

## Ill health unleashed? Cities and municipal services in Ghana

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Increasing urbanisation, wealth and ill health in cities necessitate careful study, especially in African cities whose development is widely regarded as rapid and chaotic. Using Ghanaian cities as a case study, this article analyses some of the important sources of ill health, identifies why they persist, and assesses how they impinge on economic growth, redistribution, and poverty reduction. It argues that, although there is considerable evidence that policy change is urgently needed, the tensions and contradictions between economic and social efficiency, intermeshed with vested political interests, are likely to impede significant changes to the *status quo*.

**Keywords:** Ghana; Africa; cities; water; sanitation; health

### Introduction

Now that the World Health Organisation (WHO) has put cities at the centre of public health and declared 2010 ‘Urbanisation and Health’ year, it is timely to consider public health and cities, especially in developing countries, where there is rapid and chaotic urbanisation.

In fields such as Sociology, Anthropology, Epidemiology, and Urban Planning, the approach has typically been to consider health differentials between rural and urban areas, and between and within cities (Galea *et al.* 2005). In terms of methodology, such studies are typically written from the standpoint of either public administration or mainstream public health, with the former emphasising administrative efficiency and effectiveness of institutions (for example, Smith 1997, Blore 1999, Olowu 2003), and the latter stressing the relationship between the epidemiological changes that occur with urbanisation and their impacts on health (for example, Yach *et al.* 1990, McDade and Adair 2001).

These existing studies suffer from two main weaknesses. First, they tend to look at the process of urban growth as a homogeneous phenomenon, even though there are various components of the ‘urban experience’, such as urbanicity, urbanisation, and urban environment. Urbanicity connotes the prevalence of factors such as transport congestion and industrial pollution that are more prevalent in cities than in rural areas. ‘Urbanisation’ refers to a process of change with associated socio-economic and politico-cultural transformations. ‘Urban environment’ goes beyond ‘urbanicity’ because it embraces physical, social and urban resource infrastructure (Vlahov and Galea 2002, pp. 5–6, Ompad *et al.*, 2008, p. 465). Because the urban experience is not one homogeneous transformation,

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studies on urban health need to consider demographic, social, and political economic changes in cities.

Second, these frameworks do not typically examine economic development – economic growth, redistribution, and poverty reduction. How development interacts with urban health needs more critical consideration (Blore 1999, Galea *et al.* 2005). This second analytical weakness was recognised and highlighted in the health-related sessions at the 2010 World Urban Forum in Rio de Janeiro. The forum also stimulated civil society publications which stressed the need for better understanding of health issues in cities (for example, Sugranyes and Mathivet 2010).

This article tries to overcome these conceptual and empirical gaps by using a broader political economic framework to examine urban health. It does so by analysing water delivery and waste management. It thereby seeks to explore the challenge of transforming the existing arrangements to achieve the overall goals of improving health and promoting sustainable development (UN-HABITAT 2008, p. 5). Specifically, it examines how water and sanitation services are provided and how the mode and level of service delivery, in turn, impact on urban health and wealth. The geographical focus of the study is Ghana, where two main factors make this study particularly relevant. First, Ghana is one of the most rapidly urbanising countries in Africa. According to the United Nations (UN) Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA 2007), Ghana's population was 47.8% urban as of 2005, a figure which was higher than the average for West Africa (41.7%), sub-Saharan Africa (35.0%) and Africa as a whole (37.9%). The rate of urbanisation in Ghana between 2005 and 2010 is estimated at some 3.54% per annum, lower than for West Africa (3.77%) and sub-Saharan Africa, but higher than for all of Africa (3.31%) and the world (1.91%). Second, Ghana is believed to have entered the era of *homo urbanus* (UN-HABITAT 2009) – Anna Tibaijuka's shorthand for a situation in which more people live in cities than in rural areas.<sup>1</sup> Estimates also suggest that by 2050, the share of the population living in urban areas (75.5%) will be about three times the share of the population living in rural areas (24.4%) in Ghana (DESA 2007).

The rest of the article is divided into five sections. The first four sections look at the health conditions of urban citizens, provide an overview of water and sanitation conditions and assess the effectiveness of policies to improve these municipal services, respectively, while section five empirically ascertains the connections which exist between water, sanitation and health.

### **The state of health of urban citizens**

The health situation in Ghanaian cities must be described as a prelude to the subsequent discussion. The description needs to examine trends in disease, morbidity or mortality. Although the data is not comprehensive, it is evident that there are major health problems in the cities. In 2008 alone, 37.5% of children in urban areas sought treatment for diarrhoea and 59.6% had fever; in the same year, there were 50 deaths per 1000 births (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS] and Ghana Health Service 2009a). The perinatal mortality rate is 34 per 1000. Malaria constitutes 30–40% of all outpatient cases in Ghana, with one in five children under five years old receiving malaria treatment in the two weeks preceding the 2008 demographic and health survey (GSS and Ghana Health Service 2009b).

These figures need to be put in a wider context to be meaningful. However, two problems inhibit a detailed comparative analysis with, for example, other African countries. First, obtaining comparable *urban* figures is difficult because the institutions that compile health data sets do not usually disaggregate these into urban and rural. Second,

missing figures make it difficult to compare even national-level figures. In spite of these problems, however, available data suggest that, in comparison with the rest of Africa, the health profile of inhabitants of Ghanaian cities is better than the African average in some sectors and worse in others. For example, from 1990 to 2010, the proportion of the urban population in sub-Saharan Africa living in slums declined from 70 to 62%, while in Ghana the decline was from about 80 to 45% (Economic Commission for Africa and African Development Bank Group 2009, p. 46, UN 2010a, p. 64).<sup>2</sup>

The limited figures available show that there has been considerable improvement in the health profile of urban citizens. For instance, between 1988 and 2003, the under-five mortality rate in urban areas reduced from 131.1 to 93 per 1000 live births. At the same time, the infant mortality rate dropped from 66.9 to 55.0 per 1000 live births. From 2000 to 2004, supervised delivery increased from 50.2% to 53.4%. Around the same time, postnatal care improved from 46.3% to 53.3%, nationally (Ghana Health Service 2005).

The *national* health situation in Ghana, however, does not look so good when compared to continental averages. For instance, between 1990 and 2008, infant mortality in sub-Saharan Africa dropped by 22% (UN 2010b) but in Ghana, the figures for 1988 to 2003 show a reduction of only 13% (Ghana Health Service 2006). Furthermore, malaria is more endemic in Ghana than many other tropical African countries. Ghana is classified as one of 31 'high-burden countries' by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Between 2001 and 2006, for instance, there was no evidence that there was a significant reduction in the number of malaria cases nationally, although between 2006 and 2008, the number of malaria cases declined dramatically from 8.3 million to 3.2 million (WHO 2009, p. 102). Still, malaria, delivery, and diarrhoea diseases are the worst causes of death in the country (Ghana Health Service 2006). Twenty per cent of under-five mortality results from malaria and 50% of outpatient cases relate to malaria (Koram 2008).

The health profile of urban citizens is worsened by the nature of the healthcare system. Even though Ghana has switched from a 'pay as you go' system of healthcare to health insurance, the scars of for-profit healthcare are present and the current system is limited in its coverage. Generally, about 60% of women and 70% of men are not covered by health insurance (GSS and Ghana Health Service 2009a). Only 10.8% of the urban population is covered by health insurance. Several reasons, such as inability to pay the premiums or a lack of confidence in the insurance scheme, explain this low coverage (GSS 2008, pp. 30–31).

This state of affairs has contributed to low life expectancy in Ghana. From an average of 57.9 years in 2006, life expectancy declined to 56.5 years in 2009 (UNDP 2009), a figure significantly lower than the 64.3 years which was the world average in 2006 (UNDP 2007).

What factors might be driving this poor state of health? Among a plethora of reasons, weak growth-centric developmentalist concerns such as low GDP growth, high levels of inflation and their correlates – whose collective effect is to reduce the ability of the country to invest in a pro-poor health system (see, for example, Government of Ghana 2003, Aryeetey and Kanbur 2004) – are some possible explanations. More recently, researchers, policy makers, and representatives of civil society organisations who come together every year to produce the *Ghana human development report* have argued that: 'The factors affecting life expectancy generally in Ghana include access to affordable and quality health care, *access to good drinking water, adequate sanitation, HIV/AIDS and infant mortality*' (UNDP 2007, p. 34, emphasis added). A similar diagnosis is contained in the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper which emphasises that the causes of the deepest form of poverty in Ghana must 'be directly attacked through greater investments in health, education, *safe water and sanitation*' (Government of Ghana 2005, p. 2, emphasis

added). It is estimated that 80% of diseases reported in the outpatient department in Ghana are sanitation-related (Anton 2008).

Globally, there has been a similar flurry of interest in the nexus between water, sanitation, and economic development. For instance, the *Review of Radical Political Economics* has recently published a special issue on the 'Political economy of water' which stresses that water and sanitation are a matter of 'life and death' (Barkin 2010, p. 1). For all these reasons, it is important to review how these services are provided, analyse their impacts, and learn from the experience in the Ghanaian context.

### **Providing water and sanitation to increasing populations in cities**

Generally, there are three ways in which municipal services are provided in Ghana. First, the delivery of municipal services is contracted out wholly or partially (through public-private partnerships) to private firms (local or foreign). Second, communities are forced/encouraged to provide services for themselves in the form of self-help projects.<sup>3</sup> Third, central government effort to downsize the state has led to the decentralisation of services to local governments, without commensurate financial resources, which has forced local governments to 'offload' the 'new' responsibilities to the private sector (Crook and Ayee 2006).

The water and sanitation subsectors have been particularly susceptible to the pressure for private-sector participation even though their specific histories differ quite substantially. The story of water management is told in Lindsay Whitfield's comprehensive account (Whitfield 2006, pp. 429–445) and by several other scholars (for example, Amenga-Etego and Grusky 2005, Yeboah 2006, Fuest and Haffner 2007). Without retelling it fully, it is important for the argument in this article to have an overview of the privatisation process.

Attempts to privatise water in Ghana started in 1986 when operational subsidies were removed.<sup>4</sup> In 1991, Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation was downsized and about 40% of the workers retrenched (Whitfield 2006). In 1999, the management and marketing of water was split into two, with the Ghana Water Company Ltd (GWCL) being mandated to manage urban water and the Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA) being put in charge of rural water management. The former had considerable local private-sector participation (initially comprising local non-governmental organisations [NGOs] and businesses, although later concessions were allocated to foreign entities). The latter, on the other hand, was managed mainly by community and state agency (Water Aid 2005, Whitfield 2006).

Significant changes were expected with private sector involvement – improved revenue collection, reduction in illegal water connection, improved access, reliability and improved complaints handling (PURC 2005a, p. 3). However, only modest achievements were made from 1998 to 2003. According to the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (PURC), a body set up in 1997 to regulate GWCL, it was expected that the latter would, over a period of five years, reduce losses from leakage and illegal connections from 50% to 40% of water produced. GWCL was also expected to increase revenue collection from 77% to 95% of charges billed.

Private participation in water provision led to an increase in the volume of water produced by about 12%. Prior to the privatisation of the facility, the proportion of people with access to potable water was about 65% (UNDP 2007, p. 46). Private-sector participation has led to an increase in the number of connections. For instance, between 2000 and 2005, the share of the urban population with access to piped water increased from 70% to 78% (Government of Ghana 2003, p. 112). Of these, about 98% can access safe water within 30 minutes' walking distance (UNDP 2007, p. 46).

However, most of the other targets could not be attained. For example, water loss between source and tap increased by 25.0 Mm<sup>3</sup>, from 92.07 Mm<sup>3</sup> in 1998 to 117.07 Mm<sup>3</sup> (PURC 2005a, p. 3). Thus the increase in water provision is offset by losses. Also, the level of revenue collection did not improve. Therefore, in its review of the operation of GWCL, PURC found that, overall, the headline efficiency of GWCL *expressed as the percentage of water produced which is converted into income collected* reduced from 37.8% in 1998 to 32.4% in 2003, with a low point in 2002 of 30.7% (PURC 2005a, p. 4, emphasis in original). In any case, despite increases in tariffs, the reliability of water provision did not dramatically improve.

That the water sector was facing serious challenges was incontrovertible (for example, Songsore and McGranahan 1993, Taylor *et al.* 2002). What was contested was how best to overcome the problems. A favoured strategy was to invite international private-sector investment to recapitalise and make the water sector more efficient. That was not the only perceived solution, however. Civil society groups, such as the Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC) and National Coalition Against the Privatisation of Water, Ghana, put forward alternative proposals for restructuring the public services and incentivising workers (Whitfield 2006). However, swayed by factors such as indirect international pressure or influence (Boh and Tsikata [2005] note that to expedite privatisation, the World Bank made the Ghana government a grant of US\$103 million), an inadequate number of ‘opponents’ of privatisation who were also capable of presenting coherent alternatives, and a general wave of privatisation in the global economy, the government opted for privatisation (Whitfield 2006), despite civil society protests and criticism (Yeboah 2006).

Thus on 6 January 2005, the Government of Ghana signed the Ghana Urban Water Project, a public–private partnership between the GWCL and Aqua Vitens Rand Ltd (AVRL), a private operator, with the aim of improving water supply to urban areas. The contract took full effect in June 2006 for a five-year duration (Ainuson 2009, Norström 2009, p. 16).

According to the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (PURC), the regulator of GWCL, the restructuring of the water service has been aimed at improving effective water management. That is, reduction in cost of delivery and service improvement to consumers (PURC 2005a). In the words of the World Bank:

The project will improve access to safe, reliable and affordable water services to thousands of households, targeting especially the urban poor who have been denied this service over the years due to poor performance of the urban water sector. Furthermore, the project will assist the Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL) to strengthen its management of the sector and pursue long-term financial stability, viability and sustainability. GWCL is also expected to improve its ability to respond to the increasing water needs of the urban population in a more proactive manner. (Boh and Tsikata 2005)

The two principal goals of urban water privatisation, according to the Bank, have been:

- (1) To significantly increase access to the piped water system in Ghana’s urban centers, with an emphasis on improving access, affordability and service reliability to the urban poor;
- (2) To restore long-term financial stability, viability and sustainability of the Ghana Water Company Limited. (World Bank 2009)

To what extent have these goals been achieved? A comprehensive assessment of the water sector would need to wait until the contract of AVRL comes to an end in 2011. What is attempted here is only a preliminary reflection on the water question. Based on

the objectives underpinning the current mode of service delivery, however, a preliminary assessment can be made based on four main indicators, namely access to water, reliability of service, affordability of service, and the quality of water supplied. Each of these are now examined in turn.

### **Assessing recent water provision**

Access to water in urban areas has increased from 75% of the urban population in 2005 (UNDP 2009) to a current level of 83% (UN-HABITAT 2008).<sup>5</sup> This level of access paints an optimistic picture of the water situation and has led some (for example, Norström 2009) to predict that Ghana may meet the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of reducing by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation (Goal 7, target 7c). Many reasons explain the expansion of access. For instance, several attempts have been made by AVRL to improve access. It is spending over GhC1.04 million (€700,000) to provide water to about 50,000 people in seven deprived communities under a corporate social responsibility project known as 'Water 4 Life'. Beneficiary communities include Teshie Old Town in Accra and Nsuatre in the Brong-Ahafo region, where a total of 12,500 people who previously did not have access to potable water now do (AVRL 2009a). Similar commitment has been shown in providing water to residents of Kumasi, Obuasi and Mampong (Haruna 2008). The reasons for this improvement, however, go beyond private sector involvement.

The government has complemented the effort of the company by investing in water infrastructure. For example, it has completed phase one of the Kwanyaku Water Supply Expansion Project, which increased the output of water from three million gallons per day to six million. Also, the east–west water transfer interconnection has been completed. This has improved access to water supply in the eastern parts of Accra. Similarly, the government has completed the Cape Coast Water Supply Expansion Project (MOFEP 2009, p. 102). Thus the improvement registered cannot be solely attributed to private sector participation, as government has invested considerable sums of money in the sector.

The quality of water supplied is also an effective indicator. Despite occasional media reports that potable water in sachets and bottles sold in shops or hawked on the streets is of poor quality, more systematic study by scientists who specialise in water suggest that, generally, the quality of water in Ghana is high and, by and large, consistent with WHO guidelines. It seems the contamination of piped water does not arise from the production of water *per se*. Rather, it is the processing of already produced water that sometimes leads to contamination (Okioga 2007, Cobbina *et al.* 2009). Most of the technical scientific studies reveal significant contamination of sources of water such as boreholes, wells and rivers where there are excess levels of chemicals and metals such as lead, arsenic and uranium (for example, Rossiter *et al.* 2010). Another issue that runs through many of the scientific papers is the rising cost of 'safe water', defined as piped water.

How pro-poor is the delivery of piped water? According to PURC, the public regulator, 'pro-poor' would mean that everybody, including people with low incomes, is able to pay the official water tariffs. Hence, an upward deviation from the approved fees signals that more cost than is deemed affordable is being incurred. In the words of PURC (2005b, p. 9):

Different customers experience different levels of service including: private connections, yard connections and community standpipe services. In some cases the unit cost of supply to lower levels of service may, in fact, be higher than the unit cost for a higher level of service (largely as a result of low sales) suggesting that the tariff should be higher for a lower level of service. This concept is clearly contrary to the concept of tariffs being 'pro-poor' and cannot be supported.

Although more people can now access water, frequent shortages, water rationing and interruptions to supply have substantially negated these gains. Relatively better-off individuals who have access to water store it and sell it later at rates which are about 12 times higher than the domestic rates. Also, bigger companies that can afford to invest in tankers capitalise on situations of water shortage to sell water transported in the tankers to consumers in richer neighbourhoods (Abraham *et al.* 2007). This has created distinct ‘hierarchies’ of consumers. A recent study by UN-HABITAT identified three ‘classes’ of consumers in Accra. There are those who have uninterrupted access to water and so pay the official rates, ranging from US\$0.0019 to \$0.007 a bucket. Then there is the much larger proportion of consumers with access to water but whose supply is regularly interrupted. This latter group has to supplement its supplies by purchasing water from vendors at prices of between US\$0.15 and \$0.25 a bucket, some 80% higher than the official rates. Finally, there are those – the majority – who are poor and, therefore, not connected to the network at all. In turn, they have to depend on or ‘live off’ the other groups (UN-HABITAT 2009, p. 12) who sell water to them at prices which are about three times (Osumanu 2008, p. 108) or 20 times higher (Taylor *et al.* 2002) than those the supplier groups paid in the first place. This analysis excludes water that is sold on the streets. However, there too there is considerable room to make profit in the ‘water business’. In one study in Tamale, it was revealed that water merchants can make as much as 100–400% profit on the streets of one of the poorest cities in Ghana (Okioga 2007).

This situation has implications for how much consumers can spend on other necessities of life. One study of the expenditure pattern of poor households cited in the *Ghana human development report 2007* showed that households spend about 9% of their income on water (Manu and Mensah-Abrampa cited in UNDP 2007, p. 95). Another study of two low-income settlements, Ayigya and Anloga in Kumasi, showed that households spend 15% of their income on water (Nyarko *et al.* 2006). This picture signals deep problems for the poor, especially because 60% of them obtain water via tanker, cart operators and neighbours (Norström 2009, p. 25).

The reliability of water provision has also been problematic. In terms of frequency of supply, which is one way in which PURC measures ‘level of service’ (see Smith and Hanson 2003 for indicators used in other countries), there are major challenges. For instance, in Accra the gap between production and consumption has widened from 74 million gallons per day in 2008 (Benson 2008) to 170 million gallons per day in 2010 (Essel 2010).

One main cause of this deficit is illegal connection and, hence, water that is unaccounted for. Even though over the period 2006–8, considerable effort by AVRL led to a reduction in the amount of water that is not paid for by between 5–10%, about 51% of water produced still could not be accounted for (Beyene *et al.* 2008, p. 27). Thus, AVRL has not been able to reduce the level of non-revenue-earning supplies to the 40% target set by PURC (see PURC 2005a). According to AVRL, it has been unable to meet the target because of illegal connections. Although a fair explanation, it must also be noted that the poor physical condition of water infrastructure causes about 30% of water to be lost through leakage (Abraham *et al.* 2007). Still, one has to appreciate that AVRL is working in an increasingly urbanising environment. Thus, its consumer population is growing rapidly and putting increasing pressure on its facilities. This pressure is what may have driven the company to ask government for additional capital of US\$1.5 billion to expand its facilities (GNA 2009).

However, several ‘safety nets’ have already been made available to AVRL. Four of these are particularly significant. First, it has been allowed to increase water tariffs by about 67% (Grusky 2001, GNA 2010). Second, AVRL has the option of increasing

tariffs based on trends in inflation and currency devaluation in order to insulate it from risks (Weissman 2002, Bayliss 2003). Third, the company benefits from a riskless contract in which the government undertakes to reimburse it with ‘prudently incurred costs’ (Weisman 2002).<sup>6</sup> Fourth, the company has been allowed to implement several measures to cut production costs in order to obtain more revenue.

For instance, in 2005, about 1600 trained workers constituting about half of the workforce of GWCL were dismissed and paid total compensation of a paltry €8 million – about US\$6000 each. Their replacement, a 12-person ‘expert’ group, is expected to earn over €10 million – about US\$13 million – plus other incentives and tax exemptions for a period of five years (Adam 2003). At the same time, the workers who have remained in post have had to work much harder than previously to ensure that profit is generated for the owners. In addition, incentives, wage increases, and promotion opportunities were frozen as the government of Ghana waited for AVRL to take over management (Tanoh 2007). In the first year of its management, AVRL recorded an 83% profit, or an additional 43 million cedis, mainly from blocking access to the poor, whose efforts to acquire potable water are branded ‘illegal connections’ (Adjetey-Sowah 2008). Also, without worker agitation, AVRL granted a pay increase of about 6% to its workers – but with pressure from workers, was prepared to consider increases (under conditions of Ghana government subsidy) of up to 35%, although even this compares unfavourably with salary increases of 45–55% obtained by workers in some public utility companies with similar production levels around the same time (Tanoh 2007).

Nonetheless, recurrent press reports suggest that the company does not seem to be able to solve minor problems such as the purchase of inputs like alum and spare parts for machinery – reports which have not been denied by AVRL. And yet, AVRL has benefited enough in the way of preferential policies which should enable it to respond adequately to the problems it faces, notably the pressure on its facilities. That the problems persist raises questions about whether the private sector is inherently efficient or efficient in social terms. For instance, most people in cities are dissatisfied with the quality of their water-delivery service. Systematic studies such as those by Dornelas and Eldridge (2008) and Suleiman and Cars (2010), which were based on interviews with consumers, suggest that there is widespread dissatisfaction with the service provided by AVRL.

In many ways, the company has admitted that its service delivery has fallen below public expectation. First, many of its spokesmen have publicly apologised for poor service (see, for example, GNA 2009a, GNA 2009b, Aglanu 2010). Second, some of its influential workers have admitted ‘inefficiencies’. For instance, according to one senior revenue officer of AVRL: ‘Many new service connection applicants do not come back after filling the application forms due to the high connection fees charged. Such applicants indulge in illegal connections thereafter. New service connection fees should be reduced to encourage new customers to subscribe legally.’ Another officer has noted that: ‘New service connection applicants are not billed by Data Processing Unit for several months and later billed with accumulated consumption which customers refuse to pay. Adjustments take too long to reflect on customers’ bills’ (AVRL 2009a, 2009b).

### **Assessing waste management**

Turning from water to waste management, similar concerns apply. Over two decades ago, ineffective management of urban waste in Ghana led to the formation of several government committees to consider ways of improving the situation. Coinciding with the advent of structural-adjustment programmes, emphasis was placed on service provision

by the private sector. Since 1985, the management of solid and liquid waste has been done jointly by government and the private sector (Fobil *et al.* 2008).<sup>7</sup>

According to the *Environmental sanitation policy* of Ghana, all environmental services (waste management, cleansing, and sanitation) must be delivered on full cost-recovery basis by either private firms or government in partnership with private firms. Such a pro-business approach is supported by donors like the World Bank and the Department for International Development (DFID) (Crook and Ayee 2006, pp. 56–57).

As such, the Ministry of Local Government has been partnered by the Urban Environmental Sanitation Project (UESP) of the World Bank to train local government staff on the proper drawing up and management of contracts. This ‘capacity building’ is to enable local government staff to be able to superintend competitive bidding processes for private firms interested in waste management. The arrangements with these private firms vary from franchising, contracting-out, open competition and sub-contracting to equipment leasing. With open competition and franchising, private firms charge end users directly for their services. However, with contracting out, the private firms are paid by the city authorities according to the quantity of solid waste collected and deposited. Contracting out is the most popular form of service delivery among the city authorities, constituting about 60–70% of all waste collected (Post *et al.* 2003, Awortwi 2004, pp. 215–216).

Tables 1 and 2 present data on how well targets for waste disposal have been met in practice. By this criterion, it appears that the private sector has been efficient in managing urban waste. Targets were not only met in the decade of the 1990s; they were surpassed.

The tables show that the private sector has successfully widened the coverage of its service. In the liquid waste subsector, it increased its target from 20% to 28% of waste managed, while in terms of solid waste it accounts for about 42% of the waste collected and managed. Significantly, it has consistently exceeded its target by taking on more and more of the waste the city authorities are unable to collect. More recent statistics are hard to come by. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that the situation described in Tables 1 and 2 did not change significantly between 2000 and 2010. For instance, as of 2008, the Waste Management Department of the Accra Metropolitan Authority had the capacity to collect only 60% of the waste generated in Accra (Anton 2008), a drop from 80% in 1998 (Tsiboe and Marbell 2004, p. 11). Indeed, one of the main private waste-management companies, Zoomlion Ghana Ltd (ZGL), has been singled out for particular praise. In the words of one member of parliament, ‘since the emergence of the company, Zoomlion has not only approached waste management issues professionally, but has equally focused on delivering quality waste management solutions that rely on current technical innovations’ (Boyefio 2008).

However, this success story is tainted by several problems. Because the private sector works on a for-profit basis, its activities are mainly focused on high- and middle-income areas where residents can pay for the services of the sector. As such, the much-touted improvement in waste management appears to be more significantly enjoyed by middle and higher income groups. Table 3 shows the bias towards the latter neighbourhoods.

Table 1. Liquid waste management in Accra.

Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Target (% of waste)	20	21	24	26	28
Actual performance (% of waste)	25	25	40	58	Not available

Source: Fobil *et al.* (2008, p. 267).

Table 2. Solid waste management in Accra.

Year	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Target	1	2	3	4	32	35	37	40	42
Actual performance	2	11	11	21	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: Fobil *et al.* (2008, p. 268).

The relatively low coverage in East Legon, a high-income area, deserves some explanation. Unlike Airport and Cantonments, specifically developed by government for high-class civil servants and the affluent, East Legon was privately developed by rich individuals. There are still some poor earlier settlers in the area whose waste is not collected, thus reducing the average coverage for waste collection in the area as a whole (Agyei-Mensah and Owusu 2009). Generally, private waste-management companies prioritise collection of garbage from high-income neighbourhoods because this is where these companies can derive profit from service fees, from households directly or from local governments.

The ‘business of waste management’ has its own problems. Consumers do not participate in major decisions as to when or how waste is managed. That is, the procedure of operation is top-down. Further, this business has led to a phenomenon in which politicians use the award of waste-management contracts, especially the private management of public toilets, to reward political cronies (Ayee and Crook 2003, Fobil *et al.* 2008). Citizen-based organisations operating as private firms employ caretakers who act as ‘gatekeepers’ to regulate use and are responsible for day-to-day cleaning and general upkeep of public toilet facilities.

The management of public toilets is a particularly profitable business. The costs of operation are low, and profit from user fees is high. A *Daily Guide* reporter, Gomda, has

Table 3. Waste collection according to socio-economic status in parts of Accra during the 2000 population and housing census in Ghana.

Residential neighbourhoods	Collected solid waste disposal system (%)
<i>Migrant low-class neighbourhood</i>	
Nima	8.6
Sabon Zongo	15.1
Accra New Town	25.3
<i>Indigenous low-class neighbourhood</i>	
James Town	11.0
Chorkor Down	2.9
Nungua	4.6
<i>Middle-class neighbourhood</i>	
Asylum Down	86.0
Adabraka	52.9
<i>High-class neighbourhood</i>	
Airport	74.5
Cantonments	71.1
East Legon	31.4
Accra (city-wide average)	20.8

Source: Agyei-Mensah and Owusu (2009).

observed that ‘toilet management is a goldmine’. According to him: ‘Toilet management in Accra is a serious business with some managers making millions of cedis daily, depending on the location. Such facilities in places like Tema Station and other crowded areas attract a lot of patronage and therefore money’ (Gomda 2009). This account may be an exaggeration but verifying it is difficult because of the lack of systematic studies. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that income from a medium-sized public toilet is around US\$100–200 per day or about US\$5000 per month, and as far back as the 1990s, Whittington *et al.* (1993) estimated that revenue from public toilets in Kumasi amounted to about US\$57,000 per month, which is often concentrated in the hands of a few people. According to Ayee and Crook (2003, p. 22), the chairman of the Ayawaso Sub-Metropolitan District Council (SMDC) in Accra from 1994–2000 controlled all the toilets in his electoral area and rendered virtually no account to his SMDC.

Problems of this kind have *contributed* directly to the growth of slums in the country. Thus the private sector does not collect the waste of the majority of urban citizens who cannot pay for such collection. The city authorities, on the other hand, do not sufficiently cover low-income areas because these areas are often deemed to be illegal settlements. Even in open commercial areas, the private sector fails to collect waste generated, partly because of poor monitoring of its activities. The cumulative effect of these problems is that waste-management problems in urban areas as a whole are worsening for the majority of people and improving only for the rich minority (Baabereyir 2009). In turn, slums and slum conditions persist. One such slum is Old Fadama, which is labelled Sodom and Gomorrah, or sometimes described as ‘one of the most polluted places on earth’ (Benjamin 2007). Such places contain a disproportionate number of the urban poor.

### **Socio-spatial inequalities and health**

In Ghana, there is a high level of correlation between ‘people poverty’ and urban ‘place poverty’. This correlation does not mean that poor urban places are not sometimes inhabited by relatively well-to-do people (Owusu *et al.* 2008). Rather, it means the poorest people tend to be concentrated in poor areas where HIV/AIDS, malaria, diarrhoea and cholera cases are high. This high incidence of disease in poor areas may be because disease vectors multiply faster in ‘suitable habitats’; in this case, poor environmental and water conditions, such as stagnant water and uncollected rotten garbage. Also, the clusters of poverty in such areas tend to make inhabitants exhibit risky sexual behaviours in response to multiple deprivations which, in turn, increases their likelihood of contracting the HIV virus (Jørgensen 2008). In any case, it seems malaria could hasten HIV progression (or *vice versa*), and HIV infection increases the likelihood of other viral infections (Laufer and Plowe 2007). Therefore, even though HIV and AIDS prevalence is quite low (under 5%) in Ghana compared to sub-Saharan African levels, the prevalence in cities is higher than in rural areas (Kjellstrom and Mecerdo 2008).

Figure 1 below shows the interconnections between the issues of water and sanitation, on the one hand, and the problems to which they contribute, on the other hand.

The links shown in Figure 1 are mutually reinforcing rather than exclusive. Thus, poverty could intensify the problems of water and sanitation because it determines where one lives, while where one does live could contribute to the deprivations one suffers. Even though water supplied by private agents is usually of good quality, non-affordability and non-reliability force the poor to use unhygienic water sources. Ultimately, poor service delivery to low-income and socially powerless people, and a health system that does not sufficiently cover their needs, combine to impinge negatively on health status. These

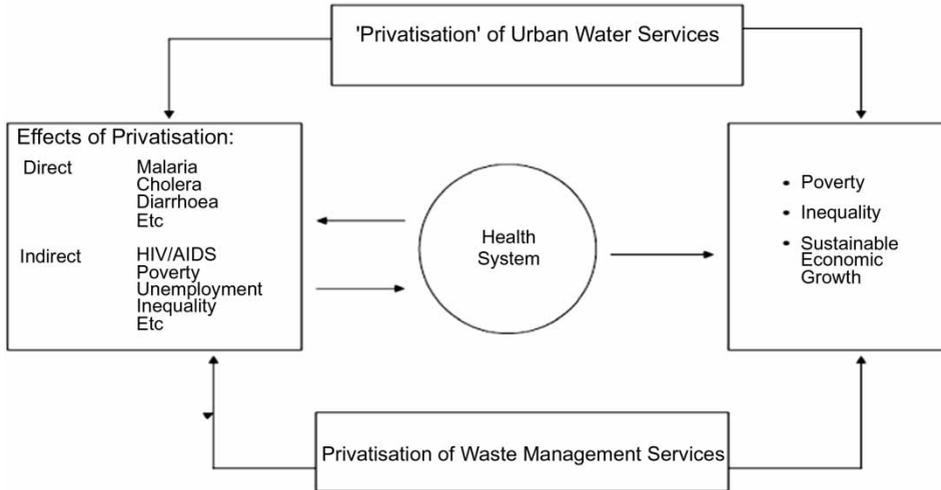


Figure 1. Urbanisation, entrepreneurial governance and health. Source: author.

conditions create stereotypes, because people from these places are marginalised and are likely to be unemployed or underemployed (Obeng-Odoom 2011). Currently, 26.1% of women and 22.1% of men in urban areas are unemployed (GSS and Ghana Health Service 2008).

Even though not all these people live in poor urban neighbourhoods, there are reasons to expect a general correlation between the spatial distribution of the underemployed and the socio-economic and health status of the locality. Processes of circular and cumulative causation operate. There is a cycle of poverty in which poor health leads to poor jobs, which, in turn, lead to poor wealth. Empirically, several studies have shown that people in such places suffer multiple deprivations which impinge on their ability to be employed. For instance, A.T. Amuzu, the Ghanaian environmentalist, and Josef Leitman, an urban planner (Amuzu and Leitman 1994, p. 5), found these tendencies in Accra, prompting them to label such people 'economically depressed'. Some may have jobs – temporary work – but not usually employment. Boadi and Kuitunen (2005) have also found significant causation between household wealth and child health, fly infestation, and respiratory-health infections. Overall, the poor of all ages in Accra experience higher death rates from infectious diseases than their wealthier neighbours. Also, research by Stephens and his colleagues (1994) over a decade ago showed that adult mortality from strokes and heart diseases is twice as high in poor areas as in rich areas; and that child mortality from infectious diseases is five times worse in poor areas in Ghana (cited in Todd 1996, p. 145).

All these correlations have negative effects on economic growth, redistribution and poverty reduction. Slums generally perpetuate inequality, not only because people there tend to be trapped in a cycle of poverty, but also because the activities of slum dwellers – selling dog chains, scrap metals, providing cheap labour – indirectly subsidise the activities of high-income groups who obtain goods and services from slum labour extremely cheaply. Also, from a macro-economic perspective, economic growth is significantly reduced if labour is not healthy enough to work or when morbidity within the workforce is high. In one case, scholars at the University of Ghana estimated that a one percentage increase in malaria-related morbidity rate in Ghana causes a slowdown of real GDP growth of 0.41% (Asante and Kusi 2005). Such an effect can impinge negatively on

poverty reduction, although this is not automatic. Indeed, recent figures from the Ghana Statistical Service show that the number of people living below the official poverty line in Ghana dropped from 39.5% in 1998/99 to 28.5% in 2005/6 (UNDP 2007). In urban areas, this reduction was as follows: urban coastal (31.0 – 5.5), urban forest (18.2 – 6.9) and urban savannah (43.0 – 27.6) (UNDP 2007).

However, levels of inequality in the country as a whole have risen sharply. The Gini coefficient has worsened from 0.38 in 1987 through 0.42 in 1998 (Vanderpuyé-Orlé 2002) to 0.43 in 2009 (UNDP 2009). Currently, the poorest 10% of the population has access to only 2% of the income in the country while the richest 10% control 32.8%. That is, the average income of the richest 10% is 16.1 times higher than that of the poorest 10%. Still, at 16.1, the ratio of inequality in Ghana is more favourable than the average (22.1) for 'medium HDI [Human Development Index] performers' like Kenya (21.3), Cape Verde (21.6) and South Africa (35.1), but worse than the situation in Egypt (7.2), Morocco (12.5) and Tanzania (8.9) (UNDP 2009), all three of which have strong interventionist states. Although this statistical evidence for large and widening inequality in Ghana describes the overall rather than the urban situation, qualitative evidence (different housing types, gated and slum dwellings, and so on) suggests that inequality within and between cities is huge and getting wider (Grant 2009, Obeng-Odoom 2010).

This rising inequality has the potential to reverse the falling levels of poverty in cities. The Ghana Statistical Service has observed that: 'If Ghana had experienced no change in inequality during the last seven years, the actual decline in poverty of 10.4[%] would have been 13.8[%] ... the decline in poverty would have been even better if it had not been offset by increasing inequality' (GSS 2007 p. 17). Thus, in Accra, one of the most unequal cities in Ghana, while urban poverty overall declined between 1998/9 and 2005/6, poverty levels in Greater Accra Metropolitan Authority rose from 4.4% to 10.6% over the same period, as did extreme poverty, which rose from 1.9% to 5.4% (GSS 2007, UNDP 2007).

Clearly, health problems in Ghanaian cities have wide impacts, striking at the very core of national economic development, and require urgent remedial action. Review of existing policies needs to be based on a frank assessment of the capacity of existing government institutions to undertake such a task. As this article has shown, a significant share of the problems discussed arise from the private provision of municipal services, particularly water delivery and waste collection. The private sector has succeeded in providing excellent facilities for those who can pay for their waste to be collected, while the poor have been forced to live in filth and use unwholesome water. It follows that there is the need for greater state interventionist policies, not only in the waste and water sectors, but also in the health sector, focusing on the improvement of slum conditions to reduce the incidence of disease. But would the state be willing to take on these responsibilities? Does the state have the financial resources to intervene? Would state officials who might be profiting from the *status quo*, either as owners or partners of private firms contracted to the state or municipal government, be willing to let go of these 'opportunities'? Would politicians be prepared to give up the opportunity they get from controlling provision of public toilets? There are no easy answers to these questions, although it is clear from the analysis of the health situation in Ghanaian cities above that without decisive government intervention, conditions will worsen further.

## Conclusion

A major factor underlying the poor health conditions in Ghanaian cities is the private provision of water and sanitation services. Private-sector engagement has increased access

to water: more people have become connected to piped water. However, water has been priced beyond the reach of many urban citizens. Consequently, relatively rich people who are more likely to access water sell to poorer neighbourhoods at a profit. In turn, a significant number of people, particularly in slum neighbourhoods, resort to the use of unwholesome sources of water.

Like water, sanitation has also received a boost in efficiency since private-sector participation. The private sector has consistently exceeded its target for waste management and water provision and has, therefore, taken over more and more of the waste-management responsibilities of city authorities, potentially enabling these authorities to refocus their limited resources elsewhere. This success is, however, more beneficial to the minority of rich people who can pay for waste services. The poor, who cannot afford comparable services, are condemned to live in unhealthy conditions. These dynamics, together with a weak health insurance system, have contributed to the poor state of health among the majority of urban citizens in Ghana.

This article has suggested several reasons why the private sector has not been able to deliver municipal services effectively and comprehensively. One reason is state failure to regulate the sector and require firms to provide greater coverage of both rich and poor neighbourhoods, possibly at differentiated rates. Another reason is 'official cronyism', in which state and municipal officials see the award of contracts to private-sector participants less as a way of improving service delivery and more as a means of dispensing patronage to political favourites. A third, more structural reason, is the nature of private-sector involvement itself, which is driven more by the profit motive than by a desire to extend municipal services to areas of greatest need.

How to resolve these tensions between private provision of water and sanitation and public concerns for public health is a difficult question. Effective state intervention has considerable potential to improve the situation because, although the state would not normally provide water and sanitation services for free, it would tend to be driven more (rather than less) by public-health concerns and less by an aspiration for profit. However, the state is severely limited in terms of resources. The will to intervene is also impaired to the extent that some government officials benefit from the *status quo*. The challenge is to make state intervention less a vehicle for the pursuit of selfish individual and group interests and more a tool for widening opportunity, reducing socio-spatial and other forms of inequality and improving ordinary people's conditions of existence.

### **Acknowledgements**

I am most grateful to Professor F.J.B. Stilwell, Dr Abraham Oduro, Lewis Eldridge, and the reviewers and Editorial Working Group of *ROAPE*, whose comments have helped to strengthen this article. Any disparity between their intentions and realisation in this article is solely my responsibility.

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### **Notes**

1. Anna Tibaijuka, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN-HABITAT, has consistently used the term '*homo urbanus*', for example in a recent lecture at the University of Sydney, Australia.

2. Note that, because of lack of more recent data, the period of comparison in Ghana is from 1990 to 2005.
3. This result has been achieved by persistently denying communities adequate municipal services and extolling the idea of 'community' self-help and 'do it yourself'.
4. The institutions involved in the management of water in Ghana include the Ministry of Works and Housing (MWH), Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL), Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA), Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD), Public Utility Regulatory Commission (PURC), District Assemblies, donor agencies, NGOs and communities; see Laryea-Adjei 2006, pp. 74–75 for a discussion of the roles of each of these organisations.
5. This broad picture hides differences between cities. In Accra, for example, more than 50% of the population do not have access to house or yard connection (Beyene *et al.* 2008).
6. Such a provision gives incentives to AVRIL to pad costs, engage in transfer pricing, and generally to 'take it easy' with economising on costs. As a profit-driven company, AVRIL could increase its profit by targeting 'non-revenue water' decomposed into water not paid for as a result of illegal connection and leakage. Between the two, AVRIL prefers to work on consumers to get their money, rather than work on the leakage (Weissman 2002).
7. Note, however, that official declaration of private involvement in waste management started in the first half of 1990. In Accra, it started in 1995 (Addo-Yobo and Ali 2003). So, prior to the official declaration, there was already private-sector involvement in the management of waste.

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## Is ‘another world’ really possible? Re-examining counter-hegemonic forces in post-apartheid South Africa

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A wide body of scholarly literature on social movements on an international level emphatically, but uncritically, declares that ‘another world is possible’. This paper investigates this trend and its implications for political and academic practice in post-apartheid South Africa, where community-based movements have emerged primarily in order to access basic services. In particular, it highlights the pivotal role that the state and poor people’s immediate basic needs play in limiting social movements’ contribution towards a transformative development agenda. Paying close attention to poor people’s struggles and needs, the paper argues that there is a sharp disjuncture between the ideologies manufactured by academics, and the worldviews that the working class and poor possess. It concludes by providing insight into the possibilities for post-apartheid political struggles – praxis – to lead to the formation of class consciousness and to a formidable challenge to neoliberalism.

**Keywords:** social movements; ideology; community politics; neoliberalism

### Introduction

A wide body of scholarly literature on social movements on an international level emphatically, but uncritically, declares that ‘another world is possible’. Particularly since the protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle in 1999, left-wing authors have simplistically defined neoliberalism as the problem, and grassroots resistance, especially in the form of direct action, as the solution (see, for example, Solnit [2004]). These struggles represent, as one author claims,

the real movements of resistance, the heroic struggles for global justice, which take place every day across this planet. (McNally 2006, p. 2)

As the left-wing intellectual activist will have heard repeatedly, albeit in slightly different wordings, citizens have woken up to form a movement with the aim of ‘cohesive global resistance; its values are justice, solidarity and participation’ (Houtart and Polet 2001, p. 1). These kinds of movements, we are told, ‘bring to life the Zapatista vision of a world in which everyone fits . . . where all steps may walk, where all may have laughter, where all may live the dawn’ (Starr 2005, p. 72).

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Indeed, within this body of literature, the well-known and oft-cited Zapatista movement in Mexico and others like the Landless People's Movement in Brazil (the Movimento de Trabalhadores Sem Terra, popularly known as the MST) are viewed as exemplary movements in the anti-capitalist or anti-globalisation struggle. It becomes problematic when movements all over the world are lumped into one. Take, for example, the following passage:

Hope rises with each revolt of the downtrodden: the 40,000 indigenous peoples who revolted against the government in Quito, Ecuador (January 15–22, 2000); the hundreds of thousands who joined the general strike against electricity privatization in Puerto Rico during the same month; the workers and indigenous peoples whose revolt overturned water privatization in Cochabamba, Bolivia (April 2000); the one million South African workers who held a one-day strike against poverty (May 11 2000) . . . the millions of Indian workers who struck against 'globalization, privatization and liberalization' (April 2001) . . . the one million courageous workers who took strike action in Columbia during the same month to protest the 'neoliberal model' imposed by the IMF. (McNally 2006, pp. 2–3)

In much of the orthodox literature which displays movements as holding the possibility for creating another world, movements are simplified and homogenised. Little academic attention is actually paid to the internal dynamics of movements, how they relate to the state and what kind of alternatives they offer to what has been defined as neoliberalism. Referring to the orthodox literature on social movements in the South, Thompson and Tapscott have correctly pointed out that 'Marxist scholars have portrayed . . . multiple protests as the manifestation of ongoing class struggle, [but] they do not necessarily represent a direct challenge to the legitimacy of the state' (2010, p. 20). Despite a desire among Marxists and others on the Left to paint a picture of a poor peasant or township dweller rising up to challenge capital, movements may, and understandably so, be more interested in obtaining a piece of the pie on offer by the state rather than challenging it altogether.

This paper investigates this trend and its implications in post-apartheid South Africa, where social movements have emerged primarily in order to access basic services from the state. In particular, it highlights the critical role that the state and poor people's immediate basic needs play in shaping the very possibilities for movements to contribute towards transformative outcomes. As Thompson and Tapscott indicate, 'the struggles of communities through collective action in the South are . . . more likely to relate to issues of basic socio-economic entitlements which are no longer in question in more developed states' (2010, p. 21). Paying particular attention to poor people's struggles and needs, the paper argues that there is a sharp disjuncture between ideologies manufactured by intellectuals and the worldviews that the working class and poor possess. Drawing from the academic literature in post-apartheid South Africa, participant observation in movements, and in-depth interviews with dozens of activists in various movements across Gauteng, it further questions the extent to which political struggles, praxis, will necessarily lead to the formation of class consciousness. Focusing in particular on the case of activists affiliated to the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) in Alexandra, who have sought to obtain housing opportunities in the Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP), it highlights the limitations of the strategic direction of even the most militant movements in the country, given the fact that they do not necessarily challenge the state *per se*, but rather seek to gain a piece of the pie on offer.

While referring to other important sites across the country, this article draws primarily from nearly five years of ethnographic research in Alexandra, one of the most politically tense, poor, and diverse townships in the country, in order to understand the way in

which popular resistance relates to development in the post-apartheid period. Alexandra is a black township 13 kilometres northeast of Johannesburg, and fits into a small, severely overcrowded block of only four square kilometres. It is surrounded by white middle-class residential and business areas including Sandton, one of the wealthiest suburbs in Africa. People have been living in Alexandra since 1904, and it was one of the few townships in which black people could actually own property during apartheid. Previous attempts by the apartheid government to renew Alexandra had been made without consulting residents, and these failed to improve the lives of the majority, but the African National Congress (ANC) government signified a completely different approach to renewal. It was committed to people-driven development, at least rhetorically, and there was great political support and vast resources which would be funnelled into Alexandra. Alexandra has been the beneficiary of the Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP) – funded with a grant of R1.3 billion by the ANC government and easily one of the country's most ambitious flagship projects ever undertaken by the South African government.

With such political and financial commitments behind the project, people's expectations of the ARP to deliver were therefore high, but many were soon disappointed. This has led to a situation in which the residents compete with each other over limited resources, through the use of courts, negotiations and direct action. This case provides insight into how scholars thus far have understood social movements in the post-apartheid context. The article argues that social protests have been simplistically and romantically analysed and understood, paying little attention to the latter's limitations. Before doing this, the following section contextualises new social movements in the context of the anti-apartheid struggle and the consolidation of ANC hegemony in post-apartheid South Africa.

### **From people's power to ANC hegemony**

South Africa has a strong history of militant and powerful community-based movements. By the mid-1980s, black township activists from across South Africa had risen up in an unprecedented manner to delegitimise and challenge the apartheid state. The apartheid state's Black Local Authorities (BLAs) failed to enable black citizens to take part in developing their townships, and many BLAs became so unpopular in communities that they were forced to resign. Some activists and intellectuals indicated at this time that because capitalism and apartheid reinforced each other, the post-apartheid struggle needed also to be directed against capitalism.

