decade) Giovanni and I had actually begun to speak of returning, now some 30 years later, to our earlier work on Africa. It was immediately apparent that this would not be a simple undertaking since our positions had already diverged markedly, but we explored the idea a bit further. Ultimately, we tried to improvise a possibly innovative framework, a book that would present itself as something of a dialogue or debate, underscoring our different starting points and letting the chips fall where they may. Giovanni even began a chapter on his own views to serve as his working document for our collaboration. But I think he must have despaired of our ability to now collaborate, to any pertinent or useful effect, intellectually – and I emphasise this word, for our friendship itself was never placed in jeopardy – and instead published the above-mentioned piece in New Left Review under the title ‘The African Crisis: World Systemic and Regional Aspects’.

There is no need to rehash the logistics of the possible alternative path NOT taken here, because the intellectual reasons for our not proceeding with any kind of collaborative project were and are readily apparent: the space between us had grown so great that it must have seemed to Giovanni, as I was also beginning to sense, unbridgeable, at least for the purposes of a joint publication even of the innovative kind we had been thinking about. Not that we have stopped thinking, of course: Giovanni has produced his magnum opus, one that, amongst other things, helps draw us together here in Madrid this week, and I have myself produced four books in the years since, including one on southern Africa entitled The Next Liberation Struggle: Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy in Southern Africa, (Saul 2005) a title that, in and of itself, may give some idea of where I continue to come from on these questions.

Here, however, let me round off this presentation by examining the substance of Giovanni’s own most recent articulation of a position on Africa as reflected in his above-mentioned article (‘The African Crisis’, NLR, 15, May–June 2002). Let me also say, at the outset, that I found and still find his views in that article singularly depressed and depressing: ‘There may be little that most [African] states can do’, he concludes, ‘to upgrade their economies in the global hierarchy of wealth’ (as we know, elsewhere in his writing he has, of course, argued the
existence of a ‘fixed hierarchy’ and there seems little chance, from the evidence of his recent writing on the continental prospect, of Africa disrupting, in its own favour, that hierarchy – whatever may be the possibilities for China of doing so). He can suggest only that there is, nonetheless, ‘always something they could do to increase (or decrease) the well-being of the citizenry at any given level of poverty or wealth’.

Conceding that even in such relatively narrow terms ‘African ruling groups have probably done far less than was in their power to do’, Arrighi nonetheless concludes – on what is apparently intended to be an upbeat note: ‘But it is not clear whether and to what extent they have on the whole been more deficient than the ruling groups of other countries and regions, the United States included. Indeed, if we take into account differentials in wealth and power, it seems likely that they have been comparatively less so’ (pp. 35–36). But, even if this were true (and, to be clear, from my own experience I see absolutely no reason to assume this to be the case), it would still stand as pretty modest accomplishment for a destitute continent – and, in any case, Arrighi does not really discuss what strategies pressed by which agents might begin to move ‘African ruling groups’ towards the more benign behaviour he apparently has in mind.

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A final comment. Let me merely reiterate that I have spoken frankly in a way that Giovanni, I know, will appreciate: he is, as I noted at the outset, quite capable of ‘fighting his own corner’ intellectually. And, needless to say, he is also someone whom I deeply respect. But I also speak here in a mood of some puzzlement. For I know that Giovanni and I share, up to a point, a very similar point of view: there is no question of either of us going over to the side of Western capitalism and the capital logic that has done so much damage, over the years, to Africa.

True, with regard to the rise of ‘Chinese capitalism’, I must confess that I remain profoundly sceptical about any promise it might be thought to hold – for Africa in particular. But I leave this to others better equipped than I am to discuss the novel assertions of China and their implications. Nonetheless, China apart, my basic question, to Giovanni, to you, remains what it was for us over 40 years ago: what about Africa? Is the continent really so side-lined as to be forced to cast about for some deus ex machina for even the very mild version of salvation he foresees open to it?

Can we, I want to ask, really rest any hope whatsoever either in a benign Chinese presence that, beyond headlong resource extraction and support for the most suspect of regimes there, shows little sign of really wishing Africa well in some substantive way? More importantly, is a kinder, gentler elite in Africa itself any better a hope there? I have suggested my scepticism about such levers of understanding and I have argued a similar point of view elsewhere.

And yet, alternatively, is the potential in Africa, for a popular, class-based and progressive politics itself anything more than a mere will-of the-wisp, a dream, a historical impossibility, however much an historical necessity, in a context of severe and pretty much unalloyed ‘historical backwardness’? You tell me. My choice though – until I hear something more convincing – is the need for a ‘next liberation struggle’. In sum, a luta continua.

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Obviously, I would have greatly preferred to hear Giovanni’s own response, be it in Baltimore or in Madrid, to the matters that I sought to debate with him. Was our disagreement primarily a confrontation of ‘pessimism of the intelligence’ on
the one hand, and ‘optimism of the will’ on the other? Of course, whatever may be the truth of the matter, it is the case that our ‘exchange’, both in Spain and in these pages of ROAPE, is now only to be the sound of one hand – my own – clapping. But my essay also shouts out full-throatedly for the man I knew and loved – one of the great thinkers of recent decades and, as well, my very dear friend.

John S. Saul, long-time activist in support of social and economic justice in Africa, is a Professor Emeritus of social and political science at York University in Toronto, Canada. His most recent book is Revolutionary Traveller: Freeze-Frames from a Life. Email: johnsaul@yorku.ca

Endnote
1. Giovanni’s connection with Rhodesia was important and very brave – not only was he closely involved with the ZAPU liberation movement, he was actually a activist in its the underground operations, running arms and information back and forth from Zambia with John Conradié. As it happens, he was arrested at about this same time with some other lecturers and activists at the University – for what were relatively mild campus-based activities. But not for the more serious ones. Therefore, hovering over his head while in custody (for some days) was the possibility that he would be rumbled for something far more important (as Conradié ultimately was, spending many years in jail). Despite that (as I recall Gerry Caplan, who was also arrested and deported at the same time, telling me), Giovanni refused to be immediately deported – much to the discomfiture of his fellow arrestees, who actually knew nothing of the additional jeopardy Giovanni was putting himself in by acting as he did but were merely understandably eager to get out of the country – until Basker Vashee, a Rhodesian but arrested with the expatriate university lecturers, was also freed and deported (as he soon was, later to become head of the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam). Only after this did Giovanni come on to Dar to join our number there.

References
Dedications

Tributes to Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem (1961–2009)

I am proud to say that I taught Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem at Bayero University Kano. Indeed, whenever I was in his company I always expected the familiar introduction: “’AB Zack’” (as he liked to call me) was my tutor at Bayero. These guys taught me Marxism”. What does one say after that, coming from one of the brightest minds to emerge out of Africa in the latter part of the twentieth century? As a student, Taju was a gem: always seeking answers to questions; always asking for articles or books (no internet then you see) with clear ordering of the sequence of the reading materials. Students of this calibre are not just a joy to teach, but they also ensure lecturers are current with the debates.

Taju was born in Funtua, Katsina State, Northern Nigeria to parents who had migrated to this major northern agricultural district from Ogbomosho, Oyo State, Southwestern Nigeria. He was a true Nigerian, one who felt at home in Kano as in Onitsha or Lagos, appropriated by all sides of diverse Nigeria. On completion of his secondary education, Taju gained entrance to Bayero University Kano (BUK), where he obtained First Class Honours in Political Science, as well as a national merit award, and later proceeded to St Peter’s College Oxford as Rhodes Scholar to pursue his doctoral work. At Oxford he continued his political work (which he had started not only with the university students union, but also with the Nigerian Labour Congress) as President of the University African Students Union.

Intellectually and politically Taju was a vibrant person, a great orator and one with a passion for politics. He was an ardent Pan-Africanist, who later became Secretary General of the newly formed Pan-Africanist Movement on the recommendation of the late Mohamed Babu, former Minister in the Tanzanian Government of Julius Nyerere. Taju was also a development activist with the portfolio of Deputy Director (Africa) for the UN Millennium Campaign (UNMC) and until his death was Director of Justice Africa and Chair of Pan Africa Development Education and Advisory Programme. He was a fearless campaigner against injustice who had his brush with the Nigerian State Security Service on a visit to his homeland in 1989. He was very much aware of how the Left in his country has been depleted by intimidation and bullying and he felt he had to act to stem the tide. Fearlessly, he organised the triumphant return to Nigeria in 2005 of Dr Patrick Wilmot, the Left Caribbean academic who was deported from Nigeria by the Babaginda regime.

My last conversation with Taju was at the International Conference on Institutions, Culture and Corruption in Africa in October 2008 organised by UNECA. As usual I was introduced to the audience as his former tutor and as such he had to watch his ways. Taju went on to give an electrifying talk for well over the allocated time, without referring to his notes. At the end, he apologised that he had to leave to catch a plane to Kampala. I now cherish the picture he insisted we took. He is survived by his wife Munira and two daughters, Aida and Aishat.

Alfred B. Zack-Williams.
Email: abzw@blueyonder.co.uk
The Tajudeen Challenge

I met Comrade Tajudeen Abdulraheem 23 years ago in Oxford, through a Trinidadian comrade, David Johnson, a fellow historian. When I informed David that I would be travelling to Oxford to do research at Rhodes House Library, he suggested I contact Taju as a potential host. Our paths never crossed when I was resident in Nigeria, from 1977–1984, but Taju knew almost everyone that mattered on the Nigerian left. Our first meeting therefore turned out to be a Central Committee Indaba that took in more members, with the arrival of Adebayo Olukoshi the following day and other Nigerian Comrades. Our discussions principally revolved around the perennial question of la project Africain – what else to talk about? – the left in Nigeria; the struggle against Apartheid; the Africanists scholarly racket; neo-colonialism/imperialism and race but hardly Pan-Africanism. This is instructive partly because Taju came from a Marxist tradition that was shaped by the left experience in Nigeria, an experience that is strictly speaking rooted in the history of Nigerian intellectuals and their romance with the ‘progressive’ faction of the fractious Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC). It is not co-incidental that his first scholarly publication, co-authored with Adebayo Olukoshi, was about the left and the struggle for socialism in Nigeria.

Taju continued to struggle within this tradition when he took up a position as researcher-cum-activist at Ben Turok’s Institute of African Alternative (IAA). The debates then, our debates, if I can call it that, were shaped by an orthodox Marxist project that was informed by classical formulations about history, theory and society. The short-lived Journal of African Marxist (JAM) was anything but African; it published articles written by African intellectuals who professed Marxist ideas but were far removed from the day-to-day reality of those for whom they claimed to speak. This distance – not just literal and metaphorical – troubled Taju who was still bogged down with primary research – his dissertation. Time and again he would evoke Cabral as if to remind us all about the monumental task ahead.

By the time he finished his dissertation Taju had crossed the proverbial Rubicon; resolved to look from within, to explore linkages and potentials within the evolving African community of exiles particularly Ghanaians, and to return to the source a la Cabral. This was the context, indeed the moment of the African Research and Information Bureau (ARIB). Indeed, ARIB would become the symbolic signpost between Taju’s self-professed Marxism and his discovery of Pan-Africanism as the essential vehicle for the liberation of Africa.

Unlike IAA, ARIB was an African organisation, stitched together by Ghanaian comrades who had been forced into exile by Rawlings: Napoleon Abdulai, Zaya Ayeebo et al. I suspect ARIB gave Taju the intellectual space to think through the African condition in close proximity with battle-tested comrades fresh from the barricades with rich experiences to reflect upon. ARIB was praxis in ways that were unimaginable at IAA; it ministered to the needs of the swelling ranks of West Africans in the 1990s and was an intellectual rendezvous for both continental and diaspora Africans. These were extremely hard times when funding was hard to come by and several attempts to cross the Atlantic came to nothing.

ARIB was involved in community matters, with race and race relations. The network widened to include Diaspora Africans, principally Caribbeans; other Africans also came on board. Before long Taju’s network included the legendary John La Rose and Mzee Babu Abdurrahman, the Zanzibari revolutionary intellectual. Taju became Babu’s
protégé, for he would draft him to organise the Kampala Pan-African conference which catapulted him to the continental stage. Before long, Taju was confronted, a la Padmore, with an organisational as well as a theoretical question: Pan-Africanism or Communism? Did Taju (re)invent himself as a pan-Africanist to pursue his self-professed Marxist objective of capturing state power? Or did he use Marxism to advance the cause of Pan-Africanism?

These two related questions underline the seminal contribution of Comrade Tajudeen Abdulraheem. Like Padmore before him, Taju did not abandon the socialist project. Rather, he skillfully employed Pan-Africanism to advance the socialist project in ways that are not too easy to understand. Unlike Padmore, however, Taju did not make an a priori distinction between organisations on the basis of their alleged revolutionary potential, that is to say, ‘revolutionary’ versus ‘non-revolutionary’ binary.

Taju’s abiding concern was how to creatively pursue the revolutionary agenda even in situations/organisations that are outrightly reactionary or seemingly counter-revolutionary. This is why he was tirelessly involved in all types of disparate liberal activities that on the surface had no bearing to his ideology. Where comrades jettison NGO’s as advancing the cause of imperialism, Taju demonstrated that the reverse is possible if the ideal is solidly ground on a Pan-African platform. Where leftist traditions collectively indict multilateral organisations as imperialist outfits, Taju turned this on its head by making us rethink an alternative trajectory. His abiding faith in human propensity for change against all odds – privileging agency over structure – remains Taju’s seminal contribution to twenty-first century African history. He demonstrated, through tireless practice, that it is possible to humanise inhuman organizations, to neutralise liberal outfits as vehicles of change, and to sell the agenda of revolution without appearing to be revolutionary.

The challenge is how to deepen the privileging of agency over structure so as to advance the struggle for our collective emancipation. This is Taju’s legacy!

Ibrahim Abdullah
Freetown, Sierra Leone
May 2009

If you sent a postcard from heaven
If you sent a postcard from heaven
If indeed there is such a place, where all the stars before you went
I imagine that in your eloquent, earth-shaking, sensational way
You would convey to us, how you rendered a report of your time here –
The report of a messenger, who carried a vision of an Africa full of promise, which would thrive when its people, once viciously divided, unite in one purpose with one voice

And your new mates would marvel at the ‘new arrival’ from the other world
Who carries the fire of conviction in his belly, the power of his message in his eyes and the hope of his people in his words
Just like the time you were with us, your audience would never be indifferent
Your boisterous presence would leave no soul untouched…

If you sent a postcard from heaven
You would tell us how you unceremoniously but boldly sought an audience
With the ‘King of Kings’ – not Ghaddafi – but the Rainmaker in your new city
You would state your continent’s case and demand a turnaround in centuries of injustices against its peoples at
the hands of insiders and outsiders alike ... 
You would plead the case of Africa’s peoples and ask for a break, for a new dawn ... 

*If you sent a postcard from heaven*
It would be the last postcard you would send

For your passionate defence, charm and eloquence wouldn’t be lost on your Host A new mission for you will await – Another cause to champion
You will again deserve the pass of the city; you would tour its length and breadth

Like you traversed your continent, making a case for your people

If you sent that last postcard, you would assure us that the task at hand was simple – having accomplished your task before vacating this scene
Your simple yet powerful message of one continent, one people, was delivered from Cape to Cairo
And the rest would be up to us ... to make the message count.

So long, dear brother

‘Funmi Olonisakin
We were saddened and shocked to hear of the early death of Professor Haroub Othman in Zanzibar on 28 June 2009. He was only 66 and had much more to give. Haroub had been Professor of Development Studies in the University of Dar es Salaam for many years, but was much more than this – he was an intellectual, a writer, a political activist, with a deep commitment to socialism, an intensely warm and decent man who never forgot those he had known many years earlier. When I last met him at the World Social Forum in Nairobi in 2007, he greeted me like a long-lost friend and comrade and we talked as if it were only yesterday we taught together at the University of Dar es Salaam (it was in the early 1970s). He leaves a wife, Professor Saida Yahya-Othman, and a son, Tahir.

In verses of tribute to ‘Professor Ho’ as he was fondly called, Issa Shivji recalls the days when Haroub became active, during the heady era of Tanzanian socialism and the struggles around it.

… Those were the days,
Of the Vietnam war.
Ho Chinh Minh was your uncle,
My uncle, our uncle.
Demos, sit-ins and boycotts,
Petitions, pictures and panels,
Unclothing war criminals.
People’s courts sentenced, public opinion enforced.

Those were the days,
Of Bertrand Russell and Stokely Carmichael,
Sitting in Stockholm,
Hearing napalmed men, women and children.
The public gallery wept, students shouted,
‘Down with Uncle Sam,
Long live Uncle Ho.’

… Moderate in language,
Measured in tone.
Civil in demeanour,
Generous in kindness.
Gentle in argument,
Steadfast in disagreement.
That was our Ho.

… Wherever there was oppression and injustice,
Our Ho knew his side.

… Imperialism he condemned,
Human rights he upheld …

Haroub was a teacher whose students, past and present, admired him greatly. Several have contacted us with their tributes to the impact he made on their lives. As one of them recalled:

I remember it was in 2001, the end of the third term for my second year, when I first saw this Professor at Nkrumah Hall … He talked about Human Rights and Democracy. It is difficult to express in words the way I felt that day after the lecture. I had to tell my class mates who missed, so that they attend the next lecture. … Thereafter he kept on inspiring [me] … If there is any burning issue I expected Mwalimu Haroub to humbly intervene either through his writings or public analysis … Conversant with the issues on his fingertips, articulate in his arguments and most important, comfortable with his standpoint. We discussed many issues, and I still remember [him saying] … ‘You young people are the ones to carry the Pan Africanism movement ahead’ … His email signature [was] ‘Transform Justice into Passion’ and this is what I see as the everlasting memory of our comrade and our
great Mwalimu [teacher] who has moved on.

Another described him as ‘humble yet inspiring, there was never a hint of arrogance in his words. He was truly a very accomplished intellectual rooted in the service of mankind ... He is going to be profoundly missed by those who love knowledge ... He is going to be profoundly missed by those who love knowledge ... a liberating intellectual’. One described him as ‘my hero...who demonstrated his academic ability beyond classroom teaching’. He was to another ‘without compare’, teaching him to seek out truth in his writing and to proclaim it publicly. Another said he always spoke the truth regardless of how bitter it was to swallow. Diligent, informed analyst and renowned Prof Ho! A treasure to Tanzania and Africa, with the wealth of thoughts, insights and scholarly works ... International affairs, human rights and law, conflict resolution, democracy and above all, Pan Africanism ... Always at the forefront in honouring those who have gone before us; Abdulrahman Babu, Mwalimu Nyerere, Walter Rodney, Seithy Chachage ... Even those who had not been taught by him had been inspired by his example. A journalist spoke of his fearlessness in opposing human rights violations in Zanzibar and how he was always ‘open in criticising politicians whenever they “misbehave”’. Unusually he seems to have been able to reach across the generational divide – as Chambi Chachage put it, Haroub was ‘passing the baton of his generation to our generation’ and Chambi responds ‘are we ready to seize the moment? Shall we make an end to injustice?’ Chambi also commented that he was always ready to be among ‘what is left of the left’, confronting neo-liberalism wherever he saw it. Even his car sticker spoke insistently ‘The leftists have rights too!’

An anonymous contributor to the Daily Nation summed up the general feeling of grief at the death of this good man. Haroub was ‘a voice of the voiceless gone silent’.

I am indebted to all those who contributed to this tribute: Chambi Chachage, Mkinga Mkinga of The Citizen, Lucy Shule, Vicensia Shule, Nicodemus Banyukwa, John Kitoka, Zainab Mwatawala and Professor Issa Shivji.

Janet Bujra, Chair of the Editorial Working Group of ROAPE. Email: j.m.bujra@bradford.ac.uk

Haroub Othman

Haroub was one of Tanzania’s most prominent intellectuals. He also commanded respect across the continent: more than just a presence on Pan-African networks, but as someone dedicated to an all-Africa knowledge and commitment. As one among many examples of how he was valued beyond his own country, he was asked to give the first Nyerere Memorial Lecture at the University of Cape Town in 2005.

Digging out a copy, I found the lecture repaid a rereading as it included some reminiscing on the role of intellectuals in Tanzania and the intellectual life at the University of Dar es Salaam, which had shaped Haroub himself and to which he had contributed so much. But it is when he turns to Julius Nyerere himself, that I realised that the qualities someone chooses to admire about a great leader like Mwalimu also says something about the writer’s own values. What Haroub picks out as well as the patriotism and Pan-African commitment are the integrity, the non-racism and internationalism, and his putting socialism on the African agenda. Those who knew Haroub will not be surprised that these were the qualities he picked out. His own work, teaching, writing and
reaching out to a broader constituency sought to generate understanding and debate about such ideas. That is the contribution for which he will be remembered.

What was more of a surprise in the lecture was Haroub flagging up the value of humour. He quotes approvingly Issa Shivji’s call that intellectuals should cultivate ‘the ability to laugh at ourselves’. Then he makes a similar reference to Nyerere’s characteristic style, ‘full of humour but deeply serious’, when recalling Mwalimu’s last appearance at the University of Dar es Salaam on his 75th birthday. All of which reminded me of Haroub’s own rich sense of fun, which came out when he was introducing me at a seminar in the University. He started by referring to my contributions to Development Studies there in the old days. Then before I could become too flattered, he added with a wicked little smile: ‘and the most important of these was that he hired me’!

Apart from poking gentle fun at both of us, he was remembering an event of almost 40 years ago. Coming back from USSR with a Masters degree in law, he found it was not recognised by the Law Faculty sufficiently for him to be given anything other than an administrative rather than an academic post. But when the interdisciplinary and socialist-oriented Development Studies course was launched across all faculties, he was one of those who responded with an offer to volunteer. The political economy training he had in the Soviet Union now allowed him to be taken on as a teaching assistant in the core team that was being built up. Once given the opportunity he responded with gusto, working his way up in seniority eventually to a Chair and the Directorship of the Institute for Development Studies, to which he devoted the whole of his career.

When I heard of his passing, I could not help recalling our long association, and comradeship – and his joke about me – a true word spoken in jest. On reflection I feel great pride that facilitating the start of such a life work turned out so productively. In remembering him we cannot do better than go back to the final words of his own tribute to Mwalimu Nyerere: ‘One should live so that in dying one can say “I gave all my strength for the liberation of humanity”’. A worthy guide to anyone, from a person who deserves that epitaph.

Lionel Cliffe, International Advisory Board, Review of African Political Economy

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Arrighi and Africa: Farewell Thoughts

John S. Saul

From 26 to 29 May of this year a group of us, convened by Carlos Prieto del Campo, came together in Madrid to celebrate the work of Giovanni Arrighi. The plan was that Giovanni himself, together with his wife and collaborator Beverly Silver, would also be at this workshop to actively engage in the exchange, to help us to clarify and expand points, and to generally add their stimulating presence to the event. Unfortunately, only the day before we were to assemble, Giovanni, seriously ill with cancer since last July, suffered an unexpected seizure and, it was announced, would have to spend the conference in the intensive care unit of a Baltimore hospital.

Although the workshop was now to be rather like ‘Hamlet without the prince’, those of us who were there managed to soldier on, with Beverly and to some degree Giovanni following our proceedings by Skype. The event certainly proved to be enlightening. Ideas and theories about global capitalism and its prospects echoed through our meeting chamber at the Reina Sofia complex in the centre of the city. These were ideas and theories very often inspired by Giovanni’s own writings, of course, with a full range of spirited opinions being presented, some supportively enthusiastic regarding his work and its implications, some more combative and sceptical. But all were there, in Giovanni’s spirit, to learn and to share. Indeed, even those of us most tempted to skulk off at various points to view Picasso’s Guernica (housed in a nearby room) or to visit the Prado tended to stay the fascinating course of such a workshop.

This was not surprising. Gathered together, after all, were a strong cadre of Giovanni’s colleagues, former students and diverse comrades from around the world – drawn by enthusiasm and respect both for Giovanni’s person and for his powerful writings. As noted, opinions were both enthusiastic and combative – a not too surprising juxtaposition of descriptors, perhaps, since Giovanni was both enthusiastic and combative in his own right, although always unfailingly warm and friendly. As it happens, and as indicated by the paper that I presented at the workshop (‘Africa in a New Global Order: A Critique of Giovanni Arrighi’s Changing Perspective on Africa’), I had found myself rather surprised at the direction his writings on Africa – where our own diverse intellectual journeys had begun together almost 45 years ago – had taken in recent years. I sought enlightenment about the precise weight and substance of our differences, writing the paper below with, I suppose, a combative enthusiasm of my own.

My intention was clear: to once again draw my old friend out on certain important issues and to debate them vigorously as we had done so often in the past (the paper, below, stands exactly as I wrote it for Madrid). I chose not to tiptoe around the issues, for I knew very well that Giovanni was more than able to take care of himself intellectually and that, in any case, he would not thank any fellow debater for patronising him or for pulling his or her punches. But of course, sadly, his riposte to my piece would not then come – and now never will. Instead, my wife and I found ourselves, a few weeks later in June, sitting a kind of post-modern form of northern Italian shiva with his wife, son and brother in Giovanni and Beverly’s Baltimore home. Now, in tribute to his
memory, and to our decades of ongoing debate, a debate that was invariably heated but one that never became testy, I offer my Madrid contribution here.

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I should, perhaps, begin by placing some of my credentials firmly on the table. I can lay claim, I think, to being one of Giovanni’s oldest living friends and comrades on both the social science and the political-activism fronts. For our friendship dates back to our days, in the mid-1960s, as colleagues (and next-door neighbours) on the campus of the University of Dar es Salaam. Giovanni arrived there after a brief and genuinely heroic interlude – about which more could easily be said – in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), that being his first academic home after leaving Lever Brothers and also, at least temporarily, his native Italy. On the campus we formed, almost immediately, an extremely warm friendship. In fact, I love the guy, a feeling that has not changed one iota despite our having come, ultimately, to hold somewhat different views both about Africa and about the world, differences to which I will also speak further in what follows.

But for the moment, let us stay in Dar es Salaam. For there, as members of the then notorious Committee of Nine Lecturers, we worked closely with such fellow faculty members as the remarkable Guyanese intellectual Walter Rodney, Catherine Hoskyns (then a leading scholar on the Congo), future Weatherman Jim Mellen, the Kenyan littérateur Grant Kamenju, and in consultation with Dennis Phombeah, a senior Tanzanian bureaucrat of firmly left persuasion, and Roger Murray, then an employee of TANU, the country’s dominant political party. Our intention: to articulate progressive proposals regarding the future shape of the University College and to present them vigorously at a ‘Conference on the Role of the University College, Dar es Salaam, in a Socialist Tanzania’, convened shortly after the promulgation of that country’s Arusha Declaration.

Exciting times certainly, about which much has been written. And here too more could easily be said. But I will merely pass on quickly to the fact that, during this same period, Giovanni and I managed to study, theorise and write a great deal together; indeed one of the very first books either of us published – entitled Essays on the Political Economy of Africa from Monthly Review Press – came directly out of the hot political atmosphere of the time and place: Dar es Salaam in the 1960s. Let me begin the main argument of this paper, that pertaining to the strengths and weaknesses of Giovanni’s shifting position about Africa and about the Global South more generally, by reiterating the thrust of that early book – with the reason for doing so soon to become apparent.

The very introduction to that book identified ‘the interaction of contemporary capitalism with patterns of domestic class formation’ as the main features of Africa’s underdevelopment. Moreover, the first chapter of that volume was entitled ‘Socialism and Economic Development in Tropical Africa’ in which we argued the need for a socialist development option, while the second chapter, ‘Nationalism and Revolution in Sub-Saharan Africa’, stated crisply that ‘socialism is, in fact, rapidly becoming a historical necessity in order to ensure the further development of the area’. We suggested the impossibility of a newly emergent post-colonial Africa realising either economic growth or (still less) a meaningful advance towards human development from within the then-present terms of its framing by global capitalism. Instead, we argued, ‘the key trend [is] towards increased subservience vis-à-vis a rationalising international capitalism’ – with development ‘effectively constrained by such a continental pattern’ and with, in consequence, a ‘Latin Americanization of independent Africa … well underway’. 
And it was on this basis that we then suggested the ‘necessity’ of a socialist break by Africa from the global capitalist system.

I was therefore surprised to find Arrighi, in the recent magisterial reflections on his intellectual trajectory over the years to be found in his New Left Review interview with David Harvey (NLR, March–April, 2009), stating of our period of work together:

There was also a difference between us that I think has persisted until this day, in that I was far less upset about [the failures of African progressive regimes] than John was. For me these movements were national liberation movements; they were not in any way socialist movements, even when they embraced the rhetoric of socialism. They were populist regimes, and therefore I didn’t expect much beyond national liberation, which we both saw as very important in itself. But whether there were possibilities for political development beyond this is something that John and I still quarrel about to this day, good-humoredly, whenever [including, I must add, here in Madrid!] we meet.

Well, yes and no: as Arrighi also acknowledges, we actually shared a similar degree of scepticism about many, if not most, of the nationalist and post-liberation-struggle regimes in the making that we saw about us in Africa, often repeating in our joint work Roger Murray’s own resonant warning of the time: do not confuse the historically possible with the historically necessary. Yet I never heard Giovanni state at the time – I’m sure he will correct me if I’m wrong [sic!] – that merely populist regimes were the best that Africans could hope for. Indeed, I thought we agreed that, in fact, ongoing class struggle in Africa might yet produce more valuable outcomes on that continent. But I now sense, in the wake of the Harvey interview, that something more profound than any different readings we may have had about the ‘socialist potential’ of this or that movement or regime was at stake (or at least: has now become so). For what we were actually disagreeing on, apparently, was the ‘socialist potential’ of Africa itself. This would become clearer as Giovanni, in later writings, came to move even further from what I had thought was our shared position of the time.

Moreover – whatever the subtlety of his position about Africa in those days may have been and however much unglimped by me – Giovanni’s more general position seemed to remain remarkably clear … and eminently consistent over many years. Thus, in his ongoing analyses at the global level, the overall structure of things did seem to render socialism a necessary step in the struggle for development (even, or so I thought, in Africa). Here the key text was a seminal paper in the New Left Review (‘World Income Inequalities and the Future of Socialism’ in the September–October 1991 issue) where, almost a quarter century after we had first written together, he articulated clearly a sophisticated perspective on the realities of the West’s oligarchic wealth and on the existence of ‘seemingly iron law of a global hierarchy of wealth’. In sum, he argued, ‘the standards of wealth enjoyed by the West correspond to what Roy Harrod once defined as “oligarchic wealth” in opposition to “democratic wealth”‘, these two worlds being separated by an ‘unbridgeable gulf’.