Particularly in the late 70s and into the early 80s, these movements employed a wide range of tactics to delegitimise the local government, including electoral boycotts, and the burning of councillors' homes to get them to resign. However, prior to the establishment of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983, civic organisations largely operated in isolation from each other on single-issue campaigns. The UDF became the main umbrella organisation that brought together civic organisations from across the country and laid the foundations for the demise of apartheid. In 1984, in a further attempt to unite movements across the country, ANC stalwart Oliver Tambo called upon civics in each community to create a situation of ungovernability. His call declared:

We must destroy the enemy organs of government. We must render them ineffective and inoperative. Indeed, why should we continue to co-operate with organs of government that we have correctly denounced as institutions imposed upon us to perpetuate our own oppression ... It makes no sense that we co-operate with Bantustans and community councils ... We have raised the level of political consciousness among ourselves to the point where we can and

must in practice refuse to submit to the dictates of the Pretoria regime. In every locality, and in all parts of our country, we must fight to ensure that we remove the enemy's organs of government, using all means available to us. (Quoted in Mayekiso 1996)

The prospects for creating 'another world' needed to come about through civic organisations which could, if necessary, pressure the government to deliver services in favour of working-class interests, even after the fall of apartheid. But these prospects were later undermined by the ANC's rise to hegemony, as well as its centralised approach to development, which witnessed the labelling of opposition as ultra-Left and counter-revolutionary.

When the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO) was launched in 1992, it brought together under a single national umbrella many of the most important civic organisations that had played a pivotal role in the anti-apartheid struggle. In the early 1990s, these civics were also in the forefront of struggles and negotiations to reconfigure local municipalities to reflect the power and interests of working-class communities. During its early stages, SANCO played a significant role in shaping the Local Government Transition Act. Also, according to Heller and Ntlokonkulu: 'Through Planact, SANCO had a role in shaping the RDP [Reconstruction and Development Programme] chapter on housing. And the RDP as a whole assigned a direct and critical role for the civics in the transformation process' (2001, p. 13).

In the early 1990s, SANCO articulated a radical and transformative development programme which rested on the two crucial pillars of popular participation and eliminating poverty. SANCO's vision was that civics were intended to be rooted within the community and to secure the participation of marginal groups, or what Mzwanele Mayekiso called the interests of the 'working class' (Mayekiso 1992). SANCO evolved out of the tradition of resistance against apartheid. In other words, it was premised upon the centrality of the interests of the working class and therefore the need for a radical project that could overthrow capitalism so that the majority's needs could be met. Mzwanele Mayekiso, then organising secretary of the Alexandra Civic Organisation (ACO, which later became SANCO), came to symbolise to some activists the desire to connect Marxist thinking to civic practice. In 1992, just prior to the launch of SANCO, he argued that 'if the movement within the ANC towards meeting basic needs begins to fail, it is logical to expect that working-class organs will continue to press for programmes that meet those needs' (*ibid.*, p. 38). Civil society was intended not as a support network for the ANC state's development trajectory, but rather as a means by which to bring about a significant redistribution of wealth to the working class. Mayekiso confirmed that the essence of working class civil society is 'to empower class-conscious communities whose good relations with a progressive democratic state will permit a redistribution of wealth that also leads to new social relations' (*ibid.*, p. 40).

With the ANC's rise to power, however, the role of SANCO changed dramatically. SANCO was no longer viewed as an organisation that could challenge state power, but instead largely became a vehicle through which the ANC could implement development. As Heller and Ntlokonkulu explain, SANCO ceded its power to the ANC:

In the euphoric aftermath of South Africa's first democratic elections – quickly followed up by local government elections – the extraordinary mass legitimacy enjoyed by the new representative government all but eclipsed the more direct and participatory forms of democracy championed by the civics. In its efforts to secure its position in the alliance, SANCO all but ruled out protest actions, depriving the movement of a key mobilisational tool and source of strategic leverage. (2001, p. 14)

Furthermore, the leadership and organisational capacity of SANCO to represent civic structures on the ground was undermined by its support for ANC structures, especially civic leaders' drive to become part of the ANC local government. This meant that the drive to build civic power in working class communities shifted to building party structures (Heller and Ntlokonkulu 2001, p. 14).

The ANC's reputation as the main organisation that liberated the oppressed majority from the apartheid government's rule has led to a situation in which the ANC has been able to maintain legitimacy in terms of its transformation agenda, regardless of whether or not citizens have determined this agenda. After the local government elections of 1995 and 1996, civics 'were called upon to play a leading role in building ANC branches. Grassroots activism thus shifted from building community structures to building party structures' (Heller and Ntlokonkulu 2001).

Nelson Mandela and other ANC members argued that civil society must move away from resistance politics and that it must now act as service-delivery agents for the state's development trajectory. This had the effect of co-opting civil society into state-designed service-delivery projects. Civil-society organisations, though key in the ending of apartheid, would move from protest politics to the politics of development. Gumede explains that the ANC supported this position:

The one thing the ANC knew was that it did not want radical civil society groups acting as watchdogs over the government, as they had under apartheid. At the party's national conference in 1997, Mandela lambasted organizations and activists, such as SANCO's Mzwanele Mayekiso ... for believing that civil society organizations should indeed play such a role and serve as channels for grassroots communities to voice their grievances and expectations. (Gumede 2005, p. 284)

Former President Thabo Mbeki and other ANC leaders therefore have a tendency to label opposition 'ultra-left', and thus perceive opposition as being opposed to progress. This stance is not against participation *per se*, but against any participation that is outside the ANC's plans. Greenstein (2003) suggests that, following from the anti-apartheid movement's struggle against a common enemy (white minority rule), the idea that local struggles must be subordinated in the name of national unity has been carried over to the post-apartheid era. However, particularly with the adoption of neoliberal policies under the Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) programme in 1996, the state could not continue for long to define the terms upon which citizens participated and, in 1999, a new era of civics emerged under the title of social movements.

### **The re-emergence of community-based movements**

More than 15 years into democracy, South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world, and the majority remains poor. In this context, left-wing intellectuals have been quick to point out that the time for Mandela-mania has long passed (Desai 2002). With the transition from apartheid to democracy, many activists hoped that civic organisations would provide the building blocks to deliver to the previously excluded black majority, but instead mechanisms for participation in post-apartheid have largely been used to co-opt the masses. Within this paradigm, the role of the black masses in post-apartheid South Africa is to sit back quietly for their turn to receive state-defined services from the government. The ANC reinforces this stance by suppressing dissent and labelling it counter-revolutionary, ultra-Left and anti-development (McKinley 2006). Perhaps

predictably then, the ANC views ward committees and development forums, its primary mechanisms of participation, as the arms and feet of state-defined services which are to be delivered within the fiscal restraints of a neoliberal framework (Sinwell 2010).

In response, movements have drawn upon key traditions of the anti-apartheid struggle, such as protest and resistance, in order to have their demands met (Gibson 2006). Though protest and resistance have been given serious attention in the literature in post-apartheid South Africa, it has been limited and superficial, labelling the voice of the poor as a virtuous one that needs no outside political strategy. Alternatively, the Left has tended to assume that movements like the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), which will be explained in more depth below, automatically challenge neoliberalism, simply because the face of the Forum's leadership is anti-neoliberal. The recent militancy of protests in townships around the country, which have seen local councillors being forcibly removed from places like Standerton and Balfour, are often misconstrued as a challenge to neoliberalism. For example, the APF political and organisational report for 2010 states that 'these latest rounds of community uprisings are a direct challenge to the neoliberal policies of the [Jacob] Zuma presidency' (APF 2010). Although these movements may represent a new level of radical militancy, they do not necessarily reflect a new kind of politics, or at least not one that the Left hopes that they will offer. Analysts have not gone so far as to examine the internal dynamics of local affiliates and other community-based movements which, in most instances, actually buy into ANC policies.

Theorists have also not paid adequate attention to the potential for movements to challenge the ideologically dominant ANC. From this perspective, academics of the Left and other activists critique the policies and ideology of the ANC in power, but the masses are left to their own devices. Gramsci's notion of hegemony is useful here. Gramsci understands hegemony to be when a political group is ideologically dominant. This means that the direction of society that is envisioned goes largely unchallenged and is considered to be 'legitimate' even by those who do not necessarily benefit materially from it. The masses maintain this hegemony by adopting the cultural beliefs of the hegemon, thereby giving their active 'consent' to those in power. Gramsci therefore argues that:

a class is dominant in two ways, i.e. 'leading' and 'dominant'. It leads the classes which are its allies, and dominates those which are its enemies. Therefore, even before attaining power a class can (and must) 'lead'; when it is in power it becomes dominant, but continues to 'lead' as well ... one should not count solely on the power and material force which such a position gives in order to exercise political leadership or hegemony. (Gramsci 1971, p. 57)

The 'common sense' of development inscribed in the minds of the masses is therefore the same as that envisioned by those in power.

For Gramsci, intellectuals play a critical role in both maintaining and, possibly also, contesting hegemony. Gramsci argues that 'all men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals' (Gramsci 1971, p. 9). While hegemony is maintained by intellectuals who seek to maintain the dominant social order in favour of their economic interests, counterhegemony occurs when the hegemon's system of beliefs begins to be questioned by what he terms 'organic intellectuals'. These intellectuals provide an alternative value system on which to base the future development of society. Invoking Gramsci, I suggest that participatory spaces may be restrained by hegemonic ideologies that have been infused in people's minds. Poor communities across the country place hope that the new populist president, Jacob Zuma, will listen to their demands and deliver socio-economic services to them, when in fact he has committed to the same old failing neoliberal policies which neglect poor communities. The ANC

remains hegemonic as the masses, and indeed the government, seek to achieve people's demands at the local level within the same political framework.

Perhaps because of the hope that the Left placed in their potential to challenge the onslaught of neoliberal policies and in the idea that 'another world is possible', many academic analysts initially treated these movements in a celebratory manner – paying little or no attention to their weaknesses (see Bond 2000, Desai 2002, McKinley 2006). Recently, however, scholars have criticised these approaches and thereby sought to uncover both the potentials *and* limitations of these movements (see Ballard *et al.* 2006, Desai 2006, Madlingozi 2007, Walsh 2008).

Oldfield and Stokke (2007) have attempted to address this issue by breaking with the binary between 'liberal' thinkers who emphasise that civil society must work with the state (Parnell *et al.* 2002), and 'radical "anti-neoliberal" critics' (Oldfield and Stokke 2007, p. 1) which create sharp distinctions between civil society opposition and the neoliberal state (see, for example, Bond 2000). Drawing from the organisational background and tactics of the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (AEC), Oldfield and Stokke argue that: 'The multiple positions and strategic engagements adopted by urban community-based movements, combined with the complex character of neoliberal policies, produce often contradictory and uneven politics that at times resonate with critiques of neoliberalism, but also articulate as locally specific issues' (Oldfield and Stokke 2007, p. 2). In a collection edited by Gibson (2006), the authors have gone so far as to suggest that new movements in post-apartheid South Africa:

are not only challenging neoliberal capitalist globalization, but also attempting to articulate alternatives and raise the question of what it means to be human. Whether reconnecting electricity, or struggling for housing or for HIV/AIDS anti-virals, these social movements are a challenge, in the most human of ways, to the mantra that 'there is no alternative' to capitalist globalization. (Gibson 2006, back cover)

While the above scholars have clearly provided a valuable starting point from which to understand the nature of social movements in post-apartheid South Africa, what has not been adequately explored is the extent to which local affiliates of social movements are most accurately characterised as reactions to the exclusion of the poor which is brought about by neoliberal policies, or whether they actually lay serious critiques against, and seek alternatives to, neoliberalism itself. This is an important distinction because the South African literature often seems to assume that the radical *tactics* of movements are necessarily underpinned by a radical or revolutionary *politics* (for example, see Oldfield and Stokke 2007). This is clearly not always the case. For example, just as a Black person in apartheid South Africa who entered a bathroom that said 'Whites Only' was not necessarily an anti-apartheid activist (though they *could* have been), neither is the poor person in a shack who 'illegally' connects his or her electricity or occupies a government-subsidised house in post-apartheid South Africa *necessarily* an anti-neoliberal activist. Although these actions are significant on their own, the problem is that they may be dressed up, or passed off, as revolutionary when in fact they may be more accurately characterised as a reaction to exclusion. Desai began to develop this thinking when he argued that:

we have to realise and respect that the core demand of many social movements is indeed simply to be placed within 'normal' relations of oppression and exploitation: in a normal job, in an RDP [Reconstruction and Development Programme] house with minimum standard of electricity and water. We might have reasons to tell other people otherwise (although, I can't see what

these reasons are) but we ought not to mislead ourselves. And we should not use the poor to satisfy our particular (intellectual) fetishes. (Desai 2006, p. 6)

This article indicates that the Left has also not paid adequate attention to the power of state concessions to control militant communities who rise up to challenge specific local interventions of the ANC in their communities.

Drawing lessons from the history of recent militant communities provides critical insight into militant community organisations which have challenged government decisions in post-apartheid South Africa. While at face value there have been important challenges to neoliberal orthodoxy, many movements die out at the faintest sign of a state concession – and this where the power of the ANC, and indeed token welfare neoliberalism, lies. The case in Khutsong (township on West Rand) throws this into sharp relief. Khutsong was one of the most militant communities in the post-apartheid period particularly between 2005 and 2006. It refused to vote in the 2006 elections and achieved its demand of being incorporated into the Gauteng province and is now, as one leader celebrates, ‘100% ANC’ (see Kirshner and Phokela 2009). Winning this kind of concession is important in its own terms for the lives of poor people in Khutsong and, indeed, for our faith in the power of human beings to resist the implementation of top-down development plans. But it must not be viewed as a sign that the neoliberal onslaught is under threat or that real resistance to neoliberalism is mounting.

Like the recent militant, and sometimes violent, service-delivery protests in Balfour, Piet Retief, and Standerton, the case in Khutsong is not connected to a critique of the ANC itself, nor do any of these communities seriously seek to pressurise the government beyond their own communities. As indicated in a report completed last year on four key service-delivery hotspots, the protests do not challenge the ANC’s national policy framework (see Sinwell *et al.*, 2009).<sup>1</sup> Abahlali is another case in point. One of the most celebrated movements in post-apartheid South Africa, Abahlali is often described as an ideal example of a bottom-up community-based organisation that genuinely represents the interests of the poor. It claims to be able to speak for itself and on behalf of poor people living in shacks (Pithouse 2008). Despite the position of the leadership of Abahlali, the majority of the people in the shack settlement at Kennedy Road vote the ANC into power (Bryant 2008). Even Abahlali’s slogan, ‘No House, No Vote’, militant as it may be, suggests, like the case of Khutsong (and maybe also Balfour), that if the ANC arrives with its state concessions, often a few poorly constructed RDP houses and toilets, residents will then vote for the ANC. Though these claims clearly reflect the community’s immediate needs, they may in fact mean very little for the enemy, neoliberalism, that so much of the Left claims to be fighting against. The danger is that the Left may describe these movements as revolutionary or liberatory, as holding realistic possibilities for creating another world, when in fact they buy into the ANC and, to a significant extent, legitimise it.

The following section provides a critical analysis of the politics of local affiliates to the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), a social movement that draws from ‘class-based ideologies’ such as ‘anti-capital, anti-GEAR, anti-globalisation, anti-market, socialist, and Trotskyist’ (Ballard *et al.* 2006, p. 400). The APF presents itself as part of a wider radical political project that is intended to transform the existing power relations embedded in the neoliberal policies of the ANC, which it claims put the rich before the poor, thereby limiting the latter’s ability to meet their basic needs. For example, Trevor Ngwane, a prominent leader of the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC, an affiliate of the APF) insists that the poor in South Africa are objects of the ANC’s capitalist trajectory. ‘The

ANC', he argues, 'serves the interests of the black and white capitalist bosses. It does not serve the working class and the poor' (APF 2006). The APF seeks to embark on a radical project with an active notion of citizenship that can define the underlying process of social change from the perspective of the working class so that they can liberate themselves from the neoliberal system of oppression that has been adopted by the ANC.

On the one hand, activists within the APF are adamant that 'the test of an authentic movement . . . is whether it holds a vision for a socialist alternative or at least opposes the state's neoliberal growth path' (Ballard *et al.* 2006, p. 401). On the other hand, Mark Heywood of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), a social movement that demands anti-retrovirals for all, has suggested that 'revolutionary social movements as defined by the left were a figment of their imagination' (*ibid.*, p. 402). Ballard *et al.* therefore suggest that 'while it might be possible to say that community struggles are – by default – anti-neoliberal, it does not follow that they set out with this ideology in mind' (*ibid.*). Given the indication that there may be a disjuncture between the APF's class ideology as a movement and the masses who actually protest on the ground, this paper provides insight into the politics of two key community movements in Alexandra township – the Wynberg Concerned Residents (WCR) and the Alexandra Vukuzenzele Crisis Committee (AVCC) – which are local affiliates of the APF. While much is known about the APF's goals as an *organisation* (Buhlungu 2006), far less is known about the politics of its local *affiliates*. While the APF presents itself as an anti-systemic class movement, the next section of this paper draws from in-depth interviews and participant observation in order to understand how its local APF affiliates present their own struggle. These methods provided critical insight into what these leaders do and the meanings they ascribe to their actions and the practical implications that social movements, like those above, have when they do not challenge the ANC's development path directly. It then questions what this means, not for poor people at the forefront of the action who understandably vie for limited housing opportunities in their own communities, but for the system called Neoliberalism which the Left claims to fight against.

### **Problematising protest in the Alexandra Renewal Project**

The AVCC and the WCR are particularly critical because they operate in the context of the Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP), a R1.3-billion flagship project with financial support from the ANC at the national, provincial and local government level. As indicated earlier, the ARP is nine years into its life span (completed in 2010), and yet Alexandra still has the face of the congested ghetto that it was during apartheid. Although the ARP has witnessed a decline in crime rates and some minor improvements in access to water and electricity, the majority of the population remains without access to adequate housing opportunities. Julian Baskin, the director of the ARP, has suggested that the development of Alexandra will 'take a lifetime' (Interview, J. Baskin, Director of the ARP, Wynberg, 9 October 2007), but the inception of the ARP gave residents high hopes and the expectation that they would not need to wait that long for delivery. While the ARP aimed to deliver 22,250 new houses in seven years, by August 2007, the ARP website noted that there were only 2727 completed housing units (including 2000 in Bramfisherville), and more than 7000 under construction (ARP 2007). Even if people had been able to immediately occupy the other 7000 houses that were under construction, the number of families or individuals receiving houses would have been 9727. While this seems substantial at first glance, it is less so given the fact that there is a housing backlog of approximately 40,000 in Alexandra (Community Agency for Social Enquiry 2005,

p. 123). In this context, local affiliates of the APF have focused on the politics of housing in Alexandra and these conditions might have provided them with a starting point from which to present a class critique of the ARP's housing policies.

The ARP works closely with the Alexandra Development Forum (ADF) which represents approximately 20 organisations in Alexandra and is intended to be the mouthpiece of the community. Together, they have come to a consensus with regard to housing policy and allocations. Due to limited resources, however, this consensus has the effect of prioritising some poor residents at the expense of others. In this context, a wide array of civic organisations in Alexandra have vied for housing opportunities. For example, The Alexandra Land and Property Owners Association (ALPOA) seeks to de-densify Alexandra so that owners' property values go up. However, these plans would undermine the interests of shack dwellers who want to remain in Alexandra. In fact, those living in shacks along the Iphuteng school cluster were part of the victory in 2005 that now enables them to be provided with houses in Extension 7, just along the borders of Alexandra, instead of being removed to periphery areas such as Diepsloot and Bramfisherville. There are also the residents who lived in S'swetla, an informal settlement in Alexandra until they were moved to a transit camp (a temporary government-designed shack settlement) so that a bridge could be built that would connect old and new Alexandra. These residents are now putting pressure on the government so that they can move into the houses that the ARP promised them. The Umpakathi Development Forum (UDF), the Marlboro Concerned Residents (MCR), and the Alexandra Concerned Residents (ACR) are the names of other civic organisations which have emerged to demand access to housing over the past several years.

The constituency of the AVCC and the WCR are microcosms of the working class make-up of Alexandra as a whole. The Wynberg residents included 293 households (96 headed by women), 11 elderly (over 60 years old), 252 children (under 18 years old), 22 disabled, 95 unemployed, and 201 chronically poverty-stricken (monthly income R800 or less). The Wynberg area consisted of a set of partitioned small rooms which are linked to each other in a confined area (Chauke 2005, p. 3). The threats of evictions of the people of Wynberg by the private developers of the Alexandra Plaza and the subsequent court case, which attached local government officials and the ARP as second and third respondents to the case, was publicised in the media between 2005 and 2006 (Indymedia South Africa 2005, Cherney 2006, Lange 2006). But, the politics and implications of the WCR's struggle for housing has not been adequately explained. Journalists arrived on 31 March 2005 when the developers of Alexandra Plaza attempted forcibly to remove the residents of Wynberg. They recorded that more than 60 security guards and police officers arrived in Wynberg to effect the evictions. IndyMedia South Africa explains the process through which the WCR expressed their power through direct action:

Hundreds of people came down into the streets where they began demonstrating against the police and lighting tires on fire. Due to the massive outpouring of resistance, the police were unable to enter the factories. (Indymedia South Africa 2005, p. 2)

The AVCC represents about 500 people, some living in factories, and includes shack dwellers who seek better accommodation from the government. Similarly, little is known about the AVCC's struggle for housing, besides Sinwell's (2009) study which demonstrates the AVCC's application of militant direct action to force the government to heed to some of its housing demands. While newspapers and/ or academic reports tell us about the *actions* of these movements, much less is known about the *politics behind these actions*,

which is the focus here. Referring to the allocation of houses in the ARP, Ellen Chauke – chairperson of the WCR – said:

It's not only us. All Alexandrans are suffering . . . There are houses that are built but they are not given to Alexandrians, only 2 or 3 who are Alexandrians. The others are from somewhere else. They are giving money to the authorities so we really don't know what is happening. (Interview, E. Chauke, Chairperson of the WCR, Wynberg, 8 May 2006)

The assumption here is that the appropriate people in Alexandra are not receiving the resources that they believe they have a right to; rather, these resources are being allocated to others who do not deserve them. Dunia Mekgoe, secretary of the WCR, also echoes this view:

[T]here were R1.3 billion that was given to people of Alexandra to build those houses. So our question is where are those houses and how many houses have they built so far? And who has a right to go to the resources? And who is in those houses? Are they Alexandrans or people from outside? Because the R1.3 billion was including us . . . we are included in the R1.3 billion so someone should think and say, where is that money? What have they built so far? (Interview, D. Mekgoe, Secretary of the WCR, Wynberg, 8 May 2006)

Beyond obtaining the immediate goal of acquiring houses for its constituency, the leaders of the WCR, awaiting the court's decision, also held a news conference at Alex San Kopano Community Centre intended to 'expose corruption, nepotism and mismanagement in the Alexandra Renewal Project' (APF 2005).

Like several other community organisations in Alexandra, the AVCC has also stressed that there is an unfair allocation of houses. Fredah Dlamini, Chairperson of AVCC, observed that 'we need more houses because the houses that are available are given to people who don't deserve them. People who bribe councillors get them' (cited in Tshabalala 2007). Reaffirming this viewpoint, Dlamini states that the 'processes of houses is not going in the right way. We need to influence how houses are going, to the poor, and not through corruption' (Interview, F. Dlamini, Chairperson of AVCC, East Bank, 4 September 2007).

Perhaps the key demand of the AVCC is to achieve 'a transparent process for the allocation of houses in Extension 7' (APF 2008). This demand, though important on its own, seems to assume that if houses were allocated in a 'transparent' manner in which the AVCC could have some direct influence, their problems would be solved within the framework of the ARP.

It seems that the central objective of the APF critique in Alexandra is to claim that the ARP is corrupt and needs to reprioritise housing opportunities. Similarly to the other protests described across the country, this resonates with people's broad frustrations with the ARP, but it is not meant, nor does it necessarily fundamentally challenge the premise of the ARP. This means that they have not offered an alternative to development, but rather, have claimed a piece of the housing pie offered by the ANC through the ARP. This analysis does not intend to undermine the potential problems that exist with corruption at the local level in relation to housing allocations. Any organisation, including the APF and the ANC, can challenge corrupt development practices in the ARP. This is because it does not offer an alternative to existing policies, but assumes that if management is effective and efficient, development will be legitimate. The APF in Alexandra, despite how leaders of the APF write about their actions, engage only with what Hickey and Mohan (2004) have termed the imminent processes of social change – that is, specific interventions. Because they do not engage directly with immanent development – that is, the underlying processes

of social change known as neoliberalism that one would expect the APF to lay sharp critiques against – the AVCC and WCR arguably lack a transformative agenda through which to enable marginalised groups to claim access to a greater stake of national resources.

This is extremely problematic in a practical way for other poor people in Alexandra, who vie for limited resources. In November 2007, while the people being displaced from the Iphuteng School Cluster were preparing to move from their shacks to Extension 7 RDP houses, the AVCC took the opportunity to occupy those houses. While the AVCC did not know whom these houses were for, they were in effect taking away the housing opportunities from those living in the Iphuteng School Cluster. Julian Baskin, the director of the ARP, commented that once ‘you invade a house, you are basically stealing it from somebody else who has already been allocated a house’ (Interview, J. Baskin, Director of the ARP, Wynberg, 9 October 2007). He further explains how this occupation could lead to conflict with other new residents:

And unless we go and deal with it . . . the guys in Iphuteng were mobilising to go there and whop these guys out, because those were their houses. They would have gone in there and killed these guys, literally, had it not been for our intervention with the police. (Interview, J. Baskin, Director of the ARP, Wynberg, 9 October 2007)

This conflict between new residents could have led to physical violence. While the AVCC claims to sympathise with the people of Iphuteng, who are also being moved from shacks to houses, they continued to occupy over 200 houses in Extension 7, houses that belong to other people, according to the ARP’s policy. Responding to this, Ali Rasetelo, a leader in S’swetla, explains that:

I think the government is dealing with that. Yes, if you move to the house illegally, then the law must take its course. I mean we can’t support that. I mean you can’t jump the queue. (Interview, A. Rasetelo, leader in S’swetla, Wynberg, 6 June 2008)

Similarly, the WCR’s housing opportunities depend on the *prioritisation* of houses, which means that a ‘win’ for the WCR would constitute a ‘loss’ for another constituency in Alexandra. The WCR battles to obtain the same limited resources within the confines of the ARP. Ellen Chauke explains this:

That is why I say there are so many people and there are so many projects happening. So, at the moment, we don’t know which group is moving out. We are still waiting. There are so many groups, organisations just like us, who are waiting to move to the houses. So, we really don’t know. Even these shacks here, S’swetla village, they have to be moved. But we really don’t know that, are they going to be the first one or we are going to be the first one. So that is why it takes such a long time. (Interview, E. Chauke, Chairperson of the WCR, Marlboro, 6 February 2008)

It ‘takes such a long time’ to obtain housing opportunities because the demand for housing is so much greater than the need. Through negotiations, they are attempting to occupy the same houses as other ‘new’ residents such as the people around Iphuteng and S’swetla. While the WCR and AVCC’s demands for housing may be legitimate, what is also significant is that the AVCC and WCR represent a minority in Alexandra. Implementing their development agendas would have to be done at the expense of other residents and as such might constitute a tyranny of the minority.

Despite a massive scale of popular protest which has resulted in a substantial degree of community control over development priorities, the project will be completed in 2010, arguably without improving the lives of the majority of residents who still live in abject poverty: the 350,000 residents remain densely packed into 74,000 shacks in four square kilometres of land. Academics would like to believe that all of these acts of resistance in places like Alexandra, when added up, will somehow miraculously challenge neoliberalism. Without questioning the framework in which development can occur in Alexandra and elsewhere, communities struggling for housing end up fighting against each other for limited resources, rather than constituting ‘another world’ or a challenge to the systemic enemy called neoliberalism.

## Conclusion

The romanticisation of social movements only takes us so far if we seriously seek to understand whether the strategies and tactics employed by movements have the potential to challenge state power. In fact, there is also no *a priori* reason to believe that these militant movements will necessarily evolve into class-conscious movements. Praxis, struggle, does not have to equal the development of class consciousness. This is, in part, evidenced by the fact that even militant movements may remain tied to the ANC after they win struggles. Battles, and particularly where state concessions have been given by the ANC, may lead to further support of the ANC without actually developing a movement against neoliberalism. The slogan, ‘no land – no house – no vote’ illustrates this clearly, as it suggests that after movements have got what they want, they will vote for the ANC. The desperation which exists in poor communities understandably creates a condition in which many poor people would rather receive a house with water and electricity than fight against the neoliberal system that mostly middle-class left-wing people identify as the problem.

Being militant and challenging top-down practices of officials is not problematic in itself. It becomes problematic, however, when the Left assumes that these kinds of protest actions across the country, which for now have largely been framed at a local level, somehow challenge the class-based project called neoliberalism. Like the people in Khutsong, the case of the AVCC and WCR highlights the fragmented nature of social movements which make claims on behalf of their own community, without adequately connecting them to broader struggles. The power of state concessions means that even militant communities like Khutsong can be easily located within the neoliberal ANC. The situation of the WCR and the AVCC in Alexandra illustrates the problem associated with this. Because these movements claim resources within the ARP’s confines, other poor people in Alexandra are excluded from their development agenda.

However, the potential that social movements in Alexandra and beyond have for achieving transformation is something that has, and will continue to, evolve over time as power relations are reshaped in unpredictable ways in post-apartheid South Africa. Those engaging in direct action in order to meet their demands on their own terms may help guide the South African masses on the path towards achieving the kind of transformative project that was undertaken during apartheid under the notion of ‘ungovernability’, which arguably prompted the apartheid government to negotiate itself out of power. The militancy across the country, particularly in places like Balfour and Standerton, suggests that unifying the power of these movements, which have tended to exert their power independently from each other, could lead towards more transformative results. While organic intellectuals have, in the main, not emerged to contest the nature of the political economy in

post-apartheid South Africa, they have refused to sit back and wait for the government to deliver. In so doing, they have begun to contest the legitimacy of the ANC government and showed other communities across the country that it can be forced to concede to poor people's demands.

This indicates that the Left's hope for 'another world' does lie in the power of poor, desperate, sometimes angry communities to control development trajectories on their own terms. However, this article has illustrated that movements need political and strategic direction in order to create 'another world' which could be favourable to all poor communities instead of only individual ones. The time has come to go beyond romanticisation in order to show the conditions under which acts of resistance, subtle or not, might be able to challenge neoliberalism. The question is whether or not intellectuals will begin to debate these issues and engage in praxis, or whether our own ideology, anti-capitalism, will remain closed off from the poor. Will academics continue to ignore the limitations of movements while simultaneously speaking past and without the poor at obscure international conferences while the enemy, neoliberalism, remains intact? Indeed, rather than speaking truth to power, the time has come to 'speak truth within the disempowered' (Desai 2006). If we do acknowledge the limitations and real potential of movements and firmly believe that 'Another World is Possible', then academics may need to consider how to capture the imagination of the masses to move beyond meeting their own immediate needs, thereby extending and strengthening, rather than deferring, a broader liberation struggle.

### Acknowledgements

Luke Sinwell is grateful to Noor Nieftagodien (previously his PhD advisor at Witwatersrand University) and for the support provided by the programme called 'The voices of the poor in urban governance: participation, mobilization and politics in South African cities'.

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### Note

1. As indicated in a report completed in 2009 on four key service-delivery hotspots, the protests do not challenge the ANC's national policy framework; see Sinwell *et al.* (2009).

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## The agrarian question in Tanzania: using new evidence to reconcile an old debate

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Rural poverty continues to be one of the most trenchant development problems in Tanzania, and yet no comprehensive solution has been found. In this paper it is argued that without a fundamental understanding of the agrarian question, any attempt to derive meaningful conclusions on rural development is doomed to be incomprehensive and incomplete. The paper traces back the roots of this important scholarly exchange of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as well as summarising the resulting debate mainly between the neo-populist school and Marxian political economy. It then goes on to outline how this original understanding of the agrarian question extended to and influenced the contemporary rural development discourse, which however widely misrepresented the original contributions and created an illustrious array of antagonistic and inconclusive approaches that culminated in the recent World Development Report 2008: *Agriculture for development*. This theoretical discussion is framed and exemplified by the case of rural development, labour market participation and poverty in the West Usambara Mountains, Tanzania. Primary survey data collected by the author in 2008 is employed to analyse the current state of the farmers, their engagement in labour markets as well as ongoing processes of class differentiation. Returning to the initial debate, an attempt to link these current realities with the overall outlook for Tanzanian development is provided.

**Keywords:** Tanzania; rural poverty; rural development; agriculture; rural labour markets; livelihood diversification

Since the inception of development economics the challenges of rural development have attracted great academic and political attention. Yet, in view of persistent and largely unchanging poverty levels – and poverty being an overwhelmingly rural phenomenon (IFAD 2001) – it becomes apparent that these problems remain largely unresolved to this day, and they continue to constitute some of the most trenchant issues of economic development, particularly with respect to Africa.<sup>1</sup> This paper argues that without a fundamental understanding of the agrarian question, the attempt to derive any conclusions on rural development is doomed to be incomprehensive and incomplete.

Unfortunately, such inconclusiveness currently is a widespread condition amongst the profession of development economics, and the publication of the recent World Development Report 2008 *Agriculture for development* serves as a lucid and illustrative example for this contemporary trend. A wide range of scholars (for example, Havenevik *et al.* 2007, Rizzo 2009, Woodhouse 2009) have pointed to and deplored its many ‘apparent

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analytical and empirical incoherence[s]’ (Oya 2009, p. 232), culminating in highly contradictory and inconclusive policy recommendations. This article aims to trace this confusion back to some of its theoretical origins in the agrarian question, as well as to reconcile them with new illustrative survey data from the West Usambara Mountains in Tanzania.

### **Connecting the challenge of rural development in Tanzania with the agrarian question**

With respect to the pressing issues of rural development, Tanzania is a typical case in point. The country remains one of the poorest economies in the world with an estimated per capita GDP of just over US\$500 (IMF 2009) and a Human Development Index ranking of 159 out of 177 countries (UNDP 2008), despite massive development efforts by the government and international donor community who continue to celebrate Tanzania as a ‘donor darling’ (Harrison *et al.* 2009) and ‘the story of an African transition’ (Nord *et al.* 2009).

And indeed, Tanzania has achieved rather respectable consistent GDP growth figures of 5–7.5% over the past decade. However, most commentators agree that the majority of Tanzanians have not benefited as poverty reduction failed to follow suit. Between the two most recent national household budget surveys in 2001 and 2007 (URoT 2002, 2008b), no statistically significant decrease of the share of people experiencing poverty could be observed – however speaking in absolute terms, it was found that about 1.5 million more Tanzanians now live in poverty compared to 2001.

As is the case in so many African countries, agriculture is the main pillar of the Tanzanian economy, contributing about 26%<sup>2</sup> to national GDP and employing more than 80% of its working population (data: URoT 2008a, World Bank 2008). It is especially the rural areas that suffer the most from widespread income poverty – about 83% of the country’s poor live in rural areas – with nearly 38% of the rural population falling below a basic needs poverty line and 18.4% below the national food poverty line (URoT 2002, 2008b). Per capita food availability has been in constant decline since its recorded high in 1979, since then having fallen by 29% to this day. It is undoubtedly here in rural Tanzania that the country’s main development challenges lie, and this has been echoed in recent donor commitments and government policies. Tanzania’s latest nationwide development strategy is called ‘*Kilimo Kwanza*’ – Agriculture First.

What is the major handicap that the rural population faces? To many politicians and academics, the answer to this question seems clear: the agricultural sector’s lack of market orientation and exposure, as President Jakaya Kikwete recently made quite clear when describing the sector: ‘It is subsistence agriculture – living from hand to mouth!’ (as cited in World Bank 2007a). On the face of it, this picture is confirmed by national surveys and academic research alike. The latest Integrated Labour Force Survey 2006 reported a share of wage or salaried employment of only 9% of the economically active population (79.8% of the total population), and allegedly only 11% of rural households have at least one member that is engaged in wage employment (URoT 2007), therewith confirming the position that African rural societies primarily consist of small-scale farming, self-reliant households. Repeatedly, numerous academic scholars further endorsed this notion by theorising the ‘peasant mode of production’ (Hyden 1980, 1983, Waters 2007). This image of African farmers has been very formative not only for public perceptions on rural Africa, but also for the design of national and international agricultural policies and poverty reduction strategies which focus on the small-scale farmer.

However, in stark contrast to this, a labour market survey conducted by the author in the West Usambara mountains in 2008 found that 78% of all participating households had at

least one member that had engaged in wage-labour activities, and 43% resorted to hired labour in their production process in the observed season. These empirical findings and their general interpretation, which will be discussed in detail in the second half of this article, are also backed by a small number of other studies (for example, Sender 1975, Sender and Smith 1990), which in general have been relatively marginalised in the wider debates of rural development and policy responses in Tanzania. Furthermore, most discussions of the ‘agrarian question’ remain deeply theoretical and abstract and this is likely to be one of the reasons why they find little resonance with the wider development community. For this reason it is believed by the author that it is essential to substantiate possibly dry theory with palpable evidence. Even though its full completion is next to impossible, we are convinced that such an attempted ‘bridge’ between the abstract and the concrete is an important tool, and this article is intended as a first contribution to this effect.

To all those who are genuinely concerned with economic and social progress in Tanzania and Africa in general, this lack of discussion should be deeply troubling. The (agrarian) question about farmers’ mode of production must lie at the very core of any rural development discourse, given that it is concerned with the systematic determinants of farmers’ reactions to political and economic stimuli of any kind. Consequentially, the rural mode of production has a direct impact on the rural economy’s dynamics, progression and indeed development. *Ceteris paribus* and greatly simplified, a subsistence farmer’s decisions about production are based on the trade-off between the ‘cost’ of personal drudgery s/he is willing to impose on himself and the aspired extent of family consumption. As long as the peasant farmer has direct control over the means of subsistence and production, ‘there is no compulsion to exchange in order to reproduce, no pressure/necessity to compete, thus no requirement to accumulate especially by way of innovating in order to survive’ (Brenner 1977, p. 49). The result of course is a mostly static situation that does not adhere to any systematic or intrinsic mechanism for improvement, advancement and investment. A capitalist farmer, on the other hand, is in a situation of direct competition for market share and profits, not least in order to be able to bear the cost of wage labour inputs. Unlike his/her peasant counterpart, he/she is subject to a systematic compulsion to be an efficient producer, and therefore to invest, to expand and to accumulate. The wage labourer – in the double sense ‘free’ from the means of subsistence and free to sell his labour power – faces competition (for jobs) too, and therewith is compelled to be as hardworking and industrious as possible in order to avoid being segregated from his sole source of income. But more importantly, ‘[o]nly under conditions of free wage labour will the individual producing units (combining labour power and the means of production) be forced to sell in order to buy, to buy in order to survive and reproduce, and ultimately to expand and innovate in order to maintain this position in relationship to other competing productive units’ (*ibid.*, p. 32). The agrarian question, as described in more detail in the following section, seeks to tackle these exact socio-economic processes of transition between the peasant economy and a capitalist agricultural sector.

The advent of capitalist relations is therefore a necessary (but clearly not sufficient) condition for development, as only through the capitalist imperative can there be a fundamental trend reversal and a systematic end to stagnation in rural Africa. ‘For capitalism differs from all pre-capitalist modes of production in its systematic tendency to unprecedented, though neither continuous nor unlimited, economic development’ (*ibid.*, p. 30), and ‘whatever Marx thought about the origins of capitalist social productive relations, he was quite clear that their establishment was indispensable for the development of the productive forces, i.e. for capitalist economic development’ (*ibid.*, p. 26). Conversely, it is – by definition – absurd to assume that capitalist development, as achieved by every advanced

economy so far, can be based on egalitarian (subsistence) communities of small-scale farmers and economic ‘backwardness’. Regrettably, in contemporary economic science and development studies these concerns and relations have been unjustifiably eclipsed. Yet, they are at the heart of the agrarian question and any rural development context, consequently having been the unresolved concern of scholars across the world for more than a century.

It is essential for any serious understanding of rural development to reconnect issues of rural and agricultural economics, as well as agrarian change, with their theoretical roots in the agrarian question. For this, in the next section I will attempt a summary of how the important historic and theoretic developments of the agrarian question together with their subsequent antagonistic theoretical and ideological approaches have culminated in the disorientation and confusion of contemporary thinking on rural development. Following this, qualitative and quantitative survey data collected in 2008 will be used to exemplify the living reality of farmers in the West Usambara Mountains in Tanzania today and show how these correspond to the different concepts discussed in the preceding section.

### The origins of the agrarian question<sup>3</sup>

The agrarian question in its original form was penned by Friedrich Engels as *Die Bauernfrage in Frankreich und Deutschland*<sup>4</sup> (Engels 1972 [1894]). Engels posed it with an exclusively political concern in mind: How to capture political power in European countries where capitalism was developing but had not yet replaced pre-capitalist social relations as the overwhelming agrarian reality? Or – to put it more bluntly – how can the (essentially pre-capitalist) peasantry be rallied and enthused for the social revolution? In the course of this endeavour, Engels immediately realised a perhaps surprising reality about the peasantry of his time: though not yet fully captured by the capitalist mode of production, it was already considerably differentiated between big, middle and small peasants. He defined small peasants as ‘the owner or tenant [...] of a small piece of land no bigger than he and his family, as a rule, can till, and no smaller than can feed the family’ (*ibid.*, p. 488, translated from the German by the author). For Engels therefore, the small peasant usually did not have to resort to non-family labour, and, if at all, only occasionally in the form of labour supply. Middle and big peasants on the other hand refers to ‘peasant property bigger than those that can be cultivated by the family itself, hence [...] who “exploit day labourers”’ (*ibid.*, p. 496). Less surprisingly, Engels concluded that socialist endeavours of his time should focus on winning over the small peasantry for their cause.

Of course, from today’s perspective the relevance of this reading has mostly disappeared. However, despite its now marginalised political value it did immediately serve to inspire a vigorous intellectual and academic interest and debate, which has lasted for more than a century and has stimulated a successive, arguably more sophisticated approach towards the agrarian question. This ‘second instalment’ was first systematically analysed by Karl Kautsky in his *Die Agrarfrage* (1899), as well as by Lenin in his treatise on *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1956 [1899]). It can be split into two distinct, but connected concerns:

- a. Why is a large peasantry apparently able to persist and reproduce itself to some degree within social formations that are characterised by an otherwise inexorable expansion of the *capitalist* mode of production and society?
- b. In what form and to what extent is capitalism developing in rural areas, and what are the barriers that may impede it?

This ‘Kautsky-Lenin’ interpretation of the agrarian question is the most widely accepted one today, although in the twenty-first century it is with reference to developing countries

that we are concerned with it. For Kautsky and Lenin the aspect of a differentiated peasantry lay at the heart of their exposition. Based on careful empirical analysis both employed a more refined distinction compared to Engels's approach, offering strata with pronounced *class* characteristics, meaning that they identified specific relationships between classes and their idiosyncratic roles in the production process as a whole. These classes are the rich, middle and poor peasantry, defined strictly by their ownership of means of production and consequential degree of reliance on wage labour. The poor peasants are those farmers who, due to competition or impoverishment, do not have direct access to enough land as means of subsistence, and therefore have to resort to selling their labour power on a regular basis in order to reproduce themselves. The middle peasants come closest to Engels's notion of 'small peasants' and can be defined as farmers who own enough land to survive independently (but no more). They might hire some labour, but usually are net sellers of labour power. This class resembles the classical idea of a peasant farmer the most, but it is also the most precarious and unstable one as their reproduction is constantly being challenged by market compulsions and its transitional position between the rich (bourgeois) and the small (proletarian) peasants. Finally, the rich peasants are the rural 'capitalist' class: they possess large land holdings, are fully commercialised, produce predominantly for the market and are compelled to hire wage labour in order to reproduce themselves as such (Byres 1986).

Kautsky and Lenin therefore agree that the European peasantries already succumbed to the overarching capitalist market system, however, the capitalist mode of production, where capital and labour are fully separated, had not fully taken control of the rural society yet. In this sense, 'the peasantry are [sic] not antagonists of capitalism, but, on the contrary, are its deepest and most durable foundation' (Lenin 1956, p. 173). Consequently, according to this theory capitalism would further encroach on the rural society which over time would lead to the gradual dissolution of the middle peasantry and the complete subsumption of the poor peasantry as wage labourers by rich peasants, who after all are more competitive given 'the law of greater productivity [. . .] of the big peasants' (*ibid.*, p. 56). To Lenin and Kautsky this is the only possible solution.

With regard to the process of development, a crucial and consequential question is what factors might contribute or impair this otherwise inexorable process. Lenin wrote that '[o]n the question of whether the disintegration of the peasantry is progressing, and if so at what rate, we have no precise statistics' (*ibid.*, p. 183). However, he offers a few explanations of what factors decide on the rate of capitalism's advancement, such as migration as a major accelerating factor to the disintegration of the peasantry, or (semi) feudal relations in which peasants are tied to their land and subjected to extra-economic coercion as a major impediment to capitalist accumulation. As a general rule, we can assert that any condition that prevents the direct producer from being 'freed in the double sense' – free to move and choose their master, but also freed from the means of subsistence (that is, land) – will retard the disintegration of the peasantry, and therewith the transition to capitalism, or in other words, the solution to the agrarian question.

In their time, Kautsky and Lenin provided important answers as to the state and future of the peasantry. Their approaches, however, did not remain unchallenged, since many authors regarded the archetypal and pristine peasantry as the superior unit of agricultural production and social organisation. They therefore sought to establish a development path that took the idealised peasant household as the role model unit, rather than requiring its demise. This, the *neo-populist* school, was led by the Russian agrarian economist Alexander Chayanov who developed *the theory of the peasant economy* (Chayanov 1966). His model of the rural economy is very antagonistic to the Marxist approaches discussed beforehand, as it

disregarded peasant differentiation based on class relations. Instead, he built an economic model that identified a peasant household's production and consumption decisions based on its demographic life cycle. In this, the individual peasant household would base its production and consumption decisions solely on the trade-off between its consumption demands (determined by the number of household members) and the level of drudgery and self-exploitation necessary to meet these (determined by the number of *working* household members). This cost-benefit calculation, which shifts pursuant to the household's demographic situation, led Chayanov and his followers to deduce that peasants constantly operate with superior efficiency compared to capitalist farms, which they regard as relatively wasteful, inefficient and unsustainable. They aspired to promote a form of development and advancement built on the shoulders of the efficient peasant households who were to lift '*Мамушка Россия*' ('Mother Russia') to greater prosperity. Naturally, neo-populists disputed the Marxists' concepts of peasant differentiation and encroachment of capitalism, leading to an intense debate. Lenin, in turn, 'insisted that all efforts to preserve the middle against the extremes as a means of recapturing this mythical past and saving the peasantry from the horrors of industrial capitalism would only serve to retard the process of "depeasantising", to institutionalize capitalism in its least developed form, and actually worsen the condition of the smallholder' (Mueller 1980, p. 3).

No matter how antiquated it may seem to some readers today, [t]he debate between Lenin and Chayanov, or between those who embrace a position broadly similar to Lenin's or Chayanov's, has lost neither its relevance nor its force in relation to today's poor countries' (Byres 1986, p. xxi). Although nowadays they commonly wear different labels, the old debates still have a profound influence on contemporary debate on rural development, and so does the wider issue of the agrarian question.

### **The unresolved legacy of the agrarian question and its continuation today**

Unfortunately, most contemporary students of development economics and related social sciences would hardly have heard about 'the agrarian question' as such, given that this term is generally reserved for the notoriously unfashionable discipline of Marxist political economy. Nevertheless they usually will have come to discuss it in some way or other, though most likely under different headings, paradigms and ideologies. Many aspects of both the Kautsky-Lenin treatment of the agrarian question, but especially of Chayanovian neo-populism, had an important impact on subsequent theories of economic development, although few of these were able to apply similar depth and grasp to reach to the core of the problem. Examples include contemporary descriptions of rural development such as the 'livelihood diversification' approach (Ellis 1998, 2000), the 'de-agrarianisation' and 'de-peasantisation' theses (Bryceson and Jamal 1997, Bryceson *et al.* 2000). The contemporary followers of the neo-populist school and the 'urban bias' thesis (for example, Lipton 1977, Hyden 1980, 1983, Waters 2007) also have their thematic roots in the original debates of the early twentieth century.

In the African context, and Tanzania in particular, this influence was vibrantly notable during and after the independence struggles of the 1960s and early 1970s. Political movements like Nyerere's Ujamaa socialism, as well as academic debates, were conducted in a similar vein and spirit. The important 'Kenya debate' (Kitching 1980, Leys 1996), which deliberated over the possibility of industrial-capitalist development in a post-independence Africa, and even more so the 'Dar es Salaam' debate (Shivji 1975, Tandon 1982), which focussed on the nature of Africa's rural class and the 'African' mode of production, represent landmarks in the translation of the agrarian question and similarly structural development challenges into a specifically African context.

However, these early progressive discussions were arguably muted in their infancy, as the neo-populist school gained a rapidly growing following, especially following the rediscovery of Chayanov's works in Western academia in the late 1960s. Probably the most prominent proponent of neo-populist development economics is Michael Lipton, who developed the theory of 'urban bias' in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and eventually produced these in the most articulate form in 1977. Urban bias refers to the perceived extraction of surplus off the 'rural class' by the 'urban class'. Neo-populists generally regard urban bias as highly detrimental to the growth of developing countries, as it ostensibly circumvents resources away from those sectors and units – agriculture and small-scale farmers – which are deemed to hold a comparative advantage. An important pillar of this approach is a reinforcement of the Chayanovian conception that smallholder farming is more efficient than other forms, especially capitalist agriculture. This direct confrontation with Kautsky's 'technical superiority of the large farm' (1899, p. 92) and Lenin's 'law of the greater productivity and, hence, of the greater stability of the big peasant farms' (1956, p. 56) is based on a number of arguments, most notably the statistically observed negative correlation between farm-size and productivity (or efficiency).<sup>5</sup> Other arguments to support the viability of peasant farming include the view that smallholder agriculture provides self-sufficiency and food security (Naerstad 2007), that it is more environmentally friendly and sustainable through its use of 'traditional' and indigenous knowledge or technology (Netting 1995, Horrigan *et al.*, 2002, La Via Campesina 2007), and most prominently that small-scale farming offers crucial answers to the challenges of poverty alleviation (for example, Rosset 1999). Ultimately, this approach tends to culminate in a more and more common view which can only be described as the romanticising of peasant and subsistence farming as a perfect 'mode or production' in harmony with nature and people.

Since their inception, these Chayanovian arguments have been vigorously debated. The inverse relationship represents a point of constant contention. Many scholars have debunked its myth by showing it to be an example of spurious correlation (Rudra 1968), that its empirical basis is generally weak (Sender and Johnston 2004), that the relation only holds in a static context but is likely to collapse with a dynamic perspective (Dyer 1998), and that the perceived high rate of efficiency is simply a reflection of the farmers' incisive poverty, which compels them to 'self-exploitation' and operation at maximum labour-intensity (Dyer 1996). Arguments for the poverty reduction potential of small-scale farming have been equally contested, primarily by showing that it is usually not the small farmers who suffer the most from abject poverty, but actually the landless, quasi-landless and especially the female-headed rural households struggling for access to land who are often worst affected (Cramer and Pontara 1998, Barrett *et al.* 2001). This of course renders support to farmers ineffective as a poverty reduction policy, given that the rural poor mostly rely on off-farm activities to make ends meet (Cramer *et al.* 2008).

Despite these serious contentions, the neo-populist ideology has exerted a great influence on development theory in general and development policies in particular. Starting in the early 1980s, the 'urban bias' doctrine gained a foothold and, together with a dominant conviction that industrial policies had failed, eventually led to the formation of an unprecedented movement that combined neo-classical market fundamentalism with neo-populist celebrations of smallholder agriculture, which was spearheaded by the World Bank (1982). The logic was clear: given their relative land abundance, African countries' comparative advantage lies in agriculture, which therefore must benefit greatly from market liberalisation. Furthermore, according to the neo-populist conviction, the small-scale farmer is the most productive, efficient and therefore competitive unit of production,

implying that s/he too must prosper in free market competition, supposedly creating an ideal mechanism of poverty reduction and growth. The neo-liberal policy towards rural development was born, which Byres later aptly debunked as ‘neoclassical neo-populism’ (Byres 2005).

However, as evidenced by many accounts and much data, the neo-liberal approach did not yield the desired results, and – rather ironically – if anything was a direct contributor to and driver of increased peasant differentiation (Ponte 2002, Havenevik *et al.* 2007, Woodhouse 2009) and in the mid to late 1990s its critics regained momentum. In particular, they took issue with the predominant assumption of neo-populist thought that the vast majority of rural societies in developing countries were organised as smallholder peasant farming. Instead, they described a great variety and dominance of activities undertaken by rural dwellers, which clearly lay outside the mere realm of the family farm, such as small businesses, wage labour employment, outmigration and reliance on remittance flows. These trends are attached to a range of new labels, like ‘livelihood diversification’ (Ellis 1998, Ponte 1998, Ellis and Mdoe 2003), ‘de-agrarianisation’ (Bryceson and Jamal 1997), and even ‘de-peasantisation’ (Bryceson 1999, Bryceson *et al.* 2000).

Generally, a slow but discernible movement away from the neo-populist school and, especially in the case of the latter, a certain rapprochement towards the Lenin-Kautsky understanding of rural societies is currently noticeable. It nevertheless is also clear that, unlike their Marxist ‘predecessors’, most of these new stories have so far failed to achieve a sufficient degree of structural understanding or explanation of these trends, and they are yet to deliver a satisfactory systematic account that is able to place the observed trends of ‘livelihood diversification’ into a coherent framework that allows conclusions to be drawn about their actual role within the development process. Part of this has to do with the lack of acknowledgement of the considerable degree of differentiation and class formation that is naturally occurring alongside the process of livelihood diversification, nay, that lies at its very core. So far, most proponents of ‘livelihood diversification’ and ‘off-farm employment’ stories continue to treat the rural community as generally homogenous individuals, of which – for some reason or other – some happen to run businesses and some others happen to be wage labourers, without being able to understand the fundamental causes of these tendencies.

That said, this new paradigm has caused considerable upheaval within the field of rural development. As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, this became impressively evident with the publication of the recent World Development Report *Agriculture for development* (World Bank 2007b), which displayed a rich array of the most vague and equivocal assertions, as well as internal contradictions. Many commentators noticed and exposed many of these, suggesting as it were that the Bank’s economists started to wave the metaphorical white flag by rather openly displaying a great amount of confusion and disorientation over the current processes of agrarian change in rural Africa. On the one side, the report acknowledges the different paths out of poverty achieved by ‘moving beyond the farm’ (World Bank 2007b, pp. 202–221), but then it devotes the bulk of its chapters to the question of how smallholder agriculture must be supported effectively (mainly through opening their access to markets). This squaring of the circle becomes even more unintelligible when the authors take up the cudgels for agribusiness, and – as Rizzo (2009) astutely points out – manage to dismiss and support the inverse relationship on one and the same page (World Bank 2007b, p. 91). In accordance with our argument in the previous paragraph, the Bank does accept the notion of diversification of farmers with regard to their individual livelihoods, but is not able to deduce from this that farmers as a logical consequence also have to be increasingly differentiated, that is, they occupy different positions in the

socio-economic and political power relations. It therefore appears as if World Bank economists desperately try to cling to the championing of this dated smallholder ideal, despite their own creeping realisation of its glaring incompatibility with reality.

The recent reappearance of contributions on the topic from African scholars goes much further than the mainstream approach. In recognising and applying holistic approaches to the debate they have devoted their attention to issues of land and (neo-)imperialism, and – intimately connected to these – the national and the agrarian question (Mafeje 2003, Moyo and Yeros 2005, Shivji 2006, Moyo 2007, Amanor and Moyo 2008, Shivji 2009). Acknowledging the distinct (class) relations between actors – nationally and internationally – they raise the question of the static and dynamic position of the African peasant within a system of global markets and wide-ranging neo-liberal hegemony, whilst clearly identifying their neo-imperialist character. Connecting to the ‘articulation of modes of production’ debate of the late 1970s (Rey 1973, Foster-Carter 1978, Wolpe 1980, Freund 1985), they characterise the process of accumulation in Africa as being ‘disarticulated’, in essence meaning that primitive and capitalist accumulation is occurring continuously, and yet it does not induce any further processes of transition, industrialisation or more generally the development of the productive forces. Instead, the created surplus value is being expatriated or used to fuel the excessive consumption levels of minuscule elites (Shivji 2009). In this regard, they identify neo-liberal policies and international financial institution (IFI) conditionality as the main reason and culprit for this, as they incapacitated the state to fulfil its role of curtailing the extent of exploitation and the resulting stagnation.<sup>6</sup> Unlike the approaches mentioned above, they tend to see livelihood diversification as a clear manifestation of deeply entrenched poverty and destitution, rather than an ‘opportunity for a new agriculture’ (World Bank 2007b, p. 58). The result is ‘the prevalence of semi-proletarianisation – worker peasants – alongside the retention of large peasantry, or of small cultivators’ (Moyo 2007, p. 10) which is often argued to be in a situation of deadlock without the implementation of radical agrarian and ‘land reform in the classical and historical sense of addressing the agrarian question’ (*ibid.*, p. 30). Unfortunately, the unanswered question remains how this can be achieved in the current age of neo-liberal domination, and – as we intend to demonstrate in the following section – more importantly the current, semi-proletarianised state of the peasantry is not necessarily as static as is often assumed.

However, even despite the current lack of pragmatic solutions from either side, all this stirring up of the erstwhile neo-populist ‘consensus’ must certainly be welcomed, as it manages to jolt the long-unquestioned dominance of neo-populism. With these current collisions of antagonistic approaches on how rural socio-economic relations have to be analysed and increasing disagreement over the resulting policy conclusions, it is obvious that the agrarian question in today’s development discourses is alive and kicking. To illustrate this, we shall now return to the original example of Tanzania and an attempt to reconcile the theoretical debate with farmers’ realities on the ground.

### **An analysis of the agrarian question in the case of the West Usambara Mountains, Tanzania**

In 2008, we undertook field research in the West Usambara Mountains (Lushoto district), Tanzania, in order to analyse the socio-economic relations between farmers in this area, laying a particular focus on the formation of rural labour-market relations. For this, a survey with a sample size of 151 households was undertaken and complemented by in-depth collection of qualitative data by means of numerous semi-structured interviews and focus groups.<sup>7</sup>

The region stretches over an area of about 3500 km<sup>2</sup> of which about 2000 km<sup>2</sup> are arable land, and at the time of the last national census in 2002, the population of Lushoto district was 420,000, implying a population density of about 120 people/km<sup>2</sup>. Altitudes range between 1050 m and 2250 m, agricultural activities depend on two rainy seasons, with the short rains from November to December and the 'long rains' from March to May. The region features great ecological and geographic variety, with three agro-ecological zones and highly varying rainfall between 600 and 2000 mm per annum. Depending on the landform, that is, slope angles, slope position, rain shadows or valley width, conditions for agriculture vary greatly. Today, the major cash crops are horticultural 'fast crops' (Ponte 1998) such as tomatoes, cabbage and other vegetables. Traditional (export) cash crops such as tea and coffee are still being cultivated in some areas, but coffee production especially has declined sharply. Main food crops are maize, beans, cassava, bananas and potatoes, however, the distinction between food and cash crops is generally misleading, as virtually all crops are both traded and consumed by individual households. Several villages in the region (some of which are included in the sample) are important vegetable suppliers for Tanzania's urban areas and therefore relatively wealthy. The majority of villages, however, are not able to benefit from this interregional trade due to their geographic or transport conditions. Overall the region takes an average economic position compared to other rural areas in Tanzania and provides an interesting case for the analysis of socio-economic dynamics and agrarian change.

The overwhelming majority of sample households (HHs) had direct access to land and were relying on farming for their reproduction in some way or other. They could therefore be identified as farmers, and as a general rule they did indeed identify themselves as such. However, at the same time, the prominence of 'livelihood diversification' is immediately recognisable. During the observed season (2007/8), out of the 151 participating HHs:

- Fifty-five percent had at least one adult member who worked for a wage at the time of the survey, and another 23% had at least one adult member who had worked as a wage labourer in the past.
- Forty-three percent of HHs hired labour at some stage of the production process and nearly half of these also supplied wage labour in the same season.
- Thirty-two-and-a-half percent of HHs presently operate at least one off-farm business of sorts, and another 15.2% had run a business in the past.
- Thirty-nine percent of HHs had at least one dependent member who temporarily migrates or has migrated in seek of income opportunities, and an additional 28% of all HHs had experienced migration in the past.
- In total, 73% of HHs did receive some form of off-farm income in the observed season.

The notion of 'livelihood diversification' therefore is clearly confirmed even after a cursory analysis of the survey data. Only a total of three HHs (1.9%) could be identified as 'subsistence' farming with no considerable contact to the market, that is, they did not have any farm or off-farm incomes.<sup>8</sup> Together with the immediately recognisable scarcity of land, this by itself tears down the notion of 'peasants' as defined in a strict Chayanovian sense as 'uncaptured by the market'. The analysis must not end there, though, as this by itself does not allow any inference on the structure of social relations for which an analysis of the labour market is indispensable.

Evidently there is an active labour market in place. However, this is not uniform, but clearly divided in two qualitatively and quantitatively different segments. The first is the

market for casual labour (*kibarua* in Swahili). *Kibarua* employment is characterised by being very insecure and irregular hard manual work, with very low wages of about 1000–2000 Tanzanian shillings (TSh) (around US\$0.75–1.5) per day, often paid in form of task/piecemeal remuneration. The other segment constitutes the market for formal labour of all kinds, most of which requires particular skills in the form of education or training, though this is not a necessary condition. In contrast to *kibarua* work, formal employment – even if sometimes hard manual work – is usually much more secure, earns considerably higher incomes, usually comes with extra benefits such as pension schemes, and is mostly situated outside the agricultural sector.

In quantitative terms, the *kibarua* market vastly surpasses the market for formal labour – 81.4% of all individuals engaged at that time in some form of wage labour employment were *kibarua* (mostly, but not exclusively doing agricultural tasks). Taking into account that another 3.4% were holding unpaid public offices, in sum only 15.2% of all wage workers were able to secure formal employment. This market segmentation is a crucial aspect in the solution of the agrarian question. For this, it is important to understand that the *kibarua* market is predominantly situated in the rural economy. *Kibarua* is the ‘indigenous’ or ‘home-grown’ form of labour, based on the communal economy, for example cultivating another farmer’s *shamba* (field), brick-making, domestic service and many more which are all organised in some form of *kibarua* employment. On the other hand, formal employment is more or less exclusively<sup>9</sup> extended from the urban economy in some form or other (for example, teachers and police officers employed by the government, bus-drivers in towns, and so on). Virtually all formal jobs in the study area are related to the urban sphere, either through direct employment as public agents in the villages (mainly teachers or extension officers), or through periodic commuting.<sup>10</sup> From the local perspective, formal salaries are very high in comparison and they enable the recipients to gain wealth and ‘capital’, as in turn this often is being used for agricultural production and the hiring of *kibarua* wage labour.

In this regard, our example of the West Usambaras is especially informative, as it represents a particular case with a marked decline of ‘external economic interests’, that is, in the form of (sometimes labelled ‘imperialist’) foreign investment or more generally large-scale, capital-intensive, export-oriented agricultural production.<sup>11</sup> It therefore shows a potential indirect transmission mechanism of capitalist relations into the rural economy through the urban sphere, which might take a dominating role in the absence of any other direct involvement of external large-scale capitalist producers. Formal employment, as an extension of the urban realm, therefore directly provides one element of increased peasant differentiation in the local village community, as it is one direct expression of the encroachment of capitalism – and ultimately contributes to the resolution of the agrarian question.

This is further exemplified by the low social status of *kibarua* work, which becomes very apparent during conversations on the topic. The Swahili word *kibarua* has a very negative connotation, as it stems from the early colonial era and slave trade during which many men and women were forced to work for the colonial authorities.<sup>12</sup> Many people are obviously ashamed and hesitant to admit that they work as *kibarua*. This general sentiment became the most evident, when people were asked whether they had been employed as *kibarua*. Several times respondents intensely proclaimed ‘*Nashukuru mungu, sijaajirwa!*’ – ‘I thank God, I have never been employed!’<sup>13</sup>

This is clear evidence for the struggle against proletarianisation. This struggle does not even faintly occur against formal employment, as that is without doubt regarded by the villagers as a clear accomplishment and ‘way out’ of village life with all its privations.<sup>14</sup>

These trends and struggles are of a systemic nature, and they cannot be simply explained by unassigned notions of ‘diversity for survival’ and ‘diversity for accumulation’ (Ellis 1998, p. 7), but must be seen as part of the wider issue of peasant differentiation. Furthermore, it is not sufficient to analyse them purely in terms of their class relations as they often are fought out within the household.

Gender and intra-household power relations are extremely important in shaping the process of proletarianisation and also which groups particularly have to endure its adversities. Typically and for a long time, the vast majority of people pushed into the labour markets were women – especially those freed from ‘marital obligation’ – due to their lack of access to the means of subsistence (Sender and Smith 1990, Oya and Sender 2009). Sender and Smith in particular used their empirical findings derived from fieldwork in the West Usambaras in 1986 to explain the often observed and paradoxical scarcity of labour supply. They concluded that married men – mainly through their control over land – were able to expropriate their wives’ labour power, therewith being able to abstain from the labour market themselves. It was mostly the unmarried, divorced or widowed women that typically constituted the small supply of labour in the local economy. However, our findings point to the possibility of a trend reversal in this regard. In our sample, only 39% of all *kibarua* labourers were women, and no significant difference between male- and female-headed households in terms of their labour supply could be determined. Beyond that, the former scarcity of labour clearly was reversed and next to all people who depend on wage employment are struggling to find jobs. These findings suggest that due to the increased pressures on their lives due to the steady encroachment of capitalism and further concentration of land, many men are likely to have lost their power to control women’s labour, and were forced to enter the labour market themselves. This generally indicates that the state of semi-proletarianisation is much less stagnant as many observers claim, and supports the notion that the capitalist transition is furthermore proceeding.

The overall level of differentiation becomes clear when not just labour supply, but also its demand side is taken into the picture. On average, hiring HHs are more than four times wealthier than non-hiring HHs, and their average land holding is twice as large. More interesting is that their incomes derived from crop sales are nearly *seven* times higher than those of HHs that rely on family labour only. This is a clear indication for accumulation that is based on the hiring of *kibarua*. The resulting class structure of the observed communities becomes obvious. However, to determine its exact composition is anything but trivial, as it may depend greatly on the applied criteria and definition of class, which has to go beyond the self-evident aspect of labour market participation. To illustrate this point, Table 1 lists possible class distributions across the sample of 151 HHs, according to different sets of class definitions.

In definition set A, farming HHs are categorised strictly according to their forms of labour market participation: rich farmers are those HHs that hire labour, but do not sell their labour power; middle farmers are those HHs that both hire and sell their labour power; and poor farmers are those who only sell labour power, but do not enter the labour market as employers. In addition, two other strata have been added that do not fit directly into the above definitions. Firstly the ‘subsistence farmers’, that is, those three HHs that are not participating in market exchange, neither in the labour nor in the commodity market. The other, more interesting category, we call ‘simple commodity producers’. These do not participate in the labour markets either, yet they do produce crops for the market. It is especially this last ‘class’ that should be the most recognisable and appealing to neo-populist scholars.

Table 1. Peasant differentiation according to three different sets of definitions.

Definition set	A				B				C			
	Count	%	Income (TSh)	Land (acres)	Count	%	Income (TSh)	Land (acres)	Count	%	Income (TSh)	Land (acres)
Rich farmers	36	24	1,347,001	3.72	43	28.5	1,576,164	3.73	19	14	2,585,750	5.18
Middle farmers	29	19	1,015,117	2.16	22	14.5	461,609	1.65	16	10.5	561,359	1.68
Poor farmers	49	32.5	307,621	1.43	48	32	307,603	1.42	44	29	314,556	1.40
Simple commodity producers	34	22.5	286,083	1.76	35	23	286,724	1.77	69	44.5	446,076	2.02
Subsistence farmers	3	2	0	0.67	3	2	0	0.67	3	2	0	0.67
Total/average	151	100	680,336	2.18	151	100	680,336	2.18	151	100	680,336	2.18

**Notes:** A = differentiation based on general labour market participation; B = differentiation based on *kibaru* labour market participation only; C = differentiation based on *kibaru* labour market participation only, together with additional qualifying criteria.

As can be seen in the table, this results in a relatively even distribution of the different classes (with the exemption of the ‘subsistence farmers’, which are included merely for the sake of completeness). This is not surprising given the relatively crude categorisation of definition set A. Nevertheless, a consistency check of comparing income and land holdings averages does seem to confirm *ex-ante* expectations, for example, that employers do have higher incomes and that poor farmers have less land at their disposal compared to simple commodity producers, which would explain why the former have to resort to wage-labour income and the latter do not. Moving to definition set B, the distinctions become slightly more revealing. Class definitions in set B are identical to those in set A, however, set B does only incorporate labour market participation on the *kibarua* market and disregards the market for formal employment. The rationale for this follows directly from the above argument that – strictly speaking – formal employment does not emanate from the rural economy, and secondly, that from the villagers’ perspective it rather constitutes, as they say, a form of ‘accumulation’ (which clearly can be described as such only in a strictly practical, but not theoretically consistent sense). Compared to set A, this leaves the classes of the poor farmers and simple commodity producers relatively unchanged as they basically had no access to formal employment in the first place, however, the extent of differentiation between middle and rich farmers has increased, allowing for this collateral form of ‘accumulation’. Set B nevertheless still incorporates some inconsistencies, since it accounts for any level of labour market participation, meaning for instance that it would regard any farmer as ‘rich’ as long as he hires any labour, regardless of his income or overall reliance on wage-labour inputs in the production process.

For this reason, an extended set of definitions (C) is necessary which comes considerably closer to the original definition in the Kautsky-Lenin sense. It includes that ‘rich farmer’ households should have a minimum income (for example, in this case at least the average annual household income: TSh680,000  $\approx$  US\$525) and minimum wage expenditures (at least TSh50,000). Accordingly, poor farmers only qualify if they fulfil criteria of minimum dependence on wage incomes, and conversely middle farmers should chiefly be family reliant and net sellers of labour power. In doing so, the class differentiation within the sample becomes the most clear and separating. However, at the same time the, in this sense, ‘residual class’ of simple commodity producers has grown considerably, now making up nearly half of the whole sample. Although this is not immediately surprising, it illustrates how sensitive survey data can react to an analysis of socio-economic strata and dynamics. This does not represent a class division of any real sort, since the majority of the ‘simple commodity producers’ of set C are of course regularly engaging in the labour market, to however petty an extent, and they are without doubt exposed and subjected to the forces of capitalist markets and relations. This simple example therewith neatly illustrates the ultimate antagonism between the abstract and the concrete.

If anything, this shows that the borders between peasant differentiation and an undifferentiated peasantry depend on the particular interpretation of particular classification criteria of the relevant groups, and the hopelessly positivist nature of such an attempt in the first place. It also shows how arbitrarily set definitions can greatly alter the outcome of the analysis, and that whichever set is chosen a multitude of important factors are doomed to be omitted, like migration, remittance flows, off-farm business, use of advanced inputs and technologies to name only a few.

Finally, and to bring home this point, it is also worth mentioning that a classification based on income quintiles – as is common in many economic analyses – is hardly able to yield any illuminating insights about the socio-economic relations within society, as it does not reveal anything about the systematic reasons behind ‘livelihood diversification’.

One illustrative example for this: a query for the number of ‘HHs with off-farm incomes’ releases a nearly *even distribution* across all five quintiles, devoid of any explanatory power and creating the misleading illusion of homogeneity.

But, with the present analysis at hand, we can conclude that peasant differentiation and capitalist relations are a clear reality in the Usambara Mountains, and for that matter also in many other rural areas of Tanzania – as indicated by a few other studies (for example, Ponte 2000, 2002). However, this is not to say that the ‘neo-populist’ element of smallholder farming with little recourse to wage-labour inputs and off-farm incomes has no relevance at all to the study of rural African societies, as a visible but dwindling element of that is obviously still existent. The consequential question is how much longer will this be the case and what factors might currently be impeding the completion of the capitalist transition, which unfortunately goes beyond the scope of this paper.

### Concluding remarks

In this paper, we have linked the old debate on the agrarian question with contemporary thinking on rural development and present-day conditions for farmers in rural Tanzania. The goal was to provide an argument for the relevance of often-forgotten debates and experiences in the now developed part of the world. It also revealed both the great importance, but also the great difficulties of attempting to create a more systematic account of rural development, rather than limiting oneself to merely stating the obvious (for example, ‘livelihood diversification’) without producing meaningful analysis.

It was shown how differentiation is a concrete reality in rural Tanzania, as it is an obvious reality in any process of capitalist development. This of course is a sobering insight, especially for those concerned with the farmers’ wellbeing. Differentiation means increased inequality, especially in comparison to the often-upheld ideal of fairly egalitarian peasant communities. The Gini coefficient of the collected survey sample is a sinister .65, compared to the country’s national Gini coefficient of .38 (URoT 2002). This of course cannot be taken as a representative account of inequality, yet it does provide an indication of the sobering conditions many farmers find themselves in today. The extensive incidence of *kibarua* employment despite the strong struggle against this is a further expression of this reality.

These considerations notwithstanding, it is clear that the *kibarua* market nowadays is central to the agricultural sector, as on the one hand, it provides casual wage incomes for most households, and on the other hand, it virtually is the only provider for agricultural labourers for larger farmers. The larger (capitalist) farmers, especially in the two richer villages depend greatly on *kibarua* labourers in their production process. The hiring of *kibarua* allows them to produce labour-intensive vegetables on a large scale, nowadays to such an extent that the West Usambaras are a major vegetable-supplying region for the Tanzanian cities. These farmers have achieved considerable wealth through horticultural farming, and they are the richest members of our sample. Their workers on the other hand, often coming from the surrounding villages on a daily basis, form the lower strata of the society and are considerably poorer. Although exploitative in its very nature, *kibarua* labour provides these farmers with enough income that lets them and their families survive despite their constantly depleting agricultural assets. It therefore can be regarded as the most direct form of poverty alleviation, despite the obvious element of exploitation. There must be no ignoring of the fact that capitalist relations are ever expanding in rural communities in Africa and across the developing world, and indeed one might conclude that the capitalist imperative itself – in true dialectic form – does destroy and create the farmers’ means of subsistence and livelihood.

Arguably, what will determine the outcome is whether the current – in a manner of speaking – ‘incomplete capitalism’ will persist and become a vehicle for deeply entrenched poverty and stagnation, or whether it will evolve into a fully fledged ‘modern’ and competitive version that is capable of bringing about agricultural growth, surpluses and rural well-being to create long-lasting development for rural Tanzanians. Either way, we have to note that development is not a smooth process of gradual improvement and enrichment, but a highly frictional affair. This has been impressively shown by Cramer (2006) for the extreme case of civil wars, but it is equally true for the everyday struggles of farmers to keep up their so-called ‘traditional’ way of life which is no longer compatible with the globalised capitalist world. It probably is a very similar struggle compared to the one that European farmers went through during the European transition from feudalism to capitalism (Brenner 1976, Hilton 1976, Wood 1999). The hope can only be that unlike so many of its African peers, a comparatively peaceful country like Tanzania will be able to manage these frictions without coming off the rails as well.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Henry Bernstein and Deborah Johnston for their invaluable comments and general support. All original data used in this article was personally collected by the author during fieldwork in 2008 which was facilitated with the kind financial support of the British Institute of Eastern Africa, the University of London, and the School of Oriental and African Studies. The research is formally acknowledged and supported by the Tanzanian Commission for Science and Technology.

### **Notes**

1. In this article, I exclusively refer to sub-Saharan Africa and, following common practice, I will use the term ‘Africa’ synonymously.
2. This figure arose suspicion among many observers, as it manifests a very sudden slump from well above 45% in 2006, raising doubts about the methodology and findings of the country’s economic surveys.
3. In this section, I partly rely on the highly influential and clarifying works on the agrarian question by Terence Byres (1977, 1986) and Henry Bernstein (1996, 2004).
4. English title: ‘The peasant question in France and Germany’.
5. In the context of developing countries, the inverse relationship was first mentioned by Amartya Sen (1962), followed by an active subsequent debate (for a summary with particular reference to Asia see Fan and Chan-Kang [2005]), however, the first notions of this kind came indeed from Chayanov.
6. Linking in to the overall argument provided here, we have discussed the problematic aspects of neoliberal economic policy when applied to issues of rural development and poverty reduction elsewhere (Mueller 2009).
7. The survey was undertaken in five distinct villages with a sample size of around 30 in each village. The villages were carefully selected based on government data, in-depth consultation of stakeholders, and officials on district and local level, as well as an extensive period of personal excursions throughout the region including test interviews. This method was chosen in order to account for the great variety of the region and to avoid producing a biased and unrepresentative record on the region’s dynamics. The goal in mind when selecting the villages was to cover the complete spectrum of geographic and economic conditions as well as their socio-economic outcomes. In this regard, the sample villages can be roughly categorised into a very prosperous village with a high level of horticultural production (Lukozi), three ‘middle-income’ villages with varying levels of horticultural production and greatly varying transport connections (Dule, Kwekitui and Ubiri), as well as one very remote and poor village in harsh overall conditions (Ngughui).
8. Even this can be disputed, as all three ‘subsistence farmers’ are in receipt of transfer payments in some way, often in the form of in-kind donations. For instance, it is quite common that these

more unfortunate members of the community are given a cow from their richer neighbours 'on loan', and once that cow gives birth to a healthy calf, the cow will be returned to its owner and the poorer household will keep the calf. Therefore, even these 'subsistence farmers' are involved in the communities' relations of exchange – for example, as receivers of a communal form of social benefit.

9. Formal jobs do of course exist in the local/agricultural realm in Tanzania (and in Africa in general), however, typically they are limited to foreign investment or the large-scale export production sector, both of which there is very little left in the West Usambaras.
10. This is not to say, that there are no *kibarua* jobs in the urban sphere, of which there are of course plenty.
11. The production of tea is an exception to this, however, none of our respondents was able to gain formal employment on any of the tea estates or the Mponde factory, and all other recorded employment on tea clearly took a very casual (*kibarua*) form. Furthermore, the production of coffee as the second export crop has experienced a sharp decline and likewise does not create any 'formal' jobs at the moment.
12. The early colonialists were in constant need of labour power, for example on plantations and in the shipyards. Given the little availability of free wage labourers and a perpetual scarcity of slaves, they would often 'hire' slaves from other slave owners. Those 'hired' slaves would carry notes (Swahili: *barua*) to identify themselves and their owner. The Swahili prefix *ki-* denotes both a diminutive, but also a factual relation, therefore making the *ki-barua* 'subject to the letter' (Eastman 1994). Apart from its etymological value, this little anecdote does indeed provide interesting support for Bill Warren's thesis that it was imperialism in the first place that brought capitalist relations to the 'Third World' (Warren 1980).
13. This must raise the suspicion that, if anything, despite the already high level of recorded labour market participation there is likely to be an element of under-reporting.
14. Households with formal employment in the sample had an average income nearly seven times higher than that of *kibarua* households. In addition, the land holdings of the former were about 2.5 times larger than those of the latter.

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## **The political economy of salt in the Afar Regional State in northeast Ethiopia**

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The Afar people are one of the most marginalised groups of people in the Horn of Africa. Politically they are fragmented into three countries – Ethiopia, Djibouti and Eritrea – and economically successive governments and more powerful neighbours have appropriated their fertile riverine lands. The economic and political marginalisation of the Afar in Ethiopia has continued even since the establishment of a federal system and the subsequent creation of the Afar Regional State in 1991. The paper chronicles and analyses the process of marginalisation of the Afar through a case study of the political economy of the recently discovered salt reserve at Lake Afdera, its impact on the derailment of Ethiopia's iodisation programme, and the associated public health risks.

**Keywords:** Afar; Ethiopia; political economy of salt; decentralisation

### **Introduction**

Ethiopia has instituted a unique political order since the regime change in 1991, widely known as ethnic federalism. Winning a protracted war against one of Africa's brutal military dictatorship – the Derg – the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) has remapped the century-old unitary Ethiopian state into an ethnic federation (James *et al.* 2002). Subsequently, nine ethno-regional states have been created that constitute the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia with constitutional rights for self-determination including and up to secession. The EPRDF itself is a coalition of ethnic-based political organisations that claims to represent four of the country's largest ethnic groups: the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF); the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM); the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO); and the Southern Ethiopia People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM). The dominant force within the EPRDF is the TPLF, though it represents a much smaller constituency than the other members of the coalition. In fact, the EPRDF was created by the TPLF when the latter needed a justification to operate militarily against the Derg establishments outside of the Tigray region at the end of the 1980s.

The EPRDF has ruled Ethiopia through 'a two-tier system of federalism' (Young 1999, p. 344). It has directly governed the four highland regional states through its member organisations and the remaining five largely lowland regional states indirectly through affiliated parties. Situated in the northeastern part of the country and with a population of about 1.4 million inhabitants, the Afar National Regional State (ANRS) is one of

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these lowland regional states that constitute the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The EPRDF's official narrative of the two-tier system of federalism is based in an essential difference in political culture between the highlanders – the historic core of the Ethiopian state – which is politically more 'developed', and the 'backward' lowland regionalism euphemistically called 'emerging' or 'developing' regional states of the Federation (Young 1999, pp. 344–345). Ostensibly the distinction also acknowledges the depth of the economic marginality and political exclusion of the peoples of these regions throughout imperial and military rule.

Ethiopia's experiment in ethnic federalism has been a subject of intense public debate and scholarly polarisation. The admirers hail it as a model of managing cultural diversity and promoting political integration in multicultural societies (Chabal and Daloz 1999, Alemseged 2004). The detractors, on the other hand, see behind ethnic federalism a strategy of divide and rule allowing an ethnic minority – the Tigreans and the TPLF that claims to represent them – to dominate the majority populations (Vestal 1999, Merara 2003).

This article appraises the praxis of ethnic federalism in reference to the lived realities of regional autonomy and economic empowerment of ethnic communities, by taking the example of the political economy of the newly found salt reserve at Lake Afdera in the Afar National Regional State. An exposition of the major economic players and their respective power positions in the production and distribution of salt reveals the continued marginalisation of the Afar despite the strong rhetoric of self-determination in post-1991 Ethiopia. The regional economy is still dominated by Afar's powerful neighbours – the Amhara and the Tigrean highlanders – in concert with the ruling EPRDF with whom they are connected through ethnic solidarity and economic networks. The case study also shows how the EPRDF has infringed upon regional autonomy and the mechanisms of dominating the national economy through its business parastatals, despite its declared commitment to a market economy and an equitable development. The article also examines the cost of marginalisation, Afar political resistance against their economic marginalisation and attempts to reposition themselves in the salt sector, and the EPRDF's failure to redress economic grievances of one of the country's historic minorities.

The empirical materials of the paper are derived from the two rounds of ethnographic fieldworks the author conducted in Afdera district and Semera town, the capital of the Afar National Regional State, in August 2009 and March 2010. The discussion that follows is organised into three sections.

### **Salt production in the Afar region**

Salt production has a long history in northeast Ethiopia in general and the Afar region in particular. It dates back to the long-distance trade of medieval times (Abir 1968), and salt bar (*amole*) was widely used as a medium of exchange up to the mid twentieth century. In fact the source of all *amole* in circulation, which connected the various regions of Ethiopia, was the salt plains of the Afar lowlands located in the Denakil depression (Bahru 2002). The rise and fall of polities in Northern Ethiopia was intimately connected to access to and control over the salt trade routes (Medhane 1995). After the independence of Eritrea in 1993, Ethiopia lost most of these Afar salt mines. Salt supply had, however, continued unaffected after the breakaway of Eritrea up until the resumption of war between the two countries in 1998 (Ministry of Health 2007).

The 1998–2000 Ethio–Eritrean war interrupted Ethiopia's salt supply from Eritrea. As a result, Ethiopia started importing salt from neighbouring countries, particularly Djibouti. Seeking to avoid dependence on the international market, the Ethiopian

government explored domestic sources of salt. Although a small amount of salt is available in underground water in Tigray and from rocks in Somali regions, abundant salt is found in the Afar National Regional State, particularly from Lake Afdera. At present, Lake Afdera, located close to the Eritrean border, produces and distributes 95% of the total salt requirement of Ethiopia. In fact, supply by far exceeds domestic demand. Ethiopia's annual domestic salt demand is estimated at 350,000 tonnes, whereas Afdera alone has an annual production capacity of 1.2 million tonnes of salt.

Salt is produced by large (over 800 tonnes a month), medium (300–800 tonnes a month) and small-scale producers (fewer than 300 tonnes a month). There are 750 salt producers in Afdera, though the officially registered investors at the Regional Bureau of Investment are in the thousands. Nearly all of the Afar fall within the category of small-scale producers. Those remaining are investors from various parts of the country, generically called highlanders (*habesha*), who own companies that fall either within the medium- or large-scale producers. The big salt companies that operate in Afdera include: Ezana; Afdera Salt Production Company (ASPC); Lucy Salt Production Company (LSPC); Ertaele; Dalol Salt Production Company (DSPC); Yo Action (YA); and Bashanfer. Established in 2000 with a capital of Birr 75,000,000, Ezana is the largest salt-producing company in Afdera. Ezana is equipped with modern salt production and iodisation plants. It has the capacity to produce 250,000 tonnes of salt per year – 71% of annual domestic product – but currently produces only 30,000 tonnes a year because of a production quota system. All salt producers in Afdera were organised in 2007 under the Afdera Salt Producers' Association (ASPA) primarily to regulate excessive production and stabilise the market. The organisation is run by a Board of 11 members elected each year. The Board has also market and legal advisers.

### **Who is in charge of Afdera's salt?**

Three sets of major players are involved in the production and distribution of Afdera's salt: the Afar; the highlanders (*habesha*); and the EPRDF-led federal government.

### ***The Afar***

Various interest groups are discernible among the Afar that have a stake in the salt business. At the highest level, Afar interest is represented by the Afar regional government. According to the 2007 Census, the Afar Region has a total population of 1,411,092, of which 90% are Afar. The rest are migrants from other parts of the country, particularly the Amhara, Tigreans and Oromo (Central Statistical Agency 2008). In 2004, only 49% of the total population had access to safe drinking water, of whom 26.89% were rural inhabitants and 78% were urban. Values for other reported common indicators of the standard of living for the Afar Region in 2005 include the following: 67% of the inhabitants fall into the lowest wealth quintile; adult literacy for men is 27%, and for women 16%; and the regional infant mortality rate is 61 infant deaths per 1000 live births (Central Statistical Agency 2008). Although endowed with abundant natural resources such as water, irrigable land, massive deposits of salt, thermal energy and various exploitable minerals, the Afar Regional State has been heavily subsidised by the federal government since 1991; it is defined by the EPRDF as one of the four 'backward' or 'developing' regional states.

The regional political leadership has sought to empower the Afar politically and economically within the regional state and beyond the region to participate in the affairs of the nation, in reference to the generous provisions of self-rule and social equity enshrined

in the country's 1995 Constitution. Keenly aware of the strategic importance of its status as the sole supplier of salt to the country and the disparity between the Afar small-scale producers and the highlander large-scale investors, the regional government has sought to increase the participation of the Afar people in the lucrative salt business. To this end, it has encouraged Afar from different parts of the region to come to Afdera and participate in salt production. The regional government also generates royalties from the salt business, with an annual revenue of around Birr 100 million. The regional government has also closely supervised the activities of the Afdera Salt Producers' Association (ASPA) and secured four out of the 11 seats on the Board. Many in the regional leadership have also invested in salt production. Unsurprisingly, they feel threatened by the economically more powerful highlander investors.

A second group of Afar with a stake in salt production is the landowners. Land is communally owned among the Afar, and clan elders serve as custodians of clan lands. Grazmach Yayo is the custodian of the land around Lake Afdera on behalf of the Gedento clan. Although members of the Gedento clan own most of the land, many Afar immigrants also have access to salt land as a result of the support they receive from the regional government.

The cross-cutting issue for all these categories of Afar is greater participation in the salt sector, which they achieve by using constitutionally sanctioned ethnic rights. According to Article 39 of the country's constitution, the Afar, like other nations and peoples of Ethiopia, are entitled to administer natural resources that are found in their respective territories. However, although the Afar have a strong political leverage over salt affairs through the regional government, they lack the financial capital necessary to graduate into large-scale producers and distributors to the national market. The economic marginalisation of the Afar echoes similar stories of marginalisation of peoples of the Ethiopian periphery such as Somali region (Hagemann 2006), Gambella (Dereje 2003) or Benishangul-Gumuz (Young 1999).

The Afar exert a strong influence over the salt business through the political leverage of the regional government. This has enabled them to occupy a new economic niche, albeit marginal vis-à-vis other economically powerful players. Coming from a subsistence society and lacking access to credit institutions, the Afars' participation in the salt business is limited to the small-scale level, with the main constraint on enhancing their share of production being limited capital. The highlanders, on the other hand, coming from an entrepreneurial culture and with a differential access to the national economy, wield a more competitive edge than the Afar. The pace at which the investors – both the large-scale producers and the distributors – have amassed profit from Afdera's salt and their ostentatious display of wealth have further reinforced the Afar's sense of relative deprivation. The issue for the Afar is no longer enhancing their participation, but maintaining their marginal position in the salt sector. This is, above all, evident in their urge to tightly control the ASPA, particularly its Board. Although they have representation on the Board, the Afar see themselves progressively marginalised in its decision-making process, particularly on issues related to the iodisation programme.

### ***Highlander investors***

The second major set of actors in Afdera's salt business is the highlanders, who are large-scale producers and distributors. Also known as *habesha*, the highlanders are mainly of Tigrean and Amhara origin, two of Afar's powerful neighbours connected to the Ethiopian state. The Amhara were Afar's overlords during the imperial period and their northern

neighbours, the Tigreans, have become politically and economically dominant in the region since the coming to power of the TPLF/EPRDF in 1991. Although the Amhara and the Tigreans appear similar in the eyes of the Afar, in cultural terms they are nevertheless historical rivals in the political competition to dominate the Ethiopian state. The first group of highlanders who came to Afdera was the Tigreans. They were brought to Afdera by the district officials, who were keen to develop the newly constituted Afdera district in 1998. Aware of Afars' limited access to capital and in anticipation of the trickle-down effect to Afdera district from a flourishing salt business, local Afar officials in fact went out of their way to persuade the Tigrean cotton investors in the Gewane area to come to Afdera and start salt mining. Some Tigrean investors responded to the call and set out in the lucrative salt business. These investors were given two kilometres of salt land along Lake Afdera's coast, and established a company known as Afdera Salt Production Company. Many more investors rushed to Afdera afterwards.

Given the lack of experience in the sector and the absence of the relevant legislation to smoothly administer the salt business, salt production in Afdera started chaotically. Establishing marketing facilities with a semblance of economic order was not well thought through by the regional or federal governments. Investors hastily joined the business, borrowing money even from usurers. As a result, the market was soon flooded. This has generated stiff economic competition between the big and small producers. The big investors connived to kick out the small businesses from the market by intentionally depressing the price of salt, which went down as low as Birr 10 per quintal. It was subsequently decided to create a more orderly marketing system. The brokers continued to play distributors off against each other. As a result, many distributors became bankrupt. Promising to fix market failures by offering a standard price despite excessive production, a sole distributor, of Amhara origin, emerged as a dominant actor on Afdera's salt scene. This was not well received by the pioneer Tigrean investors. Seeking to offset the dominance of the Amhara distributor and his favour among the Afar, the Tigrean investors networked with the federal establishments – the Ministry of Mining and Energy, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and the Ministry of Health. The Afar initially upheld the idea of 'only one distributor' as a mechanism of risk management, though monopoly would ultimately disadvantage them. Due to pressure by the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the large-scale producers, the number of salt distributors was increased in January 2010 to three. All of these distributors are highlanders: two Amhara and a Tigrean.

In comparison to the Afar, large-scale producers and distributors have stronger financial capital. In fact, some of the companies engaged in Afdera's salt business are 'heavyweights' in the national economy, including YO Action, which is linked with major Ethiopian investor Sheikh Alamudi. Place of origin and ethnic networking also make the highlander investors, particularly the Tigreans, closer to the federal establishments than the Afar. Apart from representation on the Board of the Afdera Salt Producers' Association, two of the key posts, the market and legal advisers, are occupied by Tigreans. Regional autonomy and the rise in consciousness of ethnic rights among the Afar have, nonetheless, dampened the highlanders' aspiration to easy riches and huge profit margins.

### ***The federal government***

The EPRDF-led federal government is another major player in salt production in the Afar region. It seeks self-reliance by securing a domestic source of salt supply, particularly after the outbreak of the Ethio–Eritrean war in 1998, and to that end has been actively involved in the production and pricing of Afdera's salt. In fact, the federal government has imposed a

price restriction on salt since January 2010 to regulate the sector. According to a new regulation, the price of salt at production sites is Birr 800/tonne. The price went as high as Birr 1060/tonne in 2009 when unregulated. Currently the retail price for each kilogram of non-iodised salt is Birr 2.5/kg, as compared to its price at the production site of Birr 0.8/kg. The economic interest of the federal government is served by the Ministry of Mines and Energy, and the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

Although Afdera has abundant supplies of salt, reliance on a single district for a strategic resource such as salt has made the federal government anxious to ensure control over the production and distribution of Afdera's salt. The Ministry of Mines and Energy, in collaboration with private investors, therefore established the largest salt company in Afdera, known as Ezana. Ezana is not only the largest company in terms of production capacity, but also owns large tracts of salt land. This has created tension between Ezana and the small-scale producers, particularly the Afar; Ezana acquired 11 km salt land of the 30 km-wide Lake Afdera by displacing 500 Afar small-scale producers. This forced displacement, coupled with the new interest in networking between owners of the Afdera Salt Production Company (owned by Tigreans) has infuriated the Afar, who had anticipated reciprocity and mutual support by bringing the Tigrean investors from Gewane to Afdera in the first place. The displacement has also violated Afar's customary law, according to which land is owned by a titular clan.

The federal government's involvement in Afdera's salt business is far from transparent. First, the Afar received no adequate communication about the nature of the public-private partnership that resulted in the establishment of Ezana. Due to the predominance of the Tigreans in management and leadership positions, as well as the symbolism of the company's name, Ezana is primarily considered a Tigrean company by the Afar. The sudden change of the company's name by the federal government to Afar Salt Producers' Share Company (ASPS) at the height of the political tension in 2009 over the control of salt production further alerted the Afar to enquire into the economic interests behind the company. It was only then that the federal government communicated to the regional government how the company's shares were distributed – 80% owned by the Ministry of Mines and Energy and the remaining 20% by 'private' companies. These 'private' companies are Ezana and Guna Trading plc. Ezana and Guna Trading plc are two of the major TPLF business companies that constitute EFFORT (the Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray). The dominant position of the EPRDF-affiliated business companies ('endowments') such as EFFORT in the national economy, and the preferential treatment they receive from the government, is one of the most contentious political issues since 1991 (Milkias 2001, Anonymous 2003, World Bank 2009, Zakaariyaas 2010).

According to EPRDF, the seed capital used to establish the endowments was derived from the capital it had accumulated during the armed struggle that it then redeployed. The continued existence of the endowments is further justified as fulfilling economic gaps which neither the state nor the private sector could cover (EPRDF 1999). Critics, however, point out the role of the endowments in consolidating TPLF's dominant political power outside Tigray (Anonymous 2003, p. 9). In a major study entitled 'Towards the competitive frontier: strategies for improving Ethiopia', on constraints on private sector development in Ethiopia, the World Bank also criticised the monopolistic tendencies of the endowments in the following manner: 'as the private sector grows and is in a position to contest all business areas operated by endowments, the early rationale for endowment-owned businesses has eroded' (World Bank 2009, p. 54). The fact that EPRDF proclaimed in 1993 that a political party may not directly or indirectly engage in commercial and industrial activities makes the legal status of the endowments the more contentious.

At any rate, the Afar do not believe that the federal government has the largest share of Ezana, and rather consider it as owned by Tigrean investors. When the federal government insisted that it owned the largest share of the company representing national interests, the regional government demanded greater participation of the Afar in the salt sector. According to the Afar perspective, referring to the generous ethnic rights enshrined in the constitution, the role of the federal government should be building the capacity of the regional Bureau of Mines and Energy, not substituting it by a federal ministry. The federal government sought to justify its dominant position in the language of 'lack of regional capacity', that is, that the company is a multi-million-birr venture, and the regional government does not have the capacity to administer it. Afar's frustration with its marginal position in the salt business is illustrated well by the following remark during an interview in Semera town:

The problem is not whether non-Afar can come and make money from Afar's salt. In fact, it is Afar who originally brought the highlanders to work in Afdera. The problem is rather the huge imbalance. Many of the highlanders who the Afar brought to Afdera have become very wealthy. One of the distributors, for instance, owns over 50 Scania [trucks] and drives a car worth Birr 3 million. We are wondering how they could become so rich in a very short period of time while the Afar get a very minimal portion of the profit. We suspect that they are selling our salt at a much higher price in Addis Ababa and elsewhere, and giving us only Birr 80 per quintal. And if these powerful highlanders start iodising the salt, they will make an even greater profit and Afar will ultimately be driven out of the salt business. (Interview with anonymous Afar official in the regional government, Semera, 11 March 2010)

The statement aptly captures the political economy of the salt business and Afar's moral critique of the existing and steadily growing power imbalance between them and the highlanders and the federal government. The tension has led the Afar to back up their moral critique with a display of their regional power. When the Afar Salt Producers' Association held its third board meeting on 10 March 2010, it was attended by senior Afar politicians, who expressed their discontent regarding the marginal position of the Afar, indicating the level of resistance coming from the Afar on issues related to the salt business.