What follows from such an analysis? In fact, his conclusions were equally clear and unequivocal. For he continued that 1991 article by arguing that only a process of global socialist emancipation could hope to permit the development game to start over with all players on the kind of equal footing that would permit the otherwise ‘wretched of the earth’ to stand a fair chance; only then, in short, could ‘a process that has developed to legitimate and enforce world
inequalities be turned into a means to the end of promoting greater world equality and solidarity’.

Imagine my surprise then to find Giovanni more or less rewriting that paper, now with two co-authors, a mere decade later (Arrighi et al. 2003). In fact (no surprise) the new article restates firmly, and at comparable length, much the same fine-tuned and carefully documented position as the previous one regarding the dominance of a capitalist induced, still largely geographically-defined (and Western-centric) global hierarchy. However – and here is the surprise – although the basic structure, the elaboration of the problem, is more or less exactly the same, the conclusion is now absolutely different. For now there is no mention, not even one, of ‘socialism’ as a possible antidote to a Western capitalist stranglehold on the global South. Instead, the sole hope for shaking Western economic hegemony (particularly that of the United States) and global white dominance now lies, for Giovanni and his co-authors, with the rise, on firmly capitalist foundations, of China – even though there is actually little sign, in his argument, of how the rest of the global South might benefit from the presumed rise of China (or at least the Chinese elite) within the ranks of the globally privileged!

And what about Africa as viewed within this new optic? Perhaps it is also worth noting here that at about this same time (the beginning of the present decade) Giovanni and I had actually begun to speak of returning, now some 30 years later, to our earlier work on Africa. It was immediately apparent that this would not be a simple undertaking since our positions had already diverged markedly, but we explored the idea a bit further. Ultimately, we tried to improvise a possibly innovative framework, a book that would present itself as something of a dialogue or debate, underscoring our different starting points and letting the chips fall where they may. Giovanni even began a chapter on his own views to serve as his working document for our collaboration. But I think he must have despaired of our ability to now collaborate, to any pertinent or useful effect, intellectually – and I emphasise this word, for our friendship itself was never placed in jeopardy – and instead published the above-mentioned piece in New Left Review under the title ‘The African Crisis: World Systemic and Regional Aspects’.

There is no need to rehash the logistics of the possible alternative path NOT taken here, because the intellectual reasons for our not proceeding with any kind of collaborative project were and are readily apparent: the space between us had grown so great that it must have seemed to Giovanni, as I was also beginning to sense, unbridgeable, at least for the purposes of a joint publication even of the innovative kind we had been thinking about. Not that we have stopped thinking, of course: Giovanni has produced his magnum opus, one that, amongst other things, helps draw us together here in Madrid this week, and I have myself produced four books in the years since, including one on southern Africa entitled The Next Liberation Struggle: Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy in Southern Africa, (Saul 2005) a title that, in and of itself, may give some idea of where I continue to come from on these questions.

Here, however, let me round off this presentation by examining the substance of Giovanni’s own most recent articulation of a position on Africa as reflected in his above-mentioned article (‘The African Crisis’, NLR, 15, May–June 2002). Let me also say, at the outset, that I found and still find his views in that article singularly depressed and depressing: ‘There may be little that most [African] states can do’, he concludes, ‘to upgrade their economies in the global hierarchy of wealth’ (as we know, elsewhere in his writing he has, of course, argued the
existence of a ‘fixed hierarchy’ and there seems little chance, from the evidence of his recent writing on the continental prospect, of Africa disrupting, in its own favour, that hierarchy – whatever may be the possibilities for China of doing so). He can suggest only that there is, nonetheless, ‘always something they could do to increase (or decrease) the well-being of the citizenry at any given level of poverty or wealth’.

Conceding that even in such relatively narrow terms ‘African ruling groups have probably done far less than was in their power to do’, Arrighi nonetheless concludes – on what is apparently intended to be an upbeat note: ‘But it is not clear whether and to what extent they have on the whole been more deficient than the ruling groups of other countries and regions, the United States included. Indeed, if we take into account differentials in wealth and power, it seems likely that they have been comparatively less so’ (pp. 35–36). But, even if this were true (and, to be clear, from my own experience I see absolutely no reason to assume this to be the case), it would still stand as pretty modest accomplishment for a destitute continent – and, in any case, Arrighi does not really discuss what strategies pressed by which agents might begin to move ‘African ruling groups’ towards the more benign behaviour he apparently has in mind.

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A final comment. Let me merely reiterate that I have spoken frankly in a way that Giovanni, I know, will appreciate: he is, as I noted at the outset, quite capable of ‘fighting his own corner’ intellectually. And, needless to say, he is also someone whom I deeply respect. But I also speak here in a mood of some puzzlement. For I know that Giovanni and I share, up to a point, a very similar point of view: there is no question of either of us going over to the side of Western capitalism and the capital logic that has done so much damage, over the years, to Africa.

True, with regard to the rise of ‘Chinese capitalism’, I must confess that I remain profoundly sceptical about any promise it might be thought to hold – for Africa in particular. But I leave this to others better equipped than I am to discuss the novel assertions of China and their implications. Nonetheless, China apart, my basic question, to Giovanni, to you, remains what it was for us over 40 years ago: what about Africa? Is the continent really so side-lined as to be forced to cast about for some *deus ex machina* for even the very mild version of salvation he foresees open to it?

Can we, I want to ask, really rest any hope whatsoever either in a benign Chinese presence that, beyond headlong resource extraction and support for the most suspect of regimes there, shows little sign of really wishing Africa well in some substantive way? More importantly, is a kinder, gentler elite in Africa itself any better a hope there? I have suggested my scepticism about such levers of understanding and I have argued a similar point of view elsewhere.

And yet, alternatively, is the potential in Africa, for a popular, class-based and progressive politics itself anything more than a mere will-of the-wisp, a dream, a historical impossibility, however much an historical necessity, in a context of severe and pretty much unalloyed ‘historical backwardness’? You tell me. My choice though – until I hear something more convincing – is the need for a ‘next liberation struggle’. In sum, *a luta continua*.

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Obviously, I would have greatly preferred to hear Giovanni’s own response, be it in Baltimore or in Madrid, to the matters that I sought to debate with him. Was our disagreement primarily a confrontation of ‘pessimism of the intelligence’ on
the one hand, and ‘optimism of the will’ on the other? Of course, whatever may be the truth of the matter, it is the case that our ‘exchange’, both in Spain and in these pages of ROAPE, is now only to be the sound of one hand – my own – clapping. But my essay also shouts out full-throatedly for the man I knew and loved – one of the great thinkers of recent decades and, as well, my very dear friend.

John S. Saul, long-time activist in support of social and economic justice in Africa, is a Professor Emeritus of social and political science at York University in Toronto, Canada. His most recent book is Revolutionary Traveller: Freeze-Frames from a Life. Email: johnsaul@yorku.ca

Endnote

1. Giovanni’s connection with Rhodesia was important and very brave – not only was he closely involved with the ZAPU liberation movement, he was actually a activist in its the underground operations, running arms and information back and forth from Zambia with John Conradie. As it happens, he was arrested at about this same time with some other lecturers and activists at the University – for what were relatively mild campus-based activities. But not for the more serious ones. Therefore, hovering over his head while in custody (for some days) was the possibility that he would be rumbled for something far more important (as Conradie ultimately was, spending many years in jail). Despite that (as I recall Gerry Caplan, who was also arrested and deported at the same time, telling me), Giovanni refused to be immediately deported – much to the discomfiture of his fellow arrestees, who actually knew nothing of the additional jeopardy Giovanni was putting himself in by acting as he did but were merely understandably eager to get out of the country – until Basker Vashee, a Rhodesian but arrested with the expatriate university lecturers, was also freed and deported (as he soon was, later to become head of the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam). Only after this did Giovanni come on to Dar to join our number there.

References


Dedications

Tributes to Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem (1961–2009)

I am proud to say that I taught Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem at Bayero University Kano. Indeed, whenever I was in his company I always expected the familiar introduction: “AB Zack” (as he liked to call me) was my tutor at Bayero. These guys taught me Marxism”. What does one say after that, coming from one of the brightest minds to emerge out of Africa in the latter part of the twentieth century? As a student, Taju was a gem: always seeking answers to questions; always asking for articles or books (no internet then you see) with clear ordering of the sequence of the reading materials. Students of this calibre are not just a joy to teach, but they also ensure lecturers are current with the debates.

Taju was born in Funtua, Katsina State, Northern Nigeria to parents who had migrated to this major northern agricultural district from Ogbomosho, Oyo State, Southwestern Nigeria. He was a true Nigerian, one who felt at home in Kano as in Onitsha or Lagos, appropriated by all sides of diverse Nigeria. On completion of his secondary education, Taju gained entrance to Bayero University Kano (BUK), where he obtained First Class Honours in Political Science, as well as a national merit award, and later proceeded to St Peter’s College Oxford as Rhodes Scholar to pursue his doctoral work. At Oxford he continued his political work (which he had started not only with the university students union, but also with the Nigerian Labour Congress) as President of the University African Students Union.

Intellectually and politically Taju was a vibrant person, a great orator and one with a passion for politics. He was an ardent Pan-Africanist, who later became Secretary General of the newly formed Pan-Africanist Movement on the recommendation of the late Mohamed Babu, former Minister in the Tanzanian Government of Julius Nyerere. Taju was also a development activist with the portfolio of Deputy Director (Africa) for the UN Millennium Campaign (UNMC) and until his death was Director of Justice Africa and Chair of Pan Africa Development Education and Advisory Programme. He was a fearless campaigner against injustice who had his brush with the Nigerian State Security Service on a visit to his homeland in 1989. He was very much aware of how the Left in his country has been depleted by intimidation and bullying and he felt he had to act to stem the tide. Fearlessly, he organised the triumphant return to Nigeria in 2005 of Dr Patrick Wilmot, the Left Caribbean academic who was deported from Nigeria by the Babaginda regime.

My last conversation with Taju was at the International Conference on Institutions, Culture and Corruption in Africa in October 2008 organised by UNECA. As usual I was introduced to the audience as his former tutor and as such he had to watch his ways. Taju went on to give an electrifying talk for well over the allocated time, without referring to his notes. At the end, he apologised that he had to leave to catch a plane to Kampala. I now cherish the picture he insisted we took. He is survived by his wife Munira and two daughters, Aida and Aishat.

Alfred B. Zack-Williams.
Email: abzw@blueyonder.co.uk
The Tajudeen Challenge

I met Comrade Tajudeen Abdulraheem 23 years ago in Oxford, through a Trinidadian comrade, David Johnson, a fellow historian. When I informed David that I would be travelling to Oxford to do research at Rhodes House Library, he suggested I contact Taju as a potential host. Our paths never crossed when I was resident in Nigeria, from 1977–1984, but Taju knew almost everyone that mattered on the Nigerian left. Our first meeting therefore turned out to be a Central Committee Indaba that took in more members, with the arrival of Adebayo Olukoshi the following day and other Nigerian Comrades. Our discussions principally revolved around the perennial question of *la project Africain* – what else to talk about? – the left in Nigeria; the struggle against Apartheid; the Africanists scholarly racket; neo-colonialism/imperialism and race but hardly Pan-Africanism. This is instructive partly because Taju came from a Marxist tradition that was shaped by the left experience in Nigeria, an experience that is strictly speaking rooted in the history of Nigerian intellectuals and their romance with the ‘progressive’ faction of the fractious Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC). It is not co-incidental that his first scholarly publication, co-authored with Adebayo Olukoshi, was about the left and the struggle for socialism in Nigeria.

Taju continued to struggle within this tradition when he took up a position as researcher-cum-activist at Ben Turok’s Institute of African Alternative (IAA). The debates then, our debates, if I can call it that, were shaped by an orthodox Marxist project that was informed by classical formulations about history, theory and society. The short-lived *Journal of African Marxist* (JAM) was anything but African; it published articles written by African intellectuals who professed Marxist ideas but were far removed from the day-to-day reality of those for whom they claimed to speak. This distance – not just literal and metaphorical – troubled Taju who was still bogged down with primary research – his dissertation. Time and again he would evoke Cabral as if to remind us all about the monumental task ahead.

By the time he finished his dissertation Taju had crossed the proverbial Rubicon; resolved to look from within, to explore linkages and potentials within the evolving African community of exiles particularly Ghanaians, and to return to the source a la Cabral. This was the context, indeed the moment of the African Research and Information Bureau (ARIB). Indeed, ARIB would become the symbolic signpost between Taju’s self-professed Marxism and his discovery of Pan-Africanism as the essential vehicle for the liberation of Africa.

Unlike IAA, ARIB was an African organisation, stitched together by Ghanaian comrades who had been forced into exile by Rawlings: Napoleon Abdulai, Zaya Ayeebo et al. I suspect ARIB gave Taju the intellectual space to think through the African condition in close proximity with battle-tested comrades fresh from the barricades with rich experiences to reflect upon. ARIB was praxis in ways that were unimaginable at IAA; it ministered to the needs of the swelling ranks of West Africans in the 1990s and was an intellectual rendezvous for both continental and diaspora Africans. These were extremely hard times when funding was hard to come by and several attempts to cross the Atlantic came to nothing.

ARIB was involved in community matters, with race and race relations. The network widened to include Diaspora Africans, principally Caribbeans; other Africans also came on board. Before long Taju’s network included the legendary John La Rose and Mzee Babu Abdurrahman, the Zanzibari revolutionary intellectual. Taju became Babu’s
protégé, for he would draft him to organise the Kampala Pan-African conference which catapulted him to the continental stage. Before long, Taju was confronted, a la Padmore, with an organisational as well as a theoretical question: Pan-Africanism or Communism? Did Taju (re)invent himself as a pan-Africanist to pursue his self-professed Marxist objective of capturing state power? Or did he use Marxism to advance the cause of Pan-Africanism?

These two related questions underline the seminal contribution of Comrade Tajudeen Abdulrahheem. Like Padmore before him, Taju did not abandon the socialist project. Rather, he skillfully employed Pan-Africanism to advance the socialist project in ways that are not too easy to understand. Unlike Padmore, however, Taju did not make an a priori distinction between organisations on the basis of their alleged revolutionary potential, that is to say, ‘revolutionary’ versus ‘non-revolutionary’ binary.

Taju’s abiding concern was how to creatively pursue the revolutionary agenda even in situations/organisations that are outrightly reactionary or seemingly counter-revolutionary. This is why he was tirelessly involved in all types of disparate liberal activities that on the surface had no bearing to his ideology. Where comrades jettison NGO’s as advancing the cause of imperialism, Taju demonstrated that the reverse is possible if the ideal is solidly ground on a Pan-African platform. Where leftist traditions collectively indictment multilateral organisations as imperialist outfits, Taju turned this on its head by making us rethink an alternative trajectory. His abiding faith in human propensity for change against all odds – privileging agency over structure – remains Taju’s seminal contribution to twenty-first century African history. He demonstrated, through tireless practice, that it is possible to humanise inhuman organizations, to neutralise liberal outfits as vehicles of change, and to sell the agenda of revolution without appearing to be revolutionary.

The challenge is how to deepen the privileging of agency over structure so as to advance the struggle for our collective emancipation. This is Taju’s legacy!

Ibrahim Abdullah
Freetown, Sierra Leone
May 2009

If you sent a postcard from heaven

If indeed there is such a place, where all the stars before you went
I imagine that in your eloquent, earth-shaking, sensational way
You would convey to us, how you rendered a report of your time here –
The report of a messenger, who carried a vision of an Africa full of promise, which would thrive when its people, once viciously divided, unite in one purpose with one voice

And your new mates would marvel at the ‘new arrival’ from the other world
Who carries the fire of conviction in his belly, the power of his message in his eyes and the hope of his people in his words
Just like the time you were with us, your audience would never be indifferent
Your boisterous presence would leave no soul untouched . . .
the hands of insiders and outsiders alike ...
You would plead the case of Africa’s peoples and ask for a break, for a new dawn ...

_If you sent a postcard from heaven_
It would be the last postcard you would send
For your passionate defence, charm and eloquence wouldn’t be lost on your Host A new mission for you will await – Another cause to champion
You will again deserve the pass of the city; you would tour its length and breadth

Like you traversed your continent, making a case for your people
If you sent that last postcard, you would assure us that the task at hand was simple – having accomplished your task before vacating this scene
Your simple yet powerful message of one continent, one people, was delivered from Cape to Cairo
And the rest would be up to us … to make the message count.

So long, dear brother

_Funmi Olonisakin_
Haroub Othman (1942–2009)

We were saddened and shocked to hear of the early death of Professor Haroub Othman in Zanzibar on 28 June 2009. He was only 66 and had much more to give. Haroub had been Professor of Development Studies in the University of Dar es Salaam for many years, but was much more than this – he was an intellectual, a writer, a political activist, with a deep commitment to socialism, an intensely warm and decent man who never forgot those he had known many years earlier. When I last met him at the World Social Forum in Nairobi in 2007, he greeted me like a long-lost friend and comrade and we talked as if it were only yesterday we taught together at the University of Dar es Salaam (it was in the early 1970s). He leaves a wife, Professor Saida Yahya-Othman, and a son, Tahir.

In verses of tribute to ‘Professor Ho’ as he was fondly called, Issa Shivji recalls the days when Haroub became active, during the heady era of Tanzanian socialism and the struggles around it.

… Those were the days,
Of the Vietnam war.
Ho Chinh Minh was your uncle,
My uncle, our uncle.
Demos, sit-ins and boycotts,
Petitions, pictures and panels,
Unclothing war criminals.
People’s courts sentenced, public opinion enforced.

Those were the days,
Of Bertrand Russell and Stokely Carmichael,
Sitting in Stockholm,
Hearing napalmed men, women and children.
The public gallery wept, students shouted,
‘Down with Uncle Sam,
Long live Uncle Ho.’

Haroub was a teacher whose students, past and present, admired him greatly. Several have contacted us with their tributes to the impact he made on their lives. As one of them recalled:

I remember it was in 2001, the end of the third term for my second year, when I first saw this Professor at Nkrumah Hall … He talked about Human Rights and Democracy. It is difficult to express in words the way I felt that day after the lecture. I had to tell my class mates who missed, so that they attend the next lecture. … Thereafter he kept on inspiring [me]… If there is any burning issue I expected Mwalimu Haroub to humbly intervene either through his writings or public analysis … Conversant with the issues on his fingertips, articulate in his arguments and most important, comfortable with his standpoint. We discussed many issues, and I still remember [him saying] … ‘You young people are the ones to carry the Pan Africanism movement ahead’… His email signature [was] ‘Transform Justice into Passion’ and this is what I see as the everlasting memory of our comrade and our...
great Mwalimu [teacher] who has moved on.

Another described him as ‘humble yet inspiring, there was never a hint of arrogance in his words. He was truly a very accomplished intellectual rooted in the service of mankind … He is going to be profoundly missed by those who love knowledge … a liberating intellectual’. One described him as ‘my hero…who demonstrated his academic ability beyond classroom teaching’. He was to another ‘without compare’, teaching him to seek out truth in his writing and to proclaim it publicly. Another said he always spoke the truth regardless of how bitter it was to swallow. Diligent, informed analyst and renowned Prof Ho! A treasure to Tanzania and Africa, with the wealth of thoughts, insights and scholarly works … International affairs, human rights and law, conflict resolution, democracy and above all, Pan Africanism … Always at the forefront in honouring those who have gone before us; Abdulrahman Babu, Mwalimu Nyerere, Walter Rodney, Seithy Chachage …

Even those who had not been taught by him had been inspired by his example. A journalist spoke of his fearlessness in opposing human rights violations in Zanzibar and how he was always ‘open in criticising politicians whenever they “misbehave”’. Unusually he seems to have been able to reach across the generational divide – as Chambi Chachage put it, Haroub was ‘passing the baton of his generation to our generation’ and Chambi responds ‘are we ready to seize the moment? Shall we make an end to injustice?’ Chambi also commented that he was always ready to be among ‘what is left of the left’, confronting neo-liberalism wherever he saw it. Even his car sticker spoke insistently ‘The leftists have rights too!’

An anonymous contributor to the Daily Nation summed up the general feeling of grief at the death of this good man. Haroub was ‘a voice of the voiceless gone silent’.

I am indebted to all those who contributed to this tribute: Chambi Chachage, Mkinga Mkinga of The Citizen, Lucy Shule, Vicensia Shule, Nicodemus Banyukwa, John Kitoka, Zainab Mwatawala and Professor Issa Shivji.

Janet Bujra, Chair of the Editorial Working Group of ROAPE. Email: j.m.bujra@bradford.ac.uk

Haroub Othman

Haroub was one of Tanzania’s most prominent intellectuals. He also commanded respect across the continent: more than just a presence on Pan-African networks, but as someone dedicated to an all-Africa knowledge and commitment. As one among many examples of how he was valued beyond his own country, he was asked to give the first Nyerere Memorial Lecture at the University of Cape Town in 2005.

Digging out a copy, I found the lecture repaid a rereading as it included some reminiscing on the role of intellectuals in Tanzania and the intellectual life at the University of Dar es Salaam, which had shaped Haroub himself and to which he had contributed so much. But it is when he turns to Julius Nyerere himself, that I realised that the qualities someone chooses to admire about a great leader like Mwalimu also says something about the writer’s own values. What Haroub picks out as well as the patriotism and Pan-African commitment are the integrity, the non-racism and internationalism, and his putting socialism on the African agenda. Those who knew Haroub will not be surprised that these were the qualities he picked out. His own work, teaching, writing and
reaching out to a broader constituency sought to generate understanding and debate about such ideas. That is the contribution for which he will be remembered.

What was more of a surprise in the lecture was Haroub flagging up the value of humour. He quotes approvingly Issa Shivji’s call that intellectuals should cultivate ‘the ability to laugh at ourselves’. Then he makes a similar reference to Nyerere’s characteristic style, ‘full of humour but deeply serious’, when recalling Mwalimu’s last appearance at the University of Dar es Salaam on his 75th birthday. All of which reminded me of Haroub’s own rich sense of fun, which came out when he was introducing me at a seminar in the University. He started by referring to my contributions to Development Studies there in the old days. Then before I could become too flattered, he added with a wicked little smile: ‘and the most important of these was that he hired me’!

Apart from poking gentle fun at both of us, he was remembering an event of almost 40 years ago. Coming back from USSR with a Masters degree in law, he found it was not recognised by the Law Faculty sufficiently for him to be given anything other than an administrative rather than an academic post. But when the interdisciplinary and socialist-oriented Development Studies course was launched across all faculties, he was one of those who responded with an offer to volunteer. The political economy training he had in the Soviet Union now allowed him to be taken on as a teaching assistant in the core team that was being built up. Once given the opportunity he responded with gusto, working his way up in seniority eventually to a Chair and the Directorship of the Institute for Development Studies, to which he devoted the whole of his career.

When I heard of his passing, I could not help recalling our long association, and comradeship – and his joke about me – a true word spoken in jest. On reflection I feel great pride that facilitating the start of such a life work turned out so productively. In remembering him we cannot do better than go back to the final words of his own tribute to Mwalimu Nyerere: ‘One should live so that in dying one can say “I gave all my strength for the liberation of humanity”’. A worthy guide to anyone, from a person who deserves that epitaph.

Lionel Cliffe, International Advisory Board, Review of African Political Economy

September 2009
Arrighi and Africa: Farewell Thoughts

John S. Saul

From 26 to 29 May of this year a group of us, convened by Carlos Prieto del Campo, came together in Madrid to celebrate the work of Giovanni Arrighi. The plan was that Giovanni himself, together with his wife and collaborator Beverly Silver, would also be at this workshop to actively engage in the exchange, to help us to clarify and expand points, and to generally add their stimulating presence to the event. Unfortunately, only the day before we were to assemble, Giovanni, seriously ill with cancer since last July, suffered an unexpected seizure and, it was announced, would have to spend the conference in the intensive care unit of a Baltimore hospital.

Although the workshop was now to be rather like ‘Hamlet without the prince’, those of us who were there managed to soldier on, with Beverly and to some degree Giovanni following our proceedings by Skype. The event certainly proved to be enlightening. Ideas and theories about global capitalism and its prospects echoed through our meeting chamber at the Reina Sofia complex in the centre of the city. These were ideas and theories very often inspired by Giovanni’s own writings, of course, with a full range of spirited opinions being presented, some supportively enthusiastic regarding his work and its implications, some more combative and sceptical. But all were there, in Giovanni’s spirit, to learn and to share. Indeed, even those of us most tempted to skulk off at various points to view Picasso’s Guernica (housed in a nearby room) or to visit the Prado tended to stay the fascinating course of such a workshop.

This was not surprising. Gathered together, after all, were a strong cadre of Giovanni’s colleagues, former students and diverse comrades from around the world – drawn by enthusiasm and respect both for Giovanni’s person and for his powerful writings. As noted, opinions were both enthusiastic and combative – a not too surprising juxtaposition of descriptors, perhaps, since Giovanni was both enthusiastic and combative in his own right, although always unfailingly warm and friendly. As it happens, and as indicated by the paper that I presented at the workshop (‘Africa in a New Global Order: A Critique of Giovanni Arrighi’s Changing Perspective on Africa’), I had found myself rather surprised at the direction his writings on Africa – where our own diverse intellectual journeys had begun together almost 45 years ago – had taken in recent years. I sought enlightenment about the precise weight and substance of our differences, writing the paper below with, I suppose, a combative enthusiasm of my own.

My intention was clear: to once again draw my old friend out on certain important issues and to debate them vigorously as we had done so often in the past (the paper, below, stands exactly as I wrote it for Madrid). I chose not to tiptoe around the issues, for I knew very well that Giovanni was more than able to take care of himself intellectually and that, in any case, he would not thank any fellow debater for patronising him or for pulling his or her punches. But of course, sadly, his riposte to my piece would not then come – and now never will. Instead, my wife and I found ourselves, a few weeks later in June, sitting a kind of post-modern form of northern Italian shiva with his wife, son and brother in Giovanni and Beverly’s Baltimore home. Now, in tribute to his

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memory, and to our decades of ongoing debate, a debate that was invariably heated but one that never became testy, I offer my Madrid contribution here.

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I should, perhaps, begin by placing some of my credentials firmly on the table. I can lay claim, I think, to being one of Giovanni’s oldest living friends and comrades on both the social science and the political-activism fronts. For our friendship dates back to our days, in the mid-1960s, as colleagues (and next-door neighbours) on the campus of the University of Dar es Salaam. Giovanni arrived there after a brief and genuinely heroic interlude – about which more could easily be said – in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), that being his first academic home after leaving Lever Brothers and also, at least temporarily, his native Italy. On the campus we formed, almost immediately, an extremely warm friendship. In fact, I love the guy, a feeling that has not changed one iota despite our having come, ultimately, to hold somewhat different views both about Africa and about the world, differences to which I will also speak further in what follows.

But for the moment, let us stay in Dar es Salaam. For there, as members of the then notorious Committee of Nine Lecturers, we worked closely with such fellow faculty members as the remarkable Guyanese intellectual Walter Rodney, Catherine Hoskyns (then a leading scholar on the Congo), future Weatherman Jim Mellen, the Kenyan littérateur Grant Kamenju, and in consultation with Dennis Phombeah, a senior Tanzanian bureaucrat of firmly left persuasion, and Roger Murray, then an employee of TANU, the country’s dominant political party. Our intention: to articulate progressive proposals regarding the future shape of the University College and to present them vigorously at a ‘Conference on the Role of the University College, Dar es Salaam, in a Socialist Tanzania’, convened shortly after the promulgation of that country’s Arusha Declaration.

Exciting times certainly, about which much has been written. And here too more could easily be said. But I will merely pass on quickly to the fact that, during this same period, Giovanni and I managed to study, theorise and write a great deal together; indeed one of the very first books either of us published – entitled Essays on the Political Economy of Africa from Monthly Review Press – came directly out of the hot political atmosphere of the time and place: Dar es Salaam in the 1960s. Let me begin the main argument of this paper, that pertaining to the strengths and weaknesses of Giovanni’s shifting position about Africa and about the Global South more generally, by reiterating the thrust of that early book – with the reason for doing so soon to become apparent.

The very introduction to that book identified ‘the interaction of contemporary capitalism with patterns of domestic class formation’ as the main features of Africa’s underdevelopment. Moreover, the first chapter of that volume was entitled ‘Socialism and Economic Development in Tropical Africa’ in which we argued the need for a socialist development option, while the second chapter, ‘Nationalism and Revolution in Sub-Saharan Africa’, stated crisply that ‘socialism is, in fact, rapidly becoming a historical necessity in order to ensure the further development of the area’. We suggested the impossibility of a newly emergent post-colonial Africa realising either economic growth or (still less) a meaningful advance towards human development from within the then-present terms of its framing by global capitalism. Instead, we argued, ‘the key trend [is] towards increased subservience vis-à-vis a rationalising international capitalism’ – with development ‘effectively constrained by such a continental pattern’ and with, in consequence, a ‘Latin Americanization of independent Africa … well underway’. 

Dedications: Arrighi and Africa: Farewell Thoughts 645
And it was on this basis that we then suggested the ‘necessity’ of a socialist break by Africa from the global capitalist system.

I was therefore surprised to find Arrighi, in the recent magisterial reflections on his intellectual trajectory over the years to be found in his New Left Review interview with David Harvey (NLR, March–April, 2009), stating of our period of work together:

There was also a difference between us that I think has persisted until this day, in that I was far less upset about [the failures of African progressive regimes] than John was. For me these movements were national liberation movements; they were not in any way socialist movements, even when they embraced the rhetoric of socialism. They were populist regimes, and therefore I didn’t expect much beyond national liberation, which we both saw as very important in itself. But whether there were possibilities for political development beyond this is something that John and I still quarrel about to this day, good-humoredly, whenever [including, I must add, here in Madrid!] we meet.

Well, yes and no: as Arrighi also acknowledges, we actually shared a similar degree of scepticism about many, if not most, of the nationalist and post-liberation-struggle regimes in the making that we saw about us in Africa, often repeating in our joint work Roger Murray’s own resonant warning of the time: do not confuse the historically possible with the historically necessary. Yet I never heard Giovanni state at the time – I’m sure he will correct me if I’m wrong [sic!] – that merely populist regimes were the best that Africans could hope for. Indeed, I thought we agreed that, in fact, ongoing class struggle in Africa might yet produce more valuable outcomes on that continent. But I now sense, in the wake of the Harvey interview, that something more profound than any different readings we may have had about the ‘socialist potential’ of this or that movement or regime was at stake (or at least: has now become so). For what we were actually disagreeing on, apparently, was the ‘socialist potential’ of Africa itself. This would become clearer as Giovanni, in later writings, came to move even further from what I had thought was our shared position of the time.