Ethiopia's federalism still needs to find a balance on self-rule and shared rule (Keller 2002, Assefa 2003, Turton 2006, Clapham 2009). Post-1991, decentralisation reform in Ethiopia reveals that regional governments have technically separate power to self-administer their regions, and formulate and implement their socio-economic policies and strategies. The implementation of the reform, however, shows sustained central government dominance in assignment of expenditure and revenue, continued regional dependence on central subsidy, and sustained central government interference in the administrative affair of regions. The very strong federal patronage and domination, particularly in the so-called developing regional states, has seriously undermined regional autonomy which is otherwise guarded by generous constitutional provisions. On the other end of the governance continuum, regional political actors tend to highlight the self-rule dimension of federalism that should include control over natural resources within their respective territories.

While commenting on the dominant position of the federal government and Tigreans in the production and distribution of Afdera's salt, many Afar politicians and producers have wondered whether this signifies a shift from decentralisation, represented by the federal system of government, to the old and discredited centralised system of governance of the previous regimes. An Afar salt producer remarked at the Board's third annual meeting:

Afar is not benefiting from its salt. Tomorrow petroleum could be found in the Afar area. Who should own these resources? Why is it the case that officials from Addis Ababa control

everything? We thought federalism was us. It is we who built the federal order. Is there federalism without the Afar and the other peoples? Ministry of Mines and Energy or Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ministry of Health all have branches in Afar. Why is it not possible for the federal government to build the capacity of the regional bureaus so that the Afar can actively engage in the salt business? All I can say is that the *atse sireat* [the imperial political order] is coming back! (Afar salt producer, 10 March 2010)

When more conscious members of Afar society were asked why it is not possible to bring the Afar into the economic mainstream, many replied that it was because of the lack of political will to foster equity and social justice, despite the constitutional rhetoric of local empowerment. A common suggestion of a way to foster equity in the salt sector is to give the Afar a share in the ostensibly federal government-owned ASPSC, Ezana, and if no individual Afar can buy a share, the regional government could invest in the company on their behalf.

The regional government has also complaints regarding taxation and royalties. The 40 kg bag is currently sold for Birr 80 at Afdera, and the net income is Birr 53.42 after deduction of taxes: 2% withholding tax; 3% tax for the regional Bureau of Mining and Energy; 11% tax for the district of Afdera; and 15% VAT for the regional Bureau of Finance and Economic Development. The resistance of the large-scale producers against what they consider ‘onerous’ excise and income taxes has angered the regional government. The Afdera district council demanded Birr 31.80 excise tax per quintal, and a negotiated settlement was finally reached at Birr 5.60. A more contentious issue was income tax: the salt producers never paid income tax, and the Afdera district council demanded an income tax of Birr 4.08 per quintal as of January 2010. This was heavily contested by the Board (largely representing the interests of the large-scale highlander producers), on the grounds that the income-tax tariff was not commensurate with the profit margin.

### **Contesting regional power**

The Afars’ sense of marginalisation in the salt sector needs to be historicised and contextualised within the political economy of the Ethiopian state and its relations with its peripheries in the long term. Afar political narratives centre on their sense of exclusion. The Afar region, particularly the Awash valley, has been a prime target for various government ‘development projects’ (Getachew 2001, Piguet 2007, Yasin 2008). From the imperial power, the Derg, to the EPRDF-led Ethiopian governments, various development interventions have been carried out in the Afar region. The net result of these development interventions is the Afars’ dispossession of their lands, ultimately leading to their political disempowerment.

The Afar experienced good times when a secure natural resource base and active participation in the regional trade resulted in their own state flourishing and being well respected by their neighbours, as was the case during the Awsa Sultanate (Thesiger 1935). Established in the sixteenth century, the Awsa Sultanate is currently represented by Sultan Alimirah and his family (Yassin 2008). Aware of the political implication of the economic encroachments into the Afar region, Sultan Alimirah sought to contain powerful external economic actors, including members of the royal family, by turning himself into a popular capitalist in the 1960s by pre-emptively establishing cotton plantations (Harbeson 1978). By the mid 1970s, the Alimirah family emerged as one of the key players in the Awash valley (Said 1998). When the Derg sought to curb the rising political and economic influence of the Awsa Sultanate, Sultan Alimirah fled the country and established a liberation movement called the Afar Liberation Front (ALF) (Vaughan 2003, pp. 212–213).

Militarily allied with the TPLF during the armed struggle against the Derg, ALF seized the regional political power in the early years of the 1990s (Yasin 2008, pp. 2–5). ALF's relative political autonomy, however, was not well received by the EPRDF; the ALF was soon replaced by more EPRDF-friendly political organisations that were brought into a new ruling coalition known as the Afar National Democratic Party (ANDP). With that, the historic Sultanate has gradually but steadily retreated from politics, and a new generation of dependent regional elites has come to dominate the regional power politics in its wake. But even this new generation of the regional leadership, although groomed by the EPRDF, is showing signs of strains in its partnership with the EPRDF. The main contentious political issue between the regional and ruling parties is the issue of Afar's continued marginality in the externally controlled regional development process, while paying the cost of 'development' expressed in the form of displacement and involuntary resettlement.

Apart from Afdera's salt, the federal government has recently embarked on a large-scale, risky development project in the Afar region known as the Tendaho Sugar Factory, with a large plantation farm attached to it. In November 2006, the Ministry of Trade and Industry decided that Tendaho Agricultural Development (cotton) should be dismantled and merged under the Tendaho Sugar Factory. This is part of Ethiopia's current massive expansion of sugar production responding to the new market incentives by the European Union (EU). Ethiopia has been exporting sugar to EU countries since 2001, and its quota has increased over the years. The Tendaho Sugar Factory and its plantations lie on 54,000 ha of land, with a capacity of 600,000 tonnes when it starts operation.

The gigantic factory, and the plantation associated with it, are expected to displace many Afar from their prime grazing land and induce a massive influx of highlanders from Tigray region as labourers. The Ministry of Works and Urban Development completed the construction of 3400 houses for the Tendaho Sugar Factory workers (all highlanders) in February 2010. The housing developments include multi-storey buildings, schools, health centres, hospitals and recreation centres, and have created small towns. They are mainly providing social services to the highlanders, in contrast to the older, but poorly serviced small towns largely inhabited by the Afar. These double standards have created a sense of envy and deprivation among the Afar, engendering a discourse of being reduced to 'second-class' citizenship. It is for this reason that the regional government and the federal government have been in strong disagreement over the Tendaho sugar plantation. The three ongoing road construction projects to connect the Afar region to Mekelle, the capital of the Tigray Regional State, are also part of this externally oriented and extractive 'development' process.

In the eyes of the Afar, the large-scale appropriation of their land – which is the only permanent source of water and valuable dry season pastureland, the loss of their investment (largely by the Afar officials) in the cotton farms displaced by the sugar plantation, and the expected influx of highlanders, have generated a discourse of ethnic threat. The Afar believe that they might be turned into a minority in their own homeland, ultimately leading to their extinction due to assimilation into the culture of the highlanders. Their simultaneous dispossession and the coming of even more powerful economic actors to the region are felt by the Afar to be a serious threat leading to their ultimate political disempowerment. They consider that this state of affairs threatens to make ethnic federalism a political hypocrisy.

At times, the Afar frame their inclusionary demands in the language of geopolitics, specifically in reference to the new structure of strategic relevance that the protracted Ethio–Eritrean conflict has created for them. As artificial entities, state borders are often considered to be constraints to the local communities whose settlement patterns straddle

the border. That state borders also serve as conduits and opportunities is also gaining a new currency in the field of border studies (Nugent 2002). Borderland communities could also use the border as political ‘capital’ either to negotiate their marginality or buffer governments’ tight grip over local affairs (Dereje and Hoehne 2010). The volatile inter-state relations of the Horn have created a unique opportunity for the borderland communities, enabling them to play two powerful state actors off against each other.

Embittered by the loss of its revenue from salt export to Ethiopia after the break-up of the war and engaged in a proxy war since then, the Eritrean government has sought to create instability in the Afar Regional State which it borders in the South. This ranges from co-opting Afar traditional authorities (the Sultan Alimirah families) to funding armed Afar rebel groups and mining the road that leads to Lake Afdera. Although many Afar subscribe to the project of Greater Afar (uniting the Afar of Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti), and particularly resent the secession of Eritrea, they also instrumentalise their appeal to the Eritrean government in their contestation with the Ethiopian government over regional autonomy and economic marginalisation. On 1 March 2007, a group of Western tourists and their Ethiopian tour guides were abducted by an armed group in the Afar region. On 20 February 2008, the Ethiopian government reported that the police had prevented the attempted kidnap of a group of foreign tourists travelling in the region, and a number of landmines exploded in the period on the road between Afdera and Logia. In the latest incident, a tourist vehicle travelling to Erta Ale (the active volcano site) hit a landmine on 15 April 2009, killing two Ethiopians and injuring a foreign tourist. These explosions are part of the interplay between Afar’s sense of marginalisation and the protracted Ethio–Eritrean conflict.

One of the arguments put forward by some members of the regional government following these incidents as to why the Afars’ share in the salt sector should be increased was a reference to this delicate geopolitical setting. To this end, the Afar youth was organised into salt cooperatives. Many members of the Afar Youth Cooperative are former members of either Uggugumo or Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front, two armed rebel groups that have waged a low-intensity insurgency against the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments (Yasin 2008). As one senior Afar official put it, ‘failure to reintegrate this disaffected group of people would create political instability in the region’, a political statement which is as much a concern for regional political stability as it is a veiled threat to the federal government to respond to Afar’s inclusionary demands couched in the language of geopolitics.

### **The cost of marginalisation: the ill-fated iodisation programme**

The main problem with the domestically produced salt in Ethiopia is lack of iodine. Ethiopia is a country with high prevalence of iodine deficiency. Iodine deficiency is a considerable public health problem causing foetal brain function damage that ranges from loss of up to 10 to 15 points of IQ, to severe mental retardation (McCarthy 2001). Two main sources of iodine are plants grown in soil that contain iodine and salt. Unfortunately, both Ethiopian soil and salt are iodine deficient. Ethiopia had a mandatory regulation on salt iodisation, and is one of the few countries in the region to adopt the Universal Salt Iodisation (USI) strategy. Between 1994 and 1998, over 90% of Ethiopian households were consuming iodised salt supplied by Eritrea.

Currently only 4% of Ethiopia’s 77 million people consume iodised salt – among the lowest percentages in the world (ICCIDD 2007). It is for this reason that Ethiopia is known for a high incidence of Iodine Deficiency Disorder (IDD). Aware of the severity of the

problem, the Ethiopian government has made iodisation one of its top priorities in the health sector. A number of donors such as UNICEF and the Micronutrient Initiative, the leading organisation working exclusively on elimination of vitamin and mineral deficiencies in the world's most vulnerable populations, are actively engaged with the Ministry of Health in discussion on salt iodisation. Apart from formulating relevant legislations that help combat IDD, the Ethiopian government in coordination with UNICEF has planned various strategies since 2005. A number of iodine-related initiatives were taken, including the establishment of a Central Iodisation Facility (CIF) in Afdera in 2009. Despite the favourable policy environment and the strong commitment of the donors to help Ethiopia achieve its USI, no progress has been made in combating IDD effectively, primarily because of the failure to reach a negotiated settlement among the various actors involved in the production and distribution of salt in the Afar region.

Given the stark economic imbalance between the Afar small-scale producers and the large-scale highlander investors, as well as the heavy-handedness of some of the companies, the Afar have become very suspicious of the iodisation programme. When the word spread that UNICEF had distributed iodisation machines to the large-scale producers, particularly to Ezana, the Afar questioned the whole intention of the iodisation programme as if it were yet another highlander ploy to force them out of the salt business. This underlying tension between political power and economic insecurity has created a stalemate. Five years later, the iodisation programme is stalled, and there is no resolution in sight. The following section discusses what has gone wrong with the iodisation programme, situated within the larger political economy of salt in Ethiopia.

Fearing that the iodisation programme might give the non-Afar greater say and control over the salt business, in 2009 the Afar regional government organised 60 unemployed Afar youth into an association with a principal mandate of carrying out the donor-supported salt iodisation programme. The Afar Youth Association briefly ventured into the iodisation business under the political support of the regional government, with financial support from the Micronutrient Initiative (MI). However the low development dividends from the salt business have accentuated the Afars' sense of relative deprivation, and neither federal support nor corporate social responsibility have significantly contributed to the alleviation of Afdera's daunting development challenges. Even the Afdera Salt Producers' Board failed Afdera when it appropriated the budget allocated for the construction of a school, to cover its own administrative running costs instead.

The fact that the producers' association was not duly consulted over the iodisation programme has also undermined genuine dialogue and participation from Afar at various levels. In fact, the manner in which iodisation machines were distributed to the stronger private companies (particularly to Ezana) brought about an atmosphere of suspicion. Initially six iodisation machines were distributed to the large-scale producers by UNICEF/MI, all being non-Afar. Angered by this exclusionary act, the Afar sought to take possession of the iodisation machines in a move reminiscent of the Ludditism of the early industrialisation period in Europe.

Confronted by a more determined resistance by the Afar, the federal government was forced to make concessions. Accordingly, 12 iodisation machines were supplied, 10 to the Afar Youth Association (AYA) and two to the Dobi Youth Association. Although this gave the Afar greater participation in the salt business, the Youth Associations did not manage the business well. Most of the reasons for the Afar Youth Association's failure are external. First of all, the AYA was hastily formed, created overnight by copying the national cooperative by-laws. By the time the AYA started iodisation it did not even have legal status. This frustrated producers, who were uncomfortable in dealing

with an entity that was not yet legal. Nor was iodisation profitable as a business. The AYA started without even having weighing scales, and with very poor working conditions. Moreover, the 10 machines were handled by 60 Afar youth (six people per machine) and this created a high workload (600 quintals of iodised salt per hour). Under these circumstances, the AYA could not sustain its involvement in the programme. In fact, it was kept in the business for five months merely to save face: for fear of the further politicisation of the iodisation programme, the donors continued to pay the Birr 1000 monthly salaries for the 60 members of AYA for that period.

Except for a few officials from the Ministry of Health, no one bothered to seriously engage with either the Afar political leadership or the producers about the iodisation programme. The Board's bilateral deals with the Ministry of Mines and Energy, and also with the Ministry of Health, in February 2010 were also considered a deliberate act to further marginalise the Afar voice in the salt affairs. Many Afar repeatedly referred during the second annual board meeting to the non-accountability of the Board to the producers and the regional government, with it being widely believed by the Afar that the Board had increasingly sided with the large-scale producers, the distributors and the federal establishments.

The invalidation of the scientific argument for the iodisation programme in the eyes of the Afar has further complicated the issue. This related to the lower incidence of goitre among the Afar. According to a 1980 stratified goitre survey, the gross goitre prevalence among schoolchildren and household members was 30% and 19% respectively. According to the 2005 National Micronutrient Survey conducted by the Ethiopian National Health and Nutrition Research Institute, goitre rates have increased to 40%. The prevalence rates at higher altitudes are usually higher than those at lower altitudes (Zewdie *et al.* 1993, pp. 257–268). When UNICEF personnel sought to explain to the Afar the significance of the iodisation programme for public health, the Afar were not persuaded, instead challenging the scientific arguments in the following manner:

If what you say is true, why don't you then see Afar with goitre, though Afar salt has never been iodised? Also, you said that people in the highlands suffer from goitre because the plant they grow on the soil has very low iodine. How is that then we are not affected by goitre because we get most of our crops and vegetables from the highlands? (Excerpts from discussion with UNICEF staffs in Logia, 12 March 2010).

This 'discrepancy' between the scientific arguments for the salt iodisation programme and Afar empirical evidence against it would not have been a big problem had it not been for the Afar's deep-rooted lack of trust in the highlanders as well as in the Ethiopian state. Development interventions carried out primarily through non-Afar professionals have often been met with suspicion, and in some instances outright rejection. Many Afar pastoralists, for instance, rejected veterinary services or polio vaccination for lack of confidence in their relevance or efficacy, because they happened to be 'the right thing through the wrong [that is, the highlanders'] mouth'. Against the backdrop of suspicion and loss of trust due to exclusionary practices by the federal government, the Afar never believed that the discourse of iodisation was related to health risks but considered it rather a mere camouflage to dominate the lucrative salt business by government-related private interest groups. On a larger scale this misperception is situated within Ethiopia's historically conditioned centre-peripheral relational mode that throws light on how fragile the legitimacy of the federal government is in these regions (Markakis 2003).

Aware of the danger of the further politicisation of the iodisation programme the federal government took a series of measures to calm rising Afar discontent:

- The Afdera Salt Producers Share Company's (ASPSC) 20% share (Birr 10 million) formerly owned by Ezana and Guna has now been given to the regional government.
- The Ministry of Health withdrew the mandate of iodisation from AYA to the ASPA and the larger companies.
- The AYA was provided with an alternative income-generating scheme aimed at improving the working conditions of salt mining in Afdera (ice production plant).
- The distributors were increased from one to three, in order to make the salt business competitive.

These measures have not been appreciated by the Afar, probably due to the already damaged levels of trust. The inclusionary measures that gave the Afar regional government the 20% of ASPSC shares is largely perceived as a 'trap' to lure the Afar out of the iodisation programme, and through that from the salt business. The regional government and the AYA were not consulted during the discussion that resulted in the transfer of the iodisation mandate from AYA to ASPA and the large-scale producers. This was dealt with bilaterally between the Board and the Ministry of Health, and was certainly a complicating factor which the Afar repeatedly referred to as 'disingenuous' during the Board's meeting. Nor has breaking the distribution monopoly been fully appreciated. The facts that one of the new distribution companies is a Tigrean company with a previously dubious track record as a salt producer, and that the third company is essentially an extension of the previous, Amhara-owned, distribution company are considered to have made a mockery of the proposed reforms in salt governance.

It is for this reason that the complications arising in the iodisation programme led to the Afar starting not from a medical argument, but moving immediately to the issue of the wider process of marginalisation in the regional economy and power politics. Even senior Afar officials in the regional bureau of health have defined the complication from a primarily political, rather than a medical perspective. Iodine comes after sugar and salt, and when it is picked up as an issue, it is also negatively viewed as yet another ploy to kick the Afar out of the regional economy that is increasingly dominated by the federal government and private interests connected to it.

## **Conclusion**

After nearly two decades of the implementation of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia the jury is now out to appraise empirically whether the new political order has delivered on its promises. Ethnic federalism has delivered some cultural empowerment and modest political empowerment of local communities, particularly in the peripheral areas of the country. Among the Afar, a new regional political space has been created, one that is appreciable if viewed against the backdrop of Afar's perennial quest for territorial unity within Ethiopia. The Afars' new regional political space has also been translated into cultural rehabilitation, evident for instance in the use of Afar as the administrative language of the regional government and the teaching medium in the schools.

Where Ethiopia's ethnic federalism is at its weakest is its failure to deliver economic empowerment, particularly in the peripheral areas. In fact, all the regional states still get most of their revenue from the federal government, and this asymmetry has been translated into a neo-patrimonial relational mode between the ruling EPRDF and the regional parties

affiliated to it. Unsurprisingly this has undermined a regional political voice within the federation. Despite the distinction made between ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ regional states, there has not been an affirmative economic action that could redress the huge regional imbalance in the development index. This gives an impression that the discourse of ‘backward’ or ‘developing’ regional states is not entirely innocent and rather allows the government to continue to dominate the peoples of the peripheral areas.

Instead of economic empowerment, what can be observed in the largely pastoralist peripheral areas is rather a growing economic insecurity and a threatened livelihood. Powerful farming neighbours and a state with an agrarian bias have encroached onto the rangeland, putting the viability of pastoralism into question. As a result, many Afar are leaving pastoralism without an alternative economic direction. Diversification of livelihoods, such as the Lake Afdera salt industry, could have been an exit option. As the case study demonstrated, however, new and lucrative sectors of the economy are still dominated by the more powerful neighbours and economic interest groups affiliated to the ruling party. This continuity of centre–periphery relations of dominance threatens to undermine the moral and political legitimacy of the federation. The resulting political instability thus instances an integrative failure in the peripheral areas which are otherwise the federation’s ‘organic’ constituency. The tension between legitimate local needs (economic inclusion) and the dubious national good could potentially translate into not only incapacity to make use of the country’s untapped natural resources, but also, in the case of Afar’s marginalisation in the salt sector, lack of cooperation to ensure public health safety as it is acted out in the derailment of the iodisation programme.

### Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank all Afar who trusted and shared their concerns and information with him on a sensitive subject such as this.

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## **THEME: SOUTHERN AFRICA – THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE CONTINUES**

### **Introduction to the theme**

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Many of us came to southern Africa from the starting point of support for the peoples there who were struggling, in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, against the white minority/colonial regimes that dominated them and shaped so negatively their life chances. And, in this respect, there was of course to be a record of enormous achievement, one realised against great odds and especially so when that achievement is measured against the stunted expectations that many around the world had when the 30-year war for southern African liberation first announced itself in the early 1960s. Victory in southern Africa? Here, surely, was a dramatic African achievement to celebrate.

Well, yes and no. In fact, many in the worldwide liberation support/anti-apartheid movement, seduced perhaps by the bold promises of the liberation movements themselves, had come to understand that defining liberation merely in terms of national liberation from white colonial dominance told, at best, half the story (Saul 2007, 2011). Important as it was to overcome apartheid and similar racist structures in southern Africa, it was easy to see that people in southern Africa were also seeking to liberate themselves from class and corporate oppression, from structures of male domination, and from authoritarian political practices. These goals came readily to seem to be at least as important to any true liberation as was national self-assertion. Nonetheless, the fact is that these attendant goals were to fall by the wayside; indeed now, some decades after the fall of the most visible forms of colonial and racial domination, it has become ever more apparent just how narrow the definition of ‘liberation’ has been permitted to become (Saul 2010).

For liberation in any expansive sense is, quite simply, something that has not occurred in southern Africa. How to explain this? There has been, for example, the global fall of socialism (at least in its Soviet form) and the consequent loss of that particular point of reference and support. There is, as well, the extreme nature of ‘historical backwardness’ (in terms of shortfalls in economic capacity and in the scarcity of requisite kinds of expertise amongst the hitherto subject populations) that was bequeathed as the legacy of the region’s various ruthless colonialisms. And there has been the vulnerability of the new indigenous elites (not least from the ranks of the liberation movements themselves) to a too-easy seduction into the ranks of privilege and self-interested power. And this in spite of the fact that, in the period of the initial struggle for liberation, the ostensible aims of liberation movements were defined in terms of much more transformative, even socialist,

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ends. In contrast with such ‘promises’, the prevalence of starkly neo-colonial outcomes has been sobering.

Or think of it instead as having been a recolonisation, one imposed by a new ‘Empire of Capital’. Such a conceptualisation arises from the fact that it is now much less easy than it was previously to disaggregate global capital into national capitals and to see any specific capital as being primarily attendant upon some nationally based imperialism and its colonialism. No, coming from the Global North and West (as it has done historically) but also now from the East (Japan, China and India), this new empire of linked capitals (competitive but interactive and fused together in novel ways as part of a global network of economic power) is what is currently recolonising Africa (Saul 2008). Nation-states (of both the North and the East) still have an independent role with diverse *raison d’état* that also play into the imperial equation. Nonetheless the globalisation of capital has introduced something new to the workings of imperialism – principally a ‘colonisation’ of a novel type by a new empire (of capital), a recolonisation of much of the global South in fact. True, such recolonisation has been accomplished with the overt connivance of indigenous leaders/elites – those who have inherited power with the demise of ‘white rule’ but who, in doing so, have also manifested a far greater commitment to the interests of their own privileged class-in-creation than to those of the mass of their own people. But this merely reinforces the fact that this brave new world is far from being a happy one for the vast mass of southern African citizens – despite the freedom that they had seemed to have won.

A victory of sorts then. And now in 2010 we celebrate it, 2010 being a date that falls precisely fifty years after the launching, in 1960, of the ‘thirty years war (1960–1990) for southern African liberation’, 35 years after the year of Angola’s and Mozambique’s independence, more or less 30 years after the day of independence in Zimbabwe, and a full 20 years after both Namibia’s inaugural day and the release from prison of Nelson Mandela that marked so clearly the first of the very last days of apartheid (days of transition that would culminate in Mandela’s election as president in 1994). Something to celebrate then, yet it is a sad fact that one also feels forced to ask the question, as I have recently done, as to just who actually won the struggle for southern African liberation. As I then continued:

We know who lost, of course: the white minorities in positions of formal political power (whether colonially in the Portuguese colonies or quasi-independently in South Africa and perhaps in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe). And thank fortune, and hard and brave work, for that. But who, in contrast, has won, at least for the time being: global capitalism, the West and the IFIs [international financial institutions], and local elites of state and private sectors, both white and black. But how about the mass of southern African populations, both urban and rural and largely black? Not so obviously the winners, I would suggest, and certainly not in any very expansive sense. Has it not been a kind of defeat for them too? (Saul 2009a, 2009b)

How much of a defeat? The country case studies that comprise the body of this set of essays in *ROAPE* will, cumulatively, give a very clear sense of the reality of this defeat. Merely note here that in South Africa, for example, the economic gap between black and white has indeed narrowed statistically – framed by the fact that some blacks have indeed got very much richer (from their own upward mobility as junior partners to recolonisation and from the fresh spoils of victory that this has offered them). Yet the gap between rich and poor is actually *wider* than ever it was – and it is growing.

Much valuable research (by the likes of Terreblanche [2002], McDonald [2006] and Natrass and Seekings [2005]) documents this harsh fact – and other similarly sobering facts – and its stark implications. But note also the intervention several months ago by a

leading South African prelate, Rev. Fuleni Mzukisi, who charged that poverty in South Africa is now worse than apartheid and is, in fact, 'a terrible disease'. As he said: 'Apartheid was a deep crime against humanity. It left people with deep scars, but I can assure you that poverty is worse than that . . . People do not eat human rights; they want food on the table.'<sup>1</sup>

This outcome is the result, most generally, of the grim overall inequalities between the global North and the global South that, as in many other regions, mark southern Africa. But, more specifically, it also reflects the choice of economic strategies in this latter region that can now imagine only elite enrichment and the presumed 'trickle down benefits' of unchecked capitalism as being the way in which the lot of the poorest of the poor might be improved there. How far a cry this is from the populist, even socialist, hopes for more effective and egalitarian outcomes that originally seemed to define the development dreams of all the liberation movements. Indeed, what is especially disconcerting about the present recolonisation of the region under the flag of capitalism is that it has been driven by precisely the same movements (at least in name) that led their countries to independence in the long years of overt regional struggle. But just why this should have occurred, how inevitable it was, is something we will consider in the essays that follow.

To be sure, the record varies somewhat from country to country. Thus, Mozambique under Frelimo, once the most forthrightly socialist of all the region's countries, has had to abandon that claim. True, it has also abandoned its initial brand of developmental dictatorship in favour of a formal democratisation that has stabilised the country – albeit without markedly empowering the mass of its people or improving their socio-economic lot. Indeed, a recent textbook by Bauer and Taylor on southern Africa (a book of sympathetic though not notably radical predisposition) notes that the election to the presidency of Armando Guebuza who is the 'holder of an expansive business empire and one of the richest men in Mozambique hardly signals that Frelimo will attempt to run anything but a globalist, neo-liberal agenda – regardless of the abject poverty suffered by most of the electorate' (Bauer and Taylor 2005, p. 135; also Hanlon and Smart, 2008).

As for Angola it has, until quite recently, experienced a much greater and more dramatic degree of divisive fragmentation than Mozambique – although its antidote to that, since the death of Savimbi, has had as little to do with popular empowerment and broad-based development as have the present policies of its fellow ex-Portuguese colony, Mozambique. In fact, it has been argued that it is only a handful of progressive international initiatives (Human Rights Watch, Global Witness and the like) that have had some success in holding the feet of exploitative corporations and of Angola's own government to the fire of critical scrutiny. For unfortunately, as David Sogge argues in his essay on Angola in the present collection, the country's own population, battle-scarred and battle-weary, has been rather slower to find effective means to exert their own claims. Yet, as the same Bauer and Taylor volume quoted above feels forced to conclude of Angola, oil money and corruption have merely 'exacerbated the already glaring discrepancies between rich and poor' and have, 'quite simply, threatened the country's recovery and future development' (2005, p. 163).

Meanwhile Zimbabwe, in the brutal thrall of Mugabe and ZANU, has witnessed an even greater deterioration of national circumstances than either of these two countries. There, say Bauer and Taylor, 'the ZANU-PF's stewardship of the economy [has] been an unmitigated disaster' (2005, p. 197; also Raftopoulos and Mlambo, 2009) while its politics, through years of overt and enormously costly dictatorial practices, have produced a situation, as Richard Saunders details in his own essay here, that is proving enormously difficult both to displace and to move beyond.

The results in both Namibia (Melber 2003) and South Africa, even if not quite so bloody as those produced by Renamo's war, the prolonged sparring of Savimbi with the MPLA and Mugabe's depredations, are not much more inspiring in terms of effective mass empowerment and broad-gauged human betterment – as we will see in the articles by Henning Melber and Patrick Bond. Thus, a long-time and firmly loyal African National Congress (ANC) cadre (Ben Turok) has himself, in a recent book entitled *The evolution of ANC economic policy*, acknowledged both the contribution of ANC policies to growing inequality in his country while reaching 'the irresistible conclusion that the ANC government has lost a great deal of its earlier focus on the fundamental transformation of the inherited social system' (Turok 2008, p. 263)!

In sum, South Africa, like the other 'liberated' locales of the region, has become, in the sober phrase with which Neville Alexander (Alexander 2002; see also Gumede 2008) has titled a book of his own on South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy, merely 'an ordinary country' – despite the rather finer future that many, both in southern Africa and beyond, had hoped would prove to be the outcome of the long years of liberation struggle themselves. But Alexander's characterisation could be said to apply to all of the countries in the region: what we now have, instead of a liberated southern Africa that is vibrant, humane and just, is a region of a very different sort indeed.

Moreover, not only is there deepening inequality within countries but, in the region taken as a whole, there is also – to take one glaring example – a situation in which South Africa's capitalist economic power now merely complements global capitalist power in holding the impoverished people of southern Africa in quasi-colonial thrall (as a recent series of articles in *Africafiles' Ezine* on South Africa in the southern Africa region recently documented)<sup>2</sup> – while doing disturbingly little to better the lot of such people, the vast majority both in South Africa and elsewhere. Or take the Southern African Development Community (SADC): it has become (albeit with a few honourable exceptions) primarily a club of presidents that reveal itself to be – as the sad case of its kid-gloves treatment of Zimbabwe and its backing of an otherwise deservedly embattled Mugabe amply demonstrates – more a source of tacit support for the *status quo* than a force for facilitating any kind of just transition to effective democracy in Zimbabwe.

In truth, it is now often said by people of a Left persuasion that the current global situation offers no real alternatives, no real hope, for Africa (including southern Africa). It cannot, they say, count on any plausible socialist alternative (see Gabriel Kolko's deeply unsettling *After socialism* [2006]). Moreover, a seasoned observer like Giovanni Arrighi can only urge Africa to look to a relatively benign China (a doubtful haven of hope, one fears) and/or to the kinder and gentler practices of its own elites in order to realise even a marginal adjustment to its desperate plight (Arrighi 2002, Saul 2009c). Others fall back on the equally unlikely prospect of a revolutionary transformation of the exploitative West to then lift many of the key barriers to a brighter future. Thus, as one friend has recently written to me: 'I don't see how the South can ever liberate itself in the absence of a new socialist project becoming powerful in the North.' Yet he feels forced to add that 'I don't see that happening until people are hurting and see no prospect of meeting their personal needs under globalized neoliberalism, and until a new left movement with a serious attitude to organization and democracy.' But this is a faint hope too, my correspondent – who confesses to feeling 'very pessimistic' – obviously fears.

Failing a revolution in the global capitalist centres, however, what are the actual prospects for some dramatic change occurring within the region itself, one, necessarily, driven from below? The present author has called elsewhere for 'a next liberation struggle'

(Saul 2005) in southern Africa for precisely this reason, a struggle, like the one that is currently afoot in several places in Latin America for example, that seeks to at least neutralise the intervention of imperialist forces from the North while also facilitating the empowerment of its own people in political and economic terms.

And there are – as will be surveyed on a country-by-country basis in the articles that follow – localised and grassroots resistances in the region in a wide variety of settings and on a broad range of policy fronts that seek to make headway and even to begin to add up to potential hegemonic alternatives to the failed liberation movements that we still see in power. Moreover, some attempts to so resist – the initial rise of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in opposition to Mugabe, for example, and the removal of the brazen Thabo Mbeki from South Africa's presidency before the end of his term; the dramatic grass-roots resistance, especially in South Africa, to the AIDS pandemic that stalks the entire region; and the signs of a resurgent economic nationalism that threatens to renegotiate contracts with the private sector and even to reverse certain privatisations – do begin to so promise: promise, that is, to 'add up', even if, to this point, 'not quite' and certainly 'not yet'!

So the question remains: how might one hope, even expect, that the diverse instances of resistance that are visible could come to pose hegemonic alternatives in southern Africa to the recolonisation that has been the fate of that part of the continent in the wake of its seeming 'liberation'? What might Africans on the ground in the region have to do next, and how can they best be supported from outside in doing so? Equally importantly, how might residents of the global North organise themselves in order – with respect to any 'next liberation support struggle' – to best assist them: staying the hand of our own governments and corporations on the one hand and speaking out clearly and effectively on behalf of such movements for genuine liberation on the ground on the other? One thing is clear: the liberation struggle continues. We cannot live in the (recent) past. We must act to shape the future.

The liberation of southern Africa, then. And its aftermath. A story full of heroism, but also, in many ways, a grim tale, even if the right people – the arrogant white elites who once dominated, in racist terms, southern Africa – had lost. But, in the longer run, these articles ask, who really won? Not, visibly and in any very expansive sense, the vast mass of the southern Africa people. Instead, the spoils of victory have mainly gone to 'global capitalism' on the one hand and to the thin stratum of black elites who have since arrogated to themselves whatever power and privilege global capital has left to them on the other.

The authors of the various essays in this section, are well aware, of course, that 'the struggle continues' – although the forces who actively wage it may be still fragmented and relatively weak. Indeed, the extent to which most southern African governments, through SADC, have closed ranks behind the villainous Mugabe is a sobering index of the challenge that continues to confront the people of southern Africa. For, as these articles clearly demonstrate, the realities of Zimbabwe are duplicated (albeit in somewhat less graphic terms) on each of the erstwhile fronts of liberation struggle that we explore here.

Yet we know that there are also seeds of resentment and of resistance throughout the region. Moreover, some of us remember quite vividly just how bleak the prospect for redress of racist rule in the region seemed in the 1960s. Nonetheless, the apartheid regime, and its cancerous ilk of racist hierarchies located throughout the sub-continent, fell. And now it is again just possible to catch a glimpse of often impressive stirrings of popular resistance that continue to disrupt the overweening pretensions of the temporary 'winners'. Perhaps

it is too early to say that ‘*victoria e certa*’ – over and against such ‘winners’ and as envisaged by such challengers to their present hegemony – but it is certainly not presumptuous to say, with reference to all the emergent bearers of a fresh liberation struggle, ‘*a luta continua*’.

### Acknowledgements

John S. Saul would like to acknowledge the assistance of Jim Kirkwood, Craig Hincks and Craig Dowler of the AfricaFiles Collective in Toronto for the crucial roles they played in preparing an earlier version of the present collection of articles for AfricaFiles’ noteworthy e-publication, *infoserv*, which is distributed both in North America and in Africa.

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### Notes

1. Fulemi Mzukisi, as cited in Fredrick Nzwili, ‘South Africa: pastor says poverty is worse than apartheid’, from *Ecumenical News International*, circulated by AfricaFiles (10 September 2008).
2. See AfricaFiles’ *At Issue Ezine*, ‘Vol. 8: South Africa in Africa’ (2008).

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## Angola: reinventing pasts and futures

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What's in a name? For the ruling party of Angola, it seems, quite a lot. In December 2009, that party formally abandoned its original name from 1956, *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola*, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola. Henceforth it would be known merely by the old initials: MPLA. Evidently the party thought it best to bury and forget terms like 'movement' and 'liberation'. Besides, it had long ago dropped the word *Popular* from new nation's first name, the *People's Republic of Angola*.

Such fiery terms from a burnt-out era no doubt left a lot of people cold. But deleting those tokens of past ideals came at an odd time. For never in its 53-year history had the MPLA's claims to a popular mandate looked stronger. In high-turnout parliamentary elections in September 2008, it got more than four out of every five votes. Six years earlier, its triumph over warlord-led Unita, and the non-punitive peace deal that followed, met with overwhelming relief, even among people on the losing side. Since the war, popular expectations have risen, and many, at least in urban wage-earning strata, are optimistic about the future. Urbanised and Portuguese-speaking, most people see themselves no longer chiefly as members of ethnic blocs, but as citizens of one Angolan nation (Farinha *et al.* 2004, IRI 2004).<sup>1</sup> The MPLA, more than any other political force, contributed to those outcomes.

No such scenario seemed feasible in the early 1970s. At that time the party was on the ropes, reeling from Portuguese counter-insurgency and from its own self-inflicted wounds. Like its two rival nationalist parties, the MPLA had never developed internal coherence or means to engage broadly with Angolan citizens at large. Reviewing the parties' histories, an Angolan political analyst put it as follows:

Although [national parties'] programmes proclaimed democratic liberties as objectives of the struggle, none of them conducted themselves in ways that would guarantee pluralism ... Within each organization, conditions of tolerance and openness to political debate [were] non-existent. (Gonçalves 2004, p. 17)

Angolan anti-colonial politics thus foreshadowed the autocratic political order of the post-colony. The nationalist leadership could draw on few traditions or norms on which to build a responsive, non-patrimonial bond between citizens and the state (Birmingham 1992).

Yet from the near-death experience of internal fratricide and international isolation (both Washington and Moscow had written it off by 1973), the MPLA made an astonishing comeback as a thrusting new African power. With military help from Cuban communists and

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plenty of petrodollars from Western capitalists, it gained time, space and know-how to recover and get the upper hand. Revolutionary rhetoric may have filled the airwaves in 1975–76, but in the suites where the party chieftains cut deals with the oil companies, the byword was continuity (Soares de Oliveira 2007, pp. 189–194). Neither side wished to put at risk, let alone abandon, mutually lucrative arrangements merely because they originated under colonial rule. The new leadership went on, however, to modify the *status quo* by building three key institutions: a disciplined army and security apparatus; a professionally-run state holding company, Sonangol; and a well-oiled system of patronage. Shrewd management of all three led to advances on the fronts of coercive power, state revenues and domestic politics. In short, the MPLA built what Cold-War Washington least wanted to see: a black African state with muscle and ‘attitude’.

For its impudence, Angola paid in blood. Unlike Afghanistan, where American support to Islamic fundamentalists to ‘roll back’ communism brought nasty blowback for the United States itself, American support to African anti-communists brought death and wretchedness only for Angolans. From 1975 to 2002 about one-and-a-half million of them perished, a staggering number for a country of only six million people in 1975. Of these, about 160,000 died in combat – the heaviest battle casualties, in absolute numbers, of any African conflict in the twentieth century (Ormhaug 2009, p. 8).

War utterly transfigured Angola. It did so by sheer destruction, but also by obscuring processes of dispossession, private accumulation and the consolidation of political power in Luanda. As the country’s sophisticated agro-industrial system collapsed, it took with it a sizable class of small producers and a rural semi-proletariat – social categories never trusted by the MPLA, whose adherents were mainly urban and better schooled. The violence that drove nearly half the population into urban shack settlements radically reduced the rural constituencies from which the MPLA’s enemies had drawn their support. As the belligerents swept up tens of thousands of young people into their war machines, years of apprenticeship began in trade schools for violence. Many of these veterans are today on payrolls of the army, police and private security companies.

Today, as in the war years, most of the war’s uprooted and dispossessed scrape by in netherworlds of informal work and commerce, the onshore economy’s new centre of gravity. But as elsewhere in global capitalism, that free market is only for losers. The economic winners, being politically well connected, get rich pickings such as control over lucrative import monopolies. Import streams they control supply most of the markets where the *povo*, the common people, do the work, take the risks and pay off the Economic Police and other shakedown artists to leave them in peace. Such is life under *capitalismo selvagen*: jungle capitalism.

In contrast to the rest of Africa, Angola’s elites never allowed the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to supervise economic policy directly. Yet by 1990 they had nonetheless embraced key tenets of the Washington Consensus: liberalisation of external flows, austerity for public services and privatisation of public assets. In so doing, they quashed any remaining hopes of a social contract – ‘satisfaction of the people’s needs’, in the discourse of the MPLA *anno* 1975. In that initial period, the party’s socio-economic pledges sounded vaguely social-democratic, mentioning commitments to basic schooling and literacy, which expanded rapidly up to 1980, then shrank. Primary and preventive health care, promoted by sympathetic donors like Sweden and Italy, never gained traction; government put priority instead on centralised care in city hospitals, and eventually on private clinics. For the most part, fulfilment of Central Committee pledges for public services took second place to elite preferences, politico-military imperatives and to aspirations for a Soviet command-and-control system. But within 10 years, this haphazardly built state

socialist project had been engulfed by bureaucratic disorganisation, volatile revenues, elite self-interest, a flourishing parallel market and above all, war. By 1990 most of the half-hearted gestures toward downward distribution had come to an end and elite battles for power, and especially wealth, had been joined.

The new 'market-friendly' policies ushered in a bonanza for the political class and their corporate allies abroad. Capital flight took wing. A recent study indicates that in the 1990s illicit outflows averaged US\$542 million a year, roughly 6% of gross domestic product (GDP); in the period 2000–2008 they averaged US\$2.7 billion a year, roughly 14% of GDP (GFI 2010).<sup>2</sup> Angola's 'peace dividend' has meant, literally, big dividends for interests abroad.

Judicial activists like the French magistrate Eva Joly and policy-activist organisations like Global Witness have revealed much about these shadowy systems. But just where Angola's siphoned-off wealth is stashed, and who owns it, are largely guesswork. All outflows are murky and circuitous, coursing through multiple secrecy jurisdictions from London and Lichtenstein to Delaware to end up mainly on Wall Street. That is the most likely destination identified by a team of economists of the US Federal Reserve, after sifting a lot of data in the opaque world of petrodollars (Higgins *et al.* 2006). 'Market-friendly' policies have meant exactly that: friendly to The Markets.

In addition, legally earned monies get special handling in Angola itself. Foreign corporations face low taxes and streamlined repatriation of profits – a fact attentively noted in a US government review of Angola's investment climate and in scorecards of 'economic freedom' by influential think-tanks in Washington DC (US Department of State 2010, Cato Institute 2010, Heritage Foundation 2010).

Domestic businesses, on the other hand, face different rules. They cannot accumulate at will; indeed any Angolan seeking to make serious profits has first to cut a deal with an appropriate politician. For the MPLA, any effort to accumulate beyond its purview is a matter of zero tolerance, for that could lead to autonomous bases of power. Hence there are no Angolans making money on a *substantial scale* outside the purview and participation of the political class.

MPLA statecraft includes control over media and the flow of ideas. But its main levers work through the distribution of money, status and official positions. The MPLA has used these levers, backed by brute coercion, to forge informal pacts among elites, to co-opt and neutralise adversaries and to keep the wayward on board. Despite rumours of mutual distrust – stories of VIPs at dinner parties who refuse to drink from bottles not opened before their own eyes or to eat anything not tasted first by their flunkies – the political class is holding together rather well. Pacts and patronage have been stabilising in Angola's case.

Indeed the party's centralised patronage system has thus far proven reliable for managing politics where centrifugal forces are strong and a lot of lootable wealth is at stake. That system enabled recruitment of former 'outsider' ethnicities into the military's top brass. Part of it operates through revenue sharing, particularly in sensitive oil and diamond zones, and through the allocation of official positions from which rents can be extracted. The domesticating effects of patronage are now apparent; with the exception of renegade militias in Cabinda, Angola is at peace. The argument that resources breed political chaos does not hold for Angola; mere plunder and oppression to the neglect statecraft has never been the MPLA approach.

Yet domestic acceptance of MPLA rule and developmental preferences is far from iron-clad. Indeed Angolans show hearty contempt for their politicians and for the big corporations on which they depend. Most Angolans express much greater confidence in their churches (BBC World Service Trust 2008). Public opinion polls indicate tepid satisfaction

with living standards, but at levels higher than in comparable countries (UNDP 2010).<sup>3</sup> Such mixed popular sentiments appear to back efforts by activists in the emancipatory camp of civil society, in Angola and abroad, to keep probing the connections, embarrassing the rulers and stimulating public debate. Certainly in the blogosphere, and occasionally on the ground (such when the authorities forcibly remove peri-urban shackdwellers), activism continues.

But the authorities seem increasingly adept in using coercive methods, a modicum of public services and especially engagement in a constrained civil arena to keep the lid on popular discontent. They have begun working shrewdly to contain independent ideas and associational life. In the early post-independence years it tried to colonise civil spaces with Soviet-type monopoly organisations for women, workers, peasants and youth. But with the exception of the women's organisation these never achieved any real legitimacy.

Toward the activist non-profits the MPLA employs both sticks and carrots. Repressive measures include containment (for example, independent media confined mainly to Luanda if not terrorised by hired thugs or bought out by party associates), secret police infiltration and strong-arm action such as against low-income residents of prime urban land in Luanda and Lubango. Positive incentives include favours from the party's own non-government organisations, notably the Eduardo dos Santos Foundation (Messiant 1999). Patronage and perks offered through the party's *Specialty Committees* have kept many urban professionals away from political activism. Progressive parties and vibrant periodicals (digital and printed) are alive and kicking in Luanda, but faced with MPLA cunning they have yet to form a critical mass in political life.

Citizens might mount stronger counter-pressures if there were effective court systems and other channels for public complaint and transparent regulation. And indeed cases sometimes get hearings in real courts of law, with occasional advances in real justice. These episodes may help explain why a small majority of Angolans polled by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in 2008 claimed to trust the country's legal system (BBC World Service Trust 2008, slide 57, 'Trust in Different Institutions'). In March 2010, a provincial court convicted seven policemen of the unlawful killing of eight youth in a Luanda neighbourhood, although the court was at pains to exclude higher-ups from any culpability. Indeed, it appears that most of those at upper levels enjoy effective immunity from justice. In the same month, the government promulgated a Public Probity Law that would penalise corruption and oblige top public officials to declare their personal wealth at home and abroad. Anyone can denounce abuses by public figures, but the penalties for making false accusations are severe.

Will this and other impressive laws actually promote transparency, honesty and respect for human rights? The leadership has in any case shown no haste in beefing up the Prosecutor's Office (responsible for enforcing the new Public Probity Law) or in expanding a responsive judiciary. It prefers instead law-enforcement-lite. The Judicial Ombudsman's office, provincial human rights commissions and mediation centres may provide occasions for citizens to ventilate complaints. But none have mandates to enforce laws or impose legally binding outcomes. They help alert the authorities to problems without requiring them to find solutions. Yet because they reflect, however dimly, the principle that citizens may express grievances, those bodies cannot be dismissed out of hand. They might someday provide sites for the powerless to gain a little leverage over, or at least embarrass, the powerful.

But how much of the public realm will survive? Privatisation of public services is advancing, and that largely precludes the making of claims. Private providers, for-profit or not-for-profit, face almost no obligations publically to account for what they do or fail to do. In any case public services are never portrayed as citizen entitlements, but rather

as commodities you have to pay for, or beneficence you have to show gratitude for. Neoliberal norms blanket the land, crowding out anything smacking of an equitable social contract. Indeed, Angolans are captive to a curious fusion of neoliberal formulas and a coercive state. Under capitalism in many countries, corporate and state actors develop virtual ‘condominiums’ to govern the economy, mainly in pursuit of private gain and fiscal survival. In today’s Angola, this intimacy is extremely close, state authorities and large-scale business actors being effectively ‘joined at birth’. Because accumulation takes place chiefly offshore, the arrangement is outwardly oriented and driven by strong external incentives and logics of negotiated alliances with outside corporate, military and diplomatic actors. Subordinated to it are internal mechanisms that co-opt, absorb and control business and other private actors through suave coercion but especially neo-patrimonial (and familial/dynastic) relations.