Moreover – whatever the subtlety of his position about Africa in those days may have been and however much unglimped by me – Giovanni’s more general position seemed to remain remarkably clear … and eminently consistent over many years. Thus, in his ongoing analyses at the global level, the overall structure of things did seem to render socialism a necessary step in the struggle for development (even, or so I thought, in Africa). Here the key text was a seminal paper in the New Left Review (‘World Income Inequalities and the Future of Socialism’ in the September–October 1991 issue) where, almost a quarter century after we had first written together, he articulated clearly a sophisticated perspective on the realities of the West’s oligarchic wealth and on the existence of ‘seemingly iron law of a global hierarchy of wealth’. In sum, he argued, ‘the standards of wealth enjoyed by the West correspond to what Roy Harrod once defined as “oligarchic wealth” in opposition to “democratic wealth”’, these two worlds being separated by an ‘unbridgeable gulf’.

What follows from such an analysis? In fact, his conclusions were equally clear and unequivocal. For he continued that 1991 article by arguing that only a process of global socialist emancipation could hope to permit the development game to start over with all players on the kind of equal footing that would permit the otherwise ‘wretched of the earth’ to stand a fair chance; only then, in short, could ‘a process that has developed to legitimate and enforce world
inequalities be turned into a means to the end of promoting greater world equality and solidarity’.

Imagine my surprise then to find Giovanni more or less rewriting that paper, now with two co-authors, a mere decade later (Arrighi et al. 2003). In fact (no surprise) the new article restates firmly, and at comparable length, much the same fine-tuned and carefully documented position as the previous one regarding the dominance of a capitalist induced, still largely geographically-defined (and Western-centric) global hierarchy. However – and here is the surprise – although the basic structure, the elaboration of the problem, is more or less exactly the same, the conclusion is now absolutely different. For now there is no mention, not even one, of ‘socialism’ as a possible antidote to a Western capitalist stranglehold on the global South. Instead, the sole hope for shaking Western economic hegemony (particularly that of the United States) and global white dominance now lies, for Giovanni and his co-authors, with the rise, on firmly capitalist foundations, of China – even though there is actually little sign, in his argument, of how the rest of the global South might benefit from the presumed rise of China (or at least the Chinese elite) within the ranks of the globally privileged!

And what about Africa as viewed within this new optic? Perhaps it is also worth noting here that at about this same time (the beginning of the present decade) Giovanni and I had actually begun to speak of returning, now some 30 years later, to our earlier work on Africa. It was immediately apparent that this would not be a simple undertaking since our positions had already diverged markedly, but we explored the idea a bit further. Ultimately, we tried to improvise a possibly innovative framework, a book that would present itself as something of a dialogue or debate, underscoring our different starting points and letting the chips fall where they may. Giovanni even began a chapter on his own views to serve as his working document for our collaboration. But I think he must have despaired of our ability to now collaborate, to any pertinent or useful effect, intellectually – and I emphasise this word, for our friendship itself was never placed in jeopardy – and instead published the above-mentioned piece in New Left Review under the title ‘The African Crisis: World Systemic and Regional Aspects’.

There is no need to rehash the logistics of the possible alternative path NOT taken here, because the intellectual reasons for our not proceeding with any kind of collaborative project were and are readily apparent: the space between us had grown so great that it must have seemed to Giovanni, as I was also beginning to sense, unbridgeable, at least for the purposes of a joint publication even of the innovative kind we had been thinking about. Not that we have stopped thinking, of course: Giovanni has produced his magnum opus, one that, amongst other things, helps draw us together here in Madrid this week, and I have myself produced four books in the years since, including one on southern Africa entitled The Next Liberation Struggle: Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy in Southern Africa, (Saul 2005) a title that, in and of itself, may give some idea of where I continue to come from on these questions.

Here, however, let me round off this presentation by examining the substance of Giovanni’s own most recent articulation of a position on Africa as reflected in his above-mentioned article (‘The African Crisis’, NLR, 15, May–June 2002). Let me also say, at the outset, that I found and still find his views in that article singularly depressed and depressing: ‘There may be little that most [African] states can do’, he concludes, ‘to upgrade their economies in the global hierarchy of wealth’ (as we know, elsewhere in his writing he has, of course, argued the
existence of a ‘fixed hierarchy’ and there seems little chance, from the evidence of his recent writing on the continental prospect, of Africa disrupting, in its own favour, that hierarchy – whatever may be the possibilities for China of doing so). He can suggest only that there is, nonetheless, ‘always something they could do to increase (or decrease) the well-being of the citizenry at any given level of poverty or wealth’.

Conceding that even in such relatively narrow terms ‘African ruling groups have probably done far less than was in their power to do’, Arrighi nonetheless concludes – on what is apparently intended to be an upbeat note: ‘But it is not clear whether and to what extent they have on the whole been more deficient than the ruling groups of other countries and regions, the United States included. Indeed, if we take into account differentials in wealth and power, it seems likely that they have been comparatively less so’ (pp. 35–36). But, even if this were true (and, to be clear, from my own experience I see absolutely no reason to assume this to be the case), it would still stand as pretty modest accomplishment for a destitute continent – and, in any case, Arrighi does not really discuss what strategies pressed by which agents might begin to move ‘African ruling groups’ towards the more benign behaviour he apparently has in mind.

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A final comment. Let me merely reiterate that I have spoken frankly in a way that Giovanni, I know, will appreciate: he is, as I noted at the outset, quite capable of ‘fighting his own corner’ intellectually. And, needless to say, he is also someone whom I deeply respect. But I also speak here in a mood of some puzzlement. For I know that Giovanni and I share, up to a point, a very similar point of view: there is no question of either of us going over to the side of Western capitalism and the capital logic that has done so much damage, over the years, to Africa.

True, with regard to the rise of ‘Chinese capitalism’, I must confess that I remain profoundly sceptical about any promise it might be thought to hold – for Africa in particular. But I leave this to others better equipped than I am to discuss the novel assertions of China and their implications. Nonetheless, China apart, my basic question, to Giovanni, to you, remains what it was for us over 40 years ago: what about Africa? Is the continent really so side-lined as to be forced to cast about for some deus ex machina for even the very mild version of salvation he foresees open to it?

Can we, I want to ask, really rest any hope whatsoever either in a benign Chinese presence that, beyond headlong resource extraction and support for the most suspect of regimes there, shows little sign of really wishing Africa well in some substantive way? More importantly, is a kinder, gentler elite in Africa itself any better a hope there? I have suggested my scepticism about such levers of understanding and I have argued a similar point of view elsewhere.

And yet, alternatively, is the potential in Africa, for a popular, class-based and progressive politics itself anything more than a mere will-of the-wisp, a dream, a historical impossibility, however much an historical necessity, in a context of severe and pretty much unalloyed ‘historical backwardness’? You tell me. My choice though – until I hear something more convincing – is the need for a ‘next liberation struggle’. In sum, a luta continua.

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Obviously, I would have greatly preferred to hear Giovanni’s own response, be it in Baltimore or in Madrid, to the matters that I sought to debate with him. Was our disagreement primarily a confrontation of ‘pessimism of the intelligence’ on
the one hand, and ‘optimism of the will’ on the other? Of course, whatever may be the truth of the matter, it is the case that our ‘exchange’, both in Spain and in these pages of ROAPE, is now only to be the sound of one hand – my own – clapping. But my essay also shouts out full-throatedly for the man I knew and loved – one of the great thinkers of recent decades and, as well, my very dear friend.

**John S. Saul**, long-time activist in support of social and economic justice in Africa, is a Professor Emeritus of social and political science at York University in Toronto, Canada. His most recent book is *Revolutionary Traveller: Freeze-Frames from a Life*. Email: johnsaul@yorku.ca

**Endnote**

1. Giovanni’s connection with Rhodesia was important and very brave – not only was he closely involved with the ZAPU liberation movement, he was actually a activist in its the underground operations, running arms and information back and forth from Zambia with John Conradie. As it happens, he was arrested at about this same time with some other lecturers and activists at the University – for what were relatively mild campus-based activities. But not for the more serious ones. Therefore, hovering over his head while in custody (for some days) was the possibility that he would be rumbled for something far more important (as Conradie ultimately was, spending many years in jail). Despite that (as I recall Gerry Caplan, who was also arrested and deported at the same time, telling me), Giovanni refused to be immediately deported – much to the discomfiture of his fellow arrestees, who actually knew nothing of the additional jeopardy Giovanni was putting himself in by acting as he did but were merely understandably eager to get out of the country – until Basker Vashee, a Rhodesian but arrested with the expatriate university lecturers, was also freed and deported (as he soon was, later to become head of the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam). Only after this did Giovanni come on to Dar to join our number there.

**References**


In Memoriam

Chris Allen (8 December 1942–29 September 2008)

Chris was a founding editor of ROAPE. He was at the meeting at which the idea of the journal was first discussed. The Review owes a great deal to his continued commitment and his active editorial work 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. As an undergraduate, he spent two summers working in the US South for the Student Non-violent Co-ordinating Committee. This was the radicalising experience in his life, initially as an active member of the Communist Party. He went to Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone in 1966. After his return, he left the CPGB because of its uncritical approach to politics in Africa. He went back to Oxford as a graduate student and then as a Research Fellow at Nuffield College. He lectured in African History at Ahmadu Bello University from 1970–1971 and then, until he retired in 2001, taught at Edinburgh University, in the Department of Politics and the Centre of African Studies, and also set up Scotland’s first course in Scottish politics.

Chris was an indefatigable bibliographer. From the first issue until 1988, he published his existing Radical Africana, later broadened to Current Africana, comprehensive surveys of literature in English and French. 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, whose teaching shaped his intellectual life. The 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 a collection of excerpts from key texts on the sociology of sub-Saharan Africa, which his knowledge of the literature, perceptive judgement, and meticulous editing made possible.

The Republic of Benin gained 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 in 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 was intensely loyal to close friends and committed to his students. He was often very intolerant about people and of ideas. His approach was empirical; he was not given to ‘theorising’ and was impatient of it. 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’ in ROAPE 65, 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, Chris 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.

After he retired, Chris and Frances left Edinburgh for rural life in France, but not his continued concern with political developments in Africa.

Gavin Williams, Oxford.
Email: gavin.williams@spc.ox.ac.uk
Since the appearance of *Citizen and Subject*, Mahmood Mamdani has taken on the unique part of a public intellectual and critical observer of the African scene at the highest level with a foot in New York surveying Western perceptions and another grounded on the African continent. He has intervened in debates on South Africa, Rwanda and now Sudan, apart from writing about Muslims and the West in the contemporary conjuncture. There is no doubt more to come on Zimbabwe from shorter writings that have already evoked substantial controversy elsewhere but, at the level of the full-length book, it is now his thoughts on Sudan that are reaching the spotlight.

There are essentially three related parts to this study. First, Mamdani looks at the Save Darfur Movement and explores the significance of enthusiasm for Western military invasion of this region in the very heart of Africa, based on making a case that the violence in Darfur was/is genocidal. Second, he devotes time and attention to Sudanese history in order to explore the actual roots of conflict in Darfur. Finally, he returns to the international context and the current prospects raised by the ICC demand for the arrest of the President of Sudan on the ground of war crimes in Darfur.

Let us start with the middle. Not that serious historians of Sudan need to be told this, but Mamdani underscores the key point that Furs and Arabs in Darfur do not belong to different ‘races’, that Arabs in Sudan generally are not migrants from Arabia and that Arab identity which he calls essentially ‘political’ (p. 108) has many facets that have shifted over time and has existed for many centuries in this part of Africa. Racial antagonism can be dismissed as having anything to do with this conflict.

Instead, Mamdani finds a variety of causes jointly responsible. First is the colonial heritage, and here predictably he harks back to the *Citizen and Subject* binary. Under British rule, legitimate identity in Darfur revolved around ethnicity. Of course, in that time, light-skinned Arabs were defined as better than Africans and deserving of more consideration. However, in Darfur it was the sedentary Fur who had collectively access to a dar – to land, unlike many of the nomadic, often Arabic speaking, pastoral peoples. The second stimulus to conflict lay in the long drought which virtually forced Sahelian camel nomads to abandon their usual territorial haunts and made access to more fertile and southern portions of Darfur compelling. Third came the evolution of regional entanglements, in particular long-term instability in neighbouring Chad, another huge and yet much less well-known country afflicted by drought, where close links exist between some of the Darfuri rebels and the Chad regime and from where many refugees came to live with closely aligned communities in Darfur. The possibility of assistance and refuge across the border stimulated the possibility for rebellion. Here as elsewhere in Africa, regional rivalries and
alliances fed into Cold War plots and proxy wars. Some nomadic groups were thus obviously available for mayhem to forces both in N'Djamena and Khartoum.

Finally, there is the question of the narrow, undemocratic nature of the Sudanese state itself where power has overwhelmingly always rested on cliques with ‘tribal’ ties from the middle Nile valley. This has been challenged to some extent if unsuccessfully on an Islamist basis, but this of course cannot speak to the country’s large Christian minority. The conflict between north and south in the Sudan has unhinged the whole country, inevitably influencing other contradictions into breaking out in open rebellion. It is a central contention in Mamdani’s argument that the extreme violence that climaxed in 2003/04 in Darfur came out of earlier strife that had its roots in conflict within Darfur itself; the apparently Machiavellian role played by the Bashir government in Khartoum has been more opportunistic than causative by this line of argument.

All these factors are convincingly real, although it is not quite clear to me why camel nomads would choose to re-establish themselves in agricultural areas without proposing to change their way of life, but then I am a sceptic in general towards environmentally determinist explanations in history and politics. However, the greatest problem with this assessment analytically is that Mamdani makes so little of the reality that ethnic and racial determinism, based on a poor assessment of real historical processes, while undoubtedly typical of colonial analysis, has (as in Rwanda) been internalised and seized on with alacrity by strong local forces for quite some time. It is the academic ‘doyen’ of historical studies in the Sudan, Yusuf Fadl Hasan, who lives most easily with the Harold MacMichael version of Sudanese history as Mamdani mentions, but then he represents the dominant intelligentsia of Khartoum. Arabic speaking nomads in Darfur have never claimed to be fighting a racial crusade or religious jihad; it was Fur spokesmen in the late 1980s who painted their conflict with cattle and camel nomads in starkly racial terms to suit their own position (and no doubt court influential foreign friends) as they became more and more alienated from central authority in Khartoum. Herein lies the problem of ethnic interpretation, not in its imperial origins as an argument. It is the Sudanese themselves who have yet to face the world convincingly as citizens.

Sudanese history is multi-faceted and complex and Mamdani at most gives us an aperçu of a great many events and issues; he is not really at odds with current scholarship on which his analysis largely depends. Much of the power of this book comes rather from Mamdani’s very justifiable frustration at the wilful and truly stupid ignorance of Westerners as they seek to define crises in Africa in liberal ‘humanitarian’ terms that can be applied anywhere and which exist in defiance of politics and history where racial thinking, however condemned, is still the intellectual comfort zone.

For Americans, Darfur is a place without history and without politics—simply a place where perpetrators clearly identifiable as ‘Arabs’ confront victims clearly identifiable as ‘Africans’ (p. 60).

He lays into the mischief brought about by the naive search for ‘causes’ by Hollywood and other celebrities and acutely shows how this falls into the hands of the powers that be. The genocide charge, almost impossible to apply to Darfur seriously after 2004 for a variety of reasons, creates a way of thinking where assessment of the real politics in a very complex ethnic soup, with many forces fighting and frequently realigning themselves, is made impossible. It does have to be granted that some of what is so wrong here is not just manipulation of
emotions in the interests of powerful forces but also the way the media create a kind of pseudo-politics. As Mamdani says, the Save Darfur Movement was a very successful organised popular movement; the state did not originate it. I note in a recent magazine article that the crème de la crème of the film world of Spain are currently en route to the refugee camps of the Algerian Sahara to create a film festival atmosphere for the Sahrawis – once, if briefly, Spanish subjects. Here victims and perpetrators are Arabic speaking and somewhat white ...but the genre is really the same and it also needs a less innocent gaze cast on it.

The demand for a crusade against evil Arab genocide, however unlikely to be put into practice in the Sudan, has now tended to give way to the equally stupid notion of arresting Omar Hasan Ahmad al-Bashir, the Sudanese President, for Darfur war crimes through the misuse of the International Criminal Court. Indeed, it is al-Bashir who is now blamed for racialising the situation! This in a world where Americans think they have a right to democratically vote into office transparently much greater war criminals such as Bush or Cheney who are then permitted to retreat to their luxury lairs once out of office or where a Tony Blair, after invading a country posing not the slightest danger to his own on supposedly mistaken information, instead of being locked away for the rest of his days, is passed on from high political office in Britain to become the man to negotiate peace between Israelis and Palestinians! Al-Bashir is hardly an innocent party but, as Mamdani says, the only way to a better outcome is ‘not to shun justice but to explore forms of justice that will help end rather than prolong conflicts’ (p. 286). Detaching ‘war crimes’ from ‘underlying political reality’ is not the way to go.

He is also a very sympathetic observer of the AU efforts in Darfur which he feels demonstrate far more instinct for what kind of negotiations could bring about peace and who need far more support but of course this intervention rests, as he knows, on a very weak financial foundation. For the moment, Darfur is quieter due in good part to a large outsider troop presence. Mamdani suggests that the Darfur war has become one with direct implications for the remaking of the Sudan and probably cannot be resolved short of engaging with that larger process, itself linked especially to what happens between north and south. At one level, this is convincing; Sudan is a country which cannot go forward without a reconstruction of the colonial inheritance, but this remains a rather abstract assessment. How then do we deal with the Khartoum regime as it really is? Can one really bring together into a new citizenship the fighting fragments of Darfur which have imploded since 2004? Can one see the Sudanese emancipating themselves from the grooves into which imperial categories once gathered them? Perhaps the most depressing thing in the book is his admission in places that Sudanese themselves are inclined to fall for the humanitarian trope and pray for Western intervention in desperation as an African way out seems remote or unattainable. Mamdani’s insistence on a negotiated solution, an African solution that lays all legitimate grievances on the table, is nonetheless certainly a very useful starting position for reopening the discussion.

Reference

Matthias Basedau, Gero Erdmann and Andreas Mehler’s edited volume grew out of the Thematic Conference of the Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies (AEGIS) organised by the Institute of African Affairs of the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA), 22–23 May 2003. The book seeks to take ‘a second look at the role of elections as a basic instrument for regulating political competition in Africa’ (p. 7). This seems a valid concern, given the abysmal failure of previous electoral waves in Africa, the widespread scepticism that attended the return of electoral politics under the third wave of democratisation, and the weak institutionalisation of political parties and electoral systems. These and related issues constitute the core concerns of the book.

In what looks like his personal reminiscences, E. Gyimah-Boadi sets the ball rolling with a critical dissection of how entrenched neo-patrimonialism, manifest in the legacies of authoritarianism and the domination of parties by ‘godfathers’ as well as widespread vote-buying and choiceless elections, has been inimical to the democratisation process in Africa. The widespread scepticism that attended the return of electoral politics under the third wave of democratisation, and the weak institutionalisation of political parties and electoral systems. These and related issues constitute the core concerns of the book.

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functions, including blocking, aggregation and translation; and the nexus with the choice of electoral system. He then applies the typologies to African realities, showing how electoral choices in Africa vary under different party systems, and exploring how these models underline the role of ethnic politics in different contexts. Andreas Mehler explores the links between political parties and violence in Africa, drawing illustrations from six countries. He develops an instrumental view of violence as a political means and as an expression of grievance. He then attempts an exposition on factors favouring or constraining violence, including cleavages, institutional conditions, and state weakness, all of which combine well to determine the resort to violence by political parties. Liisa Laakso takes the issue of violence in Africa further, with her critical insights into electoral violence, buttressed by analysis of selected cases across the continent. She underscores how political transitions, poverty, and ethnic politics fuel electoral violence, as well as the mobilisation of ex-warlords for advancing the electoral interests of the ruling party. The last substantive chapter, by Paul Nugent, is a critical reflection on the place of money as a political resource in the electoral process. Using the Ghanaian experience under the Fourth Republic, Nugent argues that money can be a political asset or liability depending on how it is deployed and managed. While money is central to contests over political power, it only becomes meaningful if properly converted into a source of moral authority, the absence of which may produce allegations of vote-buying and related electoral frauds. In the concluding chapter the editors recapitulate the main submissions of the book under three rubrics: political parties, party systems, voters and elections.

The overarching concern with the comparative method may have created a related problem of its own: the neglect of country case studies and the tendency to over-generalise. Out of ten substantive chapters only two (those by Gyimah-Boadi and Nugent) are country specific, and both address the Ghanaian situation. More country-specific case studies, especially on Nigeria and South Africa, two sub-regional heavy-weights on the continent, would have strengthened the book’s contribution. Nevertheless, this reservation does not detract substantially from the overall quality of the book, which provides a significant contribution to the comparative analysis of political parties and elections in Africa, with a good blend of theory and practice.


This rather ambitious volume brings together a variety of disparate, although related areas of analysis, together with three substantial case studies, in an examination of how neoliberal policies have played out in Africa over the last 25 or more years. The first four chapters present what might be termed a discourse analysis of neoliberal development thinking, tracing how that discourse has periodically transformed itself in order to maintain its legitimacy despite the numerous failures associated with it, notably the continued marginalisation of Africa. The case studies trace the influence of this neoliberal model of globalisation in the development of three disparate countries, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and South Africa, giving full weight to the role of internal forces and conditions in shaping development outcomes in the respective countries.
cases. The final chapter explicitly deals with an issue that has been implicit throughout the book, this being the security agenda that has been set by the events of 11 September and its implications for globalisation and development.

In the chapters dealing with neoliberalism as a discourse Carmody presents us with something like a genealogy of neoliberal development theory, observing how the failure of early shock therapy models of structural adjustment led to the introduction of civil society and governance issues into the discursive framework. This has in turn led to the World Bank’s adoption of participation in the context of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Of course, phenomena such as civil society have been incorporated in such a way that they support rather than challenge the basic tenets of neoliberalism. Thus, civil society is not conceived in Gramscian terms, as an arena where different class and social groups confront each other, but rather in terms of Dahlian pluralism in which a variety of interest groups compete on a roughly even basis to ensure state responsiveness to their needs. In this way civil society is seen as having an intrinsic propensity towards the distribution of political power, which mirrors the neoliberal view of the market as the most efficient means of distributing resources in accordance with needs. Carmody notes how any forces that might contest this harmonious view of political economy are defined out of civil society, notably trade unions, which are dismissed as rent seeking organisations that distort the market. This enables neoliberals to argue that promotion of civil societies in Africa will promote a form of good governance that will be supportive of market policies and to elide class based social differences that may be exacerbated by the market project. Notably, such a framing of the problem completely ignores market propensities to economic concentration and class differentiation.

A central element of Carmody’s critique of neoliberal discourse concerns how it appropriates concepts such as civil society and social capital in such a way as to empty them of political content. If such awkward factors as differential class power (and the role of the market in constitution of such differences) are left out of account, development becomes a relatively straightforward enterprise of efficiently governing society in accordance with market logic and enhancing social capital so that the poor can take advantage of the opportunities the market offers them. This vision not only fails to factor in local social differences, but also ignores international power differences and the disadvantageous way in which neoliberal globalisation incorporates most African states into the international system. Of course, this apolitical conceptualisation of development is unable to deliver substantial benefits to the African poor. However, Carmody provides an informative discussion of how neoliberal discourse has been able to adapt and legitimise itself in the face of continued failure to achieve any substantive development gains.

The case studies are well researched and provide some interesting insights as in the Zimbabwean case study where Carmody shows how the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme helped create the conditions for the later collapse of the economy. The South African case study also throws interesting light on the way in which neoliberalism has been embedded into the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). However, the concentration on the specifics of the cases perhaps led to an attenuation of the analytical focus and coherence that had been evident in the examination of neoliberal discourse in the first four chapters. If anything, this is exacerbated by the final chapter, which introduces the issue of security into the equation. Carmody’s final plea for a US embrace of a new global compact that will enhance its security through delivery...
of social investments to Africa does not sit entirely comfortably with his earlier analysis of an intransigent highly adaptable neoliberal discourse that legitimates the subordinate incorporation of Africa into an unequal global system. Ironically, events since the publication of this book, inclusive of the economic meltdown, the associated crisis of market discourse and the election of Obama may make the prospects for a slightly more caring and sharing US government seem a little more hopeful. However, the cogency of Carmody’s analysis of the resilience of neoliberal discourse should caution us against raising our hopes too high.


In the late colonial period and the immediate post-independence era (1950–70), analyses of North African politics tended towards elite studies. This movement was superseded by ‘neo-institutionalism’, which insisted on the state’s autonomous and pre-eminent power within political systems. In the field of Algeria studies in the 1980s, the institutionalist or political economy approach soon became dominant, especially rentier theory. At its best, rentier theory in Algeria demonstrated the co-constitutive relationship between those state actors who control distribution of hydrocarbon revenues and the political and economic institutions that shape such distribution. In Isabelle Werenfels’ Managing Instability in Algeria: Elites and political change since 1995 we have gone back to the future. As the subtitle suggests, Werenfels (a researcher at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs) is very much interested in ‘bringing the man back in’. By using elite theorisations, Werenfels seeks to explain Algeria’s simultaneous emergence from civil war at the turn of the millennium and the total lack of ‘profound political change in Algeria after 1995’ (pp. 4–5). However, Werenfels’ study is not a return to the old days of elite studies; her approach is hybridised and fits within the institutional turn (p. 27). ‘Control and distribution of hydrocarbon rent’, Werenfels notes, ‘not only presented the core elite with an important instrument of power but also presented a weak point in its rule, for control of the volatile oil price was not in its hands’ (p. 6).

Managing Instability is surely one of the best books yet written on Algeria’s slow transition from violent armed conflict in the 1990s to the (mostly) non-violent modes of political conflict of today. Werenfels’ study is also an erudite examination of the political challenges and triumphs of the first term (1999–2004) of Algeria’s President, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, a man widely – although disputably – credited with taming the armed conflict. This richly detailed and expertly researched account of a critical period in Algeria’s recent history is required reading for anyone attempting to understand Algeria since 2000. It will also be of interest to scholars studying the democracy problematic in developing countries or theoreticians looking for empirical data that contributes towards an understanding of the interplay between agents and structures. Although Managing Instability ends in early 2004, it is highly relevant in light of today’s political manoeuvrings in Algeria and contextualises Bouteflika’s third term victory in 2009.

The argument unfolds in a straightforward manner: theory (chapter one), methodology (two), historical context
(three), analysis (four through six) and conclusion. The primary source data – over 100 interviews with members of what Werenfels terms ‘the politically relevant elite’ – is what sets this study apart (see p. 194, note 5). The Algerian Government is a very difficult terrain to study – bureaucratic inertia, personal security concerns, widespread conspiratorial suspicion of Western motivations are just some of the problems. At the time when Werenfels was conducting her research (c.2002), the security situation for foreigners was still considered risky by many Western governments. The fact that Werenfels’ study even happened, not to mention was so successful, is impressive.

Werenfels’ story is set during the darkest period of Algeria’s history since independence from France in 1962. She chooses 1995 as year zero, when a civilian head of state was elected after three years of rule by a military junta. This date might seem a strange choice; most observers date Algeria’s recent instability – the civil war – to either 1988 (when massive anti-regime demonstrations led to elections) or 1992 (when the military annulled those elections won handily by the Islamic Salvation Front or FIS). Although the worst atrocities of the Algerian civil war took place during Werenfels’ timeframe, her account is surprisingly bloodless. There is scant mention of even the worst atrocities of the war that drew international condemnation and calls for intervention in late 1997 and early 1998. Managing Instability (p. 48) attributes the drop in violence – rather uncritically – to Bouteflika’s 1999 amnesty program (Concorde civile) without exploring the obvious explanatory candidates (e.g. rising oil revenues).

However, this line of critique is unfair given Werenfels’ intended framing. Managing Instability is not a thesis on war termination but an account of established, emerging and expanding elites (each contextualised by background and attitudes) navigating the difficult transition away from the widespread political violence of the 1990s. Werenfels’ sense of Algeria’s instability is a more generalised understanding of a state whose regime is still far from re-consolidated. Werenfels wants us to see beyond security issues; instability, she contends, has become a kind of lubricant that allows the machine to function: ‘The situation could thus be best described with the oxymoron “equilibrium of instability”’ (p. 5).

For the most part, Managing Instability does not deviate from the basic framework for understanding the functioning of political power in Algeria shared by both foreign and domestic analysts. What makes Werenfels’ contribution novel is her account and explanation of the ways in which Algeria’s authoritarian regime has become more democratised (p. 155). The distension of new groups into elite circles, Werenfels argues, not only helps explain Algeria’s mixed passage from ambiguous civil war to uneasy ‘peace’, but it also bodes ill for hopes that Algeria is on a path to a transparent and accountable government.


The common view of the state of the African continent – especially its southern part – is a grim one. Hardly anyone would deny the persistence of diverse crises in this part of the world.
Diseases, illiteracy, violence, hunger and underdevelopment are problems that so many times form a negative image of Africa. Despite countless developmental strategies, plans and propositions, which allegedly should have put the continent on track to a brighter future, Africa remains mired in tragedy. John Saul’s book *Decolonization and Empire: Contesting the Rhetoric and Reality of Resubordination in Southern Africa and Beyond* tries to discern the causes of this unpleasant (to say the least) reality for most of southern Africa. The author’s main task is to analyse historical and current socio-political developments and systemic arrangements for the continent’s resubordination by what Saul terms ‘the Empire of Capital’, which still produces inequalities and injustices. What is more, Saul does not just reveal the functioning of (neo)liberal interventions, but also sets himself an enormous task: how to think about what, in these times of prevailing ruthless capitalist logic, seems almost unthinkable – forms of resistance to the Empire of Capital.

The decolonisation process in southern Africa has been celebrated as a new beginning, which would bring freedom and just conditions to the African people. Although by no means a homogenous process, Saul frames decolonisation in this part of the world as what he calls ‘the thirty years’ war for southern African liberation’ (from around 1960–90). The beginning of the decolonisation era is marked by Ghana’s independence in 1957, and little more than three decades later this period of liberation struggle is marked by the fall of South Africa’s apartheid system. Within this framework the author identifies three ‘broad fronts of political assertion, which were available to southern Africans as they came to heightened political consciousness’ (p. 24). These are the race war, anti-colonial African nationalism and the social/socialist revolution. The author shows, through the cases of Mozambique and South Africa, how each of these fronts became a focus around which Africans organised struggles against colonialists and, as such, were also triggers for mobilising the masses. Decolonisation, however, did not live up to the expectations of many, but rather regressed to something we could call (Saul here follows Frantz Fanon) ‘false decolonization’ (p. 41). The key problem was that liberation brought too little of substance, especially in economic terms, for the vast majority of the population. Instead of being a new emancipating political strategy, decolonisation gradually turned into its exact opposite: ever-deeper resubordination to Western capitalism. As Saul describes it, recolonisation is ‘an ongoing process of reinforced ‘Western’ capitalist ascendency that has characterized Africa … and also many other parts of the global south’ (p. 69).

To show the logic behind the prevailing capitalist discourses, the book interprets prominent ideologues of the global neo-liberal capitalist order, with special attention to Niall Ferguson and Michael Ignatieff. Both thinkers see the (neo)liberal empire as the best possible solution for societies, because this Empire’s *modus operandi* is ‘one that enhances its own security and prosperity precisely by providing the rest of the world with generally beneficial public goods’ (p. 93). Thus, the Empire of Capital is not based solely on the idea of logic of free market but also relies on the idea of humanitarism.

In light of the ever more pervading Empire of Capital, Saul poses himself, in a Leninist manner, an obvious question: ‘What is to be done?’ (p. 125). How do we resist and contest global capital? How do we oppose this unjust reality that affects many people in different parts of the world? The author opts for a transformative project, which should mean a revival of socialist practices. Among other presented propositions, the crucial one is ‘the goal of collective ownership of the means of production by a democratically empowered and self-conscious majority
of the affected population’ (p. 133). The last part provides a critical reflection on the book’s central themes. Saul once again summarizes, by interpreting the cases of Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa, why socialist projects in these countries were more or less unsuccessful and why decolonisation was false, and deviated into subordination to capital.

Although Saul’s critique of the currently dispiriting situation in southern Africa is insightful, it includes some problematic analytical undertakings, the most obvious being the use of the concept of the Empire of Capital. The author does explain briefly his understanding and use of this concept at the book’s beginning, but it nevertheless persists in the text as ontologically finite and, above all, omnipotent. The latter is especially dubious because it seems that capital is the first and last instance that determines reality. Despite this shortcoming, Decolonization and Empire does address the stark reality of southern Africa with clarity and compassion that calls upon us to reflect on current global hierarchical relations not just with suspicion, but also with the will to change the world for the better.

Thakur’s analysis is driven by a wish to bridge the views of supporters of unilaterallism (mainly voices from the United States) and supporters of a more multilateral approach. The latter camp would include those who are fearful of strong states intervening at will in weaker states. Therefore the UN’s relationships with the United States on the one hand, and with developing countries on the other, occupy a central place in the book. Thakur takes seriously the political divisions between UN member states, most particularly those arising from the efforts by developing countries to influence the global peace and security discourse. Such an engagement makes this book a valuable resource for those who study Africa or the global south.

Thakur centres on five themes in the introduction and conclusion: (1) Guidelines on the use of force. He observes that the war in Iraq divided the UN membership over the issue of use of force; the Iraq war supporters were disappointed that the UN did not bless the attempt to put an end to a brutal regime and the many more countries that opposed the war were disappointed that the UN did not stop a war of aggression by the major powers against a smaller state. He then makes the case that the UN has broadened its role: from dealing with inter-state wars to considering equally important the prevention of mass atrocities. (2) The distinction between legitimacy and legality. Since unilateral intervention has had negative humanitarian consequences most often in developing countries, Thakur argues that the UN remains the best available rule-based system for conflict management. (3) The United States-UN relationship. The author asserts that the United States should value its relationship with the UN – and hence be more prepared to support its global norms. (4) The divide between industrialised and developing countries. In his view, the UN needs to both remain a relevant institution in the eyes of the United States amongst others, and to allow for influence for developing


The United Nations, Peace and Security is an authoritative acclamation of the UN as the best available forum for the pursuit of multilateralism (p. 345). Ramesh

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countries. These states, having experienced apartheid and colonisation, feel resentment that they do not have more of a say on matters of trade, development, democracy and human rights. (5) Rule of law. For Thakur, reform is necessary to protect and democratise the UN.

Taken together the chapters in the book explore a wide range of topics that provide extensive discussion and illustration of his arguments. However, by addressing more directly the five themes in each of the subsequent chapters, his study could have gained in explanatory power. If Thakur is hoping to contribute to a resolution to the UN’s crisis of legitimacy by explaining why multilateralism matters, case study-based chapters might have offered more opportunity to illustrate the benefits of his claims. Case studies might have investigated the drivers and mechanisms of how certain failures erode the UN’s credibility and legitimacy and why reform is ultimately valuable for both North and South. This would no doubt have required him to reduce the scope and breadth of his enquiry and to set out what his perspective on legitimacy is. In one place, he mentions Inis Claude’s collective legitimisation framework (p. 6) and his high esteem for the UN ‘as the principal provider of international security’, (p. 6). In another his worldview seems surprisingly realist (p. 64). In addition to the existing and incisive chapters on reform, case studies might have included the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ doctrine (r2p) and Kosovo, as well as an extended analysis of the US-intervention in Iraq in 2003 showing why the UN-US relationship is so critical. How does the danger of delegitimising the UN enjoin the developed and the under-developed world?

Other case studies that seem important for his overall argument are the UN’s many disappointing experiences in Africa. Africa warrants more attention since an estimated 60 per cent of the UN Security Council’s time is spent on African issues. The UN’s challenges with civil wars on the continent have played a role in the normative development of the r2p: in 1998 Kofi Annan stated that protecting African civilians was a ‘humanitarian imperative’ (UN 1998, para 49). At the same time, it is where the decentralisation trend of international peace and security has been most tested. What did the experiences in Somalia and inaction in Rwanda mean for the UN’s legitimacy and role as primary collective legitimising forum? Thakur discusses the UN Security Council’s failures in regard to the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the divisions on the Council concerning mass atrocities in Darfur in 2003–2004. Yet, the importance of these cases for his argument might have been more clearly drawn out. The UN’s involvement in Africa has led wide audiences to hotly contest the legitimacy of the UN Security Council as ultimately responsible for international peace and security.

Overall, this book contains an important message for those who are cynical that reforming the UN will make a difference. It is well written and engaging, and Thakur is to be congratulated for taking such a clear and well-substantiated position. His analysis has profoundly challenged UN-cynics to present a better alternative for rule-based global politics.

Reference

Since the appearance of *Citizen and Subject*, Mahmood Mamdani has taken on the unique part of a public intellectual and critical observer of the African scene at the highest level with a foot in New York surveying Western perceptions and another grounded on the African continent. He has intervened in debates on South Africa, Rwanda and now Sudan, apart from writing about Muslims and the West in the contemporary conjuncture. There is no doubt more to come on Zimbabwe from shorter writings that have already evoked substantial controversy elsewhere but, at the level of the full-length book, it is now his thoughts on Sudan that are reaching the spotlight.

There are essentially three related parts to this study. First, Mamdani looks at the Save Darfur Movement and explores the significance of enthusiasm for Western military invasion of this region in the very heart of Africa, based on making a case that the violence in Darfur was (is?) genocidal. Second, he devotes time and attention to Sudanese history in order to explore the actual roots of conflict in Darfur. Finally, he returns to the international context and the current prospects raised by the ICC demand for the arrest of the President of Sudan on the ground of war crimes in Darfur.

Let us start with the middle. Not that serious historians of Sudan need to be told this, but Mamdani underscores the key point that Furs and Arabs in Darfur do not belong to different ‘races’, that Arabs in Sudan generally are not migrants from Arabia and that Arab identity which he calls essentially ‘political’ (p. 108) has many facets that have shifted over time and has existed for many centuries in this part of Africa. Racial antagonism can be dismissed as having anything to do with this conflict.

Instead, Mamdani finds a variety of causes jointly responsible. First is the colonial heritage, and here predictably he harks back to the *Citizen and Subject* binary. Under British rule, legitimate identity in Darfur revolved around ethnicity. Of course, in that time, light-skinned Arabs were defined as better than Africans and deserving of more consideration. However, in Darfur it was the sedentary Fur who had collectively access to a *dar* – to land, unlike many of the nomadic, often Arabic speaking, pastoral peoples. The second stimulus to conflict lay in the long drought which virtually forced Sahelian camel nomads to abandon their usual territorial haunts and made access to more fertile and southern portions of Darfur compelling. Third came the evolution of regional entanglements, in particular long-term instability in neighbouring Chad, another huge and yet much less well-known country afflicted by drought, where close links exist between some of the Darfuri rebels and the Chad regime and from where many refugees came to live with closely aligned communities in Darfur. The possibility of assistance and refuge across the border stimulated the possibility for rebellion. Here as elsewhere in Africa, regional rivalries and
alliances fed into Cold War plots and proxy wars. Some nomadic groups were thus obviously available for mayhem to forces both in N’Djamena and Khartoum.

Finally, there is the question of the narrow, undemocratic nature of the Sudanese state itself where power has overwhelmingly always rested on cliques with ‘tribal’ ties from the middle Nile valley. This has been challenged to some extent if unsuccessfully on an Islamist basis, but this of course cannot speak to the country’s large Christian minority. The conflict between north and south in the Sudan has unhinged the whole country, inevitably influencing other contradictions into breaking out in open rebellion. It is a central contention in Mamdani’s argument that the extreme violence that climaxed in 2003/04 in Darfur came out of earlier strife that had its roots in conflict within Darfur itself; the apparently Machiavellian role played by the Bashir government in Khartoum has been more opportunistic than causative by this line of argument.

All these factors are convincingly real, although it is not quite clear to me why camel nomads would choose to re-establish themselves in agricultural areas without proposing to change their way of life, but then I am a sceptic in general towards environmentally determinist explanations in history and politics. However, the greatest problem with this assessment analytically is that Mamdani makes so little of the reality that ethnic and racial determinism, based on a poor assessment of real historical processes, while undoubtedly typical of colonial analysis, has (as in Rwanda) been internalised and seized on with alacrity by strong local forces for quite some time. It is the academic ‘doyen’ of historical studies in the Sudan, Yusuf Fadl Hasan, who lives most easily with the Harold MacMichael version of Sudanese history as Mamdani mentions, but then he represents the dominant intelligentsia of Khartoum. Arabic speaking nomads in Darfur have never claimed to be fighting a racial crusade or religious jihad; it was Fur spokesmen in the late 1980s who painted their conflict with cattle and camel nomads in starkly racial terms to suit their own position (and no doubt court influential foreign friends) as they became more and more alienated from central authority in Khartoum. Herein lies the problem of ethnic interpretation, not in its imperial origins as an argument. It is the Sudanese themselves who have yet to face the world convincingly as citizens.

Sudanese history is multi-faceted and complex and Mamdani at most gives us an aperçu of a great many events and issues; he is not really at odds with current scholarship on which his analysis largely depends. Much of the power of this book comes rather from Mamdani’s very justifiable frustration at the wilful and truly stupid ignorance of Westerners as they seek to define crises in Africa in liberal ‘humanitarian’ terms that can be applied anywhere and which exist in defiance of politics and history where racial thinking, however condemned, is still the intellectual comfort zone.

For Americans, Darfur is a place without history and without politics—simply a place where perpetrators clearly identifiable as ‘Arabs’ confront victims clearly identifiable as ‘Africans’ (p. 60).

He lays into the mischief brought about by the naive search for ‘causes’ by Hollywood and other celebrities and acutely shows how this falls into the hands of the powers that be. The genocide charge, almost impossible to apply to Darfur seriously after 2004 for a variety of reasons, creates a way of thinking where assessment of the real politics in a very complex ethnic soup, with many forces fighting and frequently realigning themselves, is made impossible. It does have to be granted that some of what is so wrong here is not just manipulation of
emotions in the interests of powerful forces but also the way the media create a kind of pseudo-politics. As Mamdani says, the Save Darfur Movement was a very successful organised popular movement; the state did not originate it. I note in a recent magazine article that the crème de la crème of the film world of Spain are currently en route to the refugee camps of the Algerian Sahara to create a film festival atmosphere for the Sahrawis – once, if briefly, Spanish subjects. Here victims and perpetrators are Arabic speaking and somewhat white…but the genre is really the same and it also needs a less innocent gaze cast on it.

The demand for a crusade against evil Arab genocide, however unlikely to be put into practice in the Sudan, has now tended to give way to the equally stupid notion of arresting Omar Hasan Ahmad al-Bashir, the Sudanese President, for Darfur war crimes through the misuse of the International Criminal Court. Indeed, it is al-Bashir who is now blamed for racialising the situation! This in a world where Americans think they have a right to democratically vote into office transparently much greater war criminals such as Bush or Cheney who are then permitted to retreat to their luxury lairs once out of office or where a Tony Blair, after invading a country posing not the slightest danger to his own on supposedly mistaken information, instead of being locked away for the rest of his days, is passed on from high political office in Britain to become the man to negotiate peace between Israelis and Palestinians! Al-Bashir is hardly an innocent party but, as Mamdani says, the only way to a better outcome is ‘not to shun justice but to explore forms of justice that will help end rather than prolong conflicts’ (p. 286). Detaching ‘war crimes’ from ‘underlying political reality’ is not the way to go.

He is also a very sympathetic observer of the AU efforts in Darfur which he feels demonstrate far more instinct for what kind of negotiations could bring about peace and who need far more support but of course this intervention rests, as he knows, on a very weak financial foundation. For the moment, Darfur is quieter due in good part to a large outsider troop presence. Mamdani suggests that the Darfur war has become one with direct implications for the remaking of the Sudan and probably cannot be resolved short of engaging with that larger process, itself linked especially to what happens between north and south. At one level, this is convincing; Sudan is a country which cannot go forward without a reconstruction of the colonial inheritance, but this remains a rather abstract assessment. How then do we deal with the Khartoum regime as it really is? Can one really bring together into a new citizenship the fighting fragments of Darfur which have imploded since 2004? Can one see the Sudanese emancipating themselves from the grooves into which imperial categories once gathered them? Perhaps the most depressing thing in the book is his admission in places that Sudanese themselves are inclined to fall for the humanitarian trope and pray for Western intervention in desperation as an African way out seems remote or unattainable. Mamdani’s insistence on a negotiated solution, an African solution that lays all legitimate grievances on the table, is nonetheless certainly a very useful starting position for reopening the discussion.

Reference

Matthias Basedau, Gero Erdmann and Andreas Mehler’s edited volume grew out of the Thematic Conference of the Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies (AEGIS) organised by the Institute of African Affairs of the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA), 22–23 May 2003. The book seeks to take ‘a second look at the role of elections as a basic instrument for regulating political competition in Africa’ (p. 7). This seems a valid concern, given the abysmal failure of previous electoral waves in Africa, the widespread scepticism that attended the return of electoral politics under the third wave of democratisation, and the weak institutionalisation of political parties and electoral systems. These and related issues constitute the core concerns of the book.

In what looks like his personal reminiscences, E. Gyimah-Boadi sets the ball rolling with a critical dissection of how entrenched neo-patrimonialism, manifest in the legacies of authoritarianism and the domination of parties by ‘godfathers’ as well as widespread vote-buying and choiceless elections, has been inimical to the democratisation process in Africa. This is followed by Gero Erdmann’s useful essay on party research in comparative western European and African experience. While underscoring this literature’s dominant focus on the West, he argues that the established party research approach could be applied in a modified way to political parties in Africa. He identifies various universal typologies and possible areas of application in Africa. Peter Burnell’s piece is a response to Erdmann. After a critical reflection on the justifications for Erdmann’s study, he raises further important areas for party research in Africa, including ethnic-based parties, informal politics and neo-patrimonialism. Vicky Randall investigates another crucial dimension of political parties in Africa: the representation of social groups. This is important given the fact that democracy is essentially a form of government where various associative groups and interests should be represented. After a theoretical exposition on the concept of representation and the relationship with political parties, Randall explores the situation in the African context, reflecting on the travails of ethnic-based parties, and the under-representation of civil society organisations and women due to a number of reasons, including ‘the adoption of neoliberal economic policies’ (p. 94). The chapter includes helpful discussion of policy and research implications. In a comparative study of 28 Sub-Saharan African countries, Mathias Basedau interrogates the relationship between party systems and democracy. Interestingly, the application of his classificatory scheme for party system characteristics and democracy, drawn from the literature, leads to a theory-refuting conclusion: ‘it is not the combined functionalist model but – in other studies widely untested – polarisation alone that distinguishes democratic and non-democratic party systems most significantly’ (p. 132). Christof Hartmann explores possible paths to electoral reform in Africa. The strength of the chapter lies in its historical insight and the robustness of its typologies of electoral reforms in Africa, most notably institutional conservatism, path-dependent change and path change. For Hartmann, the desirable path of reform is one that allows for popular inclusion, that is, a proportional representation electoral system. Matthijs Bogaards discusses the link between electoral systems, party systems and ethnicity in Africa. He opens with an analysis of party system

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functions, including blocking, aggregation and translation; and the nexus with the choice of electoral system. He then applies the typologies to African realities, showing how electoral choices in Africa vary under different party systems, and exploring how these models underline the role of ethnic politics in different contexts. Andreas Mehler explores the links between political parties and violence in Africa, drawing illustrations from six countries. He develops an instrumental view of violence as a political means and as an expression of grievance. He then attempts an exposition on factors favouring or constraining violence, including cleavages, institutional conditions, and state weakness, all of which combine well to determine the resort to violence by political parties. Liisa Laakso takes the issue of violence in Africa further, with her critical insights into electoral violence, buttressed by analysis of selected cases across the continent. She underscores how political transitions, poverty, and ethnic politics fuel electoral violence, as well as the mobilisation of ex-warlords for advancing the electoral interests of the ruling party. The last substantive chapter, by Paul Nugent, is a critical reflection on the place of money as a political resource in the electoral process. Using the Ghanaian experience under the Fourth Republic, Nugent argues that money can be a political asset or liability depending on how it is deployed and managed. While money is central to contests over political power, it only becomes meaningful if properly converted into a source of moral authority, the absence of which may produce allegations of vote-buying and related electoral frauds. In the concluding chapter the editors recapitulate the main submissions of the book under three rubrics: political parties, party systems, voters and elections.

The overarching concern with the comparative method may have created a related problem of its own: the neglect of country case studies and the tendency to over-generalise. Out of ten substantive chapters only two (those by Gyimah-Boadi and Nugent) are country specific, and both address the Ghanaian situation. More country-specific case studies, especially on Nigeria and South Africa, two sub-regional heavy-weights on the continent, would have strengthened the book’s contribution. Nevertheless, this reservation does not detract substantially from the overall quality of the book, which provides a significant contribution to the comparative analysis of political parties and elections in Africa, with a good blend of theory and practice.


This rather ambitious volume brings together a variety of disparate, although related areas of analysis, together with three substantial case studies, in an examination of how neoliberal policies have played out in Africa over the last 25 or more years. The first four chapters present what might be termed a discourse analysis of neoliberal development thinking, tracing how that discourse has periodically transformed itself in order to maintain its legitimacy despite the numerous failures associated with it, notably the continued marginalisation of Africa. The case studies trace the influence of this neoliberal model of globalisation in the development of three disparate countries, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and South Africa, giving full weight to the role of internal forces and conditions in shaping development outcomes in the respective...
cases. The final chapter explicitly deals with an issue that has been implicit throughout the book, this being the security agenda that has been set by the events of 11 September and its implications for globalisation and development.

In the chapters dealing with neoliberalism as a discourse Carmody presents us with something like a genealogy of neoliberal development theory, observing how the failure of early shock therapy models of structural adjustment led to the introduction of civil society and governance issues into the discursive framework. This has in turn led to the World Bank’s adoption of participation in the context of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Of course, phenomena such as civil society have been incorporated in such a way that they support rather than challenge the basic tenets of neoliberalism. Thus, civil society is not conceived in Gramscian terms, as an arena where different class and social groups confront each other, but rather in terms of Dahlian pluralism in which a variety of interest groups compete on a roughly even basis to ensure state responsiveness to their needs. In this way civil society is seen as having an intrinsic propensity towards the distribution of political power, which mirrors the neoliberal view of the market as the most efficient means of distributing resources in accordance with needs. Carmody notes how any forces that might contest this harmonious view of political economy are defined out of civil society, notably trade unions, which are dismissed as rent seeking organisations that distort the market. This enables neoliberals to argue that promotion of civil societies in Africa will promote a form of good governance that will be supportive of market policies and to elide class based social differences that may be exacerbated by the market project. Notably, such a framing of the problem completely ignores market propensities to economic concentration and class differentiation.

A central element of Carmody’s critique of neoliberal discourse concerns how it appropriates concepts such as civil society and social capital in such a way as to empty them of political content. If such awkward factors as differential class power (and the role of the market in constitution of such differences) are left out of account, development becomes a relatively straightforward enterprise of efficiently governing society in accordance with market logic and enhancing social capital so that the poor can take advantage of the opportunities the market offers them. This vision not only fails to factor in local social differences, but also ignores international power differences and the disadvantageous way in which neoliberal globalisation incorporates most African states into the international system. Of course, this apolitical conceptualisation of development is unable to deliver substantial benefits to the African poor. However, Carmody provides an informative discussion of how neoliberal discourse has been able to adapt and legitimise itself in the face of continued failure to achieve any substantive development gains.

The case studies are well researched and provide some interesting insights as in the Zimbabwean case study where Carmody shows how the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme helped create the conditions for the later collapse of the economy. The South African case study also throws interesting light on the way in which neoliberalism has been embedded into the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). However, the concentration on the specifics of the cases perhaps led to an attenuation of the analytical focus and coherence that had been evident in the examination of neoliberal discourse in the first four chapters. If anything, this is exacerbated by the final chapter, which introduces the issue of security into the equation. Carmody’s final plea for a US embrace of a new global compact that will enhance its security through delivery
of social investments to Africa does not sit entirely comfortably with his earlier analysis of an intransigent highly adaptable neoliberal discourse that legitimates the subordinate incorporation of Africa into an unequal global system. Ironically, events since the publication of this book, inclusive of the economic meltdown, the associated crisis of market discourse and the election of Obama may make the prospects for a slightly more caring and sharing US government seem a little more hopeful. However, the cogency of Carmody’s analysis of the resilience of neoliberal discourse should caution us against raising our hopes too high.


In the late colonial period and the immediate post-independence era (1950–70), analyses of North African politics tended towards elite studies. This movement was superseded by ‘neo-institutionalism’, which insisted on the state’s autonomous and pre-eminent power within political systems. In the field of Algeria studies in the 1980s, the institutionalist or political economy approach soon became dominant, especially rentier theory. At its best, rentier theory in Algeria demonstrated the co-constitutive relationship between those state actors who control distribution of hydrocarbon revenues and the political and economic institutions that shape such distribution. In Isabelle Werenfels’ Managing Instability in Algeria: Elites and political change since 1995 we have gone back to the future. As the subtitle suggests, Werenfels (a researcher at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs) is very much interested in ‘bringing the man back in’. By using elite theorisations, Werenfels seeks to explain Algeria’s simultaneous emergence from civil war at the turn of the millennium and the total lack of ‘profound political change in Algeria after 1995’ (pp. 4–5). However, Werenfels’ study is not a return to the old days of elite studies; her approach is hybridised and fits within the institutional turn (p. 27). ‘Control and distribution of hydrocarbon rent’, Werenfels notes, ‘not only presented the core elite with an important instrument of power but also presented a weak point in its rule, for control of the volatile oil price was not in its hands’ (p. 6).

Managing Instability is surely one of the best books yet written on Algeria’s slow transition from violent armed conflict in the 1990s to the (mostly) non-violent modes of political conflict of today. Werenfels’ study is also an erudite examination of the political challenges and triumphs of the first term (1999–2004) of Algeria’s President, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, a man widely – although disputably – credited with taming the armed conflict. This richly detailed and expertly researched account of a critical period in Algeria’s recent history is required reading for anyone attempting to understand Algeria since 2000. It will also be of interest to scholars studying the democracy problematic in developing countries or theoreticians looking for empirical data that contributes towards an understanding of the interplay between agents and structures. Although Managing Instability ends in early 2004, it is highly relevant in light of today’s political manoeuvrings in Algeria and contextualises Bouteflika’s third term victory in 2009.

The argument unfolds in a straightforward manner: theory (chapter one), methodology (two), historical context
(three), analysis (four through six) and conclusion. The primary source data – over 100 interviews with members of what Werenfels terms ‘the politically relevant elite’ – is what sets this study apart (see p. 194, note 5). The Algerian Government is a very difficult terrain to study – bureaucratic inertia, personal security concerns, widespread conspiratorial suspicion of Western motivations are just some of the problems. At the time when Werenfels was conducting her research (c.2002), the security situation for foreigners was still considered risky by many Western governments. The fact that Werenfels’ study even happened, not to mention was so successful, is impressive.

Werenfels’ story is set during the darkest period of Algeria’s history since independence from France in 1962. She chooses 1995 as year zero, when a civilian head of state was elected after three years of rule by a military junta. This date might seem a strange choice; most observers date Algeria’s recent instability – the civil war – to either 1988 (when massive anti-regime demonstrations led to elections) or 1992 (when the military annulled those elections won handily by the Islamic Salvation Front or FIS). Although the worst atrocities of the Algerian civil war took place during Werenfels’ timeframe, her account is surprisingly bloodless. There is scant mention of even the worst atrocities of the war that drew international condemnation and calls for intervention in late 1997 and early 1998. Managing Instability (p. 48) attributes the drop in violence – rather uncritically – to Bouteflika’s 1999 amnesty program (Concorde civile) without exploring the obvious explanatory candidates (e.g. rising oil revenues).

However, this line of critique is unfair given Werenfels’ intended framing. Managing Instability is not a thesis on war termination but an account of established, emerging and expanding elites (each contextualised by background and attitudes) navigating the difficult transition away from the widespread political violence of the 1990s. Werenfels’ sense of Algeria’s instability is a more generalised understanding of a state whose regime is still far from re-consolidated. Werenfels wants us to see beyond security issues; instability, she contends, has become a kind of lubricant that allows the machine to function: ‘The situation could thus be best described with the oxymoron “equilibrium of instability”’ (p. 5).

For the most part, Managing Instability does not deviate from the basic framework for understanding the functioning of political power in Algeria shared by both foreign and domestic analysts. What makes Werenfels’ contribution novel is her account and explanation of the ways in which Algeria’s authoritarian regime has become more democratised (p. 155). The distension of new groups into elite circles, Werenfels argues, not only helps explain Algeria’s mixed passage from ambiguous civil war to uneasy ‘peace’, but it also bodes ill for hopes that Algeria is on a path to a transparent and accountable government.


The common view of the state of the African continent – especially its southern part – is a grim one. Hardly anyone would deny the persistence of diverse crises in this part of the world.
Diseases, illiteracy, violence, hunger and underdevelopment are problems that so many times form a negative image of Africa. Despite countless developmental strategies, plans and propositions, which allegedly should have put the continent on track to a brighter future, Africa remains mired in tragedy. John Saul’s book *Decolonization and Empire: Contesting the Rhetoric and Reality of Resubordination in Southern Africa and Beyond* tries to discern the causes of this unpleasant (to say the least) reality for most of southern Africa. The author’s main task is to analyse historical and current socio-political developments and systemic arrangements for the continent’s resubordination by what Saul terms ‘the Empire of Capital’, which still produces inequalities and injustices. What is more, Saul does not just reveal the functioning of (neo)liberal interventions, but also sets himself an enormous task: how to think about what, in these times of prevailing ruthless capitalist logic, seems almost unthinkable – forms of resistance to the Empire of Capital.

The decolonisation process in southern Africa has been celebrated as a new beginning, which would bring freedom and just conditions to the African people. Although by no means a homogenous process, Saul frames decolonisation in this part of the world as what he calls ‘the thirty years’ war for southern African liberation’ (from around 1960–90). The beginning of the decolonisation era is marked by Ghana’s independence in 1957, and little more than three decades later this period of liberation struggle is marked by the fall of South Africa’s apartheid system. Within this framework the author identifies three ‘broad fronts of political assertion, which were available to southern Africans as they came to heightened political consciousness’ (p. 24). These are the race war, anti-colonial African nationalism and the social/socialist revolution. The author shows, through the cases of Mozambique and South Africa, how each of these fronts became a focus around which Africans organised struggles against colonialists and, as such, were also triggers for mobilising the masses. Decolonisation, however, did not live up to the expectations of many, but rather regressed to something we could call (Saul here follows Frantz Fanon) ‘false decolonization’ (p. 41). The key problem was that liberation brought too little of substance, especially in economic terms, for the vast majority of the population. Instead of being a new emancipating political strategy, decolonisation gradually turned into its exact opposite: ever-deeper resubordination to Western capitalism. As Saul describes it, recolonisation is ‘an ongoing process of reinforced ‘Western’ capitalist ascendency that has characterized Africa … and also many other parts of the global south’ (p. 69). To show the logic behind the prevailing capitalist discourses, the book interprets prominent ideologues of the global neoliberal capitalist order, with special attention to Niall Ferguson and Michael Ignatieff. Both thinkers see the (neo)liberal empire as the best possible solution for societies, because this Empire’s *modus operandi* is ‘one that enhances its own security and prosperity precisely by providing the rest of the world with generally beneficial public goods’ (p. 93). Thus, the Empire of Capital is not based solely on the idea of logic of free market but also relies on the idea of humanitarism.

In light of the ever more pervading Empire of Capital, Saul poses himself, in a Leninist manner, an obvious question: ‘What is to be done?’ (p. 125). How do we resist and contest global capital? How do we oppose this unjust reality that affects many people in different parts of the world? The author opts for a transformative project, which should mean a revival of socialist practices. Among other presented propositions, the crucial one is ‘the goal of collective ownership of the means of production by a democratically empowered and self-conscious majority
of the affected population’ (p. 133). The last part provides a critical reflection on the book’s central themes. Saul once again summarizes, by interpreting the cases of Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa, why socialist projects in these countries were more or less unsuccessful and why decolonisation was false, and deviated into subordination to capital.

Although Saul’s critique of the currently dispiriting situation in southern Africa is insightful, it includes some problematic analytical undertakings, the most obvious being the use of the concept of the Empire of Capital. The author does explain briefly his understanding and use of this concept at the book’s beginning, but it nevertheless persists in the text as ontologically finite and, above all, omnipotent. The latter is especially dubious because it seems that capital is the first and last instance that determines reality. Despite this shortcoming, *Decolonization and Empire* does address the stark reality of southern Africa with clarity and compassion that calls upon us to reflect on current global hierarchical relations not just with suspicion, but also with the will to change the world for the better.