Despite this political fortification, a few groups in the emancipatory wing of civil society keep probing for progressive openings. They can point to occasional modest domestic advances, such as agreements by public service providers and local-level governments to allow for public consultation and innovation in government services, such as schooling for children and range management for livestock. An experimental programme to shift more planning and spending powers to local governments raised hopes of decentralisation, but that initiative has recently been scaled back; fundamental decisions, and powers over public and private patronage, remain prerogatives of the President’s office. Meanwhile modest expansion of public education and health services suggests that the authorities might hold the line against elite and foreign donor preferences for fee-for-service approaches. But in successive national budgets, the allocations for health, education and other public services have consistently fallen below southern African averages, and much of that spending goes to foreign scholarships and medical treatment abroad. Private service providers, for-profit and non-profit, loom ever larger as commodification triumphs over entitlement-based services.

Angola’s elites call most of the shots domestically, and work smoothly and with real leverage abroad. They do so with increasing self-assurance – some domestic critics call it arrogance – thanks to the state’s huge spending powers. With oil output now surpassing that of Nigeria and oil prices still buoyant, the pressures to consume conspicuously have been intense and subsidies royal. That has left its mark in traffic gridlock, port congestion, tiny apartments renting for US\$15,000 per month. Demand has provoked supply through conspicuous investment: superhighways, shopping malls and gated housing estates. Meanwhile even the modest amounts earmarked for peripheral zones and for basic services remain routinely underspent, reinforcing spatial and social ‘asymmetries’, in the cautious word of an Angolan policy watchdog group (OPSA 2010).

Shopping abroad, an Angolan practice of long standing, is now common for Angolan state firms. The state holding company Sonangol has recently become a major if not dominant shareholder of Portuguese energy, banking and media firms. Maximising financial returns is not necessarily the point here; some observers see instead Angolan elites gaining satisfaction in lording it over the former coloniser in Lisbon. Portuguese officials in their turn never fail to express gratitude for the Angolan patronage and custom. Angola has become, after Spain, Germany and France, the fourth most important customer for Portuguese exports. Meanwhile Angolan corporate interests are also spreading their wings in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and elsewhere in the Gulf of Guinea.

Banks have worked overtime in Angola to sell loans and commodity credits. The Chinese have been hugely successful in this. Pressures to borrow are intense, yet do not always get

satisfied. Government hopes to raise US\$4 billion on the European bond market – billed as the largest-ever bond issue by a sub-Saharan African state – have been shelved for want of an international credit rating. Perhaps for this reason in 2009 the IMF finally got its foot in the door with a US\$1.4 billion loan to shore up government reserves and cushion a fiscal shortfall. Public borrowing undergoes no automatic translation into public investments; plausibly, significant portions of foreign loans depart Angola via ‘revolving doors’ to rich jurisdictions, though they remain on the debt ledger to be repaid, with interest, in the future.

Foreign borrowings and services are destined to keep building a classically high modernist, outwardly oriented model of development. The government’s *Anti-Poverty Strategy* may be studded with terms like social equity and even redistribution; but today that earnest policy paper, stillborn in 2005, has been quietly forgotten. Recently several leading Angolan development specialists – Fernando Pacheco, Cesaltina Abreu and Carlos Figueiredo – dismissed notions that Angola might achieve by 2015 even one of its eight millennium development goals – despite their all being achievable, as Figueiredo observed, given Angola’s financial capacities. The outlook is even more pessimistic, he concluded, considering the (political) weight of the forces and policies that prioritise those anti-poverty goals.<sup>4</sup>

In sum, today’s political economy resembles the colonial order of yesterday in a number of ways. A narrow state-based elite manages the economy in collaboration with foreign corporations to promote a development model that redistributes wealth upward and outward. Yet it looks different in two fundamental ways: first, governing elites are African and hold territorial powers legitimised by elections; second, national economic life is now far more dependent on consumers and producers in richer countries. Hence today’s paradox: Angolans have formal standing as citizens with votes as well as informal claims on their rulers, but they do not count for much as consumers and producers; indeed the development model has no place for most of them. Elites’ confusion of economic growth with development is, in the words of Fernando Pacheco, ‘painful and extremely penalizing for Angolans’.<sup>5</sup>

But what of the future? Some foresee a developmental state comparable to the Asian tigers. Today’s Angolan political class, and its subordinate business strata, clearly lack the modernising vision, drive and discipline found in such ‘developmental states’. Nevertheless, optimism persists. For the economist Paul Collier, ‘Angola, with its oil and its Atlantic coastline, could well prove to be another Malaysia’ (Collier 2008, p. 206). Others in the mainstream merely continue expressing breathless enthusiasm – ‘leaping from strength to strength’, ‘on the cusp of a real economic take-off’ – without conjuring up specific scenarios.

Hence the persistence of giddy anticipation among diplomats, aid managers and the business press, spurred by up-ticks in oil markets. In contemporary capitalism, after all, only the short term really matters. Yet specialists focused on the long term have begun telling a different story, one about falling oil revenues. ‘As its main oil fields reach maturity,’ a London business newsletter wrote recently, ‘production is likely to peak sometime around 2015, at which point its current and fiscal account surpluses are all but certain to disappear.’<sup>6</sup> In short, Angola’s glittering coach may soon to turn into a pumpkin.

When a fiscal and debt crisis hits Angola, a political crisis will not be far behind. Among the urban salaried strata, especially those on civilian and military state payrolls, lifestyle and career expectations have kept on rising. So too have expectations among more peripheral members of the political class and their hangers-on at the receiving ends of patronage flows. Cutbacks to these flows would bring on an unpleasant downshift in expectations. Some would take harder hits than others. The basis of elite pacts could then become quite fragile.

Should those pacts come unglued and discontent gel into organised pressure, some politicians might think of revisiting the progressive political project the MPLA once talked about. The wish of the new Angolan bourgeoisie to prettify their biographies has already been satirised in the 2004 novel *The seller of pasts*.<sup>7</sup> Today, members of Angola's bruised but resilient progressive camp, and its allies abroad, face the challenge of reinventing that political project.

### Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Dr Mariano Aguirre, Norwegian Peacebuilding Centre, Oslo; Dr Nuno Vidal, University of Coimbra; and the Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE), Madrid, for support on research underpinning this article.

### Note on contributor

Formally educated at Harvard, Princeton and the Institute of Social Studies, David Sogge first began visiting Angola in 1985. Among his published works is the book *Sustainable peace: Angola's recovery* (1992) and the FRIDE report *Angola: 'failed' yet 'successful'* (2009).

### Notes

1. Regarding Portuguese language use, see 'Geografia da língua portuguesa', *Wikipédia*. Available from: [http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geografia\\_da\\_l%C3%ADngua\\_portuguesa](http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geografia_da_l%C3%ADngua_portuguesa) [Accessed 30 January 2011].
2. GDP data from <http://unstats.un.org>.
3. The data appear in the report's tables on 'Perceptions of individual well-being and happiness'; and on 'Civic and community well-being', both of which draw on the Gallup World Poll database. 'Comparable countries' here refers to the *Human development report's* category 'Low human development'.
4. 'Angola fica a meio do caminho', *Correio do Patriota*, 15 October 2009. Available from: <http://www.correiodopatriota.com> [Accessed 30 January 2011].
5. 'Ligações perigosas', *Correio do Patriota*, 25 January 2009. Available from: <http://www.correiodopatriota.com> [Accessed 30 January 2011].
6. Business Monitor International (2009). This prediction is consistent with that provided by oil experts, as reflected in Mitchell and Stevens (2008).
7. By the Angolan novelist José Eduardo Agualusa. Original title: *O Vendedor de Passados*.

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## **Mozambique – not then but now**

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I first knew Mozambique through close contact in Dar es Salaam with Frelimo in the early and difficult years – the 1960s and the first-half of 1970s – of its armed liberation struggle. At that time Mozambique was seeking both to unite itself and to find political and military purchase against an intransigent and arrogant Portuguese colonialism. And Frelimo did indeed manage, by 1975, to lead the country to victory. Along the way, Frelimo succeeded in liberating zones in Mozambique adjacent to its rear bases in Tanzania and Zambia where it built a new social infrastructure of agricultural coops, schools and health services. Equally important, it forged an impressive corps of politically conscious and disciplined leadership cadres (see Cabaço 2001, 2009).

Then, in the very first years of Mozambique's independence, Frelimo also launched a bold experiment in socialist development. The intention: to implement a society-wide programme that would liberate the country's economic potential while also meeting the needs of the vast majority of Mozambique's population. The result? As Norrie MacQueen would firmly state of former 'Portuguese Africa', the initial plans of Portugal's 'guerrilla enemies' did offer 'a clear alternative to the cynical manipulation of ethnicity and the neo-colonial complaisance of the kleptocratic elites who increasingly defined African governance in the 1970s and 1980s'. In sum:

Whatever their fate, the projects of the post-independence regimes of lusophone Africa were probably the most principled and decent ever proposed for the continent. They have not been superseded in this regard and seem unlikely to be (1997, pp. 236–237).

This seems to me (Saul 2009) to have been especially true of the new Mozambique during its first heroic decade of independence. Equally dramatic, however, has been the reversal of direction that has taken place in the country since that time. For what we have now witnessed, in Alice Dinerman's words, is nothing less than a 'rapid unravelling of the Mozambican revolution', with the result that Mozambique, once considered a virtually peerless pioneer in forging a socialist pathway in Africa, 'now enjoys an equally exceptional, if dialectically opposed, status: today the country is, in the eyes of the IMF and the World Bank, a flagship of neoliberal principles'. Moreover, as Dinerman concludes:

Predictably, many of the leading government and party officials rank among the primary beneficiaries of the new political and economic dispensation. Those who enthusiastically promised

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that Mozambique would turn into a graveyard of capitalism are now the leading advocates of, and avid accumulators in, capitalism's recent, full-blown resurrection (2006, pp. 19–20).

There are a number of possible explanations for such an outcome, and commentators (including the present author) have continued endlessly to debate their relative weight and significance. Certainly the country's inheritance from colonial domination was a poor one, reflected in such weaknesses as the paucity of trained indigenous personnel and in an economic dependence that pulled the country strongly towards subordination to global dictate despite efforts to resist it. There was also the ongoing regional war that made Mozambique the target of destructive incursions by white-dominated Rhodesia and South Africa and of the long drawn-out campaign of terror waged so callously and destructively by these countries' sponsored ward, the Renamo counter-revolutionary movement. Finally, and despite Frelimo's benign intentions, there were the movement's own sins once in power, sins of vanguardist high-handedness and impatience and of the over-simplification of societal complexities and challenges. The latter weaknesses created additional obstacles of their own to further progress.

The results, in fact, have been bleak. For what now occurred, Bauer and Taylor suggest (2005, pp. 134–135), was the extremely rapid growth and dramatic spread of corruption (more or less unknown in the initial days of Independence) in Mozambique, as well as a fevered 'pursuit of individual profit [that has undermined] much of the legitimacy of Frelimo party leaders, who [have taken] advantage of market-based opportunities, like privatisation, to enrich themselves'. In short, as these authors then observe:

the election of Guebuza [as the new President in 2002, and since], holder of an expansive business network and one of the richest men in Mozambique, hardly signals that Frelimo will attempt to run on anything but a globalist, neoliberal agenda – regardless of the abject poverty suffered by most of its electorate. (Bauer and Taylor 2005, p. 135)

Such a sombre conclusion seems to many observers an all too accurate one, unfortunately.

Here, however, the main task of the present article comes clearly into focus: what is the nature of the present 'globalist, neoliberal agenda'? What kind of prospects, if any, does it promise for the country? What alternatives to it exist, concretely? For it is much too late in the day for an article like the present one to stop at 'mere' historical investigation or to preoccupy itself with the task of post-mortem and 'might-have-beens'. Rather we must carefully assess the actually existing moment in present-day Mozambique – while also seeking cautiously to divine the future. This is no small challenge, as we will see.

There are a number of competing paradigms that are proposed in order to shape any such assessment. One, quite straightforwardly, sees the current unapologetically capitalist project as marking a promising revival of sobriety in Mozambique. Here, at last (or so it is argued by elites both global and local), is an acceptance by Frelimo and by the country it governs of the beneficent logic of global capitalism and the slow but certain working of the system's developmental magic. And certain figures as to growth rate are generally cited to support this claim: for example, a report from the UNDP's International Poverty Centre in 2007 quotes a growth rate for the preceding year of 7.9%, a rather impressive figure!<sup>1</sup>

Yet the report also states this kind of growth rate – like similar statistics that are said to signal the country's socio-economic progress since the end of the country's wasting war in 1992 and the linked introduction of ever more accelerated 'free market' reforms – to be 'illusory at best' (as quoted in the United Nations [UN] IRIN 2007, para. 5 ). As it

affirms, ‘most of the growth in income and consumption actually occurred among the population’s richest quintile, with less than 10% of the growth affecting the country’s poorest’. Indeed, in the United Nation’s 2007/2008 Human Development Index, the country still ranked 172 out of 177 countries listed.

Two linked dimensions of this apparent growth stand out starkly here. First is the inescapable fact of the deep and widespread poverty thus alluded to. For even if some of the results in ‘growth’ terms can seem mathematically positive, the national development and poverty reduction dividends of this impressive growth rate are virtually absent. In fact, the reality in terms of extreme maldistribution and its impact on people’s lives is most distressing. Hanlon (2007, 2009a, and also in Cuanguara and Hanlon 2010) gives a particularly clear account of the social distemper which desperate poverty and hunger has produced in both the rural and urban spaces, and he documents the panic and rage of the poor as ‘local people make a desperate attempt to regain some power – as a disempowered group finally taking a stand to defend its very survival’ (2009a, p. 129).

True, the organised working class does retain some space to negotiate better wages and working conditions and otherwise act to defend itself. Unions are able to operate freely and workers are able to choose whether or not to join a union. Central labour bodies have formed a ‘concertation’ structure for acting upon issues of common interest and to participate in national policy discussions around public policy questions like establishment of minimum wage levels and changes in the labour law. Some unions, of the security guards for example, have acted especially militantly, taking wage and hours of work issues to labour tribunals and undertaking strike actions in the face of companies like the large transnational security company, G4S, which has flagrantly refused to follow Ministry of Labour rulings in the union’s favour.<sup>2</sup>

This being said, however, the space for workers’ challenges still remains severely limited, not only because of the structural factors that favour capital’s interests but also because the trade unions themselves seem to have too little sense of workers’ entitlements<sup>3</sup> – this in a context where as Pitcher (2006, p. 105) states, with impressive supportive citations, any apparent concessions to such workers must be balanced against ‘the reality of growing unemployment; a minimum wage that is insufficient to meet people’s needs; and inadequate efforts by the government to enforce aspects of the labour law regarding paid holidays, the regular payment of salaries and the punishment of employers who violate workers’ rights.’

A second dimension is the clear pattern of recolonisation by global capital of the new Mozambique that is revealed. For the present salience of transnational firms and their ‘mega-projects’ – on which the Mozambican elite has itself banked so heavily, not least in order to obtain lucrative sub-contracts for their own fledgling economic initiatives – virtually negates the presumed independence that ‘liberation’ was said to have brought. The case of Mozal is a particularly graphic demonstration of the pattern, an aluminium plant that is said to be ‘a symbol of Mozambique’s red-hot economy, touted as [indicative] of the investor-friendly environment that has led the *Wall Street Journal* to declare the country “An African success story”. Mozal’s exports have increased Mozambique’s Gross Domestic Product by between 3.2 and 5 percent. Its output represents almost half the country’s growth in manufacturing.’ However, as the article continues,

In spite of these apparent benefits this has contributed little to the country’s development. Initial investment in the project amounted to approximately 40 percent of GDP, but only created around 1,500 jobs, of which nearly a third are held by foreigners. The smelters use more electricity than the rest of Mozambique combined. The company imports most of its raw material

and equipment duty-free, and enjoys an extensive list of incentives ranging from discounted electricity to a prolonged tax holiday. It also has the right to repatriate profits. The result is an isolated economic enclave that uses large quantities of scarce resources without returning revenue or jobs to the economy.<sup>4</sup>

Castel-Branco (2008a and 2008b) and Pitcher (2006) document similar patterns, linked to mega-projects and to corporate free-booting, elsewhere throughout the Mozambican economy. Pitcher, for example, specifies the case of CFM (*Portos e Caminhos de Moçambique*), a public enterprise in the port and railways sector that was, until recently, ‘the largest employer in Mozambique’, where management has sought aggressively ‘to rationalize the work-force’ and make other kinds of adjustments thought to be appropriate to the new era – albeit, as with related practices that Pitcher also documents for Mozal, this has not occurred without some attempted resistance from the workers concerned.

Meanwhile, Judith Marshall finds an even rawer example of the nature of the ‘new Mozambique’ in the key role being played by the giant Brazilian multi-national, Vale, in a range of big mining, hydroelectric and transport projects in Tete Province. This is both central to the heralding (not least by President Guebuza himself) of a ‘Tete Corridor’ initiative, but also of a new ‘high octane global economy that feeds China’s industrialization and in which Vale’s role is [to provide] unprocessed minerals’.<sup>5</sup> And what about Mozambique? All this, Marshall concludes, ‘has nothing to do with building a national economy – whether socialist or capitalist – or creating jobs and development for the citizens of a particular geo-political space’.<sup>6</sup> Recolonisation by the Empire of Capital you say: you would not be wrong if you did.<sup>7</sup>

In practice, Mozambique seems to have come up with a two-pillar development strategy. The first pillar is to open the economy to private investors to bring mega-projects to the energy and extractive sectors. These mega-projects are driven by the external demands of the industrialised countries, and include the active roles played by capital from countries like South Africa, Brazil and China. The role of the Mozambican state, the corporations themselves and civil society in these new projects is highly problematic, as Marshall and others demonstrate.

Moreover, such mega-projects have come on stream as merely one part of the tide of neo-liberal economic and social restructuring. As a result, they are very far from feeding into a strategy of national economic development, one that might highlight job creation and links to plans for expanded industrialisation – with royalties and taxes then being employed to benefit the surrounding communities and to underpin a broad range of social and redistributive programmes. Instead, they have been established in a way that implicitly negates the possibility of any kind of nationalist or developmental state emerging.

Indeed, such an influx of mega-projects in the extractive sector suggests an overall trend in Mozambique that has come to mirror what has also been happening with the ‘mining boom’ in Latin America.<sup>8</sup> All kinds of conditions are being created to attract foreign private investment – from tax holidays to changes in mining and labour codes, to the waiving of environmental regulations. Of course, much public discourse turns on ‘corporate social responsibility’ and on the promise of mining-company largesse for the building of schools, clinics, roads and malaria eradication. Yet, behind the scenes, high stakes negotiations turn on tax and tariff waivers, changes in land, mining and labour legislation, the easing of environmental regulations and a distinctly casual attitude towards forced human resettlement. The stakes in these less than transparent negotiations are all the higher in that the complementary business opportunities related to these mega-project investments seem all too likely to be linked to the entrepreneurial interests of various government leaders.

With mega-projects in the extractive sector as one pillar of Mozambique's economic strategy, the other pillar of the national economy, much documented by Hanlon, is defined by Mozambique's having become a 'donors' darling': a country that, as an apparent reward for its eager compliance with International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank prescriptions and the periodic holding of multi-party elections (albeit with some donor concern about 'irregularities' in their execution), receives significant amounts of foreign aid in order to finance social programmes. Of course, this has even produced a significant role for the state – linked to the provision of agriculture, health and education services – albeit one heavily subsidised by Western donors.

The more cynical suggest that, even were quite modest levels of taxes and royalties demanded of investors, the Mozambican government could itself readily finance all the social programmes that it desired. Yet it chooses to establish no such taxes and royalties and to suffer instead the indignity of Western donors who hover at the elbows of the Ministers of Health, Agriculture and Education. In fact, this pattern – low taxes, little government oversight – seems designed to clinch investment deals while also permitting government leaders to ingratiate themselves with investors, thereby laying the groundwork for such leaders, in their entrepreneurial capacity, to then seal lucrative private partnerships. Meanwhile, foreign donors wind up funding social costs: in such a way Canadian taxpayers – and those in other donor countries – find themselves subsidising transnational mining companies in Mozambique!<sup>9</sup>

Are there countervailing trends to these disturbing patterns – and ways of interpreting them – that bear more promise? As seen, Hanlon is both a clear-sighted observer of the cruel inequality between elite and mass that has come to mark contemporary Mozambique and has also been a sharp critic of the overall multinationals-driven economic strategy championed by the country's elite in recent decades. Nonetheless, Hanlon's more recent work provides a sharply contrasting point of reference against which to underscore the present argument. For he seems now to have come to a rather startling conclusion. As he and his co-author Teresa Smart (Hanlon and Smart 2008, p. 3) put it, 'in the contemporary world, development tends to be capitalist in some form'. Hence they endorse the view of President Guebuza that, in their own words, 'Mozambique cannot wait with hands outstretched for mythical foreign investors, but must create, support and promote its own business people' – people, it bears emphasising, like President Guebuza himself and other such members of Mozambique's fledgling national bourgeoisie!

In fact, in recent writings Hanlon professes to discern the transformation of the latter Mozambicans from an erstwhile elite of robber barons (identified as such in his earlier texts) into captains of industry, and he makes a strong (and, for him, novel) case for the developmental vocation of just such a 'national bourgeoisie'. Thus, with Mosse, he asks, startlingly, whether 'Mozambique's elite [is] moving from corruption to development' (2009, p. 1). In another recent article he sees that elite to be 'finding its way in a globalized economy' (2009b). In such articles, he explores, revealingly, the precise make-up of this elite and the wide range of their various holding and economic interests. Writing with Mosse, for example, he places particular emphasis on the role of the President and the 'Guebuza family companies', noting Guebuza's aggressive business sense and the roots of the degree to which he and other key members of the elite (former President Chissano for example) have built on bases derived from their stake in the 'gangster capitalism', and 'greed is good' days, of the 1990s when they were able 'to expand their interests under the party and state umbrella' (2009a, p. 6).

The list of the holdings of Guebuza, his immediate family and other relatives (and of other close associates like Celso Correia), is quite staggering. But the Guebuza group is

also distinguished, says Hanlon, by a less 'predatory', more 'developmental', approach than many others of the elite – something he sees to be most promising. Recall that Hanlon was once amongst those who more effectively excoriated that very Mozambican elite as it became, over time, more and more visibly corrupt and opportunist in the seizing of all manner of market opportunities. Now such is Hanlon's attraction to Guebuza's charisma, to his nationalism, and to his savvy, that, by means of his (Hanlon's) authorial magic, Mozambique's robber baron elite is, as I have suggested, suddenly to emerge as captains of industry – and conjurers of genuine development! Indeed, the key question Hanlon and Mosse now wish to pose seems to be whether the development of presidential companies should be more openly encouraged as a way of creating firms and groups which are dynamic and effective enough to be competitive and developmental. Can these presidential companies through their privileged access to the state potentially grow to a critical mass allowing them to become major players in the development of Mozambique and southern Africa, as happened with the privileged companies in the Asian Tigers, Latin America and South Africa? And, Hanlon and Mosse further ask, can 'the Mozambican elite' not also 'develop the culture of hard work, saving and delayed consumption that was central to the economic development of the Asian tigers' (2009, p. 10).

But even if some such transformation were to occur, to whose benefit would it be in any case? To the 'robber-barons' own, self-evidently. And what of the impoverished mass of the population? It would surely take a pretty powerful 'trickle-down effect' to see Mozambique move up from number 172 on the world table to be able to establish any convincing comparison with the Asian Tigers as Hanlon implies to be possible. Nonetheless, this kind of capitalist transformation, driven by just this kind of indigenous bourgeoisie, seems to be the best scenario, the best hope, that Hanlon can conjure up for Mozambique and for Mozambicans.

Is this where the experience of both the failure of Mozambique's socialism and the subsequent recolonisation – both socially damaging and, in any transformative sense, economically unsuccessful – of the country by global capitalism must drive the well-intentioned observer: into the arms of the country's local elite who have, in fact, themselves been amongst the chief architects of the country's present sorry situation? Make no mistake here. Hanlon is massively well informed and also cares deeply about Mozambique, about its prospects for genuine development, and about the fate of its numberless poor. But would it not be possible for him and for us, instead, to look downwards, to the impoverished populace itself, instead of upwards, to the indigenous bourgeoisie, for any real promise of realising fair and meaningful change? In sharp contrast to Hanlon's latest vision, at once nationalist and bourgeois, there remains a final scenario to be considered, a prospect that pins its hopes on a revival of the country's progressive vocation.

Is this any less fanciful and fugitive a hope than is Hanlon's? Certainly the immediate prospects along these progressive lines are not great. Yet Anne Pitcher (2006) – though herself well aware of the growing wealth and power that the Mozambican elite is creating for itself – can still talk hopefully about the negative impact of elite self-aggrandisement on the attitudes and actions of those many millions of citizens, abandoned and often quite desperate, who seem consigned to languish 'at the bottom' and well 'below' the status and comfort afforded those at the top of Mozambican society.

Indeed, she goes further, suggesting a particularly tantalising way of thinking about this reality. On the one hand, Pitcher finds that the elite is busily rewriting history and recasting its public pronouncements, in ways she documents extremely clearly, so as to block any popular recall – especially any positive recall – of an earlier socialist and progressive Frelimo. Yet, she continues, the ordinary Mozambicans are not so easily convinced,

sickened by and angry at the dramatically escalating corruption and rampant greed they see to be everywhere around them in the ‘new Mozambique’, while also both holding on to their own memories of a more promising time and manifesting their continued expectations of a state that protects its citizens.

Pitcher places more hope than may be warranted in the Mozambican trade unions perhaps, some of whose weaknesses we noted above. Nonetheless, she does forcefully argue the importance of widespread worker protests that centre on demands for ‘benefits and subsidies that the government guaranteed to them in the past’ (Pitcher 2006, p. 106). And she also emphasises the importance of other realities like

the robust sales of the recorded speeches of President Samora Machel, who oversaw the implementation of socialism from 1977 until his death in 1986 [that] reveal an ongoing popular dissatisfaction with the current mode of governance and lingering attachments to another time. (Pitcher 2006, p. 106)

Moreover, it is the case that industries in the extractive sector – some of which, as in mining, also have an insatiable appetite for land – often find themselves increasingly to be in conflict with rural communities. Indeed, with the withdrawal of the state from regulating and protecting its citizens’ rights, the companies and such communities are actually advancing quite different and competing visions of development! Local demands for job creation, for localised control of new business opportunities such as transport, food services and security, for adequate compensation to those displaced, for environmental protection of water sources, and the like: around each of these issues there is the likelihood of growing resistance.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, drawing on recent evidence of protests, strikes and other instances of overt resistance in present-day Mozambique, Pitcher concludes that, even if a recent letter of protest (which she quotes) to the editor of *Noticias* in Maputo may be ‘somewhat romantic about the good old days, it [does show] that a counter-hegemonic strategy rooted in socialist ideals may be (re-)emerging in Mozambique’. Aiming not so much, it would seem, to revive Frelimo’s original project as to imagine the possibility of recasting the present in order that it might again embody something that will be (for them) much more positive. Grasping at straws? Note that this sometimes populist strain of resistance to penury and oppression can often be randomly violent, xenophobic and malfocused, as Hanlon has emphasised. Moreover, it is, even in its very best expressions, still a long way from embodying the principled and organised force for change that could expect soon to present an alternative – and winning – counter-hegemonic ‘strategy’ (such as Pitcher evokes) to the Frelimo elite’s now self-indulgent and largely self-serving rule. But perhaps it can at least be said that, at the present grim time in Mozambique, the struggle for a more genuine liberation is far from being wholly moribund.

## Notes

1. This report, itself readily available, is summarised in the article ‘Mozambique: What price the benefits of foreign investment?’, (UN IRIN 2007).
2. Interestingly, some of the staunchest defence of workers’ rights in recent years has come not from the unions but from the Frelimo Minister of Labour, Helena Taipo. Acting on her own conviction that the role of the government is to maintain balance and mutual respect amongst the main actors in the economy, she has intervened on multiple occasions where workers’ rights have not been respected, coming down hard on employers ranging from large transnationals like the G4S security company and Mozal, to Chinese state companies and senior government leaders turned businessmen.

3. True, the unions themselves sometimes seem to act in such a way as to mediate labour conflicts away rather than to take a militant stand for workers' rights to a living wage, a safe workplace and dignified treatment. Moreover, many workers seem to read the strong government support for new mega-projects like those of BHP-Billiton and Vale and the modest government role in defending those whose lands and livelihoods are lost to these projects as an indication that fighting these companies for better wages and working conditions is almost tantamount to anti-government activity.
4. *Op. cit.* (n. 1).
5. On Vale's egregious role in Canada, since 2006 the owner of Inco (now Vale Inco), see Evans and Albo (2010).
6. Judith Marshall, personal communication. Here and elsewhere in this text Marshall's advice and assistance have been particularly important to its preparation, helping me to ground it firmly in contemporary reality. Comments from both Noaman Ali (see also Ali 2009) and Jesse Ovadia have also been of great assistance, as have recent writings by Luis de Brito (2008 and 2009).
7. For more on these concepts, see my introductory essay to this *ROAPE* series entitled 'Southern Africa: the liberation struggle continues', above, and also Saul (2011).
8. While the following (in Liisa North *et al.*, *Community rights and corporate responsibility* [Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006]) was written about Latin America, it has much relevance to contemporary Mozambique; it warrants quoting *in extenso* here: 'In response to the new incentives created by the neo-liberal state, the mining industry has enjoyed a new boom. Production has been reactivated in many traditional mining areas, and operations in new zones have been aggressively pursued. But in many respects the new incentive under which these enterprises were established signaled a return to the conditions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Reduced taxation, reduced regulation, and forced labour-market flexibility meant that the countries where mineral exports grew in importance received a small share of the wealth generated by corporate mineral extraction regimes. As capital markets were liberalised, profits could be more easily transferred to, and invested in, outside countries rather than in communities and nations in which the mining operations were located. Since the new mining was even more capital-intensive and employed more sophisticated technologies than did mining operations in the past, it created even fewer jobs than before and often those jobs went to highly specialised or skilled workers brought to the mines from outside. Meanwhile local people experienced the environmental contamination and social disruptions created by mineral extraction.' Joan Kuyek underscores, in her article 'Legitimizing plunder: Canadian mining companies and corporate social responsibility' in the same volume, a firm (and ugly) Canadian connection to such dismaying realities in the Global South.
9. The previous several paragraphs draw heavily on the suggestions and formulations of Judith Marshall, as cited in n. 6, above. She further notes that even 'the donors' began to become uneasy with the Mozambican elite's behaviour. Thus 'the beginning of 2010 found these arrangements fraying at the edges. The donors delayed their transfers to the social ministries until such time as the Mozambican government was prepared to introduce changes in its electoral law and regulations regarding conflict of interest' (personal communication).
10. For there is also the promising fact that transnational mining companies are not the only players that have begun to establish complex multinational linkages: civil-society networks concerned with mining issues are also connected. Indeed, as the African experience comes to mirror that of Asia and South America where these kinds of new mining investments are more advanced, Mozambican organisations will, in all likelihood, soon be sharing even more experiences and strategies with other communities in resistance around the world.

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## **Namibia: a trust betrayed – again?**

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As Namibian youth, and as Africans, you must therefore be on the full alert and remain vigilant against deceptive attempts by opportunists and unpatriotic elements that attempt to divide you. As the future leaders of our country, you should act with dedication and commitment; to always promote the interests of the SWAPO [South West African People's Organisation] Party and the national interests before your own. It is only through that manner that the SWAPO Party will grow from strength to strength and continue to rule Namibia for the next ONE THOUSAND YEARS. (Sam Nujoma, Founding Father of the Republic of Namibia, in a speech to the SWAPO Youth League in 2010)<sup>1</sup>

Such faith-based antics document not only ignorance over the analogy to the failed empire building of a Third Reich calibre ending in the Holocaust and the Second World War. Twenty years into Namibian Independence, the above gospel stands for a mindset obsessed with maintaining political power and control literally until eternity. Liberation from colonial rule is perceived as a kind of 'end of history'. It resulted in a political project devoid of any meaningful agenda for socio-economic change beyond the pursuance of own narrow interests by the party leadership and its clientele. Namibian elite politics of a new class in the making has perpetuated deeply rooted, structurally anchored socio-economic inequality at the expense of the majority of the people.

### **A brief history of SWAPO**

Namibia's decolonisation process had been unique, insofar as it had been an official United Nations (UN) responsibility. The League of Nations had, under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, transferred the administration of what was 'German South West Africa', as a now Class C mandate, to the British Crown. Britain, in turn, had delegated the task to the Union of South Africa. But, after the Second World War, South Africa simply refused to acknowledge the UN as the legitimate and responsible successor to the League in this respect.

The dispute that then emerged from the late 1940s over the mandated territory resulted, beginning in the 1960s, in an increasingly active role for the UN, guided by the understanding that the continued South African occupation of the territory was tantamount to 'a trust betrayed', in the conflict. The UN, its mission in support of national sovereignty for Namibia ultimately being accomplished, instituted both the UN Council for Namibia and

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the UN Institute for Namibia through the UN-supervised transition to Independence, during 1989/90.<sup>2</sup>

The South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO of Namibia) was officially established in 1960. It managed to rally the support of large parts of Namibia's colonised majority under its banner of 'Solidarity, Freedom, Justice'. Equally importantly, SWAPO's backing by a majority of UN member states, especially from the non-aligned movement and the Soviet bloc, further consolidated its status as the exclusive agency of anti-colonial resistance. Although unable to influence decisively the UN Security Council's more hesitant posture (as promoted principally by various Western states), those in support of the liberation movements made their voices heard in the UN's General Assembly. Indeed, by the mid 1970s, a UN resolution recognised SWAPO as 'the sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people' – such a UN-sanctioned monopoly in representation encouraging the movement's slogan that SWAPO is the people and the people are SWAPO. And this, in turn, spawned the ominous formulation that SWAPO is the government and the government is the state – implying that SWAPO itself *is* the state and therefore has the sole power of definition over who is entitled to be a true Namibian on the basis of his/her loyalty to the party!

The Political Program adopted by the SWAPO Central Committee meeting from 28 July to 1 August 1976 in Lusaka stated that among the movement's present and future tasks was 'to unite all Namibian people, particularly the working class, the peasantry and progressive intellectuals into a vanguard party capable of safeguarding national independence and of building a classless, non-exploitative society based on the ideas and principles of scientific socialism' (SWAPO of Namibia n.d., p. 39). It further elaborated that 'the economic reconstruction in a free, democratic and united Namibia will have, as its motive force, the establishment of a classless society. The social justice and progress for all is the governing idea behind every SWAPO policy decision' (*ibid.*, 45). This claim, and the fact that the trust betrayed by South Africa was transferred by popular vote in the UN-supervised elections of November 1989 to the new government formed by SWAPO at Independence on 21 March 1990, merits further examination. To what extent, in short, has the trust as defined in this programme of SWAPO been fulfilled through the political actors – still to a large extent the very same persons who had adopted this document – now in control of the sovereign Namibian state?

### **SWAPO: from promises to failures**

Not that many informed observers really believed in the stereotypical, pseudo-socialist gyrations that the SWAPO representatives abroad undertook in the course of their diplomatic efforts to garner support from the Soviet regime and its allies. Thus, as Brian Urquhart, directly involved as UN Under-Secretary-General for Special Political Affairs in the negotiations for Namibia's independence since the 1960s, dryly testified (in his biography, published prior to Namibian Independence), regarding SWAPO's president (and later Namibia's head of state for three terms in office, 1990–2005): 'I doubted if Nujoma would know a Marxist-Leninist idea if he met one in the street, but like most liberation leaders, he would take help from wherever he could get it' (Urquhart 1991 [1987], p. 321).

Nonetheless, despite such realistic assessments, there were activists who wanted to believe in the political aims declared by leaders who claimed to be among those representing the 'wretched of the earth'. This in spite of Frantz Fanon's warning (in the chapter of his book *The wretched of the Earth* entitled 'The pitfalls of national consciousness') as to the strategy of selfish enrichment adopted by the new and opportunistic nationalist elites. As he

critically observed, they managed to occupy the commanding heights of newly accessed state power in order to serve primarily their own class interests (Fanon 2001 [1961]) – an assessment of the early 1960s, which since forced itself upon many other observers who agree ‘that the discourse of justice and liberation were often used in pursuit of exclusive nationalist and separatist agendas that went against the needs of ordinary people’ (Francis 2010, p. 2).

Unfortunately, SWAPO of Namibia provides a clear case in point of this sobering reality – not least in the willingness of the leadership in control of the exile wing to commit human rights violations in its own ranks if need be in order to protect vested interests of the established hierarchy, as well documented by several studies published early in the Independence period (cf. Leys and Saul 1995, Dobell 1998). Post-Independence statistics speak a similarly sobering language: the life expectancy of Namibians has been reduced from an estimated 60 years of age at Independence to 47 years in 2005 (not least through the HIV and AIDS pandemic). Similarly, the situation as regards under-five mortality and maternal mortality has deteriorated, while poverty remains at a chronically high level.

Thus an official Household Income and Expenditure Review published towards the end of 2008 by the Central Bureau of Statistics revealed that almost one-third of the country’s two million people lived on US\$1 or less per day. Moreover, the report also noted a sharp rise in households classified as ‘severely poor’, that is, living on less than US\$20 per month. The same survey found that one-fifth of the population has a share of 78.7% of the country’s total income, while another fifth has to survive on 1.4% of the country’s annual income.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, according to official figures released in 2010, the unemployment rate has crossed the 50% mark. In sum, this social reality contrasts sharply with the statements quoted above from SWAPO’s Political Program, suggesting that present-day Namibia is quite another country from the one the movement – as guided by promises of ‘solidarity, freedom, justice’ – suggested that it wanted to lead ‘towards the abolition of all forms of exploitation of man by man’ (SWAPO of Namibia n.d., p. 46).

### **Liberation or self-aggrandisement**

In short, the nationalist claim merely ‘operated as a rhetorical device, casting SWAPO in the role of “revolutionary agent”, bent on reconfiguring the socio-economic and political landscape’ (du Pisani 2010, p. 24). Yet, in fact, the reconfiguration of the socio-economic landscape, based on control over the political commanding heights of the newly proclaimed Namibian state, operated only through the vehicles of ‘Affirmative Action’ (AA) and ‘Black Economic Empowerment’ (BEE), a redistributive strategy based on the cooptation of a new elite into the old socio-economic structures (cf. Melber 2007). As underscored by André du Pisani, ‘national reconciliation’ of such a class character could only be ‘an elite discourse bent on maintaining the legitimacy of the state and responding to the inherent contradictions that characterize SWAPO’s [own] anti-colonial discourse’ (du Pisani 2010, p. 31).

In contrast to past promises, the new terminology by which the ordinary people have responded to the sobering realities since 1990 highlights reference to a new species, the ‘fat cats’. For it is well understood that a new political and bureaucratic class now uses its access to the country’s natural wealth to appropriate public goods and state property for private self-enrichment. As suggested above, legitimacy for such appropriation strategy has been cloaked in a nationalist discourse which has operated through an aggressively crafted version of ‘patriotic history’ (Melber 2003, Saunders 2007) supportive of the

erstwhile liberation movement's claim to be the dominant (*de facto*, one and only, solely legitimate) political force as representative of 'the' Namibian people.

Permitting, as seen, no distinction between its role as party, as government and as state, SWAPO has, since Independence, stressed the notions of peace and stability while also paying lip service to democracy (while, interestingly enough, the terms 'justice' and 'equality' have never featured prominently if at all in its official vocabulary). Instead, 'national reconciliation' has become the programmatic slogan for a cooptation strategy based on the structural legacy of settler colonial minority rule and its corresponding property relations – SWAPO's strategy becoming one of facilitating, as 'cultural entrepreneur' an elite pact designed to 'reinvent', by means of an Africanisation of the settler structure, 'an historical communality and continuity among the Namibian people(s) and [to project] a common destiny into the future' (du Pisani 2010, p. 16).

That this had worked only partially was first visible in the failed secessionist attempt by a desperate minority in the so-called Caprivi region, this in turn leading to the first and so far only declared state of emergency since Independence as invoked in August 1999. Those arrested and accused of high treason have since been on trial for a decade, even though the majority of them fall under Amnesty International's definition of political prisoners (cf. Melber 2009). Nonetheless, the consolidation of the dominant party state by means of parliamentary and presidential elections held every five years illustrates the continuing hegemonic status of SWAPO – though it also suggests that the basis for such a status outside of its stronghold in the northern regions of the former Ovamboland (which offers up to SWAPO more than half of the Namibian population and an absolute majority of votes in any national elections) is fairly weak.

Indeed, the results of the last National Assembly elections (held at the end of November 2009) suggest, in growing ethnic-regional voting patterns, an increase of local identities guiding the preference for political parties; moreover, in parts of the few urban centres SWAPO's dominance has become more contested by opposition parties than ever before. Nonetheless, SWAPO has clearly retained its dominant status. Despite the formation of a new opposition party, comprised primarily of those who had lost out in the internal power struggle over the post-Nujoma succession, SWAPO lost only one seat, keeping, with 74.3% of the votes, 54 out of 72 MPs with voting rights. The new Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP), led by former Foreign Minister Hidipo Hamutenya and founded at the end of 2007, managed, with eight seats, to become the official opposition (Cooper 2010, Melber 2010).

In any case, the RDP has seemed chiefly to promise more of the same, rather than any real alternative. For the most part, individuals promoting alternative political parties to SWAPO tend to campaign more to promote personal ambitions than political alternatives, seeking principally to secure at least some limited access to the honeypots provided by publicly financed political posts. This means that there is no sign of any meaningful socio-political alternative to SWAPO on the horizon. Indeed, if there is to be change, it is, for the moment, most likely to emerge as an alternative policy direction being articulated from within the former liberation movement. And yet, unfortunately, any such fancied alternative currently appears to be more the product of wishful thinking than the embodiment of some readily discernible tendency on the horizon.

### **Class formation, land grabs and international actors**

What, in the meantime, of Namibia's social structure? Here Volker Winterfeldt (2010) has recently offered some helpful methodological arguments as to the need to apply a more

rigorous class analysis. He pays little attention, however, to the rent-seeking nature of the new black class-in-formation, a blend of political office bearers and of entrepreneurs. These are mainly fledgling business people, although more in the sense of ‘tenderpreneurs’ who lack substantial elements of the classic features of a bourgeoisie in the making.<sup>4</sup> Their networks are interwoven with higher-ranking state and government officials. In the absence of any empirical research so far, it is difficult to quantify their numbers. But it remains a small segment of society, now sharing a similar social status with the hitherto almost exclusively white elite – often displaying their wealth far more unashamedly. Their strategies for securing and maximising profit are of a parasitic nature and not – like a ‘patriotic’ bourgeoisie – oriented towards long-term investment in productive sectors for the further accumulation of capital. Instead they use access to the state coffers for their self-enrichment strategy at the expense of the public purse (Melber 2007). According to a government official, himself a beneficiary of this form of ‘redistribution’, politics and economics are close bedfellows but clearly not about any meaningful kind of social reconstruction: BEE, is quite simply, about, ‘empowering individuals who have business ideas and need information and capital to take off’.<sup>5</sup>

In a similarly selective fashion, one that also smacks far more of class self-interest than of concepts of equality and redistribution, the government’s land policy has for two decades been idling, seeking mainly to satisfy the appetite of the new black elite for securing their own private farms. Thus, while the issue of land is at the core of much contestation in Namibia, the government has wasted time on, at best, half-hearted and half-baked legal fiddling with the matter. Harring and Odendaal (2002, p. 96), for example, have noted that during the first decade of Namibian Independence only 90 commercial farms were acquired. This would equate to 900 farms over a century – less than one-fifth of all commercial farms in the country. One is tempted to cynically observe that the efficient implementation of the Odendaal Plan in the late 1950s and early 1960s, which introduced the Bantustan policy of the South African administration in Namibia by creating and/or consolidating reserves (including the resettling not only of tens of thousands of Africans, but also of white commercial farmers), was implemented much more efficiently than the Namibian government seems capable of (or willing) – despite the declared intention to reverse the effects of institutionalised ‘separate development’.<sup>6</sup>

In the end, then, land has become every bit as much a natural resource for individual acquisition by a new political class and its allies – be it for commercial farming or for the use of protected parks and reserves for tourism enterprises or other forms of utilisation – as the country’s collective natural wealth. In fact, it is yet another sad irony that it is not the (still predominantly white) commercial farmers who are most at risk in all this. Rather, it is the peasants in the communal areas (the former reserves, where people do not hold any private land titles and hence can claim no ownership over land but rely on the patronage of the traditional authorities [who, in fact and in most cases, cooperate closely with SWAPO or represent the party’s interests]) who are the most vulnerable. The most recent evidence is the currently discussed Land Bill, which according to Werner (2010, p. 21) ‘does not introduce any innovation, although this is absolutely necessary in view of the [recent] “land grabs” that have affected Namibia. Without improved accountability and transparency towards land right holders, people in communal areas will be vulnerable to the predations of international investors and their local allies.’

These latter ‘international investors’ currently represent a wide panorama of old and new players. They range from British, Australian, French, Canadian, German, US and Japanese multinationals, mainly operating in the mining and energy sector (while Spain has concentrated on the lucrative fish industry), to the government’s fiercely competitive

new friends: Russia offering to develop a nuclear reactor for local use of Namibian uranium; India and South Korea joining the race for access to uranium deposits (Namibia ranks fourth among the world's producers of uranium); Iran holding a smaller portion of shares in one of the established uranium mines; the Chinese entering the race not only for access to the country's mineral and energy resources, but also for large parts of the construction sector; and with the North Koreans having built the pompous Heroes' Acre and the megalomaniacal new State House complex. Out of business in all this are many pre-existing Namibian companies and their local workforces – while local hawkers and street vendors are confronted with the fierce competition of Chinese shops (the relatively small capital, Windhoek, has two shopping complexes called Chinatown made up exclusively of Chinese traders).

In fact, most new short-term ventures simply generate high profits at the expense of the local economy and people; the beneficiaries, such as they are, are to be found only in the higher echelons of the public service or political offices – as the saga of the Malaysian textile manufacturer, Ramatex, suggests. This company started to manufacture apparel and textiles for export to the North American market under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) in a newly established complex in Windhoek. In a classic kind of 'race to the bottom', several southern African governments had competed for favours in return for the sanctioning of the investment, with Namibia, in the end, winning out. But not for long. For several years Ramatex did indeed produce profits (to be transferred primarily to its Malaysian owners, of course) – before closing down abruptly one day and relocating its production to China, where the Multifibre Arrangement provided a more lucrative option. The Namibian taxpayers and the Windhoek municipality were the losers in this deal, while several thousand unqualified workers (almost exclusively young women) could merely return, after years of hard work under horrible conditions (no trade union was allowed in the factory and the Namibian labour laws were not applicable, since the location was declared a Free Trade Zone) to their shacks without any compensation or savings. In his detailed case study, Winterfeldt (2007, p. 91) concludes:

Does this hold out the prospect of social progress, as measured against the principles of social equity? The liberal discourse, whether in its classical or its present shape, boldly rests on the glorification of the principle of social retardation: first comes the successful individual, the entrepreneur; then (if all goes well, and always to a lesser extent) society, that productive majority actually instrumental in creating economic wealth. First come, first served. The liberal economic ideology is not the epitome of social responsibility. It is class-biased, and so is its concept of development. . . . The analysis of Ramatex's Namibian operations shows that neoliberal economic orientations, seen in the long term, tend to affect or even negate collective structures based on social solidarity. Conversely, any vision of social welfare must [instead] make the preservation and promotion of collective structures of social solidarity the focal point of accelerated sustainable development.

### **Basic income grant: enemy of the 'fat cat' syndrome**

A recent Namibian debate around a basic income grant (BIG) bears the promise of something a bit different, however. Indeed, BIG has help launched a significant symbolic discourse as regards social policy priorities under the current government, thus complementing our assessment here. The BIG initiative, springing from a campaign spawned by a church and labour movement alliance, in collaboration with like-minded non-governmental organisations (NGOs), raised money from donors and undertook a pilot project in one selected (and quite destitute) village, that paid monthly cash allowances of N\$100 (approximately US\$14) over the past two years to each individual resident

there, in an effort to convince government that, in the absence of any other meaningful alternative, this might for the time being begin to contribute to the empowerment of local communities. Yet, since its inception BIG has been met with an almost knee-jerk response that ridicules such proposals for financial transfers as naïve justifications for free rides for those who do not really want to earn a decent living by working with their own hands.