Thakur’s analysis is driven by a wish to bridge the views of supporters of unilateralism (mainly voices from the United States) and supporters of a more multilateral approach. The latter camp would include those who are fearful of strong states intervening at will in weaker states. Therefore the UN’s relationships with the United States on the one hand, and with developing countries on the other, occupy a central place in the book. Thakur takes seriously the political divisions between UN member states, most particularly those arising from the efforts by developing countries to influence the global peace and security discourse. Such an engagement makes this book a valuable resource for those who study Africa or the global south.

Thakur centres on five themes in the introduction and conclusion: (1) Guidelines on the use of force. He observes that the war in Iraq divided the UN membership over the issue of use of force; the Iraq war supporters were disappointed that the UN did not bless the attempt to put an end to a brutal regime and the many more countries that opposed the war were disappointed that the UN did not stop a war of aggression by the major powers against a smaller state. He then makes the case that the UN has broadened its role: from dealing with inter-state wars to considering equally important the prevention of mass atrocities. (2) The distinction between legitimacy and legality. Since unilateral intervention has had negative humanitarian consequences most often in developing countries, Thakur argues that the UN remains the best available rule-based system for conflict management. (3) The United States-UN relationship. The author asserts that the United States should value its relationship with the UN – and hence be more prepared to support its global norms. (4) The divide between industrialised and developing countries. In his view, the UN needs to both remain a relevant institution in the eyes of the United States amongst others, and to allow for influence for developing
countries. These states, having experienced apartheid and colonisation, feel resentment that they do not have more of a say on matters of trade, development, democracy and human rights. (5) Rule of law. For Thakur, reform is necessary to protect and democratisethe UN.

Taken together the chapters in the book explore a wide range of topics that provide extensive discussion and illustration of his arguments. However, by addressing more directly the five themes in each of the subsequent chapters, his study could have gained in explanatory power. If Thakur is hoping to contribute to a resolution to the UN’s crisis of legitimacy by explaining why multilateralism matters, case study-based chapters might have offered more opportunity to illustrate the benefits of his claims. Case studies might have investigated the drivers and mechanisms of how certain failures erode the UN’s credibility and legitimacy and why reform is ultimately valuable for both North and South. This would no doubt have required him to reduce the scope and breadth of his enquiry and to set out what his perspective on legitimacy is. In one place, he mentions Inis Claude’s collective legitimisation framework (p. 6) and his high esteem for the UN ‘as the principal provider of international security’, (p. 6). In another his worldview seems surprisingly realist (p. 64). In addition to the existing and incisive chapters on reform, case studies might have included the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ doctrine (r2p) and Kosovo, as well as an extended analysis of the US-intervention in Iraq in 2003 showing why the UN-US relationship is so critical. How does the danger of delegitimising the UN enjoin the developed and the under-developed world?

Other case studies that seem important for his overall argument are the UN’s many disappointing experiences in Africa. Africa warrants more attention since an estimated 60 per cent of the UN Security Council’s time is spent on African issues. The UN’s challenges with civil wars on the continent have played a role in the normative development of the r2p: in 1998 Kofi Annan stated that protecting African civilians was a ‘humanitarian imperative’ (UN 1998, para 49). At the same time, it is where the decentralisation trend of international peace and security has been most tested. What did the experiences in Somalia and inaction in Rwanda mean for the UN’s legitimacy and role as primary collective legitimising forum? Thakur discusses the UN Security Council’s failures in regard to the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the divisions on the Council concerning mass atrocities in Darfur in 2003–2004. Yet, the importance of these cases for his argument might have been more clearly drawn out. The UN’s involvement in Africa has led wide audiences to hotly contest the legitimacy of the UN Security Council as ultimately responsible for international peace and security.

Overall, this book contains an important message for those who are cynical that reforming the UN will make a difference. It is well written and engaging, and Thakur is to be congratulated for taking such a clear and well-substantiated position. His analysis has profoundly challenged UN-cynics to present a better alternative for rule-based global politics.

Reference

Since the appearance of Citizen and Subject, Mahmood Mamdani has taken on the unique part of a public intellectual and critical observer of the African scene at the highest level with a foot in New York surveying Western perceptions and another grounded on the African continent. He has intervened in debates on South Africa, Rwanda and now Sudan, apart from writing about Muslims and the West in the contemporary conjuncture. There is no doubt more to come on Zimbabwe from shorter writings that have already evoked substantial controversy elsewhere but, at the level of the full-length book, it is now his thoughts on Sudan that are reaching the spotlight.

There are essentially three related parts to this study. First, Mamdani looks at the Save Darfur Movement and explores the significance of enthusiasm for Western military invasion of this region in the very heart of Africa, based on making a case that the violence in Darfur was (is?) genocidal. Second, he devotes time and attention to Sudanese history in order to explore the actual roots of conflict in Darfur. Finally, he returns to the international context and the current prospects raised by the ICC demand for the arrest of the President of Sudan on the ground of war crimes in Darfur.

Let us start with the middle. Not that serious historians of Sudan need to be told this, but Mamdani underscores the key point that Furs and Arabs in Darfur do not belong to different ‘races’, that Arabs in Sudan generally are not migrants from Arabia and that Arab identity which he calls essentially ‘political’ (p. 108) has many facets that have shifted over time and has existed for many centuries in this part of Africa. Racial antagonism can be dismissed as having anything to do with this conflict.

Instead, Mamdani finds a variety of causes jointly responsible. First is the colonial heritage, and here predictably he harks back to the Citizen and Subject binary. Under British rule, legitimate identity in Darfur revolved around ethnicity. Of course, in that time, light-skinned Arabs were defined as better than Africans and deserving of more consideration. However, in Darfur it was the sedentary Fur who had collectively access to a dar – to land, unlike many of the nomadic, often Arabic speaking, pastoral peoples. The second stimulus to conflict lay in the long drought which virtually forced Sahelian camel nomads to abandon their usual territorial haunts and made access to more fertile and southern portions of Darfur compelling. Third came the evolution of regional entanglements, in particular long-term instability in neighbouring Chad, another huge and yet much less well-known country afflicted by drought, where close links exist between some of the Darfuri rebels and the Chad regime and from where many refugees came to live with closely aligned communities in Darfur. The possibility of assistance and refuge across the border stimulated the possibility for rebellion. Here as elsewhere in Africa, regional rivalries and
alliances fed into Cold War plots and proxy wars. Some nomadic groups were thus obviously available for mayhem to forces both in N'Djamena and Khartoum.

Finally, there is the question of the narrow, undemocratic nature of the Sudanese state itself where power has overwhelmingly always rested on cliques with ‘tribal’ ties from the middle Nile valley. This has been challenged to some extent if unsuccessfully on an Islamist basis, but this of course cannot speak to the country’s large Christian minority. The conflict between north and south in the Sudan has unhinged the whole country, inevitably influencing other contradictions into breaking out in open rebellion. It is a central contention in Mamdani’s argument that the extreme violence that climaxed in 2003/04 in Darfur came out of earlier strife that had its roots in conflict within Darfur itself; the apparently Machiavellian role played by the Bashir government in Khartoum has been more opportunistic than causative by this line of argument.

All these factors are convincingly real, although it is not quite clear to me why camel nomads would choose to re-establish themselves in agricultural areas without proposing to change their way of life, but then I am a sceptic in general towards environmentally determinist explanations in history and politics. However, the greatest problem with this assessment analytically is that Mamdani makes so little of the reality that ethnic and racial determinism, based on a poor assessment of real historical processes, while undoubtedly typical of colonial analysis, has (as in Rwanda) been internalised and seized on with alacrity by strong local forces for quite some time. It is the academic ‘doyen’ of historical studies in the Sudan, Yusuf Fadl Hasan, who lives most easily with the Harold MacMichael version of Sudanese history as Mamdani mentions, but then he represents the dominant intelligentsia of Khartoum. Arabic speaking nomads in Darfur have never claimed to be fighting a racial crusade or religious jihad; it was Fur spokesmen in the late 1980s who painted their conflict with cattle and camel nomads in starkly racial terms to suit their own position (and no doubt court influential foreign friends) as they became more and more alienated from central authority in Khartoum. Herein lies the problem of ethnic interpretation, not in its imperial origins as an argument. It is the Sudanese themselves who have yet to face the world convincingly as citizens.

Sudanese history is multi-faceted and complex and Mamdani at most gives us an aperçu of a great many events and issues; he is not really at odds with current scholarship on which his analysis largely depends. Much of the power of this book comes rather from Mamdani’s very justifiable frustration at the wilful and truly stupid ignorance of Westerners as they seek to define crises in Africa in liberal ‘humanitarian’ terms that can be applied anywhere and which exist in defiance of politics and history where racial thinking, however condemned, is still the intellectual comfort zone.

For Americans, Darfur is a place without history and without politics—simply a place where perpetrators clearly identifiable as ‘Arabs’ confront victims clearly identifiable as ‘Africans’ (p. 60).

He lays into the mischief brought about by the naive search for ‘causes’ by Hollywood and other celebrities and acutely shows how this falls into the hands of the powers that be. The genocide charge, almost impossible to apply to Darfur seriously after 2004 for a variety of reasons, creates a way of thinking where assessment of the real politics in a very complex ethnic soup, with many forces fighting and frequently realigning themselves, is made impossible. It does have to be granted that some of what is so wrong here is not just manipulation of
emotions in the interests of powerful forces but also the way the media create a kind of pseudo-politics. As Mamdani says, the Save Darfur Movement was a very successful organised popular movement; the state did not originate it. I note in a recent magazine article that the crème de la crème of the film world of Spain are currently en route to the refugee camps of the Algerian Sahara to create a film festival atmosphere for the Sahrawis – once, if briefly, Spanish subjects. Here victims and perpetrators are Arabic speaking and somewhat white ... but the genre is really the same and it also needs a less innocent gaze cast on it.

The demand for a crusade against evil Arab genocide, however unlikely to be put into practice in the Sudan, has now tended to give way to the equally stupid notion of arresting Omar Hasan Ahmad al-Bashir, the Sudanese President, for Darfur war crimes through the misuse of the International Criminal Court. Indeed, it is al-Bashir who is now blamed for racialising the situation! This in a world where Americans think they have a right to democratically vote into office transparently much greater war criminals such as Bush or Cheney who are then permitted to retreat to their luxury lairs once out of office or where a Tony Blair, after invading a country posing not the slightest danger to his own on supposedly mistaken information, instead of being locked away for the rest of his days, is passed on from high political office in Britain to become the man to negotiate peace between Israelis and Palestinians! Al-Bashir is hardly an innocent party but, as Mamdani says, the only way to a better outcome is ‘not to shun justice but to explore forms of justice that will help end rather than prolong conflicts’ (p. 286). Detaching ‘war crimes’ from ‘underlying political reality’ is not the way to go.

He is also a very sympathetic observer of the AU efforts in Darfur which he feels demonstrate far more instinct for what kind of negotiations could bring about peace and who need far more support but of course this intervention rests, as he knows, on a very weak financial foundation. For the moment, Darfur is quieter due in good part to a large outsider troop presence. Mamdani suggests that the Darfur war has become one with direct implications for the remaking of the Sudan and probably cannot be resolved short of engaging with that larger process, itself linked especially to what happens between north and south. At one level, this is convincing; Sudan is a country which cannot go forward without a reconstruction of the colonial inheritance, but this remains a rather abstract assessment. How then do we deal with the Khartoum regime as it really is? Can one really bring together into a new citizenship the fighting fragments of Darfur which have imploded since 2004? Can one see the Sudanese emancipating themselves from the grooves into which imperial categories once gathered them? Perhaps the most depressing thing in the book is his admission in places that Sudanese themselves are inclined to fall for the humanitarian trope and pray for Western intervention in desperation as an African way out seems remote or unattainable. Mamdani’s insistence on a negotiated solution, an African solution that lays all legitimate grievances on the table, is nonetheless certainly a very useful starting position for reopening the discussion.

Reference

Matthias Basedau, Gero Erdmann and Andreas Mehler's edited volume grew out of the Thematic Conference of the Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies (AEGIS) organised by the Institute of African Affairs of the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA), 22–23 May 2003. The book seeks to take ‘a second look at the role of elections as a basic instrument for regulating political competition in Africa’ (p. 7). This seems a valid concern, given the abysmal failure of previous electoral waves in Africa, the widespread scepticism that attended the return of electoral politics under the third wave of democratisation, and the weak institutionalisation of political parties and electoral systems. These and related issues constitute the core concerns of the book.

In what looks like his personal reminiscences, E. Gyimah-Boadi sets the ball rolling with a critical dissection of how entrenched neo-patrimonialism, manifest in the legacies of authoritarianism and the domination of parties by ‘godfathers’ as well as widespread vote-buying and choiceless elections, has been inimical to the democratisation process in Africa. This is followed by Gero Erdmann’s useful essay on party research in comparative western European and African experience. While underscoring this literature’s dominant focus on the West, he argues that the established party research approach could be applied in a modified way to political parties in Africa. He identifies various universal typologies and possible areas of application in Africa. Peter Burnell’s piece is a response to Erdmann. After a critical reflection on the justifications for Erdmann’s study, he raises further important areas for party research in Africa, including ethnic-based parties, informal politics and neo-patrimonialism. Vicky Randall investigates another crucial dimension of political parties in Africa: the representation of social groups. This is important given the fact that democracy is essentially a form of government where various associational groups and interests should be represented. After a theoretical exposition on the concept of representation and the relationship with political parties, Randall explores the situation in the African context, reflecting on the travails of ethnic-based parties, and the under-representation of civil society organisations and women due to a number of reasons, including ‘the adoption of neoliberal economic policies’ (p. 94). The chapter includes helpful discussion of policy and research implications. In a comparative study of 28 Sub-Saharan African countries, Mathias Basedau interrogates the relationship between party systems and democracy. Interestingly, the application of his classificatory scheme for party system characteristics and democracy, drawn from the literature, leads to a theory-refuting conclusion: ‘it is not the combined functionalist model but – in other studies widely untested – polarisation alone that distinguishes democratic and non-democratic party systems most significantly’ (p. 132). Christof Hartmann explores possible paths to electoral reform in Africa. The strength of the chapter lies in its historical insight and the robustness of its typologies of electoral reforms in Africa, most notably institutional conservatism, path-dependent change and path change. For Hartmann, the desirable path of reform is one that allows for popular inclusion, that is, a proportional representation electoral system. Matthijs Bogaards discusses the link between electoral systems, party systems and ethnicity in Africa. He opens with an analysis of party system...
functions, including blocking, aggregation and translation; and the nexus with the choice of electoral system. He then applies the typologies to African realities, showing how electoral choices in Africa vary under different party systems, and exploring how these models underline the role of ethnic politics in different contexts. Andreas Mehler explores the links between political parties and violence in Africa, drawing illustrations from six countries. He develops an instrumental view of violence as a political means and as an expression of grievance. He then attempts an exposition on factors favouring or constraining violence, including cleavages, institutional conditions, and state weakness, all of which combine well to determine the resort to violence by political parties. Liisa Laakso takes the issue of violence in Africa further, with her critical insights into electoral violence, buttressed by analysis of selected cases across the continent. She underscores how political transitions, poverty, and ethnic politics fuel electoral violence, as well as the mobilisation of ex-warlords for advancing the electoral interests of the ruling party. The last substantive chapter, by Paul Nugent, is a critical reflection on the place of money as a political resource in the electoral process. Using the Ghanaian experience under the Fourth Republic, Nugent argues that money can be a political asset or liability depending on how it is deployed and managed. While money is central to contests over political power, it only becomes meaningful if properly converted into a source of moral authority, the absence of which may produce allegations of vote-buying and related electoral frauds. In the concluding chapter the editors recapitulate the main submissions of the book under three rubrics: political parties, party systems, voters and elections.

The overarching concern with the comparative method may have created a related problem of its own: the neglect of country case studies and the tendency to over-generalise. Out of ten substantive chapters only two (those by Gyimah-Boadi and Nugent) are country specific, and both address the Ghanaian situation. More country-specific case studies, especially on Nigeria and South Africa, two sub-regional heavy-weights on the continent, would have strengthened the book’s contribution. Nevertheless, this reservation does not detract substantially from the overall quality of the book, which provides a significant contribution to the comparative analysis of political parties and elections in Africa, with a good blend of theory and practice.
cases. The final chapter explicitly deals with an issue that has been implicit throughout the book, this being the security agenda that has been set by the events of 11 September and its implications for globalisation and development.

In the chapters dealing with neoliberalism as a discourse Carmody presents us with something like a genealogy of neoliberal development theory, observing how the failure of early shock therapy models of structural adjustment led to the introduction of civil society and governance issues into the discursive framework. This has in turn led to the World Bank’s adoption of participation in the context of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Of course, phenomena such as civil society have been incorporated in such a way that they support rather than challenge the basic tenets of neoliberalism. Thus, civil society is not conceived in Gramscian terms, as an arena where different class and social groups confront each other, but rather in terms of Dahlian pluralism in which a variety of interest groups compete on a roughly even basis to ensure state responsiveness to their needs. In this way civil society is seen as having an intrinsic propensity towards the distribution of political power, which mirrors the neoliberal view of the market as the most efficient means of distributing resources in accordance with needs. Carmody notes how any forces that might contest this harmonious view of political economy are defined out of civil society, notably trade unions, which are dismissed as rent seeking organisations that distort the market. This enables neoliberals to argue that promotion of civil societies in Africa will promote a form of good governance that will be supportive of market policies and to elide class based social differences that may be exacerbated by the market project. Notably, such a framing of the problem completely ignores market propensities to economic concentration and class differentiation.

A central element of Carmody’s critique of neoliberal discourse concerns how it appropriates concepts such as civil society and social capital in such a way as to empty them of political content. If such awkward factors as differential class power (and the role of the market in constitution of such differences) are left out of account, development becomes a relatively straightforward enterprise of efficiently governing society in accordance with market logic and enhancing social capital so that the poor can take advantage of the opportunities the market offers them. This vision not only fails to factor in local social differences, but also ignores international power differences and the disadvantageous way in which neoliberal globalisation incorporates most African states into the international system. Of course, this apolitical conceptualisation of development is unable to deliver substantial benefits to the African poor. However, Carmody provides an informative discussion of how neoliberal discourse has been able to adapt and legitimise itself in the face of continued failure to achieve any substantive development gains.

The case studies are well researched and provide some interesting insights as in the Zimbabwean case study where Carmody shows how the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme helped create the conditions for the later collapse of the economy. The South African case study also throws interesting light on the way in which neoliberalism has been embedded into the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). However, the concentration on the specifics of the cases perhaps led to an attenuation of the analytical focus and coherence that had been evident in the examination of neoliberal discourse in the first four chapters. If anything, this is exacerbated by the final chapter, which introduces the issue of security into the equation. Carmody’s final plea for a US embrace of a new global compact that will enhance its security through delivery
of social investments to Africa does not sit entirely comfortably with his earlier analysis of an intransigent highly adaptable neoliberal discourse that legitimates the subordinate incorporation of Africa into an unequal global system. Ironically, events since the publication of this book, inclusive of the economic meltdown, the associated crisis of market discourse and the election of Obama may make the prospects for a slightly more caring and sharing US government seem a little more hopeful. However, the cogency of Carmody’s analysis of the resilience of neoliberal discourse should caution us against raising our hopes too high.


In the late colonial period and the immediate post-independence era (1950–70), analyses of North African politics tended towards elite studies. This movement was superseded by ‘neo-institutionalism’, which insisted on the state’s autonomous and pre-eminent power within political systems. In the field of Algeria studies in the 1980s, the institutionalist or political economy approach soon became dominant, especially rentier theory. At its best, rentier theory in Algeria demonstrated the co-constitutive relationship between those state actors who control distribution of hydrocarbon revenues and the political and economic institutions that shape such distribution. In Isabelle Werenfels’ Managing Instability in Algeria: Elites and political change since 1995 we have gone back to the future. As the subtitle suggests, Werenfels (a researcher at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs) is very much interested in ‘bringing the man back in’. By using elite theorisations, Werenfels seeks to explain Algeria’s simultaneous emergence from civil war at the turn of the millennium and the total lack of ‘profound political change in Algeria after 1995’ (pp. 4–5). However, Werenfels’ study is not a return to the old days of elite studies; her approach is hybridised and fits within the institutional turn (p. 27). ‘Control and distribution of hydrocarbon rent’, Werenfels notes, ‘not only presented the core elite with an important instrument of power but also presented a weak point in its rule, for control of the volatile oil price was not in its hands’ (p. 6).

Managing Instability is surely one of the best books yet written on Algeria’s slow transition from violent armed conflict in the 1990s to the (mostly) non-violent modes of political conflict of today. Werenfels’ study is also an erudite examination of the political challenges and triumphs of the first term (1999–2004) of Algeria’s President, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, a man widely – although disputably – credited with taming the armed conflict. This richly detailed and expertly researched account of a critical period in Algeria’s recent history is required reading for anyone attempting to understand Algeria since 2000. It will also be of interest to scholars studying the democracy problematic in developing countries or theoreticians looking for empirical data that contributes towards an understanding of the interplay between agents and structures. Although Managing Instability ends in early 2004, it is highly relevant in light of today’s political manoeuvrings in Algeria and contextualises Bouteflika’s third term victory in 2009.

The argument unfolds in a straightforward manner: theory (chapter one), methodology (two), historical context

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(three), analysis (four through six) and conclusion. The primary source data – over 100 interviews with members of what Werenfels terms ‘the politically relevant elite’ – is what sets this study apart (see p. 194, note 5). The Algerian Government is a very difficult terrain to study – bureaucratic inertia, personal security concerns, widespread conspiratorial suspicion of Western motivations are just some of the problems. At the time when Werenfels was conducting her research (c.2002), the security situation for foreigners was still considered risky by many Western governments. The fact that Werenfels’ study even happened, not to mention was so successful, is impressive.

Werenfels’ story is set during the darkest period of Algeria’s history since independence from France in 1962. She chooses 1995 as year zero, when a civilian head of state was elected after three years of rule by a military junta. This date might seem a strange choice; most observers date Algeria’s recent instability – the civil war – to either 1988 (when massive anti-regime demonstrations led to elections) or 1992 (when the military annulled those elections won handily by the Islamic Salvation Front or FIS). Although the worst atrocities of the Algerian civil war took place during Werenfels’ timeframe, her account is surprisingly bloodless. There is scant mention of even the worst atrocities of the war that drew international condemnation and calls for intervention in late 1997 and early 1998. Managing Instability (p. 48) attributes the drop in violence – rather uncritically – to Bouteflika’s 1999 amnesty program (Concorde civile) without exploring the obvious explanatory candidates (e.g. rising oil revenues).

However, this line of critique is unfair given Werenfels’ intended framing. Managing Instability is a not a thesis on war termination but an account of established, emerging and expanding elites (each contextualised by background and attitudes) navigating the difficult transition away from the widespread political violence of the 1990s. Werenfels’ sense of Algeria’s instability is a more generalised understanding of a state whose regime is still far from re-consolidated. Werenfels wants us to see beyond security issues; instability, she contends, has become a kind of lubricant that allows the machine to function: ‘The situation could thus be best described with the oxymoron “equilibrium of instability”’ (p. 5).

For the most part, Managing Instability does not deviate from the basic framework for understanding the functioning of political power in Algeria shared by both foreign and domestic analysts. What makes Werenfels’ contribution novel is her account and explanation of the ways in which Algeria’s authoritarian regime has become more democratised (p. 155). The distension of new groups into elite circles, Werenfels argues, not only helps explain Algeria’s mixed passage from ambiguous civil war to uneasy ‘peace’, but it also bodes ill for hopes that Algeria is on a path to a transparent and accountable government.


The common view of the state of the African continent – especially its southern part – is a grim one. Hardly anyone would deny the persistence of diverse crises in this part of the world.
Diseases, illiteracy, violence, hunger and underdevelopment are problems that so many times form a negative image of Africa. Despite countless developmental strategies, plans and propositions, which allegedly should have put the continent on track to a brighter future, Africa remains mired in tragedy. John Saul’s book Decolonization and Empire: Contesting the Rhetoric and Reality of Resubordination in Southern Africa and Beyond tries to discern the causes of this unpleasant (to say the least) reality for most of southern Africa. The author’s main task is to analyse historical and current socio-political developments and systemic arrangements for the continent’s resubordination by what Saul terms ‘the Empire of Capital’, which still produces inequalities and injustices. What is more, Saul does not just reveal the functioning of (neo)liberal interventions, but also sets himself an enormous task: how to think about what, in these times of prevailing ruthless capitalist logic, seems almost unthinkable – forms of resistance to the Empire of Capital.

The decolonisation process in southern Africa has been celebrated as a new beginning, which would bring freedom and just conditions to the African people. Although by no means a homogenous process, Saul frames decolonisation in this part of the world as what he calls ‘the thirty years’ war for southern African liberation’ (from around 1960–90). The beginning of the decolonisation era is marked by Ghana’s independence in 1957, and little more than three decades later this period of liberation struggle is marked by the fall of South Africa’s apartheid system. Within this framework the author identifies three ‘broad fronts of political assertion, which were available to southern Africans as they came to heightened political consciousness’ (p. 24). These are the race war, anti-colonial African nationalism and the social/socialist revolution. The author shows, through the cases of Mozambique and South Africa, how each of these fronts became a focus around which Africans organised struggles against colonialists and, as such, were also triggers for mobilising the masses. Decolonisation, however, did not live up to the expectations of many, but rather regressed to something we could call (Saul here follows Frantz Fanon) ‘false decolonization’ (p. 41). The key problem was that liberation brought too little of substance, especially in economic terms, for the vast majority of the population. Instead of being a new emancipating political strategy, decolonisation gradually turned into its exact opposite: ever-deeper resubordination to Western capitalism. As Saul describes it, recolonisation is ‘an ongoing process of reinforced ‘Western’ capitalist ascendancy that has characterized Africa … and also many other parts of the global south’ (p. 69).

To show the logic behind the prevailing capitalist discourses, the book interprets prominent ideologues of the global neoliberal capitalist order, with special attention to Niall Ferguson and Michael Ignatieff. Both thinkers see the (neo)liberal empire as the best possible solution for societies, because this Empire’s modus operandi is ‘one that enhances its own security and prosperity precisely by providing the rest of the world with generally beneficial public goods’ (p. 93). Thus, the Empire of Capital is not based solely on the idea of logic of free market but also relies on the idea of humanitarianism.

In light of the ever more pervading Empire of Capital, Saul poses himself, in a Leninist manner, an obvious question: ‘What is to be done?’ (p. 125). How do we resist and contest global capital? How do we oppose this unjust reality that affects many people in different parts of the world? The author opts for a transformative project, which should mean a revival of socialist practices. Among other presented propositions, the crucial one is ‘the goal of collective ownership of the means of production by a democratically empowered and self-conscious majority
of the affected population’ (p. 133). The last part provides a critical reflection on the book’s central themes. Saul once again summarizes, by interpreting the cases of Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa, why socialist projects in these countries were more or less unsuccessful and why decolonisation was false, and deviated into subordination to capital.

Although Saul’s critique of the currently dispiriting situation in southern Africa is insightful, it includes some problematic analytical undertakings, the most obvious being the use of the concept of the Empire of Capital. The author does explain briefly his understanding and use of this concept at the book’s beginning, but it nevertheless persists in the text as ontologically finite and, above all, omnipotent. The latter is especially dubious because it seems that capital is the first and last instance that determines reality. Despite this shortcoming, *Decolonization and Empire* does address the stark reality of southern Africa with clarity and compassion that calls upon us to reflect on current global hierarchical relations not just with suspicion, but also with the will to change the world for the better.

Thakur’s analysis is driven by a wish to bridge the views of supporters of unilaterlalism (mainly voices from the United States) and supporters of a more multilateral approach. The latter camp would include those who are fearful of strong states intervening at will in weaker states. Therefore the UN’s relationships with the United States on the one hand, and with developing countries on the other, occupy a central place in the book. Thakur takes seriously the political divisions between UN member states, most particularly those arising from the efforts by developing countries to influence the global peace and security discourse. Such an engagement makes this book a valuable resource for those who study Africa or the global south.

Thakur centres on five themes in the introduction and conclusion: (1) Guidelines on the use of force. He observes that the war in Iraq divided the UN membership over the issue of use of force; the Iraq war supporters were disappointed that the UN did not bless the attempt to put an end to a brutal regime and the many more countries that opposed the war were disappointed that the UN did not stop a war of aggression by the major powers against a smaller state. He then makes the case that the UN has broadened its role: from dealing with inter-state wars to considering equally important the prevention of mass atrocities. (2) The distinction between legitimacy and legality. Since unilateral intervention has had negative humanitarian consequences most often in developing countries, Thakur argues that the UN remains the best available rule-based system for conflict management. (3) The United States-UN relationship. The author asserts that the United States should value its relationship with the UN – and hence be more prepared to support its global norms. (4) The divide between industrialised and developing countries. In his view, the UN needs to both remain a relevant institution in the eyes of the United States amongst others, and to allow for influence for developing countries.


The United Nations, Peace and Security is an authoritative acclamation of the UN as the best available forum for the pursuit of multilateralism (p. 345). Ramesh Thakur’s analysis is driven by a wish to bridge the views of supporters of unilaterlalism (mainly voices from the United States) and supporters of a more multilateral approach. The latter camp would include those who are fearful of strong states intervening at will in weaker states. Therefore the UN’s relationships with the United States on the one hand, and with developing countries on the other, occupy a central place in the book. Thakur takes seriously the political divisions between UN member states, most particularly those arising from the efforts by developing countries to influence the global peace and security discourse. Such an engagement makes this book a valuable resource for those who study Africa or the global south.

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countries. These states, having experienced apartheid and colonisation, feel resentment that they do not have more of a say on matters of trade, development, democracy and human rights. (5) Rule of law. For Thakur, reform is necessary to protect and democratise the UN.

Taken together the chapters in the book explore a wide range of topics that provide extensive discussion and illustration of his arguments. However, by addressing more directly the five themes in each of the subsequent chapters, his study could have gained in explanatory power. If Thakur is hoping to contribute to a resolution to the UN’s crisis of legitimacy by explaining why multilateralism matters, case study-based chapters might have offered more opportunity to illustrate the benefits of his claims. Case studies might have investigated the drivers and mechanisms of how certain failures erode the UN’s credibility and legitimacy and why reform is ultimately valuable for both North and South. This would no doubt have required him to reduce the scope and breadth of his enquiry and to set out what his perspective on legitimacy is. In one place, he mentions Inis Claude’s collective legitimisation framework (p. 6) and his high esteem for the UN ‘as the principal provider of international security’, (p. 6). In another his worldview seems surprisingly realist (p. 64). In addition to the existing and incisive chapters on reform, case studies might have included the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ doctrine (r2p) and Kosovo, as well as an extended analysis of the US-intervention in Iraq in 2003 showing why the UN-US relationship is so critical. How does the danger of delegitimising the UN enjoin the developed and the under-developed world?

Other case studies that seem important for his overall argument are the UN’s many disappointing experiences in Africa. Africa warrants more attention since an estimated 60 per cent of the UN Security Council’s time is spent on African issues. The UN’s challenges with civil wars on the continent have played a role in the normative development of the r2p: in 1998 Kofi Annan stated that protecting African civilians was a ‘humanitarian imperative’ (UN 1998, para 49). At the same time, it is where the decentralisation trend of international peace and security has been most tested. What did the experiences in Somalia and inaction in Rwanda mean for the UN’s legitimacy and role as primary collective legitimising forum? Thakur discusses the UN Security Council’s failures in regard to the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the divisions on the Council concerning mass atrocities in Darfur in 2003–2004. Yet, the importance of these cases for his argument might have been more clearly drawn out. The UN’s involvement in Africa has led wide audiences to hotly contest the legitimacy of the UN Security Council as ultimately responsible for international peace and security.

Overall, this book contains an important message for those who are cynical that reforming the UN will make a difference. It is well written and engaging, and Thakur is to be congratulated for taking such a clear and well-substantiated position. His analysis has profoundly challenged UN-cynics to present a better alternative for rule-based global politics.

Reference


Since the appearance of Citizen and Subject, Mahmood Mamdani has taken on the unique part of a public intellectual and critical observer of the African scene at the highest level with a foot in New York surveying Western perceptions and another grounded on the African continent. He has intervened in debates on South Africa, Rwanda and now Sudan, apart from writing about Muslims and the West in the contemporary conjuncture. There is no doubt more to come on Zimbabwe from shorter writings that have already evoked substantial controversy elsewhere but, at the level of the full-length book, it is now his thoughts on Sudan that are reaching the spotlight.

There are essentially three related parts to this study. First, Mamdani looks at the Save Darfur Movement and explores the significance of enthusiasm for Western military invasion of this region in the very heart of Africa, based on making a case that the violence in Darfur was (is?) genocidal. Second, he devotes time and attention to Sudanese history in order to explore the actual roots of conflict in Darfur. Finally, he returns to the international context and the current prospects raised by the ICC demand for the arrest of the President of Sudan on the ground of war crimes in Darfur.

Let us start with the middle. Not that serious historians of Sudan need to be told this, but Mamdani underscores the key point that Furs and Arabs in Darfur do not belong to different ‘races’, that Arabs in Sudan generally are not migrants from Arabia and that Arab identity which he calls essentially ‘political’ (p. 108) has many facets that have shifted over time and has existed for many centuries in this part of Africa. Racial antagonism can be dismissed as having anything to do with this conflict.

Instead, Mamdani finds a variety of causes jointly responsible. First is the colonial heritage, and here predictably he harks back to the Citizen and Subject binary. Under British rule, legitimate identity in Darfur revolved around ethnicity. Of course, in that time, light-skinned Arabs were defined as better than Africans and deserving of more consideration. However, in Darfur it was the sedentary Fur who had collectively access to a dar – to land, unlike many of the nomadic, often Arabic speaking, pastoral peoples. The second stimulus to conflict lay in the long drought which virtually forced Sahelian camel nomads to abandon their usual territorial haunts and made access to more fertile and southern portions of Darfur compelling. Third came the evolution of regional entanglements, in particular long-term instability in neighbouring Chad, another huge and yet much less well-known country afflicted by drought, where close links exist between some of the Darfuri rebels and the Chad regime and from where many refugees came to live with closely aligned communities in Darfur. The possibility of assistance and refuge across the border stimulated the possibility for rebellion. Here as elsewhere in Africa, regional rivalries and
alliances fed into Cold War plots and proxy wars. Some nomadic groups were thus obviously available for mayhem to forces both in N’Djamena and Khartoum.

Finally, there is the question of the narrow, undemocratic nature of the Sudanese state itself where power has overwhelmingly always rested on cliques with ‘tribal’ ties from the middle Nile valley. This has been challenged to some extent if unsuccessfully on an Islamist basis, but this of course cannot speak to the country’s large Christian minority. The conflict between north and south in the Sudan has unhinged the whole country, inevitably influencing other contradictions into breaking out in open rebellion. It is a central contention in Mamdani’s argument that the extreme violence that climaxed in 2003/04 in Darfur came out of earlier strife that had its roots in conflict within Darfur itself; the apparently Machiavellian role played by the Bashir government in Khartoum has been more opportunistic than causative by this line of argument.

All these factors are convincingly real, although it is not quite clear to me why camel nomads would choose to re-establish themselves in agricultural areas without proposing to change their way of life, but then I am a sceptic in general towards environmentally determinist explanations in history and politics. However, the greatest problem with this assessment analytically is that Mamdani makes so little of the reality that ethnic and racial determinism, based on a poor assessment of real historical processes, while undoubtedly typical of colonial analysis, has (as in Rwanda) been internalised and seized on with alacrity by strong local forces for quite some time. It is the academic ‘doyen’ of historical studies in the Sudan, Yusuf Fadl Hasan, who lives most easily with the Harold MacMichael version of Sudanese history as Mamdani mentions, but then he represents the dominant intelligentsia of Khartoum. Arabic speaking nomads in Darfur have never claimed to be fighting a racial crusade or religious jihad; it was Fur spokesmen in the late 1980s who painted their conflict with cattle and camel nomads in starkly racial terms to suit their own position (and no doubt court influential foreign friends) as they became more and more alienated from central authority in Khartoum. Herein lies the problem of ethnic interpretation, not in its imperial origins as an argument. It is the Sudanese themselves who have yet to face the world convincingly as citizens.

Sudanese history is multi-faceted and complex and Mamdani at most gives us an aperçu of a great many events and issues; he is not really at odds with current scholarship on which his analysis largely depends. Much of the power of this book comes rather from Mamdani’s very justifiable frustration at the wilful and truly stupid ignorance of Westerners as they seek to define crises in Africa in liberal ‘humanitarian’ terms that can be applied anywhere and which exist in defiance of politics and history where racial thinking, however condemned, is still the intellectual comfort zone.

For Americans, Darfur is a place without history and without politics—simply a place where perpetrators clearly identifiable as ‘Arabs’ confront victims clearly identifiable as ‘Africans’ (p. 60).

He lays into the mischief brought about by the naïve search for ‘causes’ by Hollywood and other celebrities and acutely shows how this falls into the hands of the powers that be. The genocide charge, almost impossible to apply to Darfur seriously after 2004 for a variety of reasons, creates a way of thinking where assessment of the real politics in a very complex ethnic soup, with many forces fighting and frequently realigning themselves, is made impossible. It does have to be granted that some of what is so wrong here is not just manipulation of
emotions in the interests of powerful forces but also the way the media create a kind of pseudo-politics. As Mamdani says, the Save Darfur Movement was a very successful organised popular movement; the state did not originate it. I note in a recent magazine article that the crème de la crème of the film world of Spain are currently en route to the refugee camps of the Algerian Sahara to create a film festival atmosphere for the Sahrawis – once, if briefly, Spanish subjects. Here victims and perpetrators are Arabic speaking and somewhat white . . . but the genre is really the same and it also needs a less innocent gaze cast on it.

The demand for a crusade against evil Arab genocide, however unlikely to be put into practice in the Sudan, has now tended to give way to the equally stupid notion of arresting Omar Hasan Ahmad al-Bashir, the Sudanese President, for Darfur war crimes through the misuse of the International Criminal Court. Indeed, it is al-Bashir who is now blamed for racialising the situation! This in a world where Americans think they have a right to democratically vote into office transparently much greater war criminals such as Bush or Cheney who are then permitted to retreat to their luxury lairs once out of office or where a Tony Blair, after invading a country posing not the slightest danger to his own on supposedly mistaken information, instead of being locked away for the rest of his days, is passed on from high political office in Britain to become the man to negotiate peace between Israelis and Palestinians! Al-Bashir is hardly an innocent party but, as Mamdani says, the only way to a better outcome is ‘not to shun justice but to explore forms of justice that will help end rather than prolong conflicts’ (p. 286). Detaching ‘war crimes’ from ‘underlying political reality’ is not the way to go.

He is also a very sympathetic observer of the AU efforts in Darfur which he feels demonstrate far more instinct for what kind of negotiations could bring about peace and who need far more support but of course this intervention rests, as he knows, on a very weak financial foundation. For the moment, Darfur is quieter due in good part to a large outsider troop presence. Mamdani suggests that the Darfur war has become one with direct implications for the remaking of the Sudan and probably cannot be resolved short of engaging with that larger process, itself linked especially to what happens between north and south. At one level, this is convincing; Sudan is a country which cannot go forward without a reconstruction of the colonial inheritance, but this remains a rather abstract assessment. How then do we deal with the Khartoum regime as it really is? Can one really bring together into a new citizenship the fighting fragments of Darfur which have imploded since 2004? Can one see the Sudanese emancipating themselves from the grooves into which imperial categories once gathered them? Perhaps the most depressing thing in the book is his admission in places that Sudanese themselves are inclined to fall for the humanitarian trope and pray for Western intervention in desperation as an African way out seems remote or unattainable. Mamdani’s insistence on a negotiated solution, an African solution that lays all legitimate grievances on the table, is nonetheless certainly a very useful starting position for reopening the discussion.

Reference

Matthias Basedau, Gero Erdmann and Andreas Mehler's edited volume grew out of the Thematic Conference of the Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies (AEGIS) organised by the Institute of African Affairs of the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA), 22–23 May 2003. The book seeks to take 'a second look at the role of elections as a basic instrument for regulating political competition in Africa' (p. 7). This seems a valid concern, given the abysmal failure of previous electoral waves in Africa, the widespread scepticism that attended the return of electoral politics under the third wave of democratisation, and the weak institutionalisation of political parties and electoral systems. These and related issues constitute the core concerns of the book.

In what looks like his personal reminiscences, E. Gyimah-Boadi sets the ball rolling with a critical dissection of how entrenched neo-patrimonialism, manifest in the legacies of authoritarianism and the domination of parties by 'godfathers' as well as widespread vote-buying and choiceless elections, has been inimical to the democratisation process in Africa. This is followed by Gero Erdmann's useful essay on party research in comparative western European and African experience. While underscoring this literature's dominant focus on the West, he argues that the established party research approach could be applied in a modified way to political parties in Africa. He identifies various universal typologies and possible areas of application in Africa. Peter Burnell's piece is a response to Erdmann. After a critical reflection on the justifications for Erdmann's study, he raises further important areas for party research in Africa, including ethnic-based parties, informal politics and neopatrimonialism. Vicky Randall investigates another crucial dimension of political parties in Africa: the representation of social groups. This is important given the fact that democracy is essentially a form of government where various associationist groups and interests should be represented. After a theoretical exposition on the concept of representation and the relationship with political parties, Randall explores the situation in the African context, reflecting on the travails of ethnic-based parties, and the under-representation of civil society organisations and women due to a number of reasons, including 'the adoption of neoliberal economic policies' (p. 94). The chapter includes helpful discussion of policy and research implications. In a comparative study of 28 Sub-Saharan African countries, Mathias Basedau interrogates the relationship between party systems and democracy. Interestingly, the application of his classificatory scheme for party system characteristics and democracy, drawn from the literature, leads to a theory-refuting conclusion: 'it is not the combined functionalist model but – in other studies widely untested – polarisation alone that distinguishes democratic and non-democratic party systems most significantly' (p. 132). Christof Hartmann explores possible paths to electoral reform in Africa. The strength of the chapter lies in its historical insight and the robustness of its typologies of electoral reforms in Africa, most notably institutional conservatism, path-dependent change and path change. For Hartmann, the desirable path of reform is one that allows for popular inclusion, that is, a proportional representation electoral system. Matthijs Bogaards discusses the link between electoral systems, party systems and ethnicity in Africa. He opens with an analysis of party system...
functions, including blocking, aggregation and translation; and the nexus with the choice of electoral system. He then applies the typologies to African realities, showing how electoral choices in Africa vary under different party systems, and exploring how these models underline the role of ethnic politics in different contexts. Andreas Mehler explores the links between political parties and violence in Africa, drawing illustrations from six countries. He develops an instrumental view of violence as a political means and as an expression of grievance. He then attempts an exposition on factors favouring or constraining violence, including cleavages, institutional conditions, and state weakness, all of which combine well to determine the resort to violence by political parties. Liisa Laakso takes the issue of violence in Africa further, with her critical insights into electoral violence, buttressed by analysis of selected cases across the continent. She underscores how political transitions, poverty, and ethnic politics fuel electoral violence, as well as the mobilisation of ex-warlords for advancing the electoral interests of the ruling party. The last substantive chapter, by Paul Nugent, is a critical reflection on the place of money as a political resource in the electoral process. Using the Ghanaian experience under the Fourth Republic, Nugent argues that money can be a political asset or liability depending on how it is deployed and managed. While money is central to contests over political power, it only becomes meaningful if properly converted into a source of moral authority, the absence of which may produce allegations of vote-buying and related electoral frauds. In the concluding chapter the editors recapitulate the main submissions of the book under three rubrics: political parties, party systems, voters and elections.

The overarching concern with the comparative method may have created a related problem of its own: the neglect of country case studies and the tendency to over-generalise. Out of ten substantive chapters only two (those by Gyimah-Boadi and Nugent) are country specific, and both address the Ghanaian situation. More country-specific case studies, especially on Nigeria and South Africa, two sub-regional heavy-weights on the continent, would have strengthened the book’s contribution. Nevertheless, this reservation does not detract substantially from the overall quality of the book, which provides a significant contribution to the comparative analysis of political parties and elections in Africa, with a good blend of theory and practice.


This rather ambitious volume brings together a variety of disparate, although related areas of analysis, together with three substantial case studies, in an examination of how neoliberal policies have played out in Africa over the last 25 or more years. The first four chapters present what might be termed a discourse analysis of neoliberal development thinking, tracing how that discourse has periodically transformed itself in order to maintain its legitimacy despite the numerous failures associated with it, notably the continued marginalisation of Africa. The case studies trace the influence of this neoliberal model of globalisation in the development of three disparate countries, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and South Africa, giving full weight to the role of internal forces and conditions in shaping development outcomes in the respective

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cases. The final chapter explicitly deals with an issue that has been implicit throughout the book, this being the security agenda that has been set by the events of 11 September and its implications for globalisation and development.

In the chapters dealing with neoliberalism as a discourse Carmody presents us with something like a genealogy of neoliberal development theory, observing how the failure of early shock therapy models of structural adjustment led to the introduction of civil society and governance issues into the discursive framework. This has in turn led to the World Bank’s adoption of participation in the context of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Of course, phenomena such as civil society have been incorporated in such a way that they support rather than challenge the basic tenets of neoliberalism. Thus, civil society is not conceived in Gramscian terms, as an arena where different class and social groups confront each other, but rather in terms of Dahlian pluralism in which a variety of interest groups compete on a roughly even basis to ensure state responsiveness to their needs. In this way civil society is seen as having an intrinsic propensity towards the distribution of political power, which mirrors the neoliberal view of the market as the most efficient means of distributing resources in accordance with needs. Carmody notes how any forces that might contest this harmonious view of political economy are defined out of civil society, notably trade unions, which are dismissed as rent seeking organisations that distort the market. This enables neoliberals to argue that promotion of civil societies in Africa will promote a form of good governance that will be supportive of market policies and to elide class based social differences that may be exacerbated by the market project. Notably, such a framing of the problem completely ignores market propensities to economic concentration and class differentiation.

A central element of Carmody’s critique of neoliberal discourse concerns how it appropriates concepts such as civil society and social capital in such a way as to empty them of political content. If such awkward factors as differential class power (and the role of the market in constitution of such differences) are left out of account, development becomes a relatively straightforward enterprise of efficiently governing society in accordance with market logic and enhancing social capital so that the poor can take advantage of the opportunities the market offers them. This vision not only fails to factor in local social differences, but also ignores international power differences and the disadvantageous way in which neoliberal globalisation incorporates most African states into the international system. Of course, this apolitical conceptualisation of development is unable to deliver substantial benefits to the African poor. However, Carmody provides an informative discussion of how neoliberal discourse has been able to adapt and legitimise itself in the face of continued failure to achieve any substantive development gains.

The case studies are well researched and provide some interesting insights as in the Zimbabwean case study where Carmody shows how the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme helped create the conditions for the later collapse of the economy. The South African case study also throws interesting light on the way in which neoliberalism has been embedded into the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). However, the concentration on the specifics of the cases perhaps led to an attenuation of the analytical focus and coherence that had been evident in the examination of neoliberal discourse in the first four chapters. If anything, this is exacerbated by the final chapter, which introduces the issue of security into the equation. Carmody’s final plea for a US embrace of a new global compact that will enhance its security through delivery
of social investments to Africa does not sit entirely comfortably with his earlier analysis of an intransigent highly adaptable neoliberal discourse that legitimates the subordinate incorporation of Africa into an unequal global system. Ironically, events since the publication of this book, inclusive of the economic meltdown, the associated crisis of market discourse and the election of Obama may make the prospects for a slightly more caring and sharing US government seem a little more hopeful. However, the cogency of Carmody’s analysis of the resilience of neoliberal discourse should caution us against raising our hopes too high.


In the late colonial period and the immediate post-independence era (1950–70), analyses of North African politics tended towards elite studies. This movement was superseded by ‘neo-institutionalism’, which insisted on the state’s autonomous and pre-eminent power within political systems. In the field of Algeria studies in the 1980s, the institutionalist or political economy approach soon became dominant, especially rentier theory. At its best, rentier theory in Algeria demonstrated the co-constitutive relationship between those state actors who control distribution of hydrocarbon revenues and the political and economic institutions that shape such distribution. In Isabelle Werenfels’ Managing Instability in Algeria: Elites and political change since 1995 we have gone back to the future. As the subtitle suggests, Werenfels (a researcher at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs) is very much interested in ‘bringing the man back in’. By using elite theorisations, Werenfels seeks to explain Algeria’s simultaneous emergence from civil war at the turn of the millennium and the total lack of ‘profound political change in Algeria after 1995’ (pp. 4–5). However, Werenfels’ study is not a return to the old days of elite studies; her approach is hybridised and fits within the institutional turn (p. 27). ‘Control and distribution of hydrocarbon rent’, Werenfels notes, ‘not only presented the core elite with an important instrument of power but also presented a weak point in its rule, for control of the volatile oil price was not in its hands’ (p. 6).

Managing Instability is surely one of the best books yet written on Algeria’s slow transition from violent armed conflict in the 1990s to the (mostly) non-violent modes of political conflict of today. Werenfels’ study is also an erudite examination of the political challenges and triumphs of the first term (1999–2004) of Algeria’s President, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, a man widely – although disputably – credited with taming the armed conflict. This richly detailed and expertly researched account of a critical period in Algeria’s recent history is required reading for anyone attempting to understand Algeria since 2000. It will also be of interest to scholars studying the democracy problematic in developing countries or theorists looking for empirical data that contributes towards an understanding of the interplay between agents and structures. Although Managing Instability ends in early 2004, it is highly relevant in light of today’s political manoeuvrings in Algeria and contextualises Bouteflika’s third term victory in 2009.

The argument unfolds in a straightforward manner: theory (chapter one), methodology (two), historical context...
(three), analysis (four through six) and conclusion. The primary source data – over 100 interviews with members of what Werenfels terms ‘the politically relevant elite’ – is what sets this study apart (see p. 194, note 5). The Algerian Government is a very difficult terrain to study – bureaucratic inertia, personal security concerns, widespread conspiratorial suspicion of Western motivations are just some of the problems. At the time when Werenfels was conducting her research (c.2002), the security situation for foreigners was still considered risky by many Western governments. The fact that Werenfels’ study even happened, not to mention was so successful, is impressive.

Werenfels’ story is set during the darkest period of Algeria’s history since independence from France in 1962. She chooses 1995 as year zero, when a civilian head of state was elected after three years of rule by a military junta. This date might seem a strange choice; most observers date Algeria’s recent instability – the civil war – to either 1988 (when massive anti-regime demonstrations led to elections) or 1992 (when the military annulled those elections won handily by the Islamic Salvation Front or FIS). Although the worst atrocities of the Algerian civil war took place during Werenfels’ timeframe, her account is surprisingly bloodless. There is scant mention of even the worst atrocities of the war that drew international condemnation and calls for intervention in late 1997 and early 1998. Managing Instability (p. 48) attributes the drop in violence – rather uncritically – to Bouteflika’s 1999 amnesty program (Concorde civile) without exploring the obvious explanatory candidates (e.g. rising oil revenues).

However, this line of critique is unfair given Werenfels’ intended framing. Managing Instability is not a thesis on war termination but an account of established, emerging and expanding elites (each contextualised by background and attitudes) navigating the difficult transition away from the widespread political violence of the 1990s. Werenfels’ sense of Algeria’s instability is a more generalised understanding of a state whose regime is still far from re-consolidated. Werenfels wants us to see beyond security issues; instability, she contends, has become a kind of lubricant that allows the machine to function: ‘The situation could thus be best described with the oxymoron “equilibrium of instability”’ (p. 5).

For the most part, Managing Instability does not deviate from the basic framework for understanding the functioning of political power in Algeria shared by both foreign and domestic analysts. What makes Werenfels’ contribution novel is her account and explanation of the ways in which Algeria’s authoritarian regime has become more democratised (p. 155). The distension of new groups into elite circles, Werenfels argues, not only helps explain Algeria’s mixed passage from ambiguous civil war to uneasy ‘peace’, but it also bodes ill for hopes that Algeria is on a path to a transparent and accountable government.


The common view of the state of the African continent – especially its southern part – is a grim one. Hardly anyone would deny the persistence of diverse crises in this part of the world.
Diseases, illiteracy, violence, hunger and underdevelopment are problems that so many times form a negative image of Africa. Despite countless developmental strategies, plans and propositions, which allegedly should have put the continent on track to a brighter future, Africa remains mired in tragedy. John Saul’s book *Decolonization and Empire: Contesting the Rhetoric and Reality of Resubordination in Southern Africa and Beyond* tries to discern the causes of this unpleasant (to say the least) reality for most of southern Africa. The author’s main task is to analyse historical and current socio-political developments and systemic arrangements for the continent’s resubordination by what Saul terms ‘the Empire of Capital’, which still produces inequalities and injustices. What is more, Saul does not just reveal the functioning of (neo)liberal interventions, but also sets himself an enormous task: how to think about what, in these times of prevailing ruthless capitalist logic, seems almost unthinkable – forms of resistance to the Empire of Capital.

The decolonisation process in southern Africa has been celebrated as a new beginning, which would bring freedom and just conditions to the African people. Although by no means a homogenous process, Saul frames decolonisation in this part of the world as what he calls ‘the thirty years’ war for southern African liberation’ (from around 1960–90). The beginning of the decolonisation era is marked by Ghana’s independence in 1957, and little more than three decades later this period of liberation struggle is marked by the fall of South Africa’s apartheid system. Within this framework the author identifies three ‘broad fronts of political assertion, which were available to southern Africans as they came to heightened political consciousness’ (p. 24). These are the race war, anti-colonial African nationalism and the social/socialist revolution. The author shows, through the cases of Mozambique and South Africa, how each of these fronts became a focus around which Africans organised struggles against colonialists and, as such, were also triggers for mobilising the masses. Decolonisation, however, did not live up to the expectations of many, but rather regressed to something we could call (Saul here follows Frantz Fanon) ‘false decolonization’ (p. 41). The key problem was that liberation brought too little of substance, especially in economic terms, for the vast majority of the population. Instead of being a new emancipating political strategy, decolonisation gradually turned into its exact opposite: ever-deeper resubordination to Western capitalism. As Saul describes it, recolonisation is ‘an ongoing process of reinforced ‘Western’ capitalist ascendancy that has characterized Africa … and also many other parts of the global south’ (p. 69).

To show the logic behind the prevailing capitalist discourses, the book interprets prominent ideologues of the global neoliberal capitalist order, with special attention to Niall Ferguson and Michael Ignatieff. Both thinkers see the (neo)liberal empire as the best possible solution for societies, because this Empire’s *modus operandi* is ‘one that enhances its own security and prosperity precisely by providing the rest of the world with generally beneficial public goods’ (p. 93). Thus, the Empire of Capital is not based solely on the idea of logic of free market but also relies on the idea of humanitarianism.

In light of the ever more pervading Empire of Capital, Saul poses himself, in a Leninist manner, an obvious question: ‘What is to be done?’ (p. 125). How do we resist and contest global capital? How do we oppose this unjust reality that affects many people in different parts of the world? The author opts for a transformative project, which should mean a revival of socialist practices. Among other presented propositions, the crucial one is ‘the goal of collective ownership of the means of production by a democratically empowered and self-conscious majority
of the affected population’ (p. 133). The last part provides a critical reflection on the book’s central themes. Saul once again summarizes, by interpreting the cases of Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa, why socialist projects in these countries were more or less unsuccessful and why decolonisation was false, and deviated into subordination to capital.

Although Saul’s critique of the currently dispiriting situation in southern Africa is insightful, it includes some problematic analytical undertakings, the most obvious being the use of the concept of the Empire of Capital. The author does explain briefly his understanding and use of this concept at the book’s beginning, but it nevertheless persists in the text as ontologically finite and, above all, omnipotent. The latter is especially dubious because it seems that capital is the first and last instance that determines reality. Despite this shortcoming, Decolonization and Empire does address the stark reality of southern Africa with clarity and compassion that calls upon us to reflect on current global hierarchical relations not just with suspicion, but also with the will to change the world for the better.

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Thakur’s analysis is driven by a wish to bridge the views of supporters of unilaterlalism (mainly voices from the United States) and supporters of a more multilateral approach. The latter camp would include those who are fearful of strong states intervening at will in weaker states. Therefore the UN’s relationships with the United States on the one hand, and with developing countries on the other, occupy a central place in the book. Thakur takes seriously the political divisions between UN member states, most particularly those arising from the efforts by developing countries to influence the global peace and security discourse. Such an engagement makes this book a valuable resource for those who study Africa or the global south.

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countries. These states, having experienced apartheid and colonisation, feel resentment that they do not have more of a say on matters of trade, development, democracy and human rights. (5) Rule of law. For Thakur, reform is necessary to protect and democratisethe UN.

Taken together the chapters in the book explore a wide range of topics that provide extensive discussion and illustration of his arguments. However, by addressing more directly the five themes in each of the subsequent chapters, his study could have gained in explanatory power. If Thakur is hoping to contribute to a resolution to the UN’s crisis of legitimacy by explaining why multilateralism matters, case study-based chapters might have offered more opportunity to illustrate the benefits of his claims. Case studies might have investigated the drivers and mechanisms of how certain failures erode the UN’s credibility and legitimacy and why reform is ultimately valuable for both North and South. This would no doubt have required him to reduce the scope and breadth of his enquiry and to set out what his perspective on legitimacy is. In one place, he mentions Inis Claude’s collective legitimisation framework (p. 6) and his high esteem for the UN ‘as the principal provider of international security’, (p. 6). In another his worldview seems surprisingly realist (p. 64). In addition to the existing and incisive chapters on reform, case studies might have included the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ doctrine (r2p) and Kosovo, as well as an extended analysis of the US-intervention in Iraq in 2003 showing why the UN-US relationship is so critical. How does the danger of delegitimising the UN enjoin the developed and the under-developed world?

Other case studies that seem important for his overall argument are the UN’s many disappointing experiences in Africa. Africa warrants more attention since an estimated 60 per cent of the UN Security Council’s time is spent on African issues. The UN’s challenges with civil wars on the continent have played a role in the normative development of the r2p: in 1998 Kofi Annan stated that protecting African civilians was a ‘humanitarian imperative’ (UN 1998, para 49). At the same time, it is where the decentralisation trend of international peace and security has been most tested. What did the experiences in Somalia and inaction in Rwanda mean for the UN’s legitimacy and role as primary collective legitimising forum? Thakur discusses the UN Security Council’s failures in regard to the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the divisions on the Council concerning mass atrocities in Darfur in 2003–2004. Yet, the importance of these cases for his argument might have been more clearly drawn out. The UN’s involvement in Africa has led wide audiences to hotly contest the legitimacy of the UN Security Council as ultimately responsible for international peace and security.

Overall, this book contains an important message for those who are cynical that reforming the UN will make a difference. It is well written and engaging, and Thakur is to be congratulated for taking such a clear and well-substantiated position. His analysis has profoundly challenged UN-cynics to present a better alternative for rule-based global politics.

Reference


Since the appearance of Citizen and Subject, Mahmood Mamdani has taken on the unique part of a public intellectual and critical observer of the African scene at the highest level with a foot in New York surveying Western perceptions and another grounded on the African continent. He has intervened in debates on South Africa, Rwanda and now Sudan, apart from writing about Muslims and the West in the contemporary conjuncture. There is no doubt more to come on Zimbabwe from shorter writings that have already evoked substantial controversy elsewhere but, at the level of the full-length book, it is now his thoughts on Sudan that are reaching the spotlight.

There are essentially three related parts to this study. First, Mamdani looks at the Save Darfur Movement and explores the significance of enthusiasm for Western military invasion of this region in the very heart of Africa, based on making a case that the violence in Darfur was (is?) genocidal. Second, he devotes time and attention to Sudanese history in order to explore the actual roots of conflict in Darfur. Finally, he returns to the international context and the current prospects raised by the ICC demand for the arrest of the President of Sudan on the ground of war crimes in Darfur.

Let us start with the middle. Not that serious historians of Sudan need to be told this, but Mamdani underscores the key point that Furs and Arabs in Darfur do not belong to different ‘races’, that Arabs in Sudan generally are not migrants from Arabia and that Arab identity which he calls essentially ‘political’ (p. 108) has many facets that have shifted over time and has existed for many centuries in this part of Africa. Racial antagonism can be dismissed as having anything to do with this conflict.