Thus, when President Hifikepune Pohamba delivered his State of the Nation address in Parliament earlier this year, he was asked his views on BIG and on the attendant demands that the Namibian government should introduce a generalised BIG for all Namibians. His position: to dismiss BIG as a form of exploitation of those who are able and privileged to earn their living through work, which provides them and their families with a salaried income, while their taxes would then be used as payouts for others! Quite simply, for Pohamba and for other political leaders, greed seems to be much the more acceptable way. Note that it was these same political leaders who reportedly celebrated the twentieth anniversary of Namibia's Independence by toasting with French champagne at N\$1000 a bottle. Moreover, cabinet members recently received new top-class limousines – perhaps because the old ones had become too small for their well-fed bodies!<sup>7</sup>

As if to add insult to injury, the Namibian trade-union umbrella body, the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW), announced in July 2010 out of the blue, that with immediate effect it had abandoned the BIG coalition. NUNW is affiliated to SWAPO and the move was widely seen as a response to the President's dismissal of the initiative.<sup>8</sup> Seemingly, representatives of the organised Namibian labour movement had come a long way from the days when the slogan 'an injury to one is an injury to all' had a different meaning – forgetting, apparently, that solidarity is a complementary notion to social justice and part of an ongoing struggle to achieve it. Interestingly, the BIG debate has since not faded away. The delegates to the trade-union congress at the end of August 2010 revoked the decision by its leadership and adopted a resolution that the NUNW rejoin the BIG coalition. The debate over BIG also remains a contested issue within SWAPO, as documented in some postings on the party's website.

## Conclusion

Of course, BIG may not be, in and of itself, the best answer in order to solve the challenges of structurally rooted inequality and destitution in Namibia. It seeks to ease symptoms instead of eliminating the root cause. But the initiative is concerned with creating a society in which all members obtain the minimum standard of living they deserve. It has been an effort to create an environment that could begin to enable the excluded to master their living conditions in a more empowering way, and with some degree of dignity. In Namibia, any such effort is simply dismissed by those who seem to care more about securing and further advancing their own privileges than showing empathy with the plight of ordinary people. But the hard-fought-for liberation from minority rule (and from privileges for a few at the expense of the majority) must now mean more than merely the renewed promotion of Social Darwinism. As a result of this latter mindset, the fat cat (species *Namibiana*) prospers and advances – while, in sharp contrast, the people of Namibia, who are battling to survive their anything-but-self-inflicted misery, are once again quite simply losing out. The BIG initiative does at least suggest that some resistance remains. Indeed, for so long as '*a luta continua*' continues to be translated, in practical terms, as 'the looting continues', the struggle in Namibia will be far from over.<sup>9</sup>

**Note on contributor**

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**Notes**

1. Sam Nujoma, 'Where we came from' (capital letters in the original), posted at the SWAPO Party web site: [http://www.swapoparty.org/where\\_we\\_came\\_from.html](http://www.swapoparty.org/where_we_came_from.html) [accessed 16 July 2010]. 'Founding Father of the Republic of Namibia' is the official title conferred upon Sam Nujoma by the members of Parliament when he retired after three terms in office as Head of State (1990–2005). For the third term in office a first change of Namibia's constitution was required.
2. This represented the relevant background to the award to Martti Ahtisaari – the UN Commissioner for Namibia at the time and in charge of the UN Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG) – of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2008.
3. Namibia ranks among those countries with the biggest income gaps in the world and the highest discrepancies in the distribution of wealth, in terms of the Gini coefficient. Nominally, the average income per capita even among the poorer segments of society has grown slightly. But when measured against the cost of living and the lack of basic social services, as well as other criteria contributing to the Human Development Index, the overall trend is negative. As one UNDP-affiliated economist concluded, 'over time income poverty appears to be decreasing while human poverty is increasing' (Levine 2007, p. 29).
4. This term has been used by Andrew Feinstein (2010) with reference to similar strategies in South Africa: 'The practice of high-ranking members of the party, and those close to them, benefiting from decisions about tenders of the government has become so widespread that the title "tenderpreneur" has been coined to describe the beneficiaries.'
5. Quoted in Brigitte Weidlich, 'Namibia: politics and economics are bedfellows – Shangala', *The Namibian* (Windhoek), 27 May 2010.
6. It therefore comes as no surprise that Kaapama (2010, p. 202) concludes: 'The implementation of the Land Resettlement Programme seems to be riddled by numerous significant challenges which lead to procrastination of implementation. The same applies to the significant downgrading of the initiatives for integrated rural development and poverty reduction . . . [I]t is alleged that the "economics of affection" have found expression in the ties of political patronage, which are being exploited by some bearers of political office and bureaucrats alike as elaborate avenues for allocating preferential treatment to party stalwarts, as well as friends and relatives of the ruling elite.'
7. This is by no means some kind of weird satire but was indeed the reason given by the Permanent Secretary justifying the expense of a brand new Mercedes-Benz fleet for members of the new cabinet at a total cost of N\$300 million.
8. The NUNW president, in a press conference, cited a lack of creative ideas to address poverty as the reason for this move and stated: 'We are sincere in our belief that there's serious need for poverty alleviation in this country. We believe that that the [BIG] coalition's idea is good but not the best. We're striving for the best.' He further emphasised the need to reproduce wealth, which, in his view, would be almost impossible if money were handed out to individuals for free: 'We'd rather suggest that instead of giving out \$100 to everyone each month, Government should be pushed to make it easier for equity participation by Namibians in local companies.' Quoted in Toivo Ndjebela, 'NUNW dumps BIG Coalition', *New Era* (Windhoek), 8 July 2010.
9. Recall the social awareness and responsibility expressed by Thomas Paine in his tract 'Agrarian Justice' of 1797, where he argues for the creation of a national fund to provide every citizen above the age of 21 with an annual financial amount independent of their other income and property. 'Poverty', as he diagnosed, 'is a thing created by that which is called civilized life'. As a result, so-called civilisation 'make[s] one part of the society more affluent, and the other more wretched, than would have been the lot in a natural state'. He therefore maintained: 'It is not charity but a right, not bounty but justice, that I am pleading for.' In Namibia, more than two centuries later, the argument still holds.

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## South African splinters: from ‘elite transition’ to ‘small-a alliances’

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The struggle for full liberation in South Africa was truncated by a nationalist, neoliberal bloc led first by Nelson Mandela and then, more rapidly degenerating during the early 2000s, by Thabo Mbeki, both under the influence of global capital. The backlash by trade unions and communists, once Jacob Zuma was fired as deputy president in 2005, reverberated through the ruling African National Congress (ANC). With Mbeki tossed out in late 2008, a shift was anticipated under Zuma, but did not occur. However, the independent Left failed to construct a clear alternative and began to fade, while ubiquitous populist insurgencies were rudderless. This left merely a distant hope for a union–community fusion, on some future occasion.

Since the freeing of Nelson Mandela in February 1990, the South African liberation struggle has witnessed the truncation, hijacking and reversal of its fabled ‘second stage’: the National Democratic Revolution (‘NDR’), which aims to transform the state and address class inequality. Instead, the state became an even more blatant vehicle for crony capitalism and merely tokenistic welfarism than it was under the Afrikaners’ Nationalist Party rule. By mid 2010, the contradictions had become unbearable, and a spate of labour unrest suddenly brought home the obvious point: Alliance politics must urgently restructure – along with national socio-economic policies – or face an historic breaking point.

### Society divides

The whole society began splintering just a few weeks after the World Cup provided a show of ‘nation building’, broad-based excitement and unity. But the structural cracks had been widening during a two-decade-long era of neoliberalism. As the University of Cape Town’s South African Labour and Development Research Unit recently reported, ‘income inequality increased between 1993 and 2008’ (from a 0.66 Gini coefficient to 0.70) as South Africa raced ahead of Brazil to become the world’s leader among major countries. The income of the average black (African) person actually fell as a percentage of the average white’s from 1995 (13.5%) to 2008 (13%), and ‘poverty in urban areas has increased’ (Leibbrandt *et al.* 2010).

How could a democratic government have actually amplified apartheid-era race–class inequality? It’s stunning, but Mandela (1994–99) and his successor Thabo Mbeki (1999–2008), long-serving former Finance Minister Trevor Manuel, former Trade Minister Alec

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Erwin, former Reserve Bank Governor Tito Mboweni and current President Jacob Zuma, deserve recognition for constructing a neoliberal regime that not even the most extreme pessimist would have predicted when the ANC was unbanned.

According to the University of Cape Town researchers, inequality is ‘due both to rising unemployment and rising earnings inequality’ which in turn can be traced partly to imports of manufactured goods which deindustrialised labour-intensive sectors, and partly to labour brokering, that is, the outsourcing of formerly secure employment at much lower wages with no benefits to around half a million workers. Yet in his 2010 State of the Nation speech and more recently in the midst of a strike in which he threatened to fire the entire civil service, Zuma displayed ‘no appreciation of the full extent of the massive crisis of unemployment, poverty and inequality’, according to the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu).

Indeed the two loudest anti-labour voices in Zuma’s cabinet – Defence Minister Lindiwe Sisulu and Public Service Minister Richard Baloyi – provided a burst of neoliberal–nationalist political rhetoric and strident discord so loud, in late August 2010, that it drowned even the sweet memory of World Cup vuvuzelas. Zuma’s Treasury was most to blame, for refusing to spend an extra US\$700 million per year to quickly halt the public sector strike.

For those supportive of more genuine liberation traditions, the good news amidst the political and socio-economic rancour is that the centre of power, and associated neoliberal policies, may not hold. The extreme political divisions and ideological distortions within the ruling party’s ‘big-A Alliance’ with labour and the Communist Party may not permit the ANC’s big tent to stay open to all, no matter Zuma’s personal charisma and good-times inclusiveness. It may well be necessary, finally, to construct a ‘small-a alliance’ – as John Saul (2005) named the idea – of organised workers, poor people, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), environmentalists and other organised progressives.

The reason is simple: as one of the most prescient observers of South African politics, William Gumede, pointed out just after the 1997 ANC leadership putsch of Thabo Mbeki at the Polokwane congress: ‘For all the doubts that hang over Zuma’s character, many argue that he offers a critical conduit for the poor’s grievances. These people are going to be disappointed.’

Indeed the personal has become political. Asked in early September 2010 about the lucrative and extremely dubious deal that global steelmaker ArcelorMittal (formerly South Africa’s state-owned Iscor) cut with a consortium including his son, Duduzane, as well as his nephew Khulubuse’s role in hotly contested oil-prospecting claims in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zuma replied: ‘Nobody has said, “Here is corruption”. I think for people to think that if you are a Zuma you can’t do business is a very funny thing, I tell you.’

Not everyone is amused, and communist youth leader David Masedo offered a frank rebuttal: ‘ZEE’ – Zuma Economic Empowerment. For Masedo, writing in *CityPress* newspaper (5 September 2010), ‘ZEE is not only an assault on the Young Communist League and South African Communist Party resolutions – which called for the nationalisation of monopoly industries – it amounts to a burial of the Freedom Charter. Only a few can be misled to believe that there is no link between Zuma’s rise to the presidency and his family’s rise to riches.’

But this is not only about a family of fat cats, in which the first B, ‘broad’, in Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (promised as the antidote to Mbeki’s elite-oriented Black Economic Empowerment), has apparently been replaced with a new B: belt-size (given the vast girth of several Zuma beneficiaries). More substantially, at war we now find the three main ruling-party power blocs: first, the group bent on personal accumulation

projects willing to associate (mostly privately) with ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema's ascendant crew; second, those of the Centre-Left intent on gaining more influence on policy decisions (albeit with virtually nothing to show for their efforts to date); and third, the president's KwaZulu-Natal regional allies, who are under stress because of corruption probes that seemed to have emanated from Zuma's office. The ANC's late-September National General Council in Durban featured such a bloody battle that in trying to keep peace, Zuma withdrew from the United Nations' annual (this time decennial) summit celebration of the world's failure to keep pace with the mainly meaningless Millennium Development Goals. Zuma's retreat to Durban to temporarily manage the fracturing was significant because in August, he was – apparently without irony – named by Ban Ki-moon to co-chair a United Nations (UN) commission on world sustainability.

In the hands of the aspirant pro-Zuma bourgeoisie, the ANC, meanwhile, looks increasingly like the post-liberation political party that Frantz Fanon (1961) warned of a half-century ago in *The wretched of the earth*:

Powerless economically, unable to bring about the existence of coherent social relations, and standing on the principle of its domination as a class, the bourgeoisie chooses the solution that seems to it the easiest, that of the single party. It does not yet have the quiet conscience that economic power and the control of the state machine alone can give. It does not create a state that reassures the ordinary citizen, but rather one that rouses his anxiety. The state, which by its strength and discretion ought to inspire confidence and disarm and lull everybody to sleep, on the contrary seeks to impose itself in spectacular fashion. It makes a display, it jostles people and bullies them, thus intimating to the citizen that he is in continual danger. The single party is the modern form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, unmasked, unpainted, unscrupulous and cynical. (Fanon 1963/1961, p. 138)

### **The roots of the cracks**

We have to go back at least to the early 1990s to explain the degeneration. Within the framework of neoliberal, low-intensity democracy, the secretly negotiated terms of the elite transition provided benefits mainly for a few hundred at the top of the three divergent interest groups: white Afrikaners, white English-speaking business and the liberation movement. Increasingly shifting from white to black allies in South Africa, the 'international community' – the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), other global-scale bankers, Northern 'donor' governments and associated think-tanks – together ensured that post-apartheid policies would deepen the country's vulnerability and destroy any residual self-reliance.

This entailed several economic sabotage techniques: agreeing to repay illegitimate apartheid-era debt in part by taking on an unnecessary IMF loan of US\$750 million (1993) with predictable strings attached; dropping trade tariffs even beyond what the World Trade Organisation (WTO) required (1994); liberalising exchange controls (1995) and then permitting the delisting of the largest South African firms (Anglo, DeBeers, Old Mutual, SABMiller, Investec, Mondi and others) from the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (1999–2001); raising the foreign debt from US\$25 billion in 1994 to US\$85 billion today; adopting a bound-to-fail neoliberal economic policy and insulating the Reserve Bank from democracy so as to raise interest rates to South Africa's highest real levels ever (late 1990s); privatising state assets destructively; and lowering primary corporate taxes from 48% in 1994 to less than 30% at present.

Many of us who anticipated opportunities for 'structural reforms' (Saul 2001) in the 1994 *Reconstruction and Development Programme* were foiled. Personally, of 15 policy papers I was asked to draft or edit from 1994–2000 in a dozen ministries (which I

believe to be a record of repeated reformist mistakes worse than anyone else's in post-apartheid government), not one truly converted the era's developmentalist rhetoric into actual progressive change. Indeed the type-left shift-right process I participated in convinced me by 2000 that an NDR process within the government and even the Alliance was futile. A better perspective was that of the emerging independent Left (see for example, Marais 2000, Alexander 2002, Desai 2002, Hart 2002, Bell and Ntsebeza 2003, Bond 2006, Legassick 2007, Ntsebeza and Hall 2007, Maharaj *et al.* 2010), which soon concluded that the elite transition to a failing neoliberalism required ever more desperate nationalist rhetoric to disguise ever-more unpatriotic economic practices and ever-more destructive national social and environmental policies.

One crucial problem during the entire post-apartheid period was labour's 'corporatist' strategy, or what Carolyn Bassett and Marlea Clarke (2000) called the 'class snuggle' that for a while replaced class struggle. This was especially evident in the National Economic Development and Labour Council, and in sites such as the Seattle World Trade Organisation summit in 1999 when Cosatu leaders found themselves in the 'Green Room' with leading neoliberals like Erwin negotiating the next trade deal, instead of with the youth and environmentalists blocking the entrance.

However, with class snuggle's main proponent, textile-union leader Ebrahim Patel, chosen by Zuma to head what soon became an impotent new economic development ministry in 2009, more militancy soon emerged in Cosatu. There were highly successful strikes or strike threats by transport and electricity workers in parastatals before and during the World Cup, and in the subsequent fight for wage and housing allowance increases against a state determined to draw the line at 7% and US\$97, not the 8.6% and US\$140 demanded. The settlement, agreed upon under duress in October, was 7.5% and US\$110, just as the new inflation rate of 3.4% was announced.

It was inevitable, this wedge between nationalists and proletarians. Tracing backwards to the 1980s and early 1990s, the old 'Mass Democratic Movement' carried such enormous potential that its distraction into the politics of what Neville Alexander (2002) describes as an 'ordinary country' was only temporary. In mid 2010, South Africa did appear an extraordinary society, one whose ruling crew had shifted in the region of US\$5 billion of state funding away from social needs and into a surreal soccer tournament. Unemployment had skyrocketed by 1.1 million over the prior year and a half, rising from 26.7% of the workforce to 32.8%.

This was not a function merely of 'the world crisis', but of the way the local economy had been mismanaged, with fake growth in the 2000s – reaching 5% per annum for a few years – based on real estate speculation, construction mainly of white elephant infrastructure, consumer credit and exports of base metals. It necessarily crashed of its own account, not only because of declining world materials demand and the 50% fall in world stock market prices (although those contributed), with the consequent outflow of portfolio capital.

The supposed economic boost from the World Cup meant that, though a formal 'recovery' was underway, nearly a fifth of those retrenchments were still taking place during the first half of 2010, as GDP increased (at a 3% annual rate). Blame for the tens of thousands of new job losses was not only due to the end of stadium building in nine of the country's major cities, but also to an ongoing shift away from an economy based on manufacturing employment in which unions won a variety of perks and a living wage, to one characterised by even more extreme labour casualisation.

This was a phenomenon that Zuma and his labour team had vowed to Cosatu allies they would end: 'labour broking'. Not only did they not end it, but the most globally embarrassing example of worker militancy, the Stallion Security workers' wildcat strike during

the first week of the World Cup, affecting half the stadiums, occurred because of abuse associated with outsourced work. And Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan's first budget speech, in February 2010, threatened Cosatu with even more pressure in the form of sub-minimum wages paid by corporations to young workers through a forthcoming state subsidy scheme, a position he reaffirmed in the October 2010 medium-term budget speech. To add insult to injury, in November 2010, Patel proposed a limitation on wages – as part of an overall economic programme reminiscent of the last Mbeki plan – that most Cosatu unions immediately rejected.

The other major public infrastructure under construction – a few big dams, the Medupi power plant (whose electricity would be disproportionately channelled to large mining/smelting operations), a huge boondoggle industrial project featuring an unnecessary US\$8 billion heavy-petroleum refinery (Coega), a new Durban–Johannesburg oil pipeline, some road upgrades, and the Johannesburg fast train for elite customers – received occasional praise from ANC ideologues (for example, Hirsch [2006]) for conjoining social-democratic and industrialist potentials associated with a 'developmental state'. But this was merely dishonest posturing, given the underdevelopmental nature of so much of the state spending, such as the world's cheapest electricity gift to BHP Billiton and Anglo American Corporation (US\$0.015/kWh compared to prices three times that for most businesses and seven times that for residents).

### **The war on poverty and the poor**

Likewise, a package of minor interventions aimed at bandaging the poverty rift became, under Mbeki in early 2008, the 'War on Poverty' (WoP) (for more see Mahraj *et al.* [2010]). The self-help approach was yet another of the Zuma government's neoliberal continuities, because, as the South African Broadcasting Corporation reported, Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe says 'the state believes such a project is the only way to fight poverty. He is of the opinion that such an approach will force people to help themselves out of poverty.' Unfortunately, most people did not 'help themselves' and join the state in the WoP, but instead continued to harbour the enemy (poverty) in their houses.

To illustrate the problem, Eastern Cape Premier Noxolo Kiviet confessed in April 2010 that 'lack of coordination and integration of government services' meant that in the village of Lubala, where the WoP had been formally launched in 2008, 'only 30 percent of the households surveyed received all the services needed'. Kiviet didn't mention the lack of national–local resource transfers or the neoliberal character of South African social policy as structural causes with structural solutions. Instead, he relied on scattershot state services which, no matter how bravely bureaucrat-warriors endeavoured to hit the enemy, were obviously too few and far between to genuinely defeat poverty on home turf:

- the Departments of Agriculture and Rural Development assisted families with seedlings, and provided fencing 'in more than 19 households';
- the Department of Water Affairs had 'undertaken' to provide water and sanitation to Lubala Primary School, and to give water tanks to 15 households; and
- there was skills upgrading: 'about 15 young people have been trained in areas such as First Aid, chain saw operat[ion], health and safety, personal finance and accounting'. (Bathembu 2010)

Putting aside such small incursions at the first pilot site, this tiny Protected Village, the rest of the country was going up in flames, and poverty was clearly winning the WoP. Of

course in any such war, those waging the Good Fight will suffer faulty intelligence and troops will be lost to friendly fire. The most obvious cases would be the seemingly ubiquitous 'service delivery protests' that turn the state's attention from attacking poverty, to attacking the poor themselves. The poor in turn react by burning down state buildings and councillors' houses in townships ranging from small Mpumalanga *dorpies* in the mountainous east, to the big-city ghettos and highways on the plains of the Western Cape.

To be sure, these have been called 'popcorn protests' because with the application of intense heat, the leading grains explode high into the air, but the wind may take them leftwards or rightwards, up or down, with no pre-set ideological strategic landing, and no discernable pattern that would merit the description 'urban social movement'. Still, what the popcorn protests showed was that the state's enemy, poverty, was by now bunkered in and heavily fortified. From time to time the enemy would suddenly emerge in the form of *toyitoying* youth, who could manoeuvre with seeming ease around the desperately outnumbered local police forces and even the South African National Defence Force.

Amid thousands of battles in the WoP, one was especially illustrative. Among the state's most feared symbols is an armoured vehicle, the Casspir, and on the auspicious date of 21 March 2010, Sharpeville Day, one found itself surrounded in the township of an Mpumalanga *dorpie*, Ogies. The South African Press Association's courageous reporter filed this story:

Captain Leonard Hlathi, spokesperson for the Mpumalanga police said the Casspir was irreparably damaged when it was 'outrageously attacked' by a mob who petrol bombed it several times. The protesters apparently led the Casspir into an ambush, by leading it over an improvised spike strip to puncture its tyres. Three of the heavy vehicles' puncture-proof tyres were blown out when it drove over the spikes, that were camouflaged with branches. 'Nothing working remained in the vehicle,' said Hlathi. 'Only the steel hull remained.'

Hlathi said the protesters were targeting the 10 police members that were in the vehicle. The trapped police officers were forced to fight their way out, using live sharp point ammunition. 'They had to get out of the vehicle. By that time it had been bombed several times,' said Hlathi. 'If they didn't fight back and if they weren't assisted by reinforcements who came to help, we would have been talking about a different matter entirely.'

Hlathi said it wasn't clear how many times the vehicles, which w[ere] used extensively by police during unrest before the 1994 elections, were bombed. He also couldn't say how long the spikes that were used to blow out the tyres were, or what they were made of. 'They do have puncture proof tyres, but the spikes were too long,' said Hlathi.

One protester was injured during the violence, but Hlathi said there may have been more. 'They [the protesters] carried the wounded away,' he said. Sixty-one people have been arrested for public violence during service delivery protests in Mpumalanga over the long weekend. Twenty-nine of these were in Leslie near Secunda after a municipal building and other property were burnt down. Another 32 were arrested in the Ogies protest. 'Several cars were pelted with stones and 20 complaints have already been registered for malicious damage to property cases.' Four civilian Toyota Quantum minibus taxis, a Condo, and two bakkies were also burnt down.

The Ogies protest started on Thursday, when a march was held to hand over a memorandum to representatives of the provincial government. 'It is alleged the authorities did not turn up as requested. The people went on rampage, barricading the roads with burning tyres and burning down property.' (SAPA 2010)

Encountering these sorts of minefields across the country, the state had a choice: either rapidly move from the ongoing war of position (nice-sounding rhetorical speeches) to a serious war of movement against poverty, or simply retreat. The latter was easier, and in 2010 the WoP was relocated to the rural development ministry. Back in the Pretoria War Room, it must have appeared that the WoP was now a fully fledged class war, unwinnable under the country's prevailing economic conditions, given the motley coalition of power

brokers in the Alliance and the continuing grip of neoliberal Treasury and Reserve Bank officials. The poor were advancing relentlessly, and the WoP looked like a US-in-Vietnam or Soviets/US-in-Afghanistan storyline.

The state's forces were obviously confused and confounded. The older anti-poverty strategies were comparable to pre-1942 Maginot lines, easily broken through by a clever enemy. In this new terrain, trickle-down grants were simply not good enough to stem the broken dike. Poverty – and especially the poor themselves – fought back tirelessly, with sticks, stones and Molotov cocktails, retreating into the shack settlements and township alleyways before sallying forth for yet more outrageous attacks. Newer military techniques, such as aerial bombings or even US-style drones were either too high profile (an embarrassment when the state needed legitimation during its other war – to carry off a World Cup in the face of international elite scepticism) or simply ineffectual.

### **A small-a alliance?**

The only good that can come from this chaos of warring nationalist factions and class conflict is a restructured political landscape. The only way that will happen, in the view of many political activists, is the formal departure from the ANC of its most oppressed subjects, from trade-union proletarians to the poor lumpen-protesters, and everyone in between. But that in turn awaits either a conclusive victory or defeat in the ages-old struggle for the hearts and minds of the ANC base. That base surprised many by voting out Mbeki in December 2007, which makes more serious the threat from Malema's rambunctious Youth League on 25 August 2010 that the next national leader to be targeted is the party's General Secretary (and former mineworker leader) Gwede Mantashe, who is also the Chair of the Communist Party. And not only is Party Secretary (and Higher Education Minister) Blade Nzimande feeling pressure from Malema's faction, a near-rift between the SACP and Cosatu emerged during the public-sector strike, given the weak support the unions were receiving. The rift widened with demands from Cosatu that Nzimande give up his ministry, generating a harsh reply from the SACP leadership.

The Alliance has stuck together through thick and thin for two decades, and is likely to outlast this latest conflagration, at least a few more years. But meanwhile, fearing another bout of Mbeki-style control of the airwaves, Cosatu has reemphasised its progressive values, defending media freedom and access to information, against ANC paranoia and secrecy.

The time is not yet ripe for much more. Because the only formal political opposition not in disarray is the neoliberal Democratic Alliance – the next largest parties, Congress of the People and Inkatha, are imploding with internecine leadership wars – the most important medium-term dilemma for trade unions and genuine communists is whether a small-a alliance might be the basis of a new Workers' Party. Municipal elections are scheduled for April 2011 and it is impossible that any substantive radical electoral opposition to the ANC would emerge by then, although Cosatu has threatened it will encourage a boycott of voters in ANC wards with poorly performing councillors. (The only political party to the ANC's left in Parliament, the Independent Democrats, was consumed by the Democratic Alliance in August.)

Outside the Alliance, there are two overlapping independent Left-unifying initiatives – *Amandla!* magazine and the Conference for a Democratic Left (CDL) – which are supporting the most logical means of outreach to the forces of the Left in Cosatu: a nascent South African Social Forum, so far joined by forward-thinking public-sector unions but, again, not likely to solidify as more than a small group prior to the Dakar meeting of the World

Social Forum from 5–11 February 2011. The CDL will have its first national congress in late January 2011.

The situation is too fluid to predict with confidence, but the sense of disappointment on the Left about Cosatu's 'paradox of victory' (Buhlungu 2010) in backing not only the liberation movement in general but Zuma in particular, and winning – hence putting off these debates for some years – may yet, one day before the next national elections in 2014, lift. The prerequisite is that labour endeavours to force the splinters of South African socialism together, in the first instance as a wedge to split the Alliance. Then a firmly anchored political movement able to withstand the inevitable future rounds of splits can form. As Gumede concluded in 2007: 'The ragbag collection of groups that back Zuma ranges from socialists and trade unionists to supporters of virginity testing and the death penalty. Dashed expectations may be the catalyst for a breakup of the ANC – a breakup which is debatably overdue and can only be good for democracy.'

Rebuilding a serious South African Left will be a long, halting process. Along the way, extraordinary victories have already been won, such as the Treatment Action Campaign's reversal of Mbeki's AIDS policies and opening up of pharmaceutical corporate patent monopolies (Geffen 2010). And one of the coming issues of the age, climate change, will motivate a strong environmental justice movement, for South Africa will host the Kyoto Protocol Conference of the Parties global climate summit in late 2011 (Cock 2008, Bond 2011). As well, South Africa's impressive (but today beleaguered) feminist tradition (Hassim 2006, Britton *et al.* 2008) will continue battling the resurgent patriarchy represented by Zuma at his 2006 rape trial.

On the terrain of ubiquitous community, student and labour protests that began in the late 1990s (Ballard *et al.* 2006), the more visionary activists acknowledge that they have so far lacked capacity to educate and also to influence the direction and intensity of the uprisings (Ngwane 2010). Although the critique many independent leftists offer rings increasingly true, the post-World Cup fracturing shows how impotent radicals are, and how much effort it will take to finally organise a united labour–community front. As Cosatu's (2010) own most recent Central Executive Committee political discussion paper warned: 'If we don't act decisively, we are heading rapidly in the direction of a full-blown predator state, in which a powerful, corrupt elite increasingly controls the state as a vehicle for accumulation.'

But on the other hand, as a potential 'opportunity' under such a scenario, the labour leaders openly remarked that the movement 'could become stronger by drawing on its militant tradition to organise the resistance of workers; could broaden its perspective to take up living conditions and political issues as well as wages; and could play a central role in forging a new popular alliance, and in building a new socialist movement in opposition to government.'

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## **Zimbabwe: liberation nationalism – old and born-again**

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In April 1980 Zimbabwe was born amid equal measures of celebration for the triumph over Rhodesian colonialism and expectation of the challenges that lay ahead. After seven years of armed struggle and decades of economic and political repression, inequality and conflict under white colonialism, the prospect of a new progressive order under two avowedly leftist liberation movement parties pointed to opportunities for substantial redistribution and development, and the establishment of an inclusive, participatory government in place of white minority rule. Under majority rule, the new Zimbabwean state was envisaged as the primary vehicle for this project, with the liberation movements led by Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) providing political guidance and legitimacy, and popular sections of civil society – the labour movement, collective cooperatives, progressive media, churches and rights organisations, and others – providing support in consultation and engagement from below.

Thirty years later, the last vestiges of that once inspiring project lie in ruins. Through successive cycles of economic and political restructuring inflected by unsettled and shifting class alliances in the political leadership, ZANU-PF unravelled the developmental power of the nationalist state, along with the prospects for its constructive and popular confrontation of renewed imperial power. In 2010, at the end of a turbulent decade characterised by the militarisation of politics and the dismal withering of Zimbabwe's once-envied professional state, a new 'nationalist consensus' has emerged in the guise of the securocrat business-politicians who dominate it.

ZANU-PF *v.2000* – militarised, opaque, elitist, immersed in secretive and corrupt business deals, a model of elite entitlement but not popular delivery – is *this* the model of 'liberation nationalism' that we should expect to see elsewhere in the region, as the disciplining principles of 'people's struggle' gives way to the hunger for elite class formation? Does ZANU-PF reflect the dying days of late nationalism – or its reinvention in a new form that depends importantly on interlinked elite networks of politics and markets extending beyond the country's borders?

### **An ambiguous heritage**

For many observers, the broad brushstrokes of Zimbabwe's successive dramatic political transitions under ZANU-PF – from the social welfarist, nominally socialist, redistributive

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state of the 1980s; to the elite-driven accommodation of international capital, international financial institutions and white-dominated local capital codified in the 1990s' Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) policies; to the restructuring of the state and party in the 2000s via their mutual militarisation under threat of political challenge – illustrate the skewed trajectory of a nationalist movement as it was transformed by post-independence encounters with capital and power. In this context, much of the mainstream commentary on the current political meltdown locates its origins in the adoption of ESAP in 1991, and the swirl of economic shocks, deindustrialisation, declining real income levels and rising social crisis which followed; or in the emergence of the 'war veterans' as a prominent force in ruling party politics in 1997, at a time when the leadership was under increasing attack from both traditional allies in the popular sector and newfound friends in the market.

However, important questions about the ambiguous class composition of the ZANU-PF state, and particularly the emerging power of an elitist faction-ridden petite bourgeoisie bridging the state, party and private sector were already being raised by critics from the Left in the mid-1980s.<sup>1</sup> By then, contradictory ambitions were pulling the state and ruling party in several directions simultaneously. While competing policy paths were initially accommodated through redistributive policies, the state also went to considerable lengths to engage local and international capital as economic performance grew unsteady in the wake of drought and an effective boycott by domestic and international investors. For Brian Raftopoulos, writing in *ROAPE* in 1992, the multi-class nationalist alliance contained within ZANU-PF had been faced with the unavoidable 'central dilemma of a welfare strategy: how to reconcile growth with more equitable distribution, and initiate change without serious destabilisation'.<sup>2</sup>

By 1982 an International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme involving budget restraint, subsidy cuts and liberalisation of the capital account was in place; in the mid 1980s state officials were discussing new strategies for export-oriented growth with the World Bank; and by 1987 the first in a series of sweeping trade liberalisation and foreign investment reforms were introduced, with the strong support of established and emerging black capital.<sup>3</sup> This narrower alliance of class forces, consolidated in and protected by a state-based leadership, and ideologically reproduced through ZANU-PF's invocation of nationalism, provided the key momentum for the formal shift to neoliberalism with the introduction of ESAP in 1991.

But while ESAP represented an intra-elite pacting of capital and leading political interests it also helped heighten emerging points of tension. On the one hand, the unmet ambitions of a black petite bourgeoisie frustrated by the persistent dominance of local white and international capital seemed likely to be exacerbated by ESAP. Discord grew among black capital and state-linked businesses, as important parts of the petite bourgeoisie were negatively affected by rising interest rates, import deregulation and declining state protection for home market producers. They mobilised through increasingly vocal groups like the Indigenous Business Development Centre and the more militant Affirmative Action Group, demanding protection from and more direct incorporation within ZANU-PF's shifting accumulation project. Other critical components of ZANU-PF's traditional base, including public service workers, 'war veterans' and land-hungry subsistence farmers – their hopes blunted by ESAP's market-driven approach to land reform – also found their interests and influence marginalised.

On the other hand, the severely negative economic and social consequences of adjustment – including the peeling back of many of the key health and education gains of the 1980s, and a catastrophic decline in formal-sector employment, real wages, and

manufacturing output due to import- and interest-rate-induced deindustrialisation – fuelled a resurgence in civil society activism, led by the national labour movement under the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions.<sup>4</sup> Important debates over the fate of ZANU-PF's one-party state project, which helped generate the brief appearance of Edgar Tekere's conservative Zimbabwe Unity Movement at the time of the 1990 elections, also mobilised engagement of the political inside and outside the ruling party.

But while spaces for public debate had opened significantly following ZANU-PF's 1987 absorption of Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU),<sup>5</sup> and in the broader context of post-Cold War debates about the options for democratic renewal and economic development, such debates would also have sharp limits placed on them. Labour movement structures and university students calling for government to pursue a popular agenda and clamp down on corruption and elitist tendencies met with aggressive attack; leftist currents were regularly targeted for marginalisation in the party, state structures and public institutions; and 'indigenisation' debates and activism were increasingly contained within the narrow confines of ZANU-PF policy precepts. Crucial spaces in the public media that had briefly opened were soon locked down, while a combination of harsh market conditions and seeping state harassment and threats undermined the position of several critical independent privately owned publications (despite 'political liberalisation', ZANU-PF never permitted non-state broadcasting, a situation which persists to time of writing).<sup>6</sup>

In the late 1990s, the powerful convergence of political, economic and social tensions generated by ESAP provoked the collapse of the 'liberation consensus' consolidated under ZANU-PF in the 1980s.<sup>7</sup> This unleashed a new phase of political realignment underpinned by the militarised reorganising of the ruling party, its structures and core active constituencies; the terrain of national politics (now featuring a diverse civil society alliance focused on constitutional reform and mounting a direct political challenge to ZANU-PF); and the state itself, including its representative, judicial, security and bureaucratic structures (Saul and Saunders 2005). Here, the party leadership's accommodation and political re-incorporation of disaffected 'war veterans' in 1997 marked a decisive step in the direction of a new ruling consensus dominated by the senior ranks of the party and state security institutions, and strategically incorporating and embracing elements of not only the veterans, but also poor urban youth, traditional leaders, rural landless and urban professionals, among other social fragments. This new formation was ideologically cemented from above by a repackaged nationalist mantra focused on the delivery of social justice via a 'Third Chimurenga', and by extension, the eclipse of the redistributive welfare state project of the 1980s, as well as the mass-democratic structures in which it was politically rooted. In the recalibrated nationalism of ZANU-PF and its state in the 2000s, those popular mass constituencies demanding greater transparency, equity, redistribution and the entrenchment of participatory democratic norms of political management – the resurgent political majority, it would later become clear – were increasingly identified by ZANU-PF as the prime target of attack, along with the remnants of its social welfarist state.

### **The audacity of 'No'**

The historic defeat of ZANU-PF in the February 2000 constitutional referendum by an alliance of leading civil society organisations and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)<sup>8</sup> marked a pivotal point in Zimbabwean politics.<sup>9</sup> It was the first time the party had lost a national poll since independence. With no coherent policy compass in hand,

plummeting economic indicators and fresh parliamentary elections featuring a new party looming in early 2000, ZANU-PF responded by unleashing a series of violent interventions that formally announced its abandonment of mass-democratic politics 'business as usual'.

In April 2000 the first of an extended series of commercial farm invasions was launched under the protection of, and often with the direct assistance and orchestration of, the state and party structures. 'Fast track' land reform, as it became known, would take on wider significance for ZANU-PF's economic programme and ideological repositioning in the years ahead, and lead some such as Sam Moyo and Paris Yeros to portray ZANU-PF as a paragon of militant African nationalism in the face of globalisation in post-Cold War epoch.<sup>10</sup> For others, '*jambanja*' importantly marked the reintroduction of systematic political violence under the patronage of the state, and more broadly, the *subordination* of the state to the party's emerging new agenda.

Soon after the land invasions began, violence spilled from the rural areas onto the broader political terrain. It would be regularised, institutionalised and 'legalised' – if not fully legitimated – in coming years by a wall of repressive legislation that targeted rights to public association, media and freedom of expression, citizenship and electoral participation, among others.<sup>11</sup> The primary victims of these measures were the opposition MDC leadership, rank-and-file members and supporters. But targets of repression also included a range of civil society organisations – particularly those which represented key constituencies in the popular sector and had a sustained organisational grounding in communities, like the national labour movement, residents' associations, human rights defenders and professional cadres including teachers, doctors and nurses.

An enormous and incalculable cost in lives, health, security and organisational resources was paid as ZANU-PF defaulted to violent coercion as a means of confronting the spectre of electoral defeat in 2000, 2002 and subsequent polls. One 2006 report documented more than 15,000 politically motivated gross human rights abuses since 2000, with more than 90% of these perpetrated by ruling party and state officials against perceived ZANU-PF opponents.<sup>12</sup> Murder, torture, rape, beatings, illegal detentions and property destruction, in oscillating waves related to electoral cycles and campaigns, made state-enabled political violence an established feature of the political landscape by mid decade.

'Operation *Murambatsvina*' (meaning 'clear out the rubbish'), a 2005 post-election security forces-led campaign directed primarily at MDC-supporting poorer urban areas, signalled the commitment and ruthlessness with which systematic violence was pursued. More than 200,000 homes were bulldozed, large swathes of informal-sector infrastructure was pulled down, more than 20,000 were summarily arrested and perhaps more than one million people in all were displaced and dumped.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, ZANU-PF officials suggested that informal sector permits, licences and rights to work would, in the future, be subject to effective political approval. The economic misery visited on the urban poor, particularly those displaced to the informal sector by the crash of agriculture, industry and mining, helped fuel new waves of underground migrancy to neighbouring South Africa.

Another important casualty was the state itself. ZANU-PF's coercive strategy was underpinned by – indeed *required* – a corresponding attack on the autonomy, accountability and professionalism of the judiciary and security forces, state bureaucracy, parliamentary institutions, media and information structures.<sup>14</sup> Sections of the ruling party, too, were targeted. In a selective house-cleaning led by the war vets, local party officials were summarily thrown out of office under force of violence and with the backing of the national party leadership.

The clearing-out of state development and party structures helped exacerbate an economic crisis that had taken root in the 1990s, and spiralled out of control in the 2000s. With the decline of commercial agriculture, deepening shortages of foreign exchange and slumping domestic demand in the early 2000s, Zimbabwe became the world's fastest-collapsing peace-time economy, contracting by as much as 60% in 2000–2006.<sup>15</sup> Inflation exploded past 700% in 2005 and then went supersonic, as government printed more money and repeatedly revalued and reissued currency in a failing bid to keep up with crashing market confidence. Before it finally went out of effective circulation in 2009, annual inflation had reached over 225 million per cent. Inflation and crashing production saw sharp falls in formal employment and rising poverty. By 2004, formal sector wages had fallen from 95% of the 2001 Poverty Datum Line to less than 50%. By 2006 wages fell further, to pre-1980 levels. By then perhaps 80% of Zimbabweans lived in profound poverty. Hundreds of thousands more escaped poverty and violence by leaving the country, to South Africa but also further afield. Some reports estimated that as many as three million Zimbabweans were living in South Africa by 2010 – certainly at least half that number would be a conservative estimate.

This sort of disastrous performance might have spelled political death for many political parties. But ZANU-PF survived by playing to its strengths: on the one hand, its access to the instruments of organised violence and the state electoral bureaucracy; on the other, its peerless liberation credentials. Thus ZANU-PF's unique linked claims to institutionalised violence and the mantle of restorative nationalist justice became the hallmarks of its election campaigns throughout the decade. If state and ruling party violence increasingly characterised the election process, it was in defence of 'national interests' and the gains of the liberation struggle; if the opposition was short-changed, it was in the name of defeating the agenda of 'recolonisation'; if electoral processes were flawed by imposed international standards, they nonetheless produced results that were favourable to 'Africanist aspirations'; and so forth. This recasting of electoral standards and legitimacy was peddled with considerable success in southern Africa and more widely on the continent, even as it repeatedly failed to find traction inside the country.

Most independent observers now concur that the MDC likely won the vote in every national election since 2000. The MDC's main problem, however, was in winning *recognition* of this reality and a corresponding *transfer of power*. Here, the enabling role of ZANU-PF's southern African neighbours and erstwhile allies in tolerating the party's overt manipulation of electoral processes emerged as a defining and perplexing element in Zimbabwe's continuing political crisis. Despite the refrain frequently repeated by Southern African Development Community (SADC) governments, that Zimbabweans must 'solve their problems by themselves', every attempt to do this through the ballot box since 2000 has been frustrated by the interventions of regional and continental powers – interventions skewed, almost without exception, in favour of one political player.

Was this sign of consolidation of an old boys' club among ageing liberation movement ruling parties? Of a cynical supportive stance for local nationalist-clad regimes, no matter how soiled the cloth, against the insistent and often condescending critiques of northern donors and rights activists? Or worse: of a strategy of collective mutually assured political survival in the longer term?

Yes, partly. But while regional responses to the Zimbabwe crisis often reflected such concerns, there were other factors that spoke to the continuing fragility of the wider terrain of mass-democratic politics in much of the region. Distrust of or lack of familiarity with the MDC among many regional ruling parties worked in ZANU-PF's favour – it seems clear that the model of a labour-movement-led alliance of civic and popular forces

is not one which nationalist regimes in the region wish to nurture, lest it lead by example. ZANU-PF worked hard, with the resources of the state behind it, at maintaining a diplomatic foot in the door in key regional spaces, while seeking to jam the MDC's fingers in it whenever possible.

At the same time, relatively weak and ineffectual links among regional civil society organisations helped to undermine their own capacity to lobby home governments in the region. In key countries, notably South Africa, civic interventions with government around the Zimbabwe issue were complicated by the dynamics of relations among civil society organisations and national ruling parties – which ZANU-PF was quick to exploit.

In important ways, then, ZANU-PF enjoyed a relatively open space to play out its revamped nationalist hand in the region – an advantage that dovetailed powerfully with its efforts to marginalise international initiatives against ZANU-PF's electoral and human rights abuses, while appealing to SADC to oversee 'normalisation' of the political order inside the country. The outcome was a fragile political equilibrium that saw ZANU-PF come through a series of flawed elections still in power, and dominating a thwarted, increasingly divided opposition MDC – the party split into two entirely separate entities in 2005 following deepening leadership and strategic wrangles – and a similarly factionalised, weakened and wearied civil society.

### **Class formation, revisited**

This uneasy political *status quo*, placed against the backdrop of a weakened state, low transparency and pervasive influence of securocrats, facilitated a significant restructuring of class interests in the ruling party leadership in the 2000s. This development saw the *institutionalisation* of elite-organised violence at the centre of Zimbabwe's political economy. At critical junctures of political challenge (like elections) and accumulation opportunity (whether on the land, in diamond fields or in urban vending markets), organised violent interventions would prove decisive in sustaining the ZANU-PF ruling coalition. By 2010, this fact – not the choices of Zimbabweans as expressed through their votes – would come to weigh heavily on the terrain of national electoral politics and economic policy making.

The massive shift of agrarian commercial assets in the first part of the decade – a process which is still not fully understood and about which reliable evidence remains thin – initiated a period of unprecedented reallocation of public and private productive assets. Much of this was hidden from view, the exact identities of the players and competing political factions unannounced. But it is clear from glimpsed cases of shifting ownership in commercial agriculture, parastatals, public infrastructure, mining and services, among other sectors, that substantial factors of accumulation agglomerated in political-security business networks; that this happened through irregular means, beyond the direct and transparent control of the state bureaucracy and legal system; and that this unfolding of events had profoundly negative implications for the resuscitation of a democratic development state.

Restructuring of the political-business elite in the 2000s was not simply a matter of including new 'briefcase businessmen' in the circles of state-dependent accumulation – a phenomenon seen earlier in the 1980s when politically connected entrepreneurs used access to import licences, foreign currency and other rationed production inputs, and in the 1990s under ESAP, when soft loans, government contracts and pressures for 'indigenisation' fleetingly provided new points of business entry for the black petite bourgeoisie. Those earlier forms of accumulation were relatively openly structured, and animated and sustained to a large extent by the ZANU-PF government's policy.

In the 2000s, elite accumulation increasingly went off-grid: out of reach of transparent regulation by government; primarily benefiting a small predatory cadre without systematic ‘empowerment’ redistributive concerns; and frequently, overlapping with regional ‘parallel markets’ and criminal networks. If accumulation and new class formation were driven in the first two decades of independence by state-based policy making, in the third it was often hidden behind a veil of secrecy, operating on the edges of the state and enabled by business-security networks patronised by competing ZANU-PF factional blocs with links to the military and political wings of the party. Indeed the prospect of a rehabilitated, professional Zimbabwean state *stood in the way* of the new accumulation project – whereas in the past it had been employed to nurture it.

The convergence of political, security and business interests in opaque and powerful networks was chillingly illustrated in the emergence of Zimbabwe’s own ‘blood diamonds’ in 2006.<sup>16</sup> The discovery of alluvial diamonds in the eastern district of Marange was soon followed by the arrival of state security agencies, led by the police and army, to ‘secure’ the diamond fields against illegal miners and smuggling networks. In short time, reports of extensive human rights abuses started flowing from the area, along with indications that security-forces personnel were involved in illegal mining and smuggling. In successive military-style and violent ‘operations’, hundreds of informal miners, traders and innocent locals died violently at the hands of security forces; untold numbers suffered rape, assault, illegal detention, forced labour, harassment and, for locals living near the diamond fields, forced removals.

Opposition parties and civil society, including the media, struggled to prevent the violence and mounting corruption and criminality. So did the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KP), the international organisation with a mandate to certify rough diamonds as ‘conflict-free’ in advance of export. The KP and its consensus-driven processes were repeatedly manipulated by ZANU-PF to blunt its investigative and censoring powers. Meanwhile, local civil society organisations and other investigators working on Marange diamonds were prevented from freely accessing the region to assist victims of rights abuses and compile evidence of who was responsible for, and benefiting from, the chaos.

Marange starkly illustrated a contradiction at the centre of ZANU-PF’s revised nationalist project: the entrenchment of narrowed elitist securitised power in the state and economy, amid deepening exclusion of constituencies that previously had formed its bedrock support. The political outcome was widespread desertion of the party by voters; a problem exacerbated by the withering of ZANU-PF traditional grassroots structures by the violence of the 2000s, which was nonetheless manageable by means of highly organised election manipulation – and the abiding tolerance of ZANU-PF’s SADC friends.

But there were limits to this strategy. The economic repercussions of continuing donor and investor boycotts, hyperinflationary spending under Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) Governor Gideon Gono, and the crash of the formal-sector economy, undermined the sustainability of any ZANU-PF accumulation project resting on coercion. ‘Legitimacy’ became a key sought-after economic commodity, and ZANU-PF identified new elections as the key means to achieve it while retaining overall control of the transition to ‘normality’.

In this context, the 2008 parliamentary and presidential elections were a hallmark of the contradictory political and economic imperatives within the restructured ZANU-PF *status quo*. The elections were held under slightly improved rules of procedure negotiated by South African mediators that temporarily closed loopholes which in the past had been used to control the poll *count* if not the vote itself. ZANU-PF had agreed to these changes, sufficiently confident of gaining a plurality in the context of a divided opposition –

part of which had already expressed interest in a government of ‘national unity’. But the party had woefully misjudged the situation – the depth of anger towards ZANU-PF, even in rural areas where it had once ruled unchallenged; the opposition and civil society’s careful attention to vote-counting procedures, which made it difficult to cook the count; and the enduring popularity of the main bloc of the MDC led by Morgan Tsvangirai, which made large gains in all parts of the country, among all class and ethnic constituencies.

The surprise results of the first round of voting on 29 March 2008 – the combined opposition MDC won 109 seats to ZANU-PF’s 97 – suddenly threatened to set in motion a transfer of power. There were days of ominous silence from ZANU-PF and its sounding-board state media – reruns on television of FIFA World Cup Finals of years past, endless American action movies, Swahili children’s programming – *anything* except the officially indeterminate state of Zimbabwean current affairs – as the old guard debated how to extricate itself from the mess of democracy. Its answer became clear as state security forces, war vets and youth militias were deployed to viciously attack MDC officials and supporters, but also significantly, traditional ZANU-PF areas that had turned against the party in March. With this – an unprecedented and sustained attack on ZANU-PF’s heartland structures and constituents, unambiguously labelled ‘Operation *Makavhoterapapi?*’ (‘where did you put your vote?’) – the ruling coalition of elitist securitised interests in ZANU-PF buried the old mass-based movement that had prosecuted the liberation war. The central challenge facing any transition in the near term was also drawn into focus: the security apparatus, namely the ZANU-PF-aligned military, now openly claimed the role of arbiter of power in any transfer of authority to a new political order.<sup>17</sup>

Since 2008, the threat of institutionalised violence by state security agencies has been a key vector shaping the trajectory of political restructuring, dragging the country away from the edge of democratic transition and all of the uncertainties that holds for the ZANU-PF leadership. For Tsvangirai’s MDC, the perception of this military threat by *others* – including most SADC governments, foreign donors and diplomats – was a key obstacle to securing recognition of its win in March 2008 (Kwinjeh 2008). The power-sharing Global Political Agreement (GPA) signed in September 2008 was effectively imposed on the MDC through diplomatic and coercive pressure, and had little to do with the fair and accurate representation of Zimbabweans’ political voice as expressed through their votes.

### **Compromised equilibrium?**

With such problematic origins it is unsurprising that the GPA has been ineffective in meeting its key objectives: among them, demilitarising the political space, tackling rights abuses, preparing a new constitution, readying the country for a new round of free and fair elections within two years, and importantly, reintroducing a sense of order grounded in economic recovery.

In contrast, the GPA increasingly appears to have been most efficient in serving the instrumental needs of the ZANU-PF elite (Ndlovu 2008). It has provided a flimsy but sufficient veneer of legitimacy while facilitating ZANU-PF’s continued access to strategic levers of state power – including the defence, security, police, foreign affairs and information portfolios, as well as control over state prosecutions through the Attorney-General’s office, and responsibility for strategic resource extraction sectors like mining and agriculture. These instruments have been turned overwhelmingly to meet partisan ends.<sup>18</sup> The GPA may be a ‘stalemate’, but it is one tilted unmistakably in the ZANU-PF elite’s favour. And while incremental gains have been made – for example, disastrous

hyperinflation ended with the dollarisation of the economy, although continuing dollarisation is rife with hazards in the longer term – these are primarily gains only in comparison to manifestly unacceptable and unsustainable conditions in the recent past.

In the meantime, continuing secretive and partisan exploitation of national resources, including assets in the agrarian and mining sectors, stand the risk of fuelling renewed capacity for ZANU-PF violence in the future as political-cum-security business networks move to defend themselves on the terrain of the state. Here, Marange is a sobering example of not only the depth and extent of political-security-criminal linkages; but also the efficiency with which they have made use of state power and illegal violence; the relative weaknesses of regulatory bodies and oversight institutions; and the comparatively high tolerance of governments in the region – for whatever reason – for such overtly shady behaviour.

Some of the worst human rights abuses at Marange occurred *after* the GPA was signed in September 2008. In ways that would be symptomatic for the unity government more broadly, the state appeared to nurture the *consolidation* of criminality at Marange under the direction of security and political interests. Using its strategic ministerial powers, ZANU-PF severely restricted access to Marange or information about developments there, amid documented allegations of continuing rights abuses, revenue diversion and illegal exports of diamonds by the state mining parastatal. The MDC seemed helpless to alter the situation – as was the KP – as ZANU-PF skilfully lobbied regional and other allies within the KP to hold off censure, while attacking and threatening local civil society diamond researchers working in Marange.<sup>19</sup> For some, the new government's handling of Marange represented a 'litmus test': if the grip of overtly criminal and politically partisan diamond networks could not be dislodged by the new government, what hope was there for the wider 'normalisation' of the national political economy?

In late 2010, the outcome of that 'litmus test' remains unclear, and stands as an example of the new and complex kinds of challenges faced more broadly across southern and east Africa by democratic movements calling for political and economic participation and equity. Is it possible to establish viable transitional government structures incorporating powerful constituencies with a vested interest in *preventing* real transition and transformation of political-economic systems? Can regional democracies and economies be counted on for meaningful support for change, particularly when similar voices of change become stronger across borders and threaten old orders and tired, threadbare political rhetoric? Can entrenched security and business interests, increasingly extended across regional borders, be effectively disintegrated by weakened states and vulnerable civil-society constituencies? Thirty years on from independence, the last vestiges of Zimbabwe's popular development state project lies in ruins, and civil society voices demanding a return to authentic participatory politics remain under attack and divided.

Zimbabwe's lessons for the region are not hopeful, and point to the residual creative survival capacities of late nationalist ruling elites and the corrupt and sometimes criminalised networks of accumulation they helped establish. A crucial remaining question is whether anyone or any institution, in Southern Africa or beyond, has the willpower *and* the means to challenge this situation. The regional proliferation of late-nationalist regimes, each with their own networks of politically brokered accumulation, assembled behind veils of corruption and concealment; the fallout of market excesses and ineffective supervisory regulation; and the weakness and halting, mostly ineffective interventions of international governments and organisations; suggest that the struggle to recoup popular control over markets, states and democratic transitions will be a long and difficult one.

**Note on contributor**

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**Notes**

1. See for example, the collection of critical essays in Mandaza (1986).
2. Raftopoulos (1992), p. 64.
3. See Bond and Manyanya (2002).
4. See Saunders (2000).
5. See for example, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, and Legal Resources Foundation (1997). The report, based on research of security forces, ruling party and dissident activity in two districts in Matabeleland in 1982–87, reported 2000 civilians confirmed or presumed killed by state agencies and estimated the total number of those killed at approximately 10,000. It notes that at least 10,000 were detained and that no less than 7000 were tortured or seriously wounded, the vast majority by security forces and ruling party agents.
6. See Saunders (1999).
7. Raftopoulos and Phimister (2004), p. 356.
8. The MDC, a party formed in 1999, was established under the patronage of the labour movement and other leading membership-based civil-society organisations. The bulk of its initial leadership and organisational capacity came from the labour structures of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions and its affiliates, although it soon grew substantially to include a broad range of social forces.
9. See Bond and Saunders (2005).
10. Moyo and Yeros (2007). For a contrasting view which considers ZANU-PF in the 2000s in the context of fascism, see Scarnecchia (2006).
11. For example, the ‘Public Order and Security Act’, which replaced the draconian Rhodesian ‘Law and Order (Maintenance) Act’, and the ‘Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act’, which targeted media houses, journalists and the communication of information. Both were rushed through Parliament by ZANU-PF in advance of the 2002 presidential elections (as were other Acts amending and restricting citizenship and voting rights, rights of monitoring agencies to observe and report on voting, and so forth).
12. Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (2006).
13. UN Special Envoy on Human Settlements Issues in Zimbabwe (2005). See also reports by a range of local civil-society and academic researchers, including Bracking (2005), Solidarity Peace Trust (2005) and Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (2005).
14. Supreme Court Justices and High Court judges were harassed into resignation and replaced by overtly partisan appointments by President Mugabe, while defence attorneys, public prosecutors, paralegals and other frontline justice workers were targeted for attack – in many instances by the police themselves; ‘disloyal’ civil servants were threatened, marginalised or irregularly and sometimes violently removed from their posts; the state security agencies’ officer corps was politically audited; opposition parliamentarians were besieged (more than half of the MDC’s Members of Parliament were reportedly detained at one time or another in this period); and the public media were ruthlessly brought under the direct control of Information Minister Jonathan Moyo, who forced the closure of five privately owned newspapers as he moved to criminalise critical journalism. Ranking defence force and Central Intelligence Organisation personnel increasingly were placed in senior management positions in the government bureaucracy and parastatals, and long-standing structures established to facilitate tripartite consultation were gutted.
15. All GDP, wage and poverty figures in this section from LEDRIZ (2006).
16. Saunders (2010). See also recent published reports documenting the role of security forces and political interests in Marange, including, Partnership Africa-Canada (2010), Global Witness (2010), Human Rights Watch (2009), and the Zimbabwe civil society coalition on blood diamonds (2009).
17. The orgy of violence perpetrated in support of ZANU-PF between the March and June polls saw more than 150 opposition supporters killed and thousands assaulted and displaced from their

home voting areas (Human Rights Watch 2008, Solidarity Peace Trust 2008). Coupled with extraordinary post-vote interventions by the Mugabe-appointed electoral commission, including its delay of more than a month in announcing the results of the first round of presidential voting while ZANU-PF violence raged, dispelled any notion that a second round of voting for President in June could be legitimate. Tsvangirai, who had officially polled 47.9% to Mugabe's 43.2% in March, subsequently withdrew from the second-round run-off, leaving Mugabe to 'win' with 86% of the vote. The June vote result was widely rejected – including by official African observer teams including the Pan-African Parliament Election Observer Mission, African Union Observer Mission and SADC's own team.

18. Research and Advocacy Unit (2010). This paper includes a critique of another position more supportive of sustaining the GPA, by the Solidarity Peace Trust (2010).
19. In June 2010, Farai Maguwu, director of the Centre for Research and Development, a key organisation investigating Marange diamonds, was arrested and held for passing on information critical of the Zimbabwe government. This latest attack, designed to silence a leading critic and his organisation in the midst of a KP review of Marange's export-worthiness, reflected ZANU-PF's extreme sensitivity on the issue of the lucrative illegal diamonds sector – as well as the benefits of its hardline approach. At the KP Intercessional Meeting in late June 2010, where Zimbabwe was the centre of debate, ZANU-PF's international friends and allies again saved Marange's criminalised mining regime from suspension.

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## DEBATE

### The end of the oil gambit: economic contraction and Africa

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#### Introduction: Peak Oil

In November 2009, the UK newspaper the *Guardian* ran a series of articles on 'Peak Oil' highlighting, among other points, claims that the International Energy Agency (IEA) had been downplaying the extent of the decline in world oil reserves and hence future production capacity. These claims were denied by the IEA, but a commentary by the doyen of Peak Oil theory, Colin Campbell, provided his own estimate indicating that oil production of all types, including oil from shale and tar sands, peaked in 2008. In his view, conventional crude oil production peaked in 2005, a view which broadly corresponds to that of Matthew Simmons, another leading figure in the Peak Oil debate, who unfortunately died recently.

Campbell's work has been criticised as having predicted peak oil at earlier dates, only to be proved wrong. His estimate in 2009 explains that he did not have access to accurate data for quite a long time, but that this is now available. So there is more reason now to take his present claim seriously, especially when it corroborates other estimates which were independently arrived at. In any case, the Association for the Study of Peak Oil (ASPO) was predicting beforehand that the oil peak was likely to occur between 2004 and 2008, so it now

seems that ASPO was broadly correct, at least in its predictions after the year 2000. For the purposes of debate, this article will assume that the oil peak has already arrived and it will examine some of the implications, particularly in Africa.

A series of websites has pointed out many of these implications, as well as providing regular updates on current economic problems believed to be related to the peak in oil production. Here I provide my own points, influenced by various sources. First, there is no easy substitute for oil in terms of the amount of energy per cubic centimetre. Second, there is an existing infrastructure for distribution and storage, which will be difficult to replace as energy supplies decline. Third, it is the major source of chemical feedstock for fertiliser, pesticides and various polymers. Fourth, while natural gas can be transformed into aviation fuel, and coal can be transformed into some petroleum-type products, this also takes energy, which will make substituting with these sources more difficult as overall world energy supplies decline. Fifth, this point also applies to some extent to solar, wind, tidal and hydroelectric power. They depend on physical inputs such as glass, steel, concrete and photovoltaic (PV) cells that take a fair amount of energy to produce. It has been argued that investing in such sources is borrowing from the future. At the end of their investment and operating life cycle, it is not entirely clear how they could be reproduced. It may be possible to produce

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cheaper PV cells in future, and there is news of cheaper wind power technology recently developed in Edinburgh, but the overall impact of these changes is not clear.

The above points all imply that the world is facing more serious economic difficulties than is usually envisaged in most commentaries about the current 'recession' or 'downturn'. These terms give the impression that present difficulties are temporary, and that a return to growth will soon take place. The debate tends to be about whether the recession will have a V shape, a U shape or a W shape (the latter implying a double-dip recession). What is rarely considered is the possibility of something like an L shape, where recovery takes a very long time or does not take place at all. While that may seem depressingly pessimistic, unless viable alternatives to oil can be found,<sup>1</sup> then ongoing economic contraction, or at best stasis, remains more likely than growth over the longer term.

Before attempting to explore at least some of the implications of Peak Oil for Africa, it is worth examining some of the main contenders for alternative sources of electrical power generation.

### Peak Gas

There are greater reserves of natural gas now than of oil, and it will last for some years longer than oil; this makes sources of gas, including gas flared off from many oil wells, worth utilising as soon as possible to ease the transition to a post-oil world economy. One of the major sources of gas is Russia, and the recent discoveries of new reserves in the Arctic have already led to heightened military tension there. Because oil and natural gas frequently occur together, the political and economic implications are often discussed together, but the later peak in gas production will become increasingly important, and African sources will become the object of increasing competition. Such competition is already very clear in the Caucasus,

Central Asia and East Asia, with various pipelines being proposed, and some already being built. As in Africa, one can discern a military approach to securing energy supplies by the US, backed by the rest of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as against an economic approach adopted by China and other 'emerging economies'.

### Peak Coal

It is widely asserted that there is plenty of coal left, and the main problem is seen as being that its emissions of carbon dioxide are a problem for climate change. The US and China are then usually mentioned as the biggest users of coal for electricity generation, and the biggest threat to any policy of reduction of carbon emissions.<sup>2</sup> However, while it is true that China is building a lot of new coal-fired power stations, and that the US is also increasing its capacity to a lesser extent, it is not entirely clear where the coal will come from, or how long it will last. To take the US as an example, since it has about one quarter of total global coal reserves, estimated stocks that are actually accessible are slightly less than half of the declared reserves. This is an economic calculation, and takes no account of an underlying factor that will increasingly come to dominate calculations of accessibility of coal reserves (as well as shale oil and some other oil sources). This underlying factor is *net energy gain*. In other words, if it takes more energy to extract a mineral energy source than is gained from that source, it is not worth extracting it. Economics will eventually be forced into line with the underlying geology, physics and chemistry of mineral energy extraction. Despite claims that there are hundreds of years' worth of coal in the ground, we may also be rapidly approaching the era of Peak Coal.

The recent interest in the coal deposits in Moatize, Mozambique, should be seen in this context. It seems that China, India

and Brazil are all interested, because the quality of the coking coal is high and the size of the deposits is enormous, giving them a global significance. This also has direct implications for South Africa's energy future, especially if it does not gain access to this coal, and if a proposed hydroelectric dam on the Zambezi in Mozambique is not built.

### Peak Uranium

The current worldwide plans for construction of new nuclear power stations imply a doubling of capacity for nuclear power generation within a fairly short timescale. No country is seriously planning to generate electricity from nuclear fusion. Plutonium has also been ruled out, although there may be pressure to change that when uranium supply shortages become acute.

Evidently, individual countries have made their plans without reference to others, and it is not at all clear that there is sufficient uranium to supply all of these power plants. Although it has been pointed out in the UK press by the Member of Parliament Michael Meacher that the US is already partly reliant on importing uranium from decommissioned Russian nuclear weapons, no one (in public at least) seems to have taken on board the implications. One estimate is that if all the current plans for new nuclear power stations are implemented, then there is only enough uranium for 20 years worldwide. Since that is less than the design life of many nuclear power stations, this implies a crisis within a fairly short timescale (given the lead times for the construction of such power plants). Will this lead to military as well as economic competition for uranium supplies? It may already have done so in North Africa.

Some argue that nuclear power will help mitigate the effects of declining oil output. This argument is clearly spurious. Nuclear power only provides about 2% of total world electricity production. Doubling capacity as planned only gives us 4%.

This is self-evidently only a very small part of any process of substituting other fuels for oil and gas in electricity generation.<sup>3</sup> Nuclear cannot substitute at all for oil and gas as a chemical feedstock, although it might conceivably be used in commercial shipping.

Looking at sources of uranium supply, the implications for Africa become clearer. The main sources are in Australia, Canada, Kazakhstan and Russia, but other secondary sources can be found in Sudan, Algeria, Nigeria, Namibia and South Africa. Russian companies have bought shares in Australian and Canadian uranium suppliers, and deals seem to have been struck by Putin in Namibia and South Africa. A Russian deal with Kazakhstan seems to have fallen through, with the Kazakhs preferring instead a little-known UK company. Despite this, the overall picture on uranium has Russia in quite a strong position, especially when it is also selling uranium from decommissioned nuclear warheads. Given that Russia already has some access to uranium from southern Africa, then the North African sources become especially important, most notably to France, a country which derives 80% of its electricity from nuclear power. The UK must also look to these sources, even if it does not increase the proportion of its electricity coming from nuclear power very much. Currently, it is 18%.

Incredibly, there is an alternative form of nuclear power generation that is clean and proven (by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration [NASA]) but which has been ignored in nuclear-power policy making. This is thorium, which is for practical purposes self-cleaning, thereby avoiding most of the waste storage and disposal costs associated with uranium. In addition to its other advantages, thorium would allow small-scale decentralised nuclear power generation. Although it was developed some decades ago, this technology has recently been brought to the attention of President

Barack Obama, and was also evaluated a few years ago in France. The French nuclear authorities ignored this solution, and there seems to have been no public response from the Obama administration. This leads one to the conclusion that there are fears about the terrorist implications of more widely distributed nuclear material, or that there are vested interests in large-scale power generation and transmission line infrastructure, or that uranium-based nuclear power is really desired as a source of nuclear weapons. It could conceivably be a mix of all three motives, but at present it looks as if thorium is not going to be utilised, except perhaps in spacecraft.

### **Economic contraction and US dominance**

Clearly, unless countries develop sustainable and renewable sources of energy supply, the Russians are hard to avoid. This has implications for those who argue in favour of reducing European dependence on Russian gas, or Central Asian gas transiting through Russia. Such advocates seem blithely unaware of the fact that Russia and Kazakhstan are building gas pipelines to China, and Turkmenistan seems about to follow suit. The Russians are also trying to gain access to gas sources in Africa. This includes *Gazprom*, one of the biggest companies in the world, bidding to build the proposed gas pipeline from the Gulf of Guinea to Algeria, where it would connect with Algerian pipelines crossing the Mediterranean into Europe.

Economic growth, especially that component of it arising from improved productivity, derives from various sources, but the most potent of them are organic and inorganic sources of non-human energy. Good forms of social organisation are a secondary source of increasing productivity. Since the discovery of oil in Pennsylvania in 1859, the main source of economic growth has been oil, which has since the beginning of the twentieth century increasingly replaced coal as the

prime energy source. It has also replaced coal as the prime source of chemical feedstock, and hence of new materials.<sup>4</sup>

The decline in this source of energy, which is evidently very difficult to replace with conventional technology, carries the serious threat of a reversal of the economic growth experienced over the last century or so. Such a reversal of fortunes, whether it is stagnation or economic contraction (or as one commentator has argued, hyperinflationary depression) is very difficult for any political leadership to sell to its own population.

Much of the current world pattern of economic activity will become difficult to sustain as oil output declines. World trade will contract, not only because of reduced activity in many countries, but also because shipping will need to rely less on oil, and this probably entails smaller ships, with possibly a return to sailing ships of some kind in at least part of the shipping sector. The economies of scale of larger container ships may partially disappear and hence shipping costs could rise more than the rising price of oil. At present shipping companies are running on very small profit margins and new shipping capacity is about to come on to the world market, which could be a tipping point into insolvency for some major shipping companies.

In terms of food production, agribusiness depends on oil for fertilisers, pesticides, transport and storage. Canned food may partially replace frozen food and any fresh food that is flown long distances. Genetically modified (GM) food depends on the right fertilisers, although they may reduce the use of pesticides. However, they do not provide a solution to growing food shortages and declining world food stocks because the main reason for such declines is a growing shortage of water in agricultural surplus areas. There is little evidence of research on drought-resistant GM crops.<sup>5</sup> In a situation of growing world population, declining food production

threatens large-scale famine, with Africa being particularly vulnerable.

It is particularly difficult for the US to acknowledge the problem of potential slowing or reversal of economic growth. It is a major importer of oil, but more important is the role of the US dollar as an international reserve currency, the metric in which international trade deals are calculated. Oil contracts as well as trade in many other goods and services are set in US dollars. This privileged function depends in large part on US control of oil prices. Over the years, there has been a shift away from dominance by the 'oil majors' such as ExxonMobil, BP, Shell and Chevron in many oil-producing countries, and they have been replaced by national oil companies, usually state-owned ones. As a result, the US has come to rely on military dominance to ensure its dominant position in oil markets. This was made clear in the 1970s with the Carter Doctrine, which stated that the US would use any means, including if necessary military force, to ensure oil supplies from the Middle East. The reason that the Middle East is so important in this respect is that roughly 60% of world oil reserves are located in a triangle with its apex in Kirkuk in northern Iraq and its base traversing the Gulf from eastern Saudi Arabia to eastern Iran. There are also considerable supplies of natural gas within the same triangle.

Consequently, the response of the US to the imminent oil peak has been to increase military spending. This is because its own growing imports of oil (roughly 60% of US oil consumption) and the growing economic competition from the 'emerging economies' have left it economically vulnerable.<sup>6</sup> The growing demand for oil, which induces some of the same economic effects as reaching the peak of oil production, results from the fact that the emerging economies need oil for their own industry and agriculture. Furthermore, the increase in world trade (at least prior to the financial crisis that started in 2007)

has meant a huge demand for oil to power container ships.

While the US obtains some oil from the Middle East, it mainly imports from Latin America. Military control of the Middle East enables it to maintain a stranglehold on oil flowing to its potential economic competitors, and to maintain its control over world oil markets, sustaining the US dollar in international financial markets. With a decline in world oil output, the role of the US dollar as a reserve currency is increasingly in jeopardy, and several countries have started discussions about its partial replacement.

While US companies have recently obtained the lion's share of oil contracts in Iraq, the ongoing unrest in the Middle East has led to a growing US dependence on African oil sources. Since about 2003 the US has declared Africa to be of major strategic interest, and it is official policy to source 25% of its oil from Africa. This figure has already been reached, more or less, but interest in Africa remains strong partly because Angola is an ongoing source of new oilfields and increasing production, and other smaller fields are being discovered in other countries. Angola looks as if it is about to overtake Nigeria as the largest oil exporter from Africa. The imminent danger of economic contraction means that African oil is of growing importance. This development has been accentuated by the fact that output from traditional Latin American sources of US oil imports, such as Mexico, has been declining rapidly, while other countries such as Venezuela have been striking deals with the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) countries. The response of the US has been to strengthen military ties with Colombia, Peru, Chile and Paraguay, thereby raising tensions with Venezuela and Argentina, among others. It remains to be seen how much the activities of AFRICOM (Africa Command, established in 2008 by the US Department of Defense) will raise tensions in Africa.

## AFRICOM

The establishment of AFRICOM, the United States Africa Command, did not appear out of nowhere. As Jeremy Keenan has shown in *The dark Sahara* (2009), the conditions for US military intervention in Africa were created, at least in part, by the activities of the so-called Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Keenan argues that AQIM is really an entity set up and run by the Algerian government intelligence/security sector, and he provides considerable evidence for his view. The activities of AQIM certainly helped legitimise US intervention in the Sahel and Sahara.

In addition to those developments, the foundation of AFRICOM was the result of several years of prior preparation by the US government, most notably through the discussions that led up to the founding of the Gulf of Guinea Commission in 2006. The process of establishing the Commission took place over a period extending from March 2005 until late 2006. It involved a series of three meetings of 11 countries around the Gulf of Guinea, respectively in Abuja (Nigeria), Accra (Ghana) and Cotonou (Benin), during this period. Other African countries such as Senegal also sent representatives, although the South Africans were notable by their absence. French and UK military representation was also in evidence at these meetings. The official aim of this Commission was to establish an agreement on maritime safety and security in the Gulf of Guinea, but the fact that the US Department of Defense took the initiative in organising these meetings (with the participation of the US State Department in the final one) could be seen as an indication that the main aspect of security concerning the US government was that of oil production and shipments out of Africa. This is not to deny the reality of other aspects of the Commission, including illegal fishing, drug smuggling and piracy, but it is clear

that illegal oil bunkering is costing a great deal of money to some African governments, and that it disrupts security of supply of oil exports. With hindsight, one can guess that the willingness of Ministry of Defence and other officials from 11 African countries to sign up to a mutual or joint security agreement was viewed by the US as part of the process of building a consensus for AFRICOM. In that respect, it did not totally succeed, since no African government apart from Liberia has publicly committed itself to hosting AFRICOM. One wonders whether it was hoped that Ghana would do so. That could explain President Obama's visit there, but if that were the objective, it has not worked so far. Nevertheless, as Daniel Volman has shown, there are African governments that are perfectly happy to cooperate in activities initiated by AFRICOM.

There are intrinsic benefits of participation in the Gulf of Guinea Commission for African governments. It is concerned with maritime safety and security, and encourages cooperation among African governments on these issues, with technical support provided by the US (for example on coastguard matters). As a result, it should be easier to detect illegal fishing, smuggling, illegal oil bunkering and environmental damage through improved intergovernmental cooperation and enhanced technical capacity in these areas. In addition, while financial support was not promised during the discussions leading to the Commission being set up, the Gulf of Guinea countries have doubtless been the recipients of financial as well as technical support from the US for maritime purposes.

This helps to explain why some African countries are willing to cooperate also with AFRICOM, despite the general refusal to host its headquarters. No doubt at least some African countries are hoping for similar largesse from AFRICOM, and this has already appeared, at least in the form of training courses and in some cases,

arms. The result has been that AFRICOM has been able to run a series of military exercises in Africa, with the participation of various African countries. In addition, in North Africa, there has been a series of actions under the aegis of trans-Saharan security that have been discussed by Jeremy Keenan. As with the Gulf of Guinea Commission, these preceded AFRICOM but have continued after AFRICOM was formally inaugurated. Many of these military exercises have involved African countries with oil reserves, and the Saharan events, which resulted in the inadvertent fomenting of a rebellion by the Tuareg, might be considered as a misguided attempt to secure any future trans-Saharan gas pipeline from the Gulf of Guinea to Algeria. However, these events might also have been motivated by a desire to secure uranium supplies in what is broadly the same area.

### Conclusion

The overall picture seems clear. Africa has grown in importance to the US and probably to Europe as a source of oil supplies, in anticipation of the effects of Peak Oil on economic growth. Africa is especially important to the US not only because it imports some 60% of its oil, but also because some of its main suppliers are likely to feel the effects of Peak Oil more rapidly than the world at large. This is especially true of Mexico. Equally important is that fact that US dominance in world oil markets underpins the role of the US dollar as the reserve currency for world trade. Given the enormous overseas debts that the US has run up in recent decades, it is only able to engage in the printing of dollars to sustain these debts because the rest of the world still demands US dollars as a means of payment, as well as for foreign exchange reserves (to cover future payments). In other words, Peak Oil directly threatens the current dominant role of the US in the world economy, and since some 60% of

other world resources exist outside the G7 countries, giving the 'emergent economies' a strategic advantage for any future economic growth, maintaining control of oil supplies is vital for the future of the US. It is evidently prepared to secure such control by military means. It is to be hoped that this does not lead to major wars, whether in Africa or elsewhere.

### Notes

1. Biofuels will be ignored here, since it has long been clear that they cannot be grown on a sufficient scale globally without jeopardising food supplies. This is not to rule out other possibilities such as algae, but these need to be assessed.
2. With regard to the global warming debate, it is worth pointing out that insofar as carbon dioxide is a contributor to global warming, a reduction in oil and coal supplies will mitigate the problem in the future. Whether this would happen in time and on a sufficient scale to reduce major predicted impacts of climate change is a different issue. However, while it is not a central theme of this argument, it is worth registering the point that this author does not accept the scientific basis of claims that global warming is anthropogenic, that is, 'man-made'. First, the global climate records going back thousands of years indicate very clearly that carbon dioxide levels rise only centuries, and in some cases millennia, *after* global warming takes place. There is certainly a correlation between global warming and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, but the time-lag self-evidently shows that the causation is the reverse of that usually claimed. Second, the more recent data sets take no account of the medieval warming period, despite the publicly acknowledged fact that there is simply insufficient evidence to show if this warming was confined to the northern hemisphere. If it was not, then the time series used to demonstrate global warming in recent centuries is fundamentally flawed. Other flaws in this time series have been pointed out, including the use of data in China that relied on weather stations near urban areas. Third, other scientific estimates using plausible data sets indicate that the world was warmer some 6000 years ago, and the drastic

consequences now predicted did not occur then. Fourth, evidence exists that all major bodies in the solar system have in recent decades started to show an excess of thermal and/or electromagnetic energy, leading one to suspect that the cause of global warming is astronomical. Fifth, a peer-reviewed scientific paper using observational data shows that carbon dioxide actually leads to *cooling*, owing to the fact that it generates cloud cover which has a net cooling effect. This is not only the exact opposite of the usual claims, but would explain why carbon dioxide only increases many years after global warming takes place, in the time series data. One could go on, but the idea that ‘climate change deniers’ are adopting a right-wing obscurantist position is simply false. There are many competent scientists of various political persuasions who dispute the current consensus. It is a matter of proper appraisal of relevant evidence, something that those arguing in favour of AGW (Anthropogenic Global Warming) have failed to demonstrate.

3. This also applies to arguments that uranium-based nuclear power can mitigate global warming. It is simply too small a component of the overall energy picture worldwide.
4. One small implication of a decline in oil output is that nylon may be replaced by sisal and jute for rope and sacking respect-

ively. These crops have historically been grown in Africa.

5. To my knowledge, few companies are engaged in research on food crops that grow in salt water, and only one company is using glass to evaporate seawater and use the resulting condensed freshwater to irrigate arid land near the coast.
6. The most important emerging economies are Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC, as defined by the influential Goldman Sachs). Russia has large reserves of oil and gas, while in Brazil new oil discoveries offshore should come on stream within about five years.

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## DEBATE

### Offshore finance in Ghana: why not?

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I was somewhat surprised by a newspaper headline in January 2010, ‘Tax haven risks corruption, OECD warns Ghana’ (Mathiason 2010).<sup>1</sup> As a researcher on offshore financial centres (OFCs), also known as tax havens, for a number of years this attribution to Ghana, as a tax haven, appeared at first glance as somewhat exceptional. There are a number of lists identifying either tax havens or OFCs but none include Ghana (see OECD 2000, p. 17, Tax Justice Network 2007, Zoromé 2007, p. 19, Palan *et al.* 2010, pp. 41–44).<sup>2</sup> Consequently, a question took root in my mind: why was the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), paragon of developed-state virtue, chastising Ghana? Since my initial encounter with this headline I have pursued an answer to this question, only to arrive at the title question to this intervention. In the following discussion I seek to assess the grounds for the OECD statement, and then to counter it with my own question: why not?

Let me begin then by looking at what is behind the OECD statement, and its explicit belief that the presence of an offshore financial centre ‘in the centre of the African continent’ would serve to ‘fuel corruption and crime in west Africa’ (Mathiason 2010). In 2005 Ghana initiated a process to explore the establishment of an offshore

banking facility with the advice of Barclays Bank Ghana, which in turn commissioned a study from Grant Thornton Mauritius (the Mauritius office of an international accountancy firm). The feasibility study led to Barclays Bank Ghana receiving the task of outlining the legal framework necessary to establish an international banking facility in Ghana (Amediku 2006, p. 9, Barclays Bank of Ghana 2007). Following on from this assignment to help Ghana craft the necessary legislation, Barclays was granted the first offshore banking licence, as announced in a press release from the bank in 2007, ‘Barclays Bank of Ghana Limited Launches Offshore Banking in Ghana’ (Barclays Bank of Ghana 2007). The ‘Country Overview’ page for Barclays Bank in Ghana declares that:

The Barclays Offshore Banking Unit, the first of its kind in Ghana and indeed Africa South of the Sahara, continues to offer world class banking service to non-resident private clients and corporates.<sup>3</sup>

This statement represents the extent of material concerning offshore banking services offered by the bank on its website. Moreover, the Offshore Banking Unit is not separately identified in Barclays Bank Ghana’s Annual Report for 2009.

On the surface none of this information appears to be substantial grounds for the OECD concern, particularly when Jeffrey Owens, director of the OECD’s Centre for Tax Policy and Administration, was

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quoted in that same newspaper article to the effect that government officials in Ghana were ‘aware of the risks they are running’ (Mathiason 2010). The risks as well as the benefits connected with an offshore financial centre were outlined in a Bank of Ghana study on the ‘Development of offshore financial services centre in Ghana: issues and implications’, produced as guidance for establishing an OFC in Ghana (Amediku 2006). First, this document included the standard disclaimer that it represents the views of its author and not necessarily the views of the organisation for which it was prepared and that statement is accompanied by a statement on the cover page indicating that the Working Paper series of the Bank of Ghana is ‘intended to provide analytical information to support the work of the Monetary Policy Committee’ (Amediku 2006, p. 1). The objective is reasonably satisfied in this particular study, which started from a description of the international financial services centre (IFSC) followed by a description of the institutional structures (infrastructure) necessary to support the IFSC – regulatory, organisational and operational. After setting out the responsibilities for oversight expected from the Bank of Ghana itself the study concludes with several questions ‘for further interdisciplinary research’ (Amediku 2006, p. 34).

Successful OFCs, as such, are for the most part small jurisdictions with limited economic development options. As discussed elsewhere in more detail, the OFC is particularly suited to Caribbean and Pacific islands because it is a low-impact, high-gain strategy for economic development; there is a limited direct impact to local businesses and environment while at the same time the OFC generates rents for the government from licence fees and income taxes from firms operating in the offshore sector (Vlcek 2008, pp. 24–25). These benefits were also noted in the Bank of Ghana report, which then referred to Cyprus and Grenada as examples of

some of the beneficial aspects of hosting an OFC (Amediku 2006, pp. 20–21). These two small states are not necessarily the best examples for use in a study to promote the establishment of a new OFC. Cyprus effectively removed the ‘offshore’ distinction from its financial sector in connection with EU accession, while Grenada experienced a number of financial fraud and government corruption scandals in connection with its offshore banking industry, leaving only one (which was under investigation) operating at the end of 2004 (Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs 2005, pp. 165–168, 211–213). The final offshore bank operating in Grenada has since closed, leaving the sector dormant though there have been statements indicating the government’s intentions for reviving the offshore centre (Caribbean Financial Action Task Force 2009, pp. 7, 20).

If, however, the definitional straitjacket for the OFC that constrains it to the small non-OECD jurisdiction is released (as implied by the section titles and analysis of the Bank of Ghana study) and the jurisdiction is identified simply as an *international* financial centre, then the range of identifiable locations grows to include London (in the larger UK economy), New York (in the much larger US economy) and Tokyo (in the larger Japan economy). Hence the underlying logic for an OFC in Ghana is not, and should not be, to provide a significant source of government revenue from licence fees or increased employment opportunities for citizens with a university education as was the rationale in small jurisdictions. Rather it should be understood as an avenue to provide a domestic (and regional) financial intermediation capacity, to establish the foundation on which to build a more expansive domestic capital market in support of economic development.

Similar to the public statement of the OECD concerning the economic hazards represented by the presence of an OFC in

Ghana, reports from research centres and NGOs also have expressed a concern for the potential negative consequences from its establishment for Ghana, and Africa more generally. Among the specific points made are: that it will facilitate capital flight, corruption and tax evasion; that an OFC in Ghana will increase these risks to the region; that insufficient regulatory enforcement may not prevent Ghanaian residents from using these ‘offshore’ banking facilities; and the risk that the presence of the OFC ‘could contribute to financial instability’ in Ghana (Christensen 2009, p. 18, Prichard and Bentum 2009, p. 44). Yet the potential problems that are attributed to the presence of an OFC in Ghana already exist; they are not a direct result of the establishment of the OFC and consequently the problems of capital flight, corruption and tax evasion may or may not increase due to its proximity. The concern, for example, with the lost potential tax revenue due to capital flight is outlined in some detail by the Tax Justice Network report *Closing the flood-gates* (Christensen *et al.* 2007). In turn this report may be compared to a similar report produced by the US-based non-governmental organisation (NGO), Global Financial Integrity (Kar and Cartwright-Smith 2007).<sup>4</sup> The already existing capital flight identified in these reports utilised the financial services offered by more distant financial centres in Europe and North America without difficulty. In which case, beyond the question of effective enforcement raised by Prichard and Bentum, to what extent would capital flight *increase* from the presence of the OFC in Ghana as compared to the already existing capital flows labelled in these reports as capital flight?

The alternative view is that the presence of a more local OFC offers an increased potential that this capital, if placed in Ghana’s offshore banks rather than using a bank in Europe or North America, could be used for investments in Africa, a point noted by the Bank of Ghana study (Amediku 2006). Prichard and Bentum

identified this possibility as an ‘international benefit’ in their report and stated that ‘there is anecdotal evidence from elsewhere in the world that IFSC [international financial services centre] can serve to deepen regional capital markets and expand access to capital’ (Prichard and Bentum 2009, p. 45). In fact, the evidence is slightly more substantial than suggested by the word ‘anecdotal’ as indicated by the published work of several economists (Desai *et al.* 2004, Desai *et al.* 2006, Dharmapala and Hines Jr 2009). And it could be argued that the potential for investments and loans in and for Africa is a more likely occurrence from an offshore bank located in Ghana, than it is from an offshore bank located in Geneva, London or New York.

The assumption that the presence of a more convenient OFC will lead to increased capital flight means that the authors also assume that there is capital in Ghana and West Africa that would flee the region, if only the destination bank were closer. This assumption is based on a logic of geography, that physical distance matters, when anyone with the disposable income available to send it abroad presumably also has sufficient disposable income to establish and use an Internet-accessible bank account. J.C. Sharman has already established that it is possible to establish an offshore business company and open an account with a foreign bank in some jurisdictions without the rigorous identity verification procedures expected of anti-money laundering recommendations (Sharman 2010). It is interesting also to note that the more lenient jurisdictions in this regard were the US and UK and not the frequently criticised small islands of the Caribbean.

The fact of the matter is that simply establishing and maintaining the surveillance mechanisms expected in order to comply with the Financial Action Task Force’s (FATF) Forty + Nine Recommendations against money laundering and terrorist finance are just as much about constructing

an aura of compliance as they are about actually interdicting and preventing financial criminality. As amply demonstrated by the past misdeeds of Sani Abacha (Nigeria), Ferdinand Marcos (Philippines) and Mobutu Sese Seko (Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), OECD member states have not been particularly exemplary in demonstrating financial probity when accepting suspicious money. Now the response of the financial industry in the developed economies may be that these example kleptocratic rulers are old cases that pre-date the FATF (established in 1989), and that the regulatory system against financial crimes has been improved since that time. However, as a point of fact the Forty Recommendations were first implemented to deal with illegal drugs-related money laundering in the founding members of the FATF (16 developed states, including the G7), yet the system was in place and failed to identify the illicit assets of either Charles Taylor (Liberia) or Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo (Equatorial Guinea) when they were placed in banks in Europe and North America. These two examples indicate that yes, in the end, the structures created to interdict such financial misdeeds come into play, but not necessarily as a result of the ongoing surveillance by government regulators over the banking industry or the banks' regulatory compliance. Rather it was civil society, through the medium of Global Witness and the media in the case of Obiang, and United Nations and Liberian efforts to recover the assets accumulated by Taylor after his arrest and transfer to the Hague (Silverstein 2003, Carvajal 2010).

On reflection, would an OFC in Ghana provide more positives than negatives for the Ghanaian economy? The meta-question here, with respect to the negative consequences attributed to the presence and operations of the OFC in the global political economy, which came first, the supply or the demand? John Christensen, for example, highlights a claim that tax havens

provide 'a supply-side stimulus that encourages and enables grand-scale corruption' in Africa (Christensen 2009, p. 2). A consideration of Ronen Palan's genealogy of the international financial centre suggests that there was in fact a demand for the London banks to carve out a space to seek profit from the creation of the Euromarkets, which in turn Palan argues brought about the structure of OFCs as they exist today (Palan 2010). But in a deeper historical perspective, the demand is far older and created by citizens seeking a safe place to protect their assets away from the rapacious, whether king, bandit or foraging army. There is, for example, the Swiss banking industry developing in response to French nobility seeking a haven from the King's tax farmers a century before the Revolution (Faith 1982, pp. 19–22). But looking even further back in time there is the example of the Hoxne Hoard. Now resident in the British Museum, it was discovered in Suffolk in 1992 and contained coins, jewellery, silver and gold dated to the early fifth century. It is believed that this cache was buried about the time that the Roman Empire withdrew from Britain, and the owner never returned to retrieve it (British Museum 2000). The point here is that eliminating the supply of offshore banking via some international arrangement should not be seen as simultaneously removing the demand for such financial services or the desire to keep the assets one has acquired for one's self.

It needs to be acknowledged that any author's approach to discussing, analysing or critiquing the structure of international finance variously named the offshore financial centre (OFC), tax haven, secrecy haven or secrecy jurisdiction is privileged by the author's personal viewpoint against or in support of its existence.<sup>5</sup> That attitude reflects the author's social and political position in the world, their personal knowledge and life experience and probably their place of birth (and source of political awareness) as shaping a sense of moral awareness of

the world. Consequently, whatever claim may be made for rational and impartial judgment is by its very nature coloured and shaped (biased) by the author's worldview. It is that worldview that determines the theoretical approach deployed in any analysis, and the nature of the argument made justifying the conclusion reached and recommendations proposed for further action. There is at the same time operating here socially constructed understandings for the nature of the licit/illicit and legitimate/illegitimate, which, it may be argued by some, are grounded on a distinction based in law. However, the law itself is a social construct created by the state to serve the needs of the state as much as it may serve the needs of society. Hence we have the construction of 'money laundering' as a distinct criminal activity independent of the actions that generated the income (Hülse 2007, Alldridge 2008).

Clearly these points apply to any political economy study; nonetheless they bear repeating in order to emphasise first, that there is no consensus position for this specific topic of inquiry; and second, that the nature of the analysis deployed is very much situated in a developed-state context, critiquing the developed sub-state jurisdictions and developing state (and sub-state) jurisdictions that are utilising existing features of the international system/political economy for their benefit as opposed to benefiting the core developed states. The source for most criticisms of offshore finance rests in these developed states, where the harm that is generated by an OFC is its 'lost tax revenue'. The incorporation of an argument that the OFC is detrimental to development and to the developing economy serves to mask the persistent and overarching agenda that offshore finance, in the form of these 'tax havens', is detrimental to the developed state economy. Or more precisely, their financial services are detrimental to the ability of the *developed* state to prevent its residents from engaging in capital flight and avoiding taxes. The

revival of the OECD campaign against tax competition and OFCs by the G20 at its 2009 London meeting was very much about the tax revenue demands of the developed states (France, Germany). And it was a developing state, China, that hindered the efforts of the G7 on this agenda item (Fidler and Batson 2009).

All that said, the presumption made by the OECD, representing predominantly the core developed states, and the referenced NGOs (resident in these same developed states) is that the presence of an OFC in Ghana is inherently bad, both for Ghana and for West Africa. Nonetheless, as long as offshore financial services exist at some place in the world economy the negative features attributed to them would remain present while any localised economic benefits produced by the OFC would accumulate in that place. The creation of an OFC in Ghana represents an effort to capture the rents of offshore finance in Ghana, rather than leaving them to be collected in other locations. In other words, rather than continuing to enrich the banks in Europe and North America, the OFC in Ghana offers the opportunity to keep the wealth in Africa and potentially it will also attract money avoiding taxes in Europe and North America.

#### Note on contributor

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#### Notes

1. It should be noted that this warning statement was not to be found on the OECD's website, which includes a section dedicated to 'harmful tax practices' along with its associated Global Forum on Transparency

- and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes. And the OECD document linked to by the online version of the newspaper article also fails to mention Ghana; see: [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org). All public (Internet) references to the OECD statement on the Ghanaian OFC reference the *Guardian* article.
2. NB: the table in Palan *et al.* (2010) aggregates the lists from eleven sources dating back to 1977, including OECD (2000) and Zoromé (2007).
  3. See: [http://www.barclays.com/africa/ghana/barclays\\_in.htm](http://www.barclays.com/africa/ghana/barclays_in.htm).
  4. Readers interested in a more academically rigorous analysis on capital flight out of Africa are referred to Ndikumana and Boyce (2003) and Ndikumana and Boyce (2008); and for an analysis of the difficulties involved in estimating capital flight in developing economies see Epstein (2005).
  5. The term 'secrecy jurisdiction' was adopted by the Tax Justice Network in 2008 in order to elide the debate surrounding the usage of tax haven versus offshore financial centre, see: [www.secrecyjurisdictions.com](http://www.secrecyjurisdictions.com).

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## BRIEFING

### The hidden element in the 2010 public-sector strike in South Africa

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A hand-lettered placard captured the intensely political implications of the August 2010 public-sector strike in South Africa. The placard read: ‘Comrades stay together, just like buttocks. When buttocks separate, 7% (shit) comes out.’ Seven per cent was the ‘final offer’ from government negotiators, which precipitated the strike when teachers and hospital workers rejected the offer despite their leaders.

The strike reflected two sets of tensions. First, the strike took place amongst persistent tensions between the trade-union federation Cosatu and the group around Jacob Zuma, the man backed by Cosatu against Thabo Mbeki, in the ruling African National Congress (ANC). It brought the number of strike days for the second year of Zuma’s presidency to rival 2007, when public-sector workers last went on strike in the dying days of the Mbeki regime. These two massive strikes are responsible for the highest strike levels since the end of apartheid, and possibly in the whole of South African history. Like the 2007 strike, the 2010 strike took place in a volatile political climate. After a short lull in protest, the Zuma government has had its hands full putting out fires. There has been a resurgence of delivery protests (Sinwell *et al.* 2009, Alexander 2010, Alexander and Pfaffe 2010) and Zuma is

struggling to hold together ‘his increasingly fractious allies’ (Plaut 2010, p. 201) amongst a series of public spats with members of the ANC Youth League and between Cosatu and the South African Communist Party (SACP). Zuma’s faction has kept up a patient ideological appeal for its own ultimate authority – admonishing Julius Malema, for example, in Zuma’s speech to the National General Council for failing to respect his ‘seniors’ – but it has not proved easy to put the lid back on. Cosatu has been more assertive towards government, which had thumbed its nose at Cosatu over demands to ban labour broking. The union federation’s Central Executive Committee had released a document assessing the early days of the Zuma government which concluded that: ‘The post-Polokwane period has been highly contested . . . despite some important gains, we are far from realising the bold vision set out by the ANC delegates in 2007’ (Cosatu Central Executive Committee 2010, p. 1).

Until now, the usual fire extinguishers have worked: presidential visits to some townships defused delivery protests for the time being (Alexander 2010, p. 11), and the logic of collective bargaining eventually damped the strike, as I will describe below, but the Zuma government is sweating.

The strike was not only a test of the Zuma government but also a test for Cosatu’s strategy to achieve change by influencing policy through their alliance

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with the ruling party. It revealed a second dimension of contradiction, arising from the different pressures on union leaders caught up in collective bargaining, and the members. In part, the tale of the 2010 strike is a classic case of containment, with Cosatu playing both conflict manager as well as strikers' interlocutor in collective bargaining. The strategy of relying on the alliance to achieve policy reform deferred the immediate issues of the strike to the political kingdom, as in 2007 (see Ceruti 2008).