Instead, Mamdani finds a variety of causes jointly responsible. First is the colonial heritage, and here predictably he harks back to the Citizen and Subject binary. Under British rule, legitimate identity in Darfur revolved around ethnicity. Of course, in that time, light-skinned Arabs were defined as better than Africans and deserving of more consideration. However, in Darfur it was the sedentary Fur who had collectively access to a dar – to land, unlike many of the nomadic, often Arabic speaking, pastoral peoples. The second stimulus to conflict lay in the long drought which virtually forced Sahelian camel nomads to abandon their usual territorial haunts and made access to more fertile and southern portions of Darfur compelling. Third came the evolution of regional entanglements, in particular long-term instability in neighbouring Chad, another huge and yet much less well-known country afflicted by drought, where close links exist between some of the Darfuri rebels and the Chad regime and from where many refugees came to live with closely aligned communities in Darfur. The possibility of assistance and refuge across the border stimulated the possibility for rebellion. Here as elsewhere in Africa, regional rivalries and
alliances fed into Cold War plots and proxy wars. Some nomadic groups were thus obviously available for mayhem to forces both in N‘Djamena and Khartoum.

Finally, there is the question of the narrow, undemocratic nature of the Sudanese state itself where power has overwhelmingly always rested on cliques with ‘tribal’ ties from the middle Nile valley. This has been challenged to some extent if unsuccessfully on an Islamist basis, but this of course cannot speak to the country’s large Christian minority. The conflict between north and south in the Sudan has unhinged the whole country, inevitably influencing other contradictions into breaking out in open rebellion. It is a central contention in Mamdani’s argument that the extreme violence that climaxed in 2003/04 in Darfur came out of earlier strife that had its roots in conflict within Darfur itself; the apparently Machiavellian role played by the Bashir government in Khartoum has been more opportunistic than causative by this line of argument.

All these factors are convincingly real, although it is not quite clear to me why camel nomads would choose to re-establish themselves in agricultural areas without proposing to change their way of life, but then I am a sceptic in general towards environmentally determinist explanations in history and politics. However, the greatest problem with this assessment analytically is that Mamdani makes so little of the reality that ethnic and racial determinism, based on a poor assessment of real historical processes, while undoubtedly typical of colonial analysis, has (as in Rwanda) been internalised and seized on with alacrity by strong local forces for quite some time. It is the academic ‘doyen’ of historical studies in the Sudan, Yusuf Fadl Hasan, who lives most easily with the Harold MacMichael version of Sudanese history as Mamdani mentions, but then he represents the dominant intelligentsia of Khartoum. Arabic speaking nomads in Darfur have never claimed to be fighting a racial crusade or religious jihad; it was Fur spokesmen in the late 1980s who painted their conflict with cattle and camel nomads in starkly racial terms to suit their own position (and no doubt court influential foreign friends) as they became more and more alienated from central authority in Khartoum. Herein lies the problem of ethnic interpretation, not in its imperial origins as an argument. It is the Sudanese themselves who have yet to face the world convincingly as citizens.

Sudanese history is multi-faceted and complex and Mamdani at most gives us an aperçu of a great many events and issues; he is not really at odds with current scholarship on which his analysis largely depends. Much of the power of this book comes rather from Mamdani’s very justifiable frustration at the wilful and truly stupid ignorance of Westerners as they seek to define crises in Africa in liberal ‘humanitarian’ terms that can be applied anywhere and which exist in defiance of politics and history where racial thinking, however condemned, is still the intellectual comfort zone.

For Americans, Darfur is a place without history and without politics—simply a place where perpetrators clearly identifiable as ‘Arabs’ confront victims clearly identifiable as ‘Africans’ (p. 60).

He lays into the mischief brought about by the naive search for ‘causes’ by Hollywood and other celebrities and acutely shows how this falls into the hands of the powers that be. The genocide charge, almost impossible to apply to Darfur seriously after 2004 for a variety of reasons, creates a way of thinking where assessment of the real politics in a very complex ethnic soup, with many forces fighting and frequently realigning themselves, is made impossible. It does have to be granted that some of what is so wrong here is not just manipulation of
emotions in the interests of powerful forces but also the way the media create a kind of pseudo-politics. As Mamdani says, the Save Darfur Movement was a very successful organised popular movement; the state did not originate it. I note in a recent magazine article that the crème de la crème of the film world of Spain are currently en route to the refugee camps of the Algerian Sahara to create a film festival atmosphere for the Sahrawis – once, if briefly, Spanish subjects. Here victims and perpetrators are Arabic speaking and somewhat white . . . but the genre is really the same and it also needs a less innocent gaze cast on it.

The demand for a crusade against evil Arab genocide, however unlikely to be put into practice in the Sudan, has now tended to give way to the equally stupid notion of arresting Omar Hasan Ahmad al-Bashir, the Sudanese President, for Darfur war crimes through the misuse of the International Criminal Court. Indeed, it is al-Bashir who is now blamed for racialising the situation! This in a world where Americans think they have a right to democratically vote into office transparently much greater war criminals such as Bush or Cheney who are then permitted to retreat to their luxury lairs once out of office or where a Tony Blair, after invading a country posing not the slightest danger to his own on supposedly mistaken information, instead of being locked away for the rest of his days, is passed on from high political office in Britain to become the man to negotiate peace between Israelis and Palestinians! Al-Bashir is hardly an innocent party but, as Mamdani says, the only way to a better outcome is ‘not to shun justice but to explore forms of justice that will help end rather than prolong conflicts’ (p. 286). Detaching ‘war crimes’ from ‘underlying political reality’ is not the way to go.

He is also a very sympathetic observer of the AU efforts in Darfur which he feels demonstrate far more instinct for what kind of negotiations could bring about peace and who need far more support but of course this intervention rests, as he knows, on a very weak financial foundation. For the moment, Darfur is quieter due in good part to a large outsider troop presence. Mamdani suggests that the Darfur war has become one with direct implications for the remaking of the Sudan and probably cannot be resolved short of engaging with that larger process, itself linked especially to what happens between north and south. At one level, this is convincing; Sudan is a country which cannot go forward without a reconstruction of the colonial inheritance, but this remains a rather abstract assessment. How then do we deal with the Khartoum regime as it really is? Can one really bring together into a new citizenship the fighting fragments of Darfur which have imploded since 2004? Can one see the Sudanese emancipating themselves from the grooves into which imperial categories once gathered them? Perhaps the most depressing thing in the book is his admission in places that Sudanese themselves are inclined to fall for the humanitarian trope and pray for Western intervention in desperation as an African way out seems remote or unattainable. Mamdani’s insistence on a negotiated solution, an African solution that lays all legitimate grievances on the table, is nonetheless certainly a very useful starting position for reopening the discussion.

Reference


Matthias Basedau, Gero Erdmann and Andreas Mehler’s edited volume grew out of the Thematic Conference of the Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies (AEGIS) organised by the Institute of African Affairs of the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA), 22–23 May 2003. The book seeks to take ‘a second look at the role of elections as a basic instrument for regulating political competition in Africa’ (p. 7). This seems a valid concern, given the abysmal failure of previous electoral waves in Africa, the widespread scepticism that attended the return of electoral politics under the third wave of democratisation, and the weak institutionalisation of political parties and electoral systems. These and related issues constitute the core concerns of the book.

In what looks like his personal reminiscences, E. Gyimah-Boadi sets the ball rolling with a critical dissection of how entrenched neo-patrimonialism, manifest in the legacies of authoritarianism and the domination of parties by ‘godfathers’ as well as widespread vote-buying and choiceless elections, has been inimical to the democratisation process in Africa. The widespread scepticism that attended the return of electoral politics under the third wave of democratisation, and the weak institutionalisation of political parties and electoral systems. These and related issues constitute the core concerns of the book.

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functions, including blocking, aggregation and translation; and the nexus with the choice of electoral system. He then applies the typologies to African realities, showing how electoral choices in Africa vary under different party systems, and exploring how these models underline the role of ethnic politics in different contexts. Andreas Mehler explores the links between political parties and violence in Africa, drawing illustrations from six countries. He develops an instrumental view of violence as a political means and as an expression of grievance. He then attempts an exposition on factors favouring or constraining violence, including cleavages, institutional conditions, and state weakness, all of which combine well to determine the resort to violence by political parties. Liisa Laakso takes the issue of violence in Africa further, with her critical insights into electoral violence, buttressed by analysis of selected cases across the continent. She underscores how political transitions, poverty, and ethnic politics fuel electoral violence, as well as the mobilisation of ex-warlords for advancing the electoral interests of the ruling party.

The last substantive chapter, by Paul Nugent, is a critical reflection on the place of money as a political resource in the electoral process. Using the Ghanaian experience under the Fourth Republic, Nugent argues that money can be a political asset or liability depending on how it is deployed and managed. While money is central to contests over political power, it only becomes meaningful if properly converted into a source of moral authority, the absence of which may produce allegations of vote-buying and related electoral frauds. In the concluding chapter the editors recapitulate the main submissions of the book under three rubrics: political parties, party systems, voters and elections.

The overarching concern with the comparative method may have created a related problem of its own: the neglect of country case studies and the tendency to over-generalise. Out of ten substantive chapters only two (those by Gyimah-Boadi and Nugent) are country specific, and both address the Ghanaian situation. More country-specific case studies, especially on Nigeria and South Africa, two sub-regional heavy-weights on the continent, would have strengthened the book’s contribution. Nevertheless, this reservation does not detract substantially from the overall quality of the book, which provides a significant contribution to the comparative analysis of political parties and elections in Africa, with a good blend of theory and practice.


This rather ambitious volume brings together a variety of disparate, although related areas of analysis, together with three substantial case studies, in an examination of how neoliberal policies have played out in Africa over the last 25 or more years. The first four chapters present what might be termed a discourse analysis of neoliberal development thinking, tracing how that discourse has periodically transformed itself in order to maintain its legitimacy despite the numerous failures associated with it, notably the continued marginalisation of Africa. The case studies trace the influence of this neoliberal model of globalisation in the development of three disparate countries, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and South Africa, giving full weight to the role of internal forces and conditions in shaping development outcomes in the respective...
cases. The final chapter explicitly deals with an issue that has been implicit throughout the book, this being the security agenda that has been set by the events of 11 September and its implications for globalisation and development.

In the chapters dealing with neoliberalism as a discourse Carmody presents us with something like a genealogy of neoliberal development theory, observing how the failure of early shock therapy models of structural adjustment led to the introduction of civil society and governance issues into the discursive framework. This has in turn led to the World Bank’s adoption of participation in the context of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Of course, phenomena such as civil society have been incorporated in such a way that they support rather than challenge the basic tenets of neoliberalism. Thus, civil society is not conceived in Gramscian terms, as an arena where different class and social groups confront each other, but rather in terms of Dahlian pluralism in which a variety of interest groups compete on a roughly even basis to ensure state responsiveness to their needs. In this way civil society is seen as having an intrinsic propensity towards the distribution of political power, which mirrors the neoliberal view of the market as the most efficient means of distributing resources in accordance with needs. Carmody notes how any forces that might contest this harmonious view of political economy are defined out of civil society, notably trade unions, which are dismissed as rent seeking organisations that distort the market. This enables neoliberals to argue that promotion of civil societies in Africa will promote a form of good governance that will be supportive of market policies and to elide class based social differences that may be exacerbated by the market project. Notably, such a framing of the problem completely ignores market propensities to economic concentration and class differentiation.

A central element of Carmody’s critique of neoliberal discourse concerns how it appropriates concepts such as civil society and social capital in such a way as to empty them of political content. If such awkward factors as differential class power (and the role of the market in constitution of such differences) are left out of account, development becomes a relatively straightforward enterprise of efficiently governing society in accordance with market logic and enhancing social capital so that the poor can take advantage of the opportunities the market offers them. This vision not only fails to factor in local social differences, but also ignores international power differences and the disadvantageous way in which neoliberal globalisation incorporates most African states into the international system. Of course, this apolitical conceptualisation of development is unable to deliver substantial benefits to the African poor. However, Carmody provides an informative discussion of how neoliberal discourse has been able to adapt and legitimise itself in the face of continued failure to achieve any substantive development gains.

The case studies are well researched and provide some interesting insights as in the Zimbabwean case study where Carmody shows how the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme helped create the conditions for the later collapse of the economy. The South African case study also throws interesting light on the way in which neoliberalism has been embedded into the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). However, the concentration on the specifics of the cases perhaps led to an attenuation of the analytical focus and coherence that had been evident in the examination of neoliberal discourse in the first four chapters. If anything, this is exacerbated by the final chapter, which introduces the issue of security into the equation. Carmody’s final plea for a US embrace of a new global compact that will enhance its security through delivery
of social investments to Africa does not sit entirely comfortably with his earlier analysis of an intransigent highly adaptable neoliberal discourse that legitimates the subordinate incorporation of Africa into an unequal global system. Ironically, events since the publication of this book, inclusive of the economic meltdown, the associated crisis of market discourse and the election of Obama may make the prospects for a slightly more caring and sharing US government seem a little more hopeful. However, the cogency of Carmody’s analysis of the resilience of neoliberal discourse should caution us against raising our hopes too high.


In the late colonial period and the immediate post-independence era (1950–70), analyses of North African politics tended towards elite studies. This movement was superseded by ‘neo-institutionalism’, which insisted on the state’s autonomous and pre-eminent power within political systems. In the field of Algeria studies in the 1980s, the institutionalist or political economy approach soon became dominant, especially rentier theory. At its best, rentier theory in Algeria demonstrated the co-constitutive relationship between those state actors who control distribution of hydrocarbon revenues and the political and economic institutions that shape such distribution. In Isabelle Werenfels’ Managing Instability in Algeria: Elites and political change since 1995 we have gone back to the future. As the subtitle suggests, Werenfels (a researcher at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs) is very much interested in ‘bringing the man back in’. By using elite theorisations, Werenfels seeks to explain Algeria’s simultaneous emergence from civil war at the turn of the millennium and the total lack of ‘profound political change in Algeria after 1995’ (pp. 4–5). However, Werenfels’ study is not a return to the old days of elite studies; her approach is hybridised and fits within the institutional turn (p. 27). ‘Control and distribution of hydrocarbon rent’, Werenfels notes, ‘not only presented the core elite with an important instrument of power but also presented a weak point in its rule, for control of the volatile oil price was not in its hands’ (p. 6).

Managing Instability is surely one of the best books yet written on Algeria’s slow transition from violent armed conflict in the 1990s to the (mostly) non-violent modes of political conflict of today. Werenfels’ study is also an erudite examination of the political challenges and triumphs of the first term (1999–2004) of Algeria’s President, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, a man widely – although disputably – credited with taming the armed conflict. This richly detailed and expertly researched account of a critical period in Algeria’s recent history is required reading for anyone attempting to understand Algeria since 2000. It will also be of interest to scholars studying the democracy problematic in developing countries or theorists looking for empirical data that contributes towards an understanding of the interplay between agents and structures. Although Managing Instability ends in early 2004, it is highly relevant in light of today’s political manoeuvrings in Algeria and contextualises Bouteflika’s third term victory in 2009.

The argument unfolds in a straightforward manner: theory (chapter one), methodology (two), historical context

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(three), analysis (four through six) and conclusion. The primary source data – over 100 interviews with members of what Werenfels terms ‘the politically relevant elite’ – is what sets this study apart (see p. 194, note 5). The Algerian Government is a very difficult terrain to study – bureaucratic inertia, personal security concerns, widespread conspiratorial suspicion of Western motivations are just some of the problems. At the time when Werenfels was conducting her research (c.2002), the security situation for foreigners was still considered risky by many Western governments. The fact that Werenfels’ study even happened, not to mention was so successful, is impressive.

Werenfels’ story is set during the darkest period of Algeria’s history since independence from France in 1962. She chooses 1995 as year zero, when a civilian head of state was elected after three years of rule by a military junta. This date might seem a strange choice; most observers date Algeria’s recent instability – the civil war – to either 1988 (when massive anti-regime demonstrations led to elections) or 1992 (when the military annulled those elections won handily by the Islamic Salvation Front or FIS). Although the worst atrocities of the Algerian civil war took place during Werenfels’ timeframe, her account is surprisingly bloodless. There is scant mention of even the worst atrocities of the war that drew international condemnation and calls for intervention in late 1997 and early 1998. Managing Instability (p. 48) attributes the drop in violence – rather uncritically – to Bouteflika’s 1999 amnesty program (Concorde civile) without exploring the obvious explanatory candidates (e.g. rising oil revenues).

However, this line of critique is unfair given Werenfels’ intended framing. Managing Instability is a not a thesis on war termination but an account of established, emerging and expanding elites (each contextualised by background and attitudes) navigating the difficult transition away from the widespread political violence of the 1990s. Werenfels’ sense of Algeria’s instability is a more generalised understanding of a state whose regime is still far from re-consolidated. Werenfels wants us to see beyond security issues; instability, she contends, has become a kind of lubricant that allows the machine to function: ‘The situation could thus be best described with the oxymoron “equilibrium of instability”’ (p. 5).

For the most part, Managing Instability does not deviate from the basic framework for understanding the functioning of political power in Algeria shared by both foreign and domestic analysts. What makes Werenfels’ contribution novel is her account and explanation of the ways in which Algeria’s authoritarian regime has become more democratised (p. 155). The distension of new groups into elite circles, Werenfels argues, not only helps explain Algeria’s mixed passage from ambiguous civil war to uneasy ‘peace’, but it also bodes ill for hopes that Algeria is on a path to a transparent and accountable government.


The common view of the state of the African continent – especially its southern part – is a grim one. Hardly anyone would deny the persistence of diverse crises in this part of the world.
Diseases, illiteracy, violence, hunger and underdevelopment are problems that so many times form a negative image of Africa. Despite countless developmental strategies, plans and propositions, which allegedly should have put the continent on track to a brighter future, Africa remains mired in tragedy. John Saul’s book *Decolonization and Empire: Contesting the Rhetoric and Reality of Resubordination in Southern Africa and Beyond* tries to discern the causes of this unpleasant (to say the least) reality for most of southern Africa. The author’s main task is to analyse historical and current socio-political developments and systemic arrangements for the continent’s resubordination by what Saul terms ‘the Empire of Capital’, which still produces inequalities and injustices. What is more, Saul does not just reveal the functioning of (neo)liberal interventions, but also sets himself an enormous task: how to think about what, in these times of prevailing ruthless capitalist logic, seems almost unthinkable – forms of resistance to the Empire of Capital.

The decolonisation process in southern Africa has been celebrated as a new beginning, which would bring freedom and just conditions to the African people. Although by no means a homogenous process, Saul frames decolonisation in this part of the world as what he calls ‘the thirty years’ war for southern African liberation’ (from around 1960–90). The beginning of the decolonisation era is marked by Ghana’s independence in 1957, and little more than three decades later this period of liberation struggle is marked by the fall of South Africa’s apartheid system. Within this framework the author identifies three ‘broad fronts of political assertion, which were available to southern Africans as they came to heightened political consciousness’ (p. 24). These are the race war, anti-colonial African nationalism and the social/socialist revolution. The author shows, through the cases of Mozambique and South Africa, how each of these fronts became a focus around which Africans organised struggles against colonialists and, as such, were also triggers for mobilising the masses. Decolonisation, however, did not live up to the expectations of many, but rather regressed to something we could call (Saul here follows Frantz Fanon) ‘false decolonization’ (p. 41). The key problem was that liberation brought too little of substance, especially in economic terms, for the vast majority of the population. Instead of being a new emancipating political strategy, decolonisation gradually turned into its exact opposite: ever-deeper resubordination to Western capitalism. As Saul describes it, recolonisation is ‘an ongoing process of reinforced ‘Western’ capitalist ascendancy that has characterized Africa … and also many other parts of the global south’ (p. 69).

To show the logic behind the prevailing capitalist discourses, the book interprets prominent ideologues of the global neoliberal capitalist order, with special attention to Niall Ferguson and Michael Ignatieff. Both thinkers see the (neo)liberal empire as the best possible solution for societies, because this Empire’s *modus operandi* is ‘one that enhances its own security and prosperity precisely by providing the rest of the world with generally beneficial public goods’ (p. 93). Thus, the Empire of Capital is not based solely on the idea of logic of free market but also relies on the idea of humanitarism.

In light of the ever more pervading Empire of Capital, Saul poses himself, in a Leninist manner, an obvious question: ‘What is to be done?’ (p. 125). How do we resist and contest global capital? How do we oppose this unjust reality that affects many people in different parts of the world? The author opts for a transformative project, which should mean a revival of socialist practices. Among other presented propositions, the crucial one is ‘the goal of collective ownership of the means of production by a democratically empowered and self-conscious majority
of the affected population’ (p. 133). The last part provides a critical reflection on the book’s central themes. Saul once again summarizes, by interpreting the cases of Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa, why socialist projects in these countries were more or less unsuccessful and why decolonisation was false, and deviated into subordination to capital.

Although Saul’s critique of the currently dispiriting situation in southern Africa is insightful, it includes some problematic analytical undertakings, the most obvious being the use of the concept of the Empire of Capital. The author does explain briefly his understanding and use of this concept at the book’s beginning, but it nevertheless persists in the text as ontologically finite and, above all, omnipotent. The latter is especially dubious because it seems that capital is the first and last instance that determines reality. Despite this shortcoming, Decolonization and Empire does address the stark reality of southern Africa with clarity and compassion that calls upon us to reflect on current global hierarchical relations not just with suspicion, but also with the will to change the world for the better.

Thakur’s analysis is driven by a wish to bridge the views of supporters of unilateralism (mainly voices from the United States) and supporters of a more multilateral approach. The latter camp would include those who are fearful of strong states intervening at will in weaker states. Therefore the UN’s relationships with the United States on the one hand, and with developing countries on the other, occupy a central place in the book. Thakur takes seriously the political divisions between UN member states, most particularly those arising from the efforts by developing countries to influence the global peace and security discourse. Such an engagement makes this book a valuable resource for those who study Africa or the global south.


The United Nations, Peace and Security is an authoritative acclamation of the UN as the best available forum for the pursuit of multilateralism (p. 345). Ramesh Thakur’s analysis is driven by a wish to bridge the views of supporters of unilateralism (mainly voices from the United States) and supporters of a more multilateral approach. The latter camp would include those who are fearful of strong states intervening at will in weaker states. Therefore the UN’s relationships with the United States on the one hand, and with developing countries on the other, occupy a central place in the book. Thakur takes seriously the political divisions between UN member states, most particularly those arising from the efforts by developing countries to influence the global peace and security discourse. Such an engagement makes this book a valuable resource for those who study Africa or the global south.

Thakur centres on five themes in the introduction and conclusion: (1) Guidelines on the use of force. He observes that the war in Iraq divided the UN membership over the issue of use of force; the Iraq war supporters were disappointed that the UN did not bless the attempt to put an end to a brutal regime and the many more countries that opposed the war were disappointed that the UN did not stop a war of aggression by the major powers against a smaller state. He then makes the case that the UN has broadened its role: from dealing with inter-state wars to considering equally important the prevention of mass atrocities. (2) The distinction between legitimacy and legality. Since unilateral intervention has had negative humanitarian consequences most often in developing countries, Thakur argues that the UN remains the best available rule-based system for conflict management. (3) The United States-UN relationship. The author asserts that the United States should value its relationship with the UN – and hence be more prepared to support its global norms. (4) The divide between industrialised and developing countries. In his view, the UN needs to both remain a relevant institution in the eyes of the United States amongst others, and to allow for influence for developing countries. In his view, the UN needs to both remain a relevant institution in the eyes of the United States amongst others, and to allow for influence for developing
countries. These states, having experienced apartheid and colonisation, feel resentment that they do not have more of a say on matters of trade, development, democracy and human rights. (5) Rule of law. For Thakur, reform is necessary to protect and democratis the UN.

Taken together the chapters in the book explore a wide range of topics that provide extensive discussion and illustration of his arguments. However, by addressing more directly the five themes in each of the subsequent chapters, his study could have gained in explanatory power. If Thakur is hoping to contribute to a resolution to the UN’s crisis of legitimacy by explaining why multilateralism matters, case study-based chapters might have offered more opportunity to illustrate the benefits of his claims. Case studies might have investigated the drivers and mechanisms of how certain failures erode the UN’s credibility and legitimacy and why reform is ultimately valuable for both North and South. This would no doubt have required him to reduce the scope and breadth of his enquiry and to set out what his perspective on legitimacy is. In one place, he mentions Inis Claude’s collective legitimisation framework (p. 6) and his high esteem for the UN ‘as the principal provider of international security’, (p. 6). In another his worldview seems surprisingly realist (p. 64). In addition to the existing and incisive chapters on reform, case studies might have included the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ doctrine (r2p) and Kosovo, as well as an extended analysis of the US-intervention in Iraq in 2003 showing why the UN-US relationship is so critical. How does the danger of delegitimising the UN enjoin the developed and the under-developed world?

Other case studies that seem important for his overall argument are the UN’s many disappointing experiences in Africa. Africa warrants more attention since an estimated 60 per cent of the UN Security Council’s time is spent on African issues. The UN’s challenges with civil wars on the continent have played a role in the normative development of the r2p: in 1998 Kofi Annan stated that protecting African civilians was a ‘humanitarian imperative’ (UN 1998, para 49). At the same time, it is where the decentralisation trend of international peace and security has been most tested. What did the experiences in Somalia and inaction in Rwanda mean for the UN’s legitimacy and role as primary collective legitimising forum? Thakur discusses the UN Security Council’s failures in regard to the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the divisions on the Council concerning mass atrocities in Darfur in 2003–2004. Yet, the importance of these cases for his argument might have been more clearly drawn out. The UN’s involvement in Africa has led wide audiences to hotly contest the legitimacy of the UN Security Council as ultimately responsible for international peace and security.

Overall, this book contains an important message for those who are cynical that reforming the UN will make a difference. It is well written and engaging, and Thakur is to be congratulated for taking such a clear and well-substantiated position. His analysis has profoundly challenged UN-cynics to present a better alternative for rule-based global politics.

Reference


Since the appearance of Citizen and Subject, Mahmood Mamdani has taken on the unique part of a public intellectual and critical observer of the African scene at the highest level with a foot in New York surveying Western perceptions and another grounded on the African continent. He has intervened in debates on South Africa, Rwanda and now Sudan, apart from writing about Muslims and the West in the contemporary conjuncture. There is no doubt more to come on Zimbabwe from shorter writings that have already evoked substantial controversy elsewhere but, at the level of the full-length book, it is now his thoughts on Sudan that are reaching the spotlight.

There are essentially three related parts to this study. First, Mamdani looks at the Save Darfur Movement and explores the significance of enthusiasm for Western military invasion of this region in the very heart of Africa, based on making a case that the violence in Darfur was (is?) genocidal. Second, he devotes time and attention to Sudanese history in order to explore the actual roots of conflict in Darfur. Finally, he returns to the international context and the current prospects raised by the ICC demand for the arrest of the President of Sudan on the ground of war crimes in Darfur.

Let us start with the middle. Not that serious historians of Sudan need to be told this, but Mamdani underscores the key point that Furs and Arabs in Darfur do not belong to different ‘races’, that Arabs in Sudan generally are not migrants from Arabia and that Arab identity which he calls essentially ‘political’ (p. 108) has many facets that have shifted over time and has existed for many centuries in this part of Africa. Racial antagonism can be dismissed as having anything to do with this conflict.

Instead, Mamdani finds a variety of causes jointly responsible. First is the colonial heritage, and here predictably he harks back to the Citizen and Subject binary. Under British rule, legitimate identity in Darfur revolved around ethnicity. Of course, in that time, light-skinned Arabs were defined as better than Africans and deserving of more consideration. However, in Darfur it was the sedentary Fur who had collectively access to a dar – to land, unlike many of the nomadic, often Arabic speaking, pastoral peoples. The second stimulus to conflict lay in the long drought which virtually forced Sahelian camel nomads to abandon their usual territorial haunts and made access to more fertile and southern portions of Darfur compelling. Third came the evolution of regional entanglements, in particular long-term instability in neighbouring Chad, another huge and yet much less well-known country afflicted by drought, where close links exist between some of the Darfuri rebels and the Chad regime and from where many refugees came to live with closely aligned communities in Darfur. The possibility of assistance and refuge across the border stimulated the possibility for rebellion. Here as elsewhere in Africa, regional rivalries and
alliances fed into Cold War plots and proxy wars. Some nomadic groups were thus obviously available for mayhem to forces both in N’Djamena and Khartoum.

Finally, there is the question of the narrow, undemocratic nature of the Sudanese state itself where power has overwhelmingly always rested on cliques with ‘tribal’ ties from the middle Nile valley. This has been challenged to some extent if unsuccessfully on an Islamist basis, but this of course cannot speak to the country’s large Christian minority. The conflict between north and south in the Sudan has unhinged the whole country, inevitably influencing other contradictions into breaking out in open rebellion. It is a central contention in Mamdani’s argument that the extreme violence that climaxed in 2003/04 in Darfur came out of earlier strife that had its roots in conflict within Darfur itself; the apparently Machiavellian role played by the Bashir government in Khartoum has been more opportunistic than causative by this line of argument.

All these factors are convincingly real, although it is not quite clear to me why camel nomads would choose to re-establish themselves in agricultural areas without proposing to change their way of life, but then I am a sceptic in general towards environmentally determinist explanations in history and politics. However, the greatest problem with this assessment analytically is that Mamdani makes so little of the reality that ethnic and racial determinism, based on a poor assessment of real historical processes, while undoubtedly typical of colonial analysis, has (as in Rwanda) been internalised and seized on with alacrity by strong local forces for quite some time. It is the academic ‘doyen’ of historical studies in the Sudan, Yusuf Fadl Hasan, who lives most easily with the Harold MacMichael version of Sudanese history as Mamdani mentions, but then he represents the dominant intelligentsia of Khartoum. Arabic speaking nomads in Darfur have never claimed to be fighting a racial crusade or religious jihad; it was Fur spokesmen in the late 1980s who painted their conflict with cattle and camel nomads in starkly racial terms to suit their own position (and no doubt court influential foreign friends) as they became more and more alienated from central authority in Khartoum. Herein lies the problem of ethnic interpretation, not in its imperial origins as an argument. It is the Sudanese themselves who have yet to face the world convincingly as citizens.

Sudanese history is multi-faceted and complex and Mamdani at most gives us an aperçu of a great many events and issues; he is not really at odds with current scholarship on which his analysis largely depends. Much of the power of this book comes rather from Mamdani’s very justifiable frustration at the wilful and truly stupid ignorance of Westerners as they seek to define crises in Africa in liberal ‘humanitarian’ terms that can be applied anywhere and which exist in defiance of politics and history where racial thinking, however condemned, is still the intellectual comfort zone.

For Americans, Darfur is a place without history and without politics—simply a place where perpetrators clearly identifiable as ‘Arabs’ confront victims clearly identifiable as ‘Africans’ (p. 60).