But the strike also demonstrated that the elastic holding the grassroots to the alliance has been stretched, for some, to new limits by renewed expectations in Zuma. The spike in strikes and protests is not unlike the 18 months after the 1994 elections, where people took confidence from the defeat of apartheid and the notion that 'our government' was in power. In the decade following, the concept of 'our own government' worked as a leash on dissent within the alliance of the ANC, SACP and Cosatu. But more recently, the concept has acquired an edge of demand for accountability: as by the unionist who said, 'I think government is taking advantage of the fact that we are the people who rallied around government' and another striker who complained, 'It is extremely unfair because we all fought for this freedom, which we deserve, all of us.'<sup>1</sup> The tale of the strike is, therefore, also simultaneously a tale of strikers forming explanations for the bewildering realities they experience in the strike, and sometimes groping for new styles of striking. This element, all too often obscured in political analyses, remains the less predictable element in forecasting how things will unfold.

### **1. The fire this time: what caused the strike?**

In the 2007 public sector strike, the leadership of the unions was kicking against their marginalisation in the alliance, which encouraged the fighting spirit among a

membership under increasing economic pressure (Ceruti 2008). In 2010, members forced the strike onto a leadership who were either reluctant to strike or naively believed they would not have to. The behaviour of three key collective actors in the 2010 strike was crucially shaped by the reformulation of the alliance that put Zuma at the head of the ANC.

Relations between President Mbeki and Cosatu were already developing stress fractures when strikes began to revive from 2004, alongside the growth of the township delivery protests. After a high in 2007, few strike days were lost in 2008, in the period when Zuma had been elected president of the ANC but before the national elections made him president of the country.<sup>2</sup> The rhythms of strikes in South Africa are affected by three-year wage bargaining arrangements in some of the biggest sectors, but the fact that delivery protests also decline in this period (Alexander 2010, p. 28) suggests that people, on the ground and in leadership, were deferring expectations to the renewal of the ANC leadership. Zuma had not been particularly supportive of the public-sector workers during the 2007 strike; when asked to comment on that strike, after speaking at a union congress, he refused to take a side (e.tv, 7 pm news broadcast, 12 June 2007). But the ANC conference in Polokwane in December 2007 promised to resolve public-sector workers' grievances.

In 2009, the year of the elections, strikes began to creep up again. In 2010, Andrew Levy Employment, a labour law consultancy that monitors strikes, reports about 1.25 million working days lost to strikes in the six months through June (double the number compared to the same period in 2009). The 20-day strike by state employees added some 10 million days, and various strikes in the motor sector brought the figure to around 14 million days lost by the end of September 2010.

Several strikers reported in personal communications with me that the 2010 strike was ‘called suddenly’ without proper preparation (see also Gentle 2010, p. 3). It seems that the leaders of Nehawu, the Cosatu-affiliated health workers’ union, and SADTU (South African Democratic Teachers’ Union), the teachers’ Cosatu affiliate, expected cooperation from government. They even agreed to hold off from declaring a deadlock until after the soccer World Cup. Hassen (2010, p. 4) believes they drew confidence from the fact that public service minister Richard Baloyi had, in 2009, agreed easily to above-budget salary adjustments.

Government negotiators may have been counting on the union leaders’ reluctance to strike (Gentle 2010). Government was under two sorts of pressures. First, World Cup expenditure went well over budget and the economic crisis was biting. Second, giving in too easily to the demands of the teachers and hospital workers could encourage the sense of entitlement already causing headaches in the resumption of the delivery protests.

The constraints and demands of their different positions would conspire against the best intentions of union and government negotiators to understand their comrades. On 11 August, after a one-day ‘warning strike’ in Pretoria, the government tabled a ‘final offer’ of 7% and R700 housing allowance. By ‘final’ they meant that the offer would go to arbitration in 21 days, with or without the unions’ signatures. At that time, the teachers’ and health workers’ demands were 8.6% and R1000 (about \$150) housing allowance. Cosatu’s general secretary, Zwelinzima Vavi, believes this extraordinarily clumsy ultimatum was an unwitting blunder arising from the honest belief that the union leaders could deliver the members’ cooperation (Vavi 2010, p. 2). Gentle (2010, p. 3) by contrast, believes the government deliberately sought confrontation to stamp its authority. Either way, it is

difficult to see how teachers and health workers would take a ‘final offer’ at this stage as anything other than a provocation. Union officials, sensitive to accusations of unaccountability after the campaign against Mbeki, appeared on television announcing that members had rejected the ‘final’ deal, and that the full-blown strike was to start on 18 August.

What made the third actor, the public-sector workers, ‘very stubborn’, as one striker put it? Apart from their day-to-day financial difficulties (see Gentle 2010) the evidence of World Cup expenditure was used as an illustration that money could be found for wage increases if money could be found for stadiums (author’s observations and photos). Beyond this, Cosatu’s statements about slow progress affirmed strikers’ expectations that the Zuma government should be sympathetic to their demands. Finally, some strikers had begun to generalise, seeing their grievances as part of a wider set of grievances. In 2007, most strikers I spoke to were unsure how to view the delivery protests. By 2010, the development of the political period encouraged most to see the protests as similar to their own dispute.

Sentiments directly implicating Zuma, not only his ministers, developed quickly and sharply in the 2010 strike. Strikers interviewed during the warning strike shared with 2007 strikers an ambiguous relation to government: they approached it in its role as employer (embodied in ministers) as the strikers’ enemy, but simultaneously entreated it to ‘listen with both ears’ to the strikers in their roles as The Elected and as alliance comrades. But, as early as the warning strike, strikers were saying things like ‘Zuma promised us a lot of things but I see nothing, nothing has happened.’ During the strike, amongst the homemade placards reminding the public of the value of their work, teachers and health workers enjoined Zuma to ‘Remember Polokwane promises’, reminded him that a teacher taught him to

read and that strikers donated to his support fund when he was on trial, lambasted his sexual habits, and warned him not to bring home any more babies or wives from his state visit to China during the strike. (Zuma has five wives and more than 20 children). Songs such as ‘*Uskebereshe*’ (slut) appear on the surface merely as crude slurs, but imply that people go to Parliament only to sell themselves to the highest bidder. More than one placard recommended Vavi for president and appealed to the SACP to stand in elections.<sup>3</sup>

So the reshaping of the alliance produced a contradictory effect: it re-established some measure of loyalty between leaders and government, restoring their faith in collective bargaining. But its effect on workers was to heighten expectations and therefore to heighten militancy around a sense of righteous demand when those expectations were disappointed. That contradiction affected the development of the strike.

## 2. Caught between the comrades and the comrades

The unfolding of the strike is partly the story of the contortions of union negotiators caught between betraying their ‘comrades in government’ and betraying their members. The pragmatics of collective bargaining take precedence over strategising the strike. This develops into a conclusion which shakes many strikers.

Government’s response to the strike was decidedly uncomradely. By day two of the strike, police had attacked strikers at several hospitals and fired rubber bullets on a crowd of teachers who walked onto a highway near Soweto. Zuma appeared on national television repeating a polite refrain about the right to strike, but asserting the government’s right to fire essential workers – in particular nurses – who joined the strike (Sapa 2010) and condemning ‘violence and intimidation’ on picket lines. Court interdicts were

filed to prevent soldiers, police and prison guards from joining the strike, and to prevent municipal workers from joining a solidarity strike. It is only much later, some 10 days into the strike, that Zuma ordered negotiators back to the table.

Cosatu was about to release its economic proposals ahead of the ANC National General Council, scheduled for September, and could not afford a defeat of its biggest sectors. The proposals were intended to feed into the government’s new economic growth plan (finally released in November). The strike presented an opportunity to shift the balance of power. The danger for Cosatu lay in the conflict developing into an all-or-nothing showdown with those expected to consider Cosatu’s document. Cosatu faced its own delicate balance between asserting the programmes for which they had deposed Mbeki, without destroying relations with the Zuma government who were, in this strategy, key to getting these plans implemented.

Against this background, Cosatu general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi played a central but contradictory role throughout the strike. Vavi was not afraid to play up the political implications of the strike, leading a government spokesperson, Themba Maseko, to complain that government was worried by the anger being displayed by trade-union leaders: ‘We are beginning to see and hear too many statements that are taking the strike beyond labour relations. It worries us,’ he said (*Business Day* 2010). At a march in Johannesburg 12 days into the strike, on 26 August, Vavi echoed strikers’ anger in a declaration, borrowed from the Cosatu Central Executive Committee, that ‘the alliance is once again dysfunctional’, and lambasted ‘predatory elites’ in the ANC (Cosatu Central Executive Council 2010). On the same day he announced that the federation had filed the necessary notice to call a one-day general strike in solidarity with the public workers. But at the same time, he was working hard to help the parties

find each other at the table. Vavi describes this role in a remarkably unselfconscious letter responding to SADTU accusations that he had sold them out (Vavi 2010). He says that the negotiators were 'acutely aware how difficult it was for government to move' and describes a number of attempts to reach a compromise on figures suggested by the public-sector union officials, but apparently not caucused with their members.

When Zuma ordered the parties back to negotiations, strikers were enormously hopeful, and Cosatu called off the general strike before anything had emerged from the new negotiations. The offer that came back, however, was just 0.5% more. Adding to the confusion, Vavi announced the offer and recommended on public radio that unions should accept it before the unions had taken the offer to their members. According to Vavi's letter, he decided that nothing more could be won when government negotiators received a call at 3am, after which they 'folded their folders and went home'. Vavi's reading is that they felt betrayed by their union comrades who had twice promised they could sell a deal to members, only to be told the members had rejected it.

Strikers were furious at the deal and at Vavi's public announcement, but also demoralised. Picket lines which survived police attacks shrank after the new offer was announced on 1 September. Nevertheless a substantial core of strikers remained 'stubborn'. A Nehawu document shows that the vast majority of hospitals reject the offer, although most staff of clinics had by then returned to work (personal communication). In a speech at a teachers' meeting I attended, the Johannesburg Central chair of the teachers' union, SADTU, reported that the majority of SADTU regions had rejected the offer, then lambasted Vavi for announcing the offer before consultation and lambasted him even harder on the grounds that strikers had mandated leaders to take their demands

forward, 'not to go and find out whether government could afford the deal'.

Despite the widespread rejection of this offer, and although SADTU refused to sign the offer, a suspension of the strike was imposed from above on 6 September (SADTU 2010). Both Vavi and Nehawu officials argued that it was impossible to reject the deal because the picket lines had dwindled. Yet as the strike wore on, they had provided little leadership on creative ways of intensifying or broadening the strike, and indeed even the crucial call for a general strike is revealed to have been, in Vavi's mind, mere posturing for the bargaining chamber rather than a real possibility.

On the other hand, strikers were not organised on the ground to resist the suspension and have yet to develop their own collective strategic imagination. Officials and office bearers from the different Cosatu unions met during the strike, but teachers and health workers did not, except sometimes during picketing. Without a meeting that brought together strikers from different sectors and unions, the high morale of the Johannesburg Central region could not easily affect health workers, who were more despondent towards the end of the strike. While strikers themselves discussed strategy on the smaller hospital picket lines, the big, lively teachers' meetings in Soweto consisted mainly of hard-hitting speeches from the platform without discussion amongst the strikers. This fragmentation limited creative strategising.

A crucial weakness in the strike was that no effort was made to build a community campaign in 2010. (In 2007, rudimentary efforts were made in Soweto.) This left the strikers at the mercy of the press – which was virulently anti-strike – in judging public opinion of themselves, so that they felt more and more isolated as the strike wore on. Similarly strikers made no attempt to decide for themselves who should be an 'essential worker' despite government's failure to agree on the definition of essential worker, by setting up their own

committees to keep a skeleton staff going in hospitals, thus building public sympathy.

Strikers I interviewed were ambiguous about the suspension of the strike but generally disgruntled at the manner in which it was ended. There was an element of relief – the ‘no work no pay’ rule was biting – and many strikers were concerned about patients and learners, feeling embattled by the relentless media barrage against them. Yet no one I spoke to was satisfied with the deal, and there was deep dissatisfaction with the way Vavi announced the deal and the way the strike was ended, even among strikers who accepted the logic of bargaining. Health workers in particular came across as depressed and tired at the suspension of the strike. Soweto teachers, who could at least retain some respect for their own leadership, seemed more upbeat but nevertheless furious with Vavi. A shop steward in a hospital, who had been resolutely resistant to any criticism of union leaders in the 2007 strike complained openly and bitterly about them this time. A former striker who had subsequently changed jobs read Vavi’s intervention as using the strike to advance political agendas.

Early in the strike it had become clear to strikers that the ‘comrades in government’ were not automatically on their side. Suddenly it had become, at least momentarily, a little unclear whose side Vavi was on.

Vavi, the unions and the strikers did have alternatives. But the Zuma government had painted itself into a something of a corner and the stakes were therefore high. A strategy to seriously build the strike could have affected the balance of strength with regard to policy but would also have meant a much bigger confrontation. Vavi’s eyes were on a more modest prize.

### **3. The aftermath**

For the Zuma group in the ANC, struggling for control over conflicting interests, the spectre of the 2010 public-sector strike is

the spectre of an alliance with a union leadership unable to control its own members. The ANC’s over-reaction to Cosatu’s civil-society conference shows they are nervous of this prospect. It reflects also in the government’s New Growth Path, released in November, which recognises the need to placate labour, but makes no major concessions to it in terms of the overall economy. The growth path is a break with classic neoliberalism – for example it asserts a greater role for the state and the need for a certain amount of social welfare – but it is by no means the Keynesianesque dream drafted by Cosatu. While Cosatu was at pains to point out that it had not rejected the Growth Path, it said it rejected ‘the macroeconomic framework underpinning it’. This is a little like saying you are fine with the colour of the car, but do not like the internal-combustion engine. Most of the concessions to Cosatu take the form of targets or intentions, such as the intention to create five million jobs, rather than policies. And, crucially, these promises come at a price: the plan calls for wage restraint for workers earning as little as R3000 a month. And the centrepiece of the plan, step number one in the government’s view, is a social pact between capital, the state and labour – an industrial alliance to reinforce the still-shaky political one.

On the ground, the political residue of the strike is harder to discern. After the 2007 strike, most strikers found ways to rationalise a less-than-satisfactory settlement. The danger here is that adaptation to disappointment turns into demobilisation: a first-time striker said she ‘now understood’ those second-time strikers who ‘just stayed at home to do their housework’ during the strike. However a still-restive residue was evident in the skirmishes which continued after the strike was over, between the militant Johannesburg Central region of the teachers’ union and the Department of Education, and when delegates to the national SADTU Congress

booed a government minister who had been invited to speak at the congress (*Weekly Mail* 2010). Vavi had to tour from congress to congress repeating his justification for his role, and the role of the public-sector officials, in the strike.

The Zuma government desperately needs to tie the unions again, but the possibility of rifts between the government and Cosatu have not closed, despite Vavi's recent reassurances that the ANC leads the alliance. Such stresses will continue to challenge orthodoxies about the alliance. What remains to be seen is whether members will develop ideological and organisational alternatives to current strategies, and how members' interpretations of these events will affect Cosatu's strategies in the future.

### Acknowledgements

The author thanks Samuel Amakoa and Dhiraj Nite for sharing their photos, interviews and observations and also thanks the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, which funds her salary.

### Note on contributor

Claire Ceruti is a researcher attached to the South African Research Chair in Social Change, in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Johannesburg in South Africa. She is currently researching class in South Africa, and completing a PhD on the development of consciousness during strikes. She has been active in strike support and social movements since the mid 1980s.

### Notes

1. My main sources are direct and occasionally participant observation of the strikes in 2007 and 2010, including repeat interviews with strikers, photos and footage of particular days in the strikes, my notes about television news during the strike, and informal conversations. I also use news reports and documents published by the unions, the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP). The tone of this analysis reflects the fact that my interest in the strike went beyond dispassionate observation. However this lack of distance was crucial in developing the

analysis present here and therefore I prefer not to conceal this fact.

2. Andrew Levy quoted in 'SA girds for new strike wave', *The Times*, 25 July 2009.
3. Author's photos, notes, recordings and footage.

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## BRIEFING

### Interview with Shahenda Maklad

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On 30 April 1966, Salah Hussein was shot dead in his village, Kamshish, located in Menoufiya Governorate in the heart of the Nile Delta. An educated son of the village, he engaged in leftist politics and in nationalist anti-colonial struggles pre-1952. He later switched the focus of his activity against a family of landlords that had long subjected the village to a rule of terror and oppression. He led a peasant struggle against the landlords and exposed their tricks in evading the agrarian reform law, and was finally assassinated. He was survived by his widow Shahenda Maklad, who was barely 27 when he was killed. Shahenda became a local and national leader defending peasants' rights and other grassroots causes. She is a member of the Tagamu' leftist party, the founder of the independent Peasants Union, and most recently the leader of the 'Women for Change' group, apart from being a national icon of resistance. Kamshish became a symbol of peasants' struggle against oppression, and also a source of guidance and inspiration for other villages. April 30<sup>th</sup> became a date for not only commemorating Hussein's anniversary, but for holding a yearly convention in Kamshish where activists from various walks of the political scene gather to discuss both peasant-related issues and national-level

current political matters. This year, the village commemorated the forty-fourth anniversary of Hussein with a convention whose slogan was 'Peasants and Change'.

This year's anniversary was held against a backdrop of a highly charged political scene in Egypt. For almost a decade, the country has been witnessing waves of political protests and an increasingly intensifying mood of discontent. Demonstrations, protest activity and strikes dominated the country. Such activities included labour and peasant protests on an unprecedented scale, and extended to cover sectors that traditionally seldom engaged in protest activity such as professionals and government employees. Such activities were mainly triggered by economic demands, yet their scale and impact were of clear political significance. The atmosphere was further charged with the arrival on the scene of Mohamed el-Baradei, former chief of the International Atomic Energy Agency and now a campaigner for constitutional reform and a main opponent of the Mubarak regime. His slogan of 'Change' proved catchy, and served as a point of focus for various social and political forces.

Within this background, Kamshish held the anniversary of its martyr. With a huge attendance and with the participation of representatives of all significant political groups, Kamshish continues to prove its relevance, and to play its role as a link between peasants' concerns on the one hand and the wider political scene on the other.

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The following interview was conducted by Reem Saad and Yasmine Ahmed with Shahenda Maklad on 3 June 2010 in Cairo, Egypt, in connection with the project 'Poverty dynamics, access to resources and social change in rural MENA [Middle East and North Africa]: a gendered approach.'

### Interview

Reem Saad (RS): So, tell us the story of Kamshish and its significance in the farmers' struggle in Egypt. You could use 30 April 1966 as an entry point.

Shahenda Maklad (SM): On 30 April 1966, martyr Salah Hussein was assassinated by the feudalists. His funeral was transformed into a demonstration that called for a trial against feudalists. In the following years, April 30<sup>th</sup> became a day of remembrance and commemoration, where Kamshish farmers and activists meet and discuss pertinent farmers' issues in Egypt, as well as drafting an agenda for action.

RS: Who is Salah Hussein?

SM: Salah Hussein is my husband. We got married in 1957. He was *the* local leader for farmers' struggle in Kamshish, and led them through various battles against feudalism. Kamshish is a village dating back to the times of the pharaohs, and you can find this in reference books. It has a land area of around 2000 feddans.<sup>1</sup>

Historically, Kamshish had small land ownerships, and consisted of small and medium farmers' households. It was relatively recently that Kamshish saw large ownerships and witnessed the emergence of feudalism. One of Kamshish's men betrayed the 'Orabi Revolution in the late nineteenth century, which resulted in his moving from being a small farmer to a large landlord, seizing lands and forcing people to give their lands away, including members of his own family.<sup>2</sup> And this was when farmers' struggle and resistance started to emerge in Kamshish.

In 1951, martyr Salah Hussein, my husband, and one of the village sons,

joined armed resistance groups against the British in the Suez Canal area. There, he met with Wasseem Khaled and Hussein Tawfiq, an armed resistance group that was involved in the assassination of Amin Osman.<sup>3</sup>

Together with his fellows, Salah Hussein decided to fight feudalism in Kamshish, with the belief that the first step towards the liberation of Palestine is to liberate Egypt and to get rid of feudalism first. Between 1951 and 1952, they made a plan of how to achieve their goal in Kamshish. Armed resistance was common at the time. So, the first step was to form an armed resistance group from the village, and for this, they needed to recruit people. Salah and his fellows started to carry out small tests, through which they could identify potential fellows for their resistance plan. The first thing they did was to ask school pupils to take off the hats that were imposed on them by the feudalist, and to pray by the side of, rather than behind, the feudalist.<sup>4</sup> It was through these small acts of rebellion that Salah and his fellows were able to form a small group of activists, who were commonly called in the village '*al-talaba*' or the students.

As the revolution took place in 1952, the idea of armed resistance became irrelevant; however, the political cause itself remained active.

Just before the passing of the 1952 agrarian reform law, Salah Hussein started using mosques, wedding ceremonies and funerals as occasions to call people to claim their rights, their land, to refuse obedience, and to end existing inequities and inequalities. New forms of passive resistance emerged. Kamshish farmers started to respond to Hussein by disobeying the feudalist; they refused to work as *corvée* labour, to which they had been subjected for a long time. This was followed by a series of small battles. One of the things they did, for example, was to sabotage a canal route dug by the feudalist in the middle of their lands to ensure that his

land was well irrigated. The feudalists knew, so they shot at the farmers, injuring 17 of them, and of course, the canal route remained in the middle of the lands. After this event, the feudalist remained in power, and nothing has changed, so Kamshish people felt that the revolution did not help them in any way. Salah and his fellows knew that they had to introduce the taste of victory among Kamshish people. So they decided to break a dam built by the feudalist that ensured that his land was irrigated before the Kamshish farmers. They went armed and broke the dam, and when the feudalist came to check what was going on, they pointed the weapons at him, so he got scared and left. This incident stimulated resistance among Kamshish people.

To counter the farmers' resistance, the feudalist recruited outlaws to threaten the farmers; they were armed and used to stand in the middle of the road to control Kamshish streets and to threaten its people.

One day, Kamshish people decided to get rid of the outlaws, so they left them shooting until they felt that they ran out of bullets, and then all the village attacked them, killing all four of them. That was in 1953. As a result, a curfew was imposed on the village, and Salah was banned from travelling outside Alexandria Governorate.

So Anwar El Sadat came to try to bring about a reconciliation between the Kamshish people and the al-Fekky family. At the time, he was a member of the Revolutionary Council. He made several attempts to reconcile both parties, but it did not work out. There was a split in the village between those who wanted reconciliation, and those who did not. Sadat went to the village, and met with Kamshish representatives and al-Fekky. He tried to talk to witnesses in Kamshish, but couldn't find any, so he got upset and threw 25 farmers in prison, believing that this would get rid of a 'deviant' minority. He went to the house of Sheikh al-Balad [a local leader], and when Kamshish people knew that he was

there, they held a demonstration, and burned the house where he was staying. So he realised that reconciliation had not been achieved.

So my father stepped in.<sup>5</sup> At the time, he was the chief of police in Beni Soueif. He called Sadat, and asked him to release the prisoners. So they both went to Kamshish, and Sadat gave a speech and promised to release the prisoners.

A series of fights then began, all about land. The 1952 first agrarian reform law was not implemented in Kamshish because the feudalists managed to evade the expropriation of their land. Al-Fekki had seized people's lands, however, on paper, the lands were registered under the name of small farmers, so that they could not claim for lands that, according to the papers, they already held. Only 50 feddans were distributed to the farmers. So we had to fight for the lands. In 1958 I ran for a seat in the local council, and I won. So I and other local leaders in the village became involved with the Committee to take the seized lands back. We did field visits to verify land ownership. This was a big fight; [the Al-Fekkis] were giving bribes and we were sending telegrams to Gamal Abdel Nasser. This fight lasted from 1958 to 1962. So after the separation of Egypt and Syria, Nasser started to pay more attention to our cause. The lands were sequestered, and then distributed to 199 beneficiaries. We followed our own rules in land distribution and not the Committee's; we established a local committee whose members were knowledgeable about the real situation, like who actually worked on the land, who had six children and who did not, and so forth.

Then we started to discuss the issue of access to land and poverty. The question was: 'Did we solve the problem of poverty by gaining access to the land?' The answer was no. So we thought of developing the movement by investing in new crops, and it was then that the idea of establishing a cooperative began, meaning

that we would cultivate the land together. People started to join the cooperative, and a developed political mobilisation movement emerged in the village. We wanted to transform the feudalists' houses and lands into service centres for the village, and this was a step further in the movement. So [the Al-Fekkis] found no alternative but to kill Salah. They made several attempts, and eventually killed him on 30 April 1966. I often say that before Salah's killing, our enemies were Kamshish feudalists, and after Salah's killing, our enemies became all the feudalists who escaped the agrarian reform. That's why the campaign against us was intensified later on. In 1967, many people were arrested, that's why we didn't commemorate the anniversary that year.

We did the first commemoration for Salah on 30 April 1968. Everybody came to Kamshish; Abdel Rahman al-Sharkawy, Loutfy al-Khouly, Zaky Mourad, Nabil al-Helaly, Youssef Hegab, al-Abnoudy, members of all social, intellectual and political forces in Egypt. The Kamshish cause started to attract media attention. It became a focal point for activists from all over Egypt. We used to hand-write the invitation, and send it from various post offices across governorates. We did not send all the invitations from one place for fear it would be easily tracked by the government.

I received numerous invitations to speak in different governorates, and the groups of Kamshish supporters became so numerous that the security officers wanted to remove me from Kamshish. The purpose of the commemoration was two-fold – first to talk about problems that farmers face, and, second to solve these problems.

RS: It seems to me that Kamshish has had an impact on the political movement in Egypt. Could you elaborate on that?

SM: This annual event has had a great impact on the student movement in Egypt for example. In fact, a number of Kamshish

leaders became leaders in the student movements. Slogans for the Egyptian peasants' movement emerged in Kamshish. It also included a programme for the peasants' movement and for the political movement; our agenda emerged from the participants, not from our small group.

RS: Can you describe the relationship between the Kamshish people and President Sadat?

SM: We were against Sadat from the beginning. We had a bad history with him despite the fact that some active groups at the time had welcomed him as vice-president. President Sadat tried to silence us, as he did in his 'corrective movement' that he led against leftist members who were in power at the time. This was on 15 May 1971.

We were not part of political parties or groups, like the Youth Organisation or the Vanguard Organisation, so he couldn't take us with them. However, he forced us to stay away from our governorate one month later, on 15 June. We were banished.

Police forces attacked Kamshish houses, and arrested the people, arguing that they were hiding illegal weapons in their houses; however, they couldn't find any. They took all the books that were in people's houses, as we used to sell books at reduced prices at the annual event on 30 April. They also took the pictures of Salah that were hanging on the walls of people's houses. At the time, I was in Alexandria, so they couldn't reach me, but they issued a decision that restricted where we lived. They restricted the residency of 12 men and women farmers, and separated partners by residency (that is, issuing an order to employ the woman in one governorate and her husband in another governorate). We were not allowed to enter Menoufeya Governorate, so we filed a suit against the government, and we returned after five years by a court decree.

RS: Can you now tell us about peasant protest movements during Sadat's time?

SM: I first want to tell you about something that happened earlier. When Egypt was defeated in the 1967 war, the reactionary forces blamed socialism for this. In 1968, and in response to such pressures, Nasser ordered the lifting of sequestration<sup>6</sup> that had been placed on the property of some of the former feudalists. There was a 40-feddan plot of land in Kamshish that belonged to a member of the feudalists' family. This plot was sequestered and distributed to 40 previously landless peasants. The land was neglected and barren, but they worked hard until it became productive again. When they got the land they were penniless. We helped them by setting up a cooperative and we raised money to buy an irrigation pump. When the land started producing they started repaying the cost of the pump. Just as the land started being productive and their standard of living started to improve, they discovered that they were going to be evicted. It was then that we started a fight and said that no one had the right to trespass on the peasants' gains. But we wanted this to be their decision, not ours.

We first complained to the members of the Socialist Union, but they did nothing. Then we decided to go to Cairo and we asked for the help of lawyers. In short, we exhausted all legitimate and peaceful avenues, but to no avail. A court order ruled that the peasants would be evicted. A force came to the village to carry out the order. They first went to a peasant called Sayed and asked him to sign the eviction order. He then said to them: 'You want me to leave the land, you sons of dogs?' And he raised his axe to strike them, and they ran away. It was then that the decision was taken to 'stand on the land'. We joined the 40 tenants and their families and stood on the land on the day that the force was coming to carry out the evictions. We were about 200 people. It was like a battleground. The only way to get to the land was through a narrow alley inside the village. When the forces tried to

go down the alley, the women threw dirty water at them, then they started screaming, then pelted them with rocks. There were armed men, but these were hiding, and were to be a last resort.

Rumours started spreading that we were heavily armed. The officer in charge of the force contacted the Minister of the Interior and told him: 'If you want me to storm the village, you will have to send me reinforcements.' At this point, the minister asked him to retreat with his forces. We remained on the land for 15 days. At the same time we were conducting a media campaign. It was due to these events that Nasser ordered that no peasant would be evicted because of the raising of sequestration. The peasants' status changed to that of tenants, and they were not evicted. This decree benefited peasants on sequestered land all over the country, and this was one example how the struggle of the people of Kamshish had a positive influence on the peasants of Egypt as a whole.

RS: Tell me now about the time when the regime clearly repealed socialist measures, and switched policies to the opposite direction.

SM: Ever since 1968 there had been attempts to repeal the tenancy guarantees that were part of Agrarian Reform Law,<sup>7</sup> but we resisted, and these attempts were halted. When Sadat came to power in 1970, this issue re-emerged. At that time I was heading the peasants' bureau at the Tagamu' Party, and this was a crucial issue that we continued to fight against. Tenancy guarantees were much more important than the redistribution part of Agrarian Reform, because they affected the lives of many more people. We continued to resist, but the new law was finally issued in 1992 and it was a real catastrophe. So from 1968 until 1992 this was our main battle, and this issue was always raised in the 30 April convention. It was also a central issue for us since we declared the Peasants' Union.

RS: When was that?

SM: On 30 April 1983 in Kamshish. Before that I went to villages all over Egypt together with my colleagues, and we introduced the idea and discussed it with villagers from everywhere. In 1983 we declared the Peasants' Union in the presence of 360 representatives from villages from all over the country. It was one of the most glorious days in the history of Egyptian peasants and of the political movement. The Union then started defending the rights of tenants. We also dealt with other problems, such as resisting the abolition of agricultural cooperatives and their replacement with village banks. Unfortunately we did not receive any support except from the Tagamu' Party, and not from any other political force.

RS: Why?

SM: I don't know. We always knew that Egypt means peasants, but for some reason the political activists were never really attracted to the peasant problem.

We were alone also in the period between the issuing of the law in 1992 and its full implementation in 1997. It was only in 1997 that other political forces realised that this is an important battle. It could have been possible to prepare for a big battle but this was not possible by then. The balance of power was not in our favour; the peasants were not ready and a movement did not crystallise; and other political forces were also not strong enough.

We held the 1997 April 30<sup>th</sup> memorial in Cairo because it is central and would enable people to come from different parts of the country. Thousands attended. The political forces that had had nothing to do with peasants up till then saw this as an opportunity and many imagined they would lead the movement. In my opinion, the actions of these people really aborted the possibility of a big movement. They started pushing peasants into battles before they were ready or organised. Our

idea was first to organise people; thousands of people came to Cairo on that day and filled out applications to join the Peasants' Union. The other forces started working in a chaotic way and many peasants were arrested and many were killed. This had a negative effect on our movement. From 1997, the Union started declining and what was left of it was just a symbolic presence. Also, many people of the founders died before a new generation was ready to take over. After that we started to form new ways of organising. Now the most active of these is the Committee for Defending Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries.

RS: When was this formed?

SM: In 2005.

RS: Tell us about the new development that this Committee came in response to.

SM: After the tenancy law was passed and they got rid of the tenants, we knew that they were now set on getting rid of all small farmers. When they lifted subsidies, abolished facilities for marketing and abolished all forms of cooperatives – all these policies were directed against small farmers. Also after 1997, agrarian reform beneficiaries were especially targeted. A wave started in the late 1990s and continues now, whereby the old owners are using their power to recapture the land from the beneficiaries even though the latter paid all dues. But there are now numerous and increasing cases of old owners colluding with local officials to forge papers and issue eviction orders and, in collusion with local police forces, they get the farmers off the land. In some places there was resistance, but in others the peasants were helpless and the land was taken away.

RS: Now let's move to 30 April of this year, where the title of the meeting was 'Peasants and Change'.<sup>8</sup> Tell us what you think is happening at this present stage.

SM: All things are related. It is not possible to fix one part and leave the rest. You

cannot say you want a pro-peasant agrarian policy when you do not have proper industrialisation, nor political rights, nor rights of association. That is why we now say we need change. Change is what will allow social forces to defend their rights. The gains that people obtained in the Nasser era were received as gifts from Nasser: 'Nasser will give workers their rights'; 'Nasser will give peasants their rights'; 'Nasser will distribute the land'. People lived that era only as recipients. That is why when the land was being taken away from them they were incredulous. They were saying: 'They are the ones who gave us the land, why are they taking it from us now?' I think that when this happened, peasants realised that they were the ones who had to defend themselves. This realisation is now clear in the protest movements that are taking place everywhere, with workers and peasants and all. I do not see these movements expressing narrow economic demands; I've seen men and women workers speaking with greater political awareness than most political leaders. This is what's new now: people realise that they are the ones who will have to defend themselves and they do this with a realisation that all things are interrelated.

RS: How do you see the present movement for 'Change' that is led by el-Baradei? How do you see your role, and the peasants' role in this movement?

SM: When Baradei first returned to Egypt and there was talk that he would be a presidential candidate, I just observed. Of course he is a respectable man and so on, but I was apprehensive. But when I heard him speak I felt his sincerity, and I was relieved about his approach; that he was not presenting himself as a candidate but was rather proposing that all forces unite to change the rules of the game through a movement for change, starting with demands for constitutional reforms. I felt that this was the right approach, and one that would help bring together the different efforts for

change. This approach means that there is a point of consensus for the different political forces, while not infringing on the autonomy of the different groups. Baradei is Baradei, peasants are peasants and workers are workers. But this is a framework that allows us all to work together towards bringing real change to this country.

RS: Did el-Baradei send a statement to the 30 April convention this year?

SM: Yes he did, and he said that he would have attended but was travelling. This was a good thing, and it had a positive impact. We responded by making proposals for change that reflected the interests of the peasants. We put three main demands: (1) peasants' rights to independent association; (2) peasants' rights to secure access to land; and (3) peasants' rights to housing, health and education. These are, of course, general principles and not a detailed programme. This is what is needed at this stage.

RS: What do you think of the opinion that says that peasants are not concerned, and will not understand all this talk about change, and that they are only concerned with what touches upon their immediate everyday life?

SM: This is completely wrong. Peasants know very well that the law passed against them means that the people in the Parliament do not represent them and do not defend them, and that is why they are calling for the establishment of an independent Peasants' Union that would defend their real interests. Likewise, the workers who are protesting are saying very clearly that the people in the Parliament do not represent them. How can someone come and say that workers and peasants do not see a link between their economic situation and the political situation?

RS: Let's go back to the April 30<sup>th</sup> convention of this year, with its slogan 'Peasants and Change'. Do you still see Kamshish as playing a role beyond its

borders? And how does this specifically relate to today's movement for change?

SM: From the very beginning, April 30<sup>th</sup> always linked national concerns with peasants' concerns. This year Kamshish again played the role of bringing together the different political forces and helped focus their efforts in one direction. The convention this year was attended by representatives from across the political spectrum: Revolutionary Socialists, Communists, Muslim Brotherhood, other parties, as well as representatives of the different protest movements operating today. I believe we succeeded in suggesting a reasonable framework that would hopefully inspire other players.

RS: How do you see the difference between working with peasants and working with intellectuals?

SM: A big difference. Intellectuals fight with each other a lot, but peasants do not have this 'disease'. Peasants may, at times, feel discouraged or are too cautious. But at the time of the battle I have always found them next to me. And, by the way, intellectuals are at their best when they cooperate with peasants. I have never seen any group as loyal, sincere, patient and believing in their cause as peasants. For 44 years now, a convention has been held in the memory of Salah. This has not been done even for Nasser. I am now 72 and don't know if this will continue after I die. But the fact that it is continuing, and with this momentum, must tell us something.

RS: How many times were you in prison?

SM: Three times – in 1975, 1979 and 1981, and I went into hiding for one year. This was all during the time of Sadat, and it was all because of opposition to his policies. The last time I was arrested I was accused of being the Women's Officer of the Egyptian Communist Party. I laughed at the prosecutor and said to him: 'Where are you getting these accusations from? When have I ever had anything to do with women's activities?'

RS: But you do now. Has there been a change in the way you think about this issue?

SM: My first activity with women was when my colleagues insisted that they, and I with them, join a women's NGO that was founded in the 1980s. I was embarrassed and agreed to join, and I am still with them. Now I am heading 'Women for Change' and I think it is a very good group and is doing useful things.

You are asking if my position has changed on working on women's issues. I don't know. In general I could never differentiate between political activity and women's activity. I do not see women in isolation. And even all my women-related activities are political. I cannot imagine a free woman in a society that is not free. Yes, there are certain rights that women specifically are deprived of, but she does not struggle for them alone; she does so alongside men. In fact I never felt oppressed by any man, not by my father, nor my husband, nor my brothers, nor anyone. It did not happen to me so maybe I cannot feel it.

RS: One last question. What is your position on democracy, and has it undergone any change?

SM: Of course I am not at all a liberal, and never was in any way. But when I look at the experience of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries I see how the so-called democratic centralism whereby the centre ultimately monopolises all power has cancelled any interaction and changed people into pieces of chess. I am for any democratic form that safeguards the rights of the majority while not doing injustice to anyone, but this is of course a very difficult thing.

RS: How else have you changed over the years?

SM: I have become more flexible. I wouldn't say that my opinions have changed, but I have maybe become more politically mature.

### Acknowledgements

This interview was conducted in connection with the project 'Poverty dynamics, access to resources and social change in rural MENA [Middle East and North Africa]: a gendered approach'. The project is carried out under the auspices of the Social Research Center of the American University in Cairo, with support from the Ford Foundation and Oxfam Novib. The authors would, of course, wish to thank Shahenda Maklad for her time and patience.

### Notes on contributors

Reem Saad is a social anthropologist with research interests in rural society, public culture and historical anthropology. She is currently directing the Middle East Studies Center of the American University in Cairo.

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### Notes

1. 1 feddan = 1.038 acres or 0.4 hectares.
2. Maklad referred to this man as the feudalist. He also became the 'Umda (mayor/local authority) of Kamshish.
3. Salah Hussein first joined the Muslim Brotherhood in the late 1940s, and went

to Palestine. When he came back, he decided to leave this group.

4. The feudalist in the village required the school pupils to wear hats in front of him as a form of humiliation and a mark of inferiority. The feudalist had his own mosque where he performed his prayers alone on the carpet, whereas the rest of the village performed the prayers behind him.
5. Shahenda and Salah were cousins. Her father was his maternal uncle.
6. While agrarian reform was only concerned with expropriating land above a certain ceiling, sequestration was considered a punishment against certain persons who were deemed enemies of the Revolution, and it usually involved confiscating all property, and not just land.
7. The first agrarian reform law issued in 1952 stipulated the expropriation of land beyond a ceiling of 200 feddans, but with fathers of more than two children allowed to own 300 feddans. The law also included tenancy guarantees whereby tenants had secure open-ended contracts and paid a rent fixed at seven times the land tax. A new tenancy law was passed in 1992 with a five-year transitional period that lapsed on the first of October 1997. Almost one million families were adversely affected by this measure.
8. 'Change' is the slogan of Mohamed el-Baradei, former Chief of the International Atomic Energy Agency and now a campaigner for constitutional reform and a main opponent of the Mubarak regime.

## BRIEFING

### Report on conference of European Association of Social Anthropologists, Maynooth, Ireland, 24–28 August 2010

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#### **Imaginaires identitaires, stratégies de survie et rôle de l'Etat : Parcours transnationaux**

La mobilité sociale et la confrontation de systèmes de valeurs ont toujours été deux volets prioritaires du débat des conférences de l'EASA (European Association of Social Anthropologists). La dernière rencontre, centrée autour du thème « Crisis and Imagination », témoigne d'une poursuite de la réflexion approchant le thème de la mobilité à partir des nodalités de situations locales et transnationales de 'crise' et des stratégies et représentations engagées dans ce cadre par les acteurs sociaux en place. Le but de la conférence était de mettre en évidence les nouveaux imaginaires qui sous-tendent les pratiques du social (mouvements religieux, fondamentalismes, altermondisme, etc) issues de la transnationalisation des relations sociales et des rapports de souveraineté et d'analyser les effets de changement enchâssés dans les conjonctures de crise.

La question du rôle de l'Etat et, par conséquent, les implications locales du pluralisme juridique, ont représenté des volets de débat saillants. D'une part, les mobilités locale et transnationale semblent confrontées à la gestion, par les Etats-souverains,

des sphères individuelles et collectives fonctionnelles à la représentation et à la pérennisation de la machine étatique. D'autre part, les processus de mondialisation ont abouti à une acception des relations sociales de plus en plus plurielle et détachée des frontières législatives nationales, issue d' « échecs de l'imaginaire », tels, par exemple, les paradigmes du monopole d'Etat de l'outil juridique. La pluralité d'acteurs concernés par la « normation » de la vie quotidienne (institutions, organisations internationales, organisations non gouvernementales [ONG], mouvements sociaux, associations locales, individus) a ainsi abouti à une « alchimie institutionnelle » issue d'arènes sociales transversales de plus en plus contestées et mutuellement conditionnées (Zerilli 2010, p. 7). Cette fragmentation structurelle des terrains de gestion du quotidien a comporté un progressif assouplissement de la sphère juridique et, dans la pratique, de la nature coercitive de l'outil législatif en faveur d'une loi souple (« soft law ») censée mieux s'adapter à la pluralité des logiques et des pratiques transnationales (Zerilli 2010). Ainsi, plusieurs ateliers ont analysé la dimension représentationnelle de la gestion du pouvoir dans la mesure où la conception ontologique de la souveraineté a laissé la place à une « legal consciousness » ancrée dans les pratiques du quotidien. Dans cette optique, la souveraineté, autrefois incarnée par la loi d'Etat, s'identifie dans l'essor d'une forme d'autorité

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dérivée de la violence censée forcer la loyauté, la peur et la légitimité à tous les niveaux de la chaîne sociale (Blom Hansen and Stepputat 2006).

Le thème des imaginaires étatiques, collectifs et individuels, s'est reflété dans le choix des séances plénières. Pour ne citer que quelques exemples, se penchant sur les représentations générées par la violence, Talal Asad (City University, New York) a analysé la perception de la violence dans la lutte contre le terrorisme engagée par le gouvernement du Président Obama. En analysant le paradoxe d'une violence qui est, à la fois, subie et pratiquée par l'Etat américain Asad aboutit, en dernière instance, à une philosophie de 'cruauté dans la compassion'. Paul Richards (Université de Wageningen) a proposé une réflexion sur les auto-représentations des miliciens en Sierra Leone à travers la relecture proposée par Mary Douglas du concept durkheimien d'effervescence.<sup>1</sup> Parmi les jeunes chercheurs, Katia Sejdel (Vienna University/NUI Maynooth) a illustré plusieurs cas de la réception populaire, en Argentine, du concept de 'génocide' tels que l'ONU le conçoit, appliqué aux crimes de masse perpétrés par le régime de Pinochet.

L'un des ateliers (092), *Frontiers of 'legality' under neoliberalism: ethnographic explorations across shifting temporal and spatial scales* (Présidents: Filippo Zerilli, Université de Cagliari et Berardino Palumbo<sup>2</sup>, Université de Messina) constitue un exemple assez éclairant de l'approche 'par le bas' des mécanismes structurels de mise en place des représentations coercitives de l'Etat et, de réflexe, des stratégies de réaction à celles-ci. Les orateurs ont sondé aussi bien les représentations qui sous-tendent la construction politique de l'illégalité que l'organisation sociale des circuits informels ou clandestins locaux (produits de contrebande et de contrefaçon, migrants, objets d'art). En dernière instance, une confrontation s'est dessinée entre l'essence matérielle et corporelle des sujets de

l'apparat juridique et normatif. La perspective de la matérialité sous-tend une représentation étatique réifiée des entités labellisées comme 'illégal' à travers le « fétichisme de la loi » : médiatisation des 'corps du délit' – portraits-robot, photos, 'paysages du crime', statistiques et classifications – aux fins du contrôle politique. Ainsi, à travers une synergie de « spatial scenes » et de « disjonctive temporalité » censée bâtir un horizon collectif d'intégration nationale, l'Etat constitue des relations d'identification aptes à transformer les individus et les corps en représentations d'une entité abstraite (Axel 2002). En même temps, la légalisation de la vie publique a alimenté l'essor de 'communautés' marginales 'hors la loi', bourgeonnant à l'ombre de l'Etat, qui s'approprient les significations de l'Etat et du marché (Comaroff and Comaroff 2007). Une approche de la corporalité des réseaux marginaux est censée ainsi éclairer, à la fois, l'organisation sociale des réseaux et les systèmes de représentation qui sous-tendent les pratiques des parcours marginaux. Ces deux approches se confrontent dans la mesure où la première aboutit à l'objectivation de ses sujets, la deuxième à la multiplication des variantes (stratégies de survie économique, classe sociale, réseaux de domination et d'assujettissement).

La réflexion sur le rapport entre dynamiques de criminalisation et maintien des pouvoirs forts de l'Etat montre ainsi que la conformation des comportements collectifs à travers la politique pénale ne vise pas nécessairement à l'extinction du crime et de l'illégalisme (Foucault 2004). Au contraire, une telle conformation creuse des domaines d'intersection et d'interaction entre coercition étatique et trajectoires criminelles individuelles. Les écarts de la co-habitation entre législation nationale et norme sociale génèrent ainsi des espaces interstitiels de survie économique et des parcours d'auto-représentation de prestige et de héroïsme. Dans ce cadre, l'apparat législatif de l'Etat est contourné, réexploité ou

dépassé à travers la mise en place d'outils symboliques de gestion et de réduction du risque ainsi que d'optimisation des stratégies d'accumulation. Par ailleurs, la gestion du risque a fait l'objet du workshop 098 *Chance in time of crisis* (Présidents : Riccardo Ciavolella, CNRS Toulouse, Université de Teramo et Lorenzo D'Angelo, Université de Milano-Bicocca) à travers l'analyse des représentations sociales de la 'chance'. Les orateurs ont montré que la production d'outils symboliques de réduction du risque est d'autant plus articulée que l'aide de l'Etat est perçue comme absente ou insuffisante.

La réglementation de l' 'immigration clandestine' au sein de l'Union européenne constitue un exemple probant de la nécessité d'une synergie d'approches des stratégies de construction des 'illégalités' et des 'criminalités' par l'Etat et, en même temps, des stratégies de résistance et des auto-représentations mises en place par les acteurs classés comme 'illégaux'. L'atelier 054 *Understanding Mediterranean transit migration* (Présidents : William Cavanagh, Université de San Pablo et Jutta Lauth Bacas, Académie d'Athènes) a proposé une large palette d'ethnographies de la migration internationale à travers, dans la plupart des cas, la collecte de témoignages vécus.<sup>3</sup> Ainsi, l'on compare le caractère homogénéisant et réitéré du discours politique véhiculé au sein de l'Union européenne, aboutissant à l'objectivation des la migrants, à la variété des trajectoires individuelles (variantes de genre et générationnelles) et à l'analyse des contextes de départ des migrants. Les différentes communications présentées au sein des ateliers qui ont touché au thème de l'immigration<sup>4</sup> ont montré que la construction politique du migrant 'illégal' ne relève pas seulement de la violation d'une perception identitaire du monde mais aussi d'une vision capitaliste de la circulation des personnes (Khosravi 2007). Un décalage évident semble ainsi se manifester, au niveau de l'Etat, entre la volonté

d'unifier les marchés des capitaux et des marchandises et les politiques de cloisonnement de la force de travail (Bayart 2004).

Le renvoi des communications aux thèmes que je viens de présenter a été constant. Néanmoins, aussi bien l'engagement émotionnel qui a accompagné les présentations des jeunes chercheurs que l'empreinte plus théorique proposée par les chercheurs seniors posent, une fois de plus, la question du rôle de l'anthropologie sociale aujourd'hui.<sup>5</sup> L'appel