He lays into the mischief brought about by the naive search for ‘causes’ by Hollywood and other celebrities and acutely shows how this falls into the hands of the powers that be. The genocide charge, almost impossible to apply to Darfur seriously after 2004 for a variety of reasons, creates a way of thinking where assessment of the real politics in a very complex ethnic soup, with many forces fighting and frequently realigning themselves, is made impossible. It does have to be granted that some of what is so wrong here is not just manipulation of
emotions in the interests of powerful forces but also the way the media create a kind of pseudo-politics. As Mamdani says, the Save Darfur Movement was a very successful organised popular movement; the state did not originate it. I note in a recent magazine article that the crème de la crème of the film world of Spain are currently en route to the refugee camps of the Algerian Sahara to create a film festival atmosphere for the Sahrawis – once, if briefly, Spanish subjects. Here victims and perpetrators are Arabic speaking and somewhat white...but the genre is really the same and it also needs a less innocent gaze cast on it.

The demand for a crusade against evil Arab genocide, however unlikely to be put into practice in the Sudan, has now tended to give way to the equally stupid notion of arresting Omar Hasan Ahmad al-Bashir, the Sudanese President, for Darfur war crimes through the misuse of the International Criminal Court. Indeed, it is al-Bashir who is now blamed for racialising the situation! This in a world where Americans think they have a right to democratically vote into office transparently much greater war criminals such as Bush or Cheney who are then permitted to retreat to their luxury lairs once out of office or where a Tony Blair, after invading a country posing not the slightest danger to his own on supposedly mistaken information, instead of being locked away for the rest of his days, is passed on from high political office in Britain to become the man to negotiate peace between Israelis and Palestinians! Al-Bashir is hardly an innocent party but, as Mamdani says, the only way to a better outcome is ‘not to shun justice but to explore forms of justice that will help end rather than prolong conflicts’ (p. 286). Detaching ‘war crimes’ from ‘underlying political reality’ is not the way to go.

He is also a very sympathetic observer of the AU efforts in Darfur which he feels demonstrate far more instinct for what kind of negotiations could bring about peace and who need far more support but of course this intervention rests, as he knows, on a very weak financial foundation. For the moment, Darfur is quieter due in good part to a large outsider troop presence. Mamdani suggests that the Darfur war has become one with direct implications for the remaking of the Sudan and probably cannot be resolved short of engaging with that larger process, itself linked especially to what happens between north and south. At one level, this is convincing; Sudan is a country which cannot go forward without a reconstruction of the colonial inheritance, but this remains a rather abstract assessment. How then do we deal with the Khartoum regime as it really is? Can one really bring together into a new citizenship the fighting fragments of Darfur which have imploded since 2004? Can one see the Sudanese emancipating themselves from the grooves into which imperial categories once gathered them? Perhaps the most depressing thing in the book is his admission in places that Sudanese themselves are inclined to fall for the humanitarian trope and pray for Western intervention in desperation as an African way out seems remote or unattainable. Mamdani’s insistence on a negotiated solution, an African solution that lays all legitimate grievances on the table, is nonetheless certainly a very useful starting position for reopening the discussion.

Reference

Matthias Basedau, Gero Erdmann and Andreas Mehler’s edited volume grew out of the Thematic Conference of the Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies (AEGIS) organised by the Institute of African Affairs of the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA), 22–23 May 2003. The book seeks to take ‘a second look at the role of elections as a basic instrument for regulating political competition in Africa’ (p. 7). This seems a valid concern, given the abysmal failure of previous electoral waves in Africa, the widespread scepticism that attended the return of electoral politics under the third wave of democratisation, and the weak institutionalisation of political parties and electoral systems. These and related issues constitute the core concerns of the book.

In what looks like his personal reminiscences, E. Gyimah-Boadi sets the ball rolling with a critical dissection of how entrenched neo-patrimonialism, manifest in the legacies of authoritarianism and the domination of parties by ‘godfathers’ as well as widespread vote-buying and choiceless elections, has been inimical to the democratisation process in Africa. This is followed by Gero Erdmann’s useful essay on party research in comparative western European and African experience. While underscoring this literature’s dominant focus on the West, he argues that the established party research approach could be applied in a modified way to political parties in Africa. He identifies various universal typologies and possible areas of application in Africa. Peter Burnell’s piece is a response to Erdmann. After a critical reflection on the justifications for Erdmann’s study, he raises further important areas for party research in Africa, including ethnic-based parties, informal politics and neo-patrimonialism. Vicky Randall investigates another crucial dimension of political parties in Africa: the representation of social groups. This is important given the fact that democracy is essentially a form of government where various associative groups and interests should be represented. After a theoretical exposition on the concept of representation and the relationship with political parties, Randall explores the situation in the African context, reflecting on the travails of ethnic-based parties, and the under-representation of civil society organisations and women due to a number of reasons, including ‘the adoption of neoliberal economic policies’ (p. 94). The chapter includes helpful discussion of policy and research implications. In a comparative study of 28 Sub-Saharan African countries, Mathias Basedau interrogates the relationship between party systems and democracy. Interestingly, the application of his classificatory scheme for party system characteristics and democracy, drawn from the literature, leads to a theory-refuting conclusion: ‘it is not the combined functionalist model but – in other studies widely untested – polarisation alone that distinguishes democratic and non-democratic party systems most significantly’ (p. 132). Christof Hartmann explores possible paths to electoral reform in Africa. The strength of the chapter lies in its historical insight and the robustness of its typologies of electoral reforms in Africa, most notably institutional conservatism, path-dependent change and path change. For Hartmann, the desirable path of reform is one that allows for popular inclusion, that is, a proportional representation electoral system. Matthijs Bogaards discusses the link between electoral systems, party systems and ethnicity in Africa. He opens with an analysis of party system

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functions, including blocking, aggregation and translation; and the nexus with the choice of electoral system. He then applies the typologies to African realities, showing how electoral choices in Africa vary under different party systems, and exploring how these models underline the role of ethnic politics in different contexts. Andreas Mehler explores the links between political parties and violence in Africa, drawing illustrations from six countries. He develops an instrumental view of violence as a political means and as an expression of grievance. He then attempts an exposition on factors favouring or constraining violence, including cleavages, institutional conditions, and state weakness, all of which combine well to determine the resort to violence by political parties. Liisa Laakso takes the issue of violence in Africa further, with her critical insights into electoral violence, buttressed by analysis of selected cases across the continent. She underscores how political transitions, poverty, and ethnic politics fuel electoral violence, as well as the mobilisation of ex-warlords for advancing the electoral interests of the ruling party. The last substantive chapter, by Paul Nugent, is a critical reflection on the place of money as a political resource in the electoral process. Using the Ghanaian experience under the Fourth Republic, Nugent argues that money can be a political asset or liability depending on how it is deployed and managed. While money is central to contests over political power, it only becomes meaningful if properly converted into a source of moral authority, the absence of which may produce allegations of vote-buying and related electoral frauds. In the concluding chapter the editors recapitulate the main submissions of the book under three rubrics: political parties, party systems, voters and elections.

The overarching concern with the comparative method may have created a related problem of its own: the neglect of country case studies and the tendency to over-generalise. Out of ten substantive chapters only two (those by Gyimah-Boadi and Nugent) are country specific, and both address the Ghanaian situation. More country-specific case studies, especially on Nigeria and South Africa, two sub-regional heavy-weights on the continent, would have strengthened the book’s contribution. Nevertheless, this reservation does not detract substantially from the overall quality of the book, which provides a significant contribution to the comparative analysis of political parties and elections in Africa, with a good blend of theory and practice.


This rather ambitious volume brings together a variety of disparate, although related areas of analysis, together with three substantial case studies, in an examination of how neoliberal policies have played out in Africa over the last 25 or more years. The first four chapters present what might be termed a discourse analysis of neoliberal development thinking, tracing how that discourse has periodically transformed itself in order to maintain its legitimacy despite the numerous failures associated with it, notably the continued marginalisation of Africa. The case studies trace the influence of this neoliberal model of globalisation in the development of three disparate countries, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and South Africa, giving full weight to the role of internal forces and conditions in shaping development outcomes in the respective...
cases. The final chapter explicitly deals with an issue that has been implicit throughout the book, this being the security agenda that has been set by the events of 11 September and its implications for globalisation and development.

In the chapters dealing with neoliberalism as a discourse Carmody presents us with something like a genealogy of neoliberal development theory, observing how the failure of early shock therapy models of structural adjustment led to the introduction of civil society and governance issues into the discursive framework. This has in turn led to the World Bank’s adoption of participation in the context of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Of course, phenomena such as civil society have been incorporated in such a way that they support rather than challenge the basic tenets of neoliberalism. Thus, civil society is not conceived in Gramscian terms, as an arena where different class and social groups confront each other, but rather in terms of Dahlian pluralism in which a variety of interest groups compete on a roughly even basis to ensure state responsiveness to their needs. In this way civil society is seen as having an intrinsic propensity towards the distribution of political power, which mirrors the neoliberal view of the market as the most efficient means of distributing resources in accordance with needs. Carmody notes how any forces that might contest this harmonious view of political economy are defined out of civil society, notably trade unions, which are dismissed as rent seeking organisations that distort the market. This enables neoliberals to argue that promotion of civil societies in Africa will promote a form of good governance that will be supportive of market policies and to elide class based social differences that may be exacerbated by the market project. Notably, such a framing of the problem completely ignores market propensities to economic concentration and class differentiation.

A central element of Carmody’s critique of neoliberal discourse concerns how it appropriates concepts such as civil society and social capital in such a way as to empty them of political content. If such awkward factors as differential class power (and the role of the market in constitution of such differences) are left out of account, development becomes a relatively straightforward enterprise of efficiently governing society in accordance with market logic and enhancing social capital so that the poor can take advantage of the opportunities the market offers them. This vision not only fails to factor in local social differences, but also ignores international power differences and the disadvantageous way in which neoliberal globalisation incorporates most African states into the international system. Of course, this apolitical conceptualisation of development is unable to deliver substantial benefits to the African poor. However, Carmody provides an informative discussion of how neoliberal discourse has been able to adapt and legitimise itself in the face of continued failure to achieve any substantive development gains.

The case studies are well researched and provide some interesting insights as in the Zimbabwean case study where Carmody shows how the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme helped create the conditions for the later collapse of the economy. The South African case study also throws interesting light on the way in which neoliberalism has been embedded into the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). However, the concentration on the specifics of the cases perhaps led to an attenuation of the analytical focus and coherence that had been evident in the examination of neoliberal discourse in the first four chapters. If anything, this is exacerbated by the final chapter, which introduces the issue of security into the equation. Carmody’s final plea for a US embrace of a new global compact that will enhance its security through delivery
of social investments to Africa does not sit entirely comfortably with his earlier analysis of an intransigent highly adaptable neoliberal discourse that legitimates the subordinate incorporation of Africa into an unequal global system. Ironically, events since the publication of this book, inclusive of the economic meltdown, the associated crisis of market discourse and the election of Obama may make the prospects for a slightly more caring and sharing US government seem a little more hopeful. However, the cogency of Carmody’s analysis of the resilience of neoliberal discourse should caution us against raising our hopes too high.


In the late colonial period and the immediate post-independence era (1950–70), analyses of North African politics tended towards elite studies. This movement was superseded by ‘neo-institutionalism’, which insisted on the state’s autonomous and pre-eminent power within political systems. In the field of Algeria studies in the 1980s, the institutionalist or political economy approach soon became dominant, especially rentier theory. At its best, rentier theory in Algeria demonstrated the co-constitutive relationship between those state actors who control distribution of hydrocarbon revenues and the political and economic institutions that shape such distribution. In Isabelle Werenfels’ Managing Instability in Algeria: Elites and political change since 1995 we have gone back to the future. As the subtitle suggests, Werenfels (a researcher at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs) is very much interested in ‘bringing the man back in’. By using elite theorisations, Werenfels seeks to explain Algeria’s simultaneous emergence from civil war at the turn of the millennium and the total lack of ‘profound political change in Algeria after 1995’ (pp. 4–5). However, Werenfels’ study is not a return to the old days of elite studies; her approach is hybridised and fits within the institutional turn (p. 27). ‘Control and distribution of hydrocarbon rent’, Werenfels notes, ‘not only presented the core elite with an important instrument of power but also presented a weak point in its rule, for control of the volatile oil price was not in its hands’ (p. 6).

Managing Instability is surely one of the best books yet written on Algeria’s slow transition from violent armed conflict in the 1990s to the (mostly) non-violent modes of political conflict of today. Werenfels’ study is also an erudite examination of the political challenges and triumphs of the first term (1999–2004) of Algeria’s President, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, a man widely – although disputably – credited with taming the armed conflict. This richly detailed and expertly researched account of a critical period in Algeria’s recent history is required reading for anyone attempting to understand Algeria since 2000. It will also be of interest to scholars studying the democracy problematic in developing countries or theoreticians looking for empirical data that contributes towards an understanding of the interplay between agents and structures. Although Managing Instability ends in early 2004, it is highly relevant in light of today’s political manoeuvrings in Algeria and contextualises Bouteflika’s third term victory in 2009.

The argument unfolds in a straightforward manner: theory (chapter one), methodology (two), historical context
Werenfels’ story is set during the darkest period of Algeria’s history since independence from France in 1962. She chooses 1995 as year zero, when a civilian head of state was elected after three years of rule by a military junta. This date might seem a strange choice; most observers date Algeria’s recent instability – the civil war – to either 1988 (when massive anti-regime demonstrations led to elections) or 1992 (when the military annulled those elections won handily by the Islamic Salvation Front or FIS). Although the worst atrocities of the Algerian civil war took place during Werenfels’ timeframe, her account is surprisingly bloodless. There is scant mention of even the worst atrocities of the war that drew international condemnation and calls for intervention in late 1997 and early 1998. Managing Instability (p. 48) attributes the drop in violence – rather uncritically – to Bouteflika’s 1999 amnesty program (Concorde civile) without exploring the obvious explanatory candidates (e.g. rising oil revenues).

However, this line of critique is unfair given Werenfels’ intended framing. Managing Instability is a not a thesis on war termination but an account of established, emerging and expanding elites (each contextualised by background and attitudes) navigating the difficult transition away from the widespread political violence of the 1990s. Werenfels’ sense of Algeria’s instability is a more generalised understanding of a state whose regime is still far from re-consolidated. Werenfels wants us to see beyond security issues; instability, she contends, has become a kind of lubricant that allows the machine to function: ‘The situation could thus be best described with the oxymoron “equilibrium of instability”’ (p. 5).

For the most part, Managing Instability does not deviate from the basic framework for understanding the functioning of political power in Algeria shared by both foreign and domestic analysts. What makes Werenfels’ contribution novel is her account and explanation of the ways in which Algeria’s authoritarian regime has become more democratised (p. 155). The distension of new groups into elite circles, Werenfels argues, not only helps explain Algeria’s mixed passage from ambiguous civil war to uneasy ‘peace’, but it also bodes ill for hopes that Algeria is on a path to a transparent and accountable government.


The common view of the state of the African continent – especially its southern part – is a grim one. Hardly anyone would deny the persistence of diverse crises in this part of the world.
Diseases, illiteracy, violence, hunger and underdevelopment are problems that so many times form a negative image of Africa. Despite countless developmental strategies, plans and propositions, which allegedly should have put the continent on track to a brighter future, Africa remains mired in tragedy. John Saul’s book *Decolonization and Empire: Contesting the Rhetoric and Reality of Resubordination in Southern Africa and Beyond* tries to discern the causes of this unpleasant (to say the least) reality for most of southern Africa. The author’s main task is to analyse historical and current socio-political developments and systemic arrangements for the continent’s resubordination by what Saul terms ‘the Empire of Capital’, which still produces inequalities and injustices. What is more, Saul does not just reveal the functioning of (neo)liberal interventions, but also sets himself an enormous task: how to think about what, in these times of prevailing ruthless capitalist logic, seems almost unthinkable – forms of resistance to the Empire of Capital.

The decolonisation process in southern Africa has been celebrated as a new beginning, which would bring freedom and just conditions to the African people. Although by no means a homogenous process, Saul frames decolonisation in this part of the world as what he calls ‘the thirty years’ war for southern African liberation’ (from around 1960–90). The beginning of the decolonisation era is marked by Ghana’s independence in 1957, and little more than three decades later this period of liberation struggle is marked by the fall of South Africa’s apartheid system. Within this framework the author identifies three ‘broad fronts of political assertion, which were available to southern Africans as they came to heightened political consciousness’ (p. 24). These are the race war, anti-colonial African nationalism and the social/socialist revolution. The author shows, through the cases of Mozambique and South Africa, how each of these fronts became a focus around which Africans organised struggles against colonialists and, as such, were also triggers for mobilising the masses. Decolonisation, however, did not live up to the expectations of many, but rather regressed to something we could call (Saul here follows Frantz Fanon) ‘false decolonization’ (p. 41). The key problem was that liberation brought too little of substance, especially in economic terms, for the vast majority of the population. Instead of being a new emancipating political strategy, decolonisation gradually turned into its exact opposite: ever-deeper resubordination to Western capitalism. As Saul describes it, recolonisation is ‘an ongoing process of reinforced ‘Western’ capitalist ascendancy that has characterized Africa … and also many other parts of the global south’ (p. 69).

To show the logic behind the prevailing capitalist discourses, the book interprets prominent ideologues of the global neoliberal capitalist order, with special attention to Niall Ferguson and Michael Ignatieff. Both thinkers see the (neo)liberal empire as the best possible solution for societies, because this Empire’s *modus operandi* is ‘one that enhances its own security and prosperity precisely by providing the rest of the world with generally beneficial public goods’ (p. 93). Thus, the Empire of Capital is not based solely on the idea of logic of free market but also relies on the idea of humanitarianism.

In light of the ever more pervading Empire of Capital, Saul poses himself, in a Leninist manner, an obvious question: ‘What is to be done?’ (p. 125). How do we resist and contest global capital? How do we oppose this unjust reality that affects many people in different parts of the world? The author opts for a transformative project, which should mean a revival of socialist practices. Among other presented propositions, the crucial one is ‘the goal of collective ownership of the means of production by a democratically empowered and self-conscious majority
of the affected population’ (p. 133). The last part provides a critical reflection on the book’s central themes. Saul once again summarizes, by interpreting the cases of Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa, why socialist projects in these countries were more or less unsuccessful and why decolonisation was false, and deviated into subordination to capital.

Although Saul’s critique of the currently dispiriting situation in southern Africa is insightful, it includes some problematic analytical undertakings, the most obvious being the use of the concept of the Empire of Capital. The author does explain briefly his understanding and use of this concept at the book’s beginning, but it nevertheless persists in the text as ontologically finite and, above all, omnipotent. The latter is especially dubious because it seems that capital is the first and last instance that determines reality. Despite this shortcoming, Decolonization and Empire does address the stark reality of southern Africa with clarity and compassion that calls upon us to reflect on current global hierarchical relations not just with suspicion, but also with the will to change the world for the better.

Thakur’s analysis is driven by a wish to bridge the views of supporters of unilaterlistism (mainly voices from the United States) and supporters of a more multilateral approach. The latter camp would include those who are fearful of strong states intervening at will in weaker states. Therefore the UN’s relationships with the United States on the one hand, and with developing countries on the other, occupy a central place in the book. Thakur takes seriously the political divisions between UN member states, most particularly those arising from the efforts by developing countries to influence the global peace and security discourse. Such an engagement makes this book a valuable resource for those who study Africa or the global south.

Thakur centres on five themes in the introduction and conclusion: (1) Guidelines on the use of force. He observes that the war in Iraq divided the UN membership over the issue of use of force; the Iraq war supporters were disappointed that the UN did not bless the attempt to put an end to a brutal regime and the many more countries that opposed the war were disappointed that the UN did not stop a war of aggression by the major powers against a smaller state. He then makes the case that the UN has broadened its role: from dealing with inter-state wars to considering equally important the prevention of mass atrocities. (2) The distinction between legitimacy and legality. Since unilateral intervention has had negative humanitarian consequences most often in developing countries, Thakur argues that the UN remains the best available rule-based system for conflict management. (3) The United States-UN relationship. The author asserts that the United States should value its relationship with the UN – and hence be more prepared to support its global norms. (4) The divide between industrialised and developing countries. In his view, the UN needs to both remain a relevant institution in the eyes of the United States amongst others, and to allow for influence for developing
countries. These states, having experienced apartheid and colonisation, feel resentment that they do not have more of a say on matters of trade, development, democracy and human rights. (5) Rule of law. For Thakur, reform is necessary to protect and democratise the UN.

Taken together the chapters in the book explore a wide range of topics that provide extensive discussion and illustration of his arguments. However, by addressing more directly the five themes in each of the subsequent chapters, his study could have gained in explanatory power. If Thakur is hoping to contribute to a resolution to the UN’s crisis of legitimacy by explaining why multilateralism matters, case study-based chapters might have offered more opportunity to illustrate the benefits of his claims. Case studies might have investigated the drivers and mechanisms of how certain failures erode the UN’s credibility and legitimacy and why reform is ultimately valuable for both North and South. This would no doubt have required him to reduce the scope and breadth of his enquiry and to set out what his perspective on legitimacy is. In one place, he mentions Inis Claude’s collective legitimisation framework (p. 6) and his high esteem for the UN ‘as the principal provider of international security’, (p. 6). In another his worldview seems surprisingly realist (p. 64). In addition to the existing and incisive chapters on reform, case studies might have included the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ doctrine (r2p) and Kosovo, as well as an extended analysis of the US-intervention in Iraq in 2003 showing why the UN-US relationship is so critical. How does the danger of delegitimising the UN enjoin the developed and the under-developed world?

Other case studies that seem important for his overall argument are the UN’s many disappointing experiences in Africa. Africa warrants more attention since an estimated 60 per cent of the UN Security Council’s time is spent on African issues. The UN’s challenges with civil wars on the continent have played a role in the normative development of the r2p: in 1998 Kofi Annan stated that protecting African civilians was a ‘humanitarian imperative’ (UN 1998, para 49). At the same time, it is where the decentralisation trend of international peace and security has been most tested. What did the experiences in Somalia and inaction in Rwanda mean for the UN’s legitimacy and role as primary collective legitimising forum? Thakur discusses the UN Security Council’s failures in regard to the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the divisions on the Council concerning mass atrocities in Darfur in 2003–2004. Yet, the importance of these cases for his argument might have been more clearly drawn out. The UN’s involvement in Africa has led wide audiences to hotly contest the legitimacy of the UN Security Council as ultimately responsible for international peace and security.

Overall, this book contains an important message for those who are cynical that reforming the UN will make a difference. It is well written and engaging, and Thakur is to be congratulated for taking such a clear and well-substantiated position. His analysis has profoundly challenged UN-cynics to present a better alternative for rule-based global politics.

Reference

Against One-dimensional Africa

Graham Harrison & Reginald Cline-Cole

World Bank President Robert Zoellick recently wrote in Uganda’s main independent newspaper:

The financial crisis has wounded Africa. But Africans’ vision for the future has remained resilient: They seek energy, infrastructure, agricultural development, regional integration linked to global trade and markets, and a dynamic private sector. . . . For states coming out of conflicts, the challenge is ‘securing development’ – through a reinforcing mix of peace and order, governance, economy, and legitimacy. (http://allafrica.com/stories/200909010510.html)

One could replace the first sentence with any global event over the last 30 years and this could convincingly be the beginning of an address by any World Bank or IMF spokesperson. Empirically, these statements are almost meaningless; with increasing iteration, they begin to resemble a liturgy: a speech-act of faith in which ‘Africa’ is conjured up and blessed with the neoliberal canon. Thus for Zoellick, ‘this could be a century of African opportunity and growth’ (see: http://web.worldbank.org/WSBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/0,,contentMDK:22284283~pagePK:146736~piPK:146830~theSitePK:258644,00.html?cid=EXTAFR1rbzwrap).

But how and why can such a vacuous neoliberal universalism persist and remain ascendant? Related to this, what does it tell us about debates in African political economy that the slender counter-hegemonies that do exist are externally derived: developmental states, the Chinese model, new Latin American social democracies.

These questions are more important for ROAPE than for other journals, as ROAPE aims to encourage and disseminate oppositions and alternatives: often deriving from African intellectual circles, based in narratives of struggle and resistance that specific countries or regions might generate. Next year, ROAPE will be publishing a special issue titled ‘Africa struggles’ which will focus on resistance-as-practice: protest, organisation, every-day, ideational and collective.

As Casse and Jensen show in their examination of the politics and representation of poverty reduction in this issue, studies of African political agency are very far removed from the neoliberal abstractions which are either asserted or derived from quantitative analysis. But, this does not mean that simply relaying qualitative research from ‘on the ground’ excuses us from engaging with broader intellectual issues. Indeed, Casse and Jensen do precisely this, first, by raising questions about both the reliability of widely deployed theoretical and conceptual assumptions in poverty reduction research and intervention, and the argument for a correspondence between economic growth and poverty reduction; and, second, by calling attention
to the possible replacement of poverty reduction strategies by Poverty Reduction Growth Facility programmes, which are reminiscent of structural adjustment loans.

So, what lessons can we draw from an age in which a neoliberal ideology doggedly persists, even as its practices, logic and morality are called into question. Substitutes are either neoliberal alternatives or, where they profess to be alternatives to neoliberalism, are models which are sketchy and derived largely from social transitions that have taken place outside Africa? This question is worth a little exploration.

**Answering questions**

Ostensibly ranged in opposition to neoliberalism are critical approaches to African development. But what does ‘critical’, which has become the lodestone for any unorthodox social science, mean? It signifies a cynicism of political power, but little else. It represents only the broadest of oppositions and is normatively attractive: who wishes to label themselves as ‘uncritical’? The question therefore becomes: critical in what sense?

For students of political economy, critical approaches must surely be based in an understanding of the dynamics of global capitalism and the ways in which social relations in African countries have (re)produced forms of poverty, political marginality, injustice and, frankly, mass mortality. The political economy of capitalism is not a master narrative of necessity or economic determination; it is a more open political economy of accumulation, contested labour and trading relations; the political assertion of property rights; and a wealth of cultural-political endeavours to defend, undermine, critique, and reconfigure public spaces of authority. It recognises that capitalism has at its core a ‘tragic’ historical motor, of offering at least the potential of material progress, but always with a tendency to impose social disruption, high levels of exploitation, alienation, and modern forms of impoverishment and marginality. Both the potential and the tragedy are played out in multiple settings through variegated social and political institutions, both formal and informal, and very often in integrated fashion. This is, in broad brush strokes, the multidimensional Africa that a critical political economy provides. Such a political economy is evidently twinned to political norms such as popular participation/agency, gender equality, social justice; it also evokes – or prefigures – notions of liberation and socialism. Both Patrick Bond and Peter Jacobs’ briefings challenge major neoliberal and disciplining structures by highlighting the anti-democratic and social deleterious nature of the APRM and the ‘pro-poor’ responses to economic crisis in South Africa.

**Questioning answers**

It might well be that most readers of ROAPE are happy to agree a broad analytical frame based in a critical approach to capitalism in Africa which cleaves to norms of social progress. Yet, this does not allow us to agree a ‘constitution’ for researching and evaluating contemporary events. All it does is provide the basis for asking meaningful questions.

ROAPE’s own intellectual history demonstrates this very well. Throughout its pages, one can see arguments about the value of ‘Marxist-Leninist’ nationalist projects, the role of the national bourgeoisie, the historic agency of peasant societies, the presence and potential of civil society organisations or new social movements. It is striking that
there is no sense in which a consensus can be reached about the definitive place that
any of these forms of political change suggest a single Model for Africa. It would be
tragic indeed if critical scholars replaced the vulgar teleologies of neoliberal ideology
with new teleologies that set out necessary, correct, or irrefutable prospectives for
Africa. In this sense, answers to the pressing questions regarding social justice,
struggle, and development must always be provisional and subject to as much
questioning as that reserved for a new World Bank lending programme or a large
oil investment on the Bight of Benin.

This issue of ROAPE carries a diversity of articles, but each of them works against
one-dimensional views of Africa. Peter Kragelund provides an contribution to
debates concerning the role of Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa. He
starts from a paradox: that Western conditionalities of economic liberalisation have
enabled the entry of certain types of Chinese investment into Africa. Concentrating
on the case of Zambia, he shows how this has happened and how important it is to
consider the sector and scale of FDI in order to come to judgements about its
broader social effects. If Kragleund can be read as a case for nuanced and complex
global articulations, the article by Ebenezer Obadare and Wale Adebanwi reinforces
this point in its reflections on the politics of remittances. Obadare and Adebanwi
argue that the ‘developmental’ focus of research into remittances is based in the ques-
tion: what impact do remittances have on recipient economies? The authors argue that
a broader set of research question also needs addressing: how do remittances affect the
role of African states and the nature of the national citizenry? The diasporic, spatially
unbounded, and opaque nature of many ‘national communities’ suggests profound
shifts in the nature of state authority and civic action.

Of course, much of the research on African states (or for some the African state) is recon-
ciled to the ways in which state authority is limited, negotiated, evaded and manifest in
‘shadow politics to use Bill Reno’s felicitous phrase. This is part of the story of the trans-
national effects of remittances and it is also central to the ways in which states have
reformed their local presence. J. Tyler Dickovick provides a fascinating comparative
study of three of Africa’s most prominent attempts to reconstruct local state power
(Uganda, Burkina Faso and Ghana), revealing how three categorical interactions
between the ‘central’ and the ‘local’ have emerged. Burkina Faso exemplifies confronta-
tion, Ghana cooption and Uganda construction. Dickovick argues that these strategies
–and indeed their efficacy – are strongly related to the nature of prevailing localised
forms of authority, commonly expressed through modern structures of chieftaincy.

Thorkil Casse and Stig Jensen analyse contemporary Burkina Faso and Madagascar in
light of the poverty reduction strategy framework which currently orients a great deal
of Western aid policy. Indeed, as Casse and Jensen argue, it is the connection of the
poverty reduction agenda with the Millennium Development Goals that underpins
the type of relentless optimism with which Zoellick commences this editorial. But,
in these two case studies, the linkages between poverty reduction (if it is taking
place and even then only by the slender standards of the World Bank) are tendentious
and opaque. There is no good reason why one should assume that a well-implemented
poverty reduction strategy will lead to a process of poverty reduction; this is assumed
by so many who then go on to analyse the extent of implementation or the level of aid/
credit that underpins a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.

Ibaba S. Ibaba and Jeremiah O. Arowosegbe both deal with the politics of violence in
the Niger Delta. Both of them identify the corrosive effects of violence. The injustices of
oil exploration which underpin the emergence of rebellions, insurgencies, and more complex and novel forms of violence, have obvious impacts on the peoples of the Delta who are thrown into a permanent state of emergency. But furthermore, broader political projects of development or conflict resolution seem increasingly remote in contexts of insurgency/counter-insurgency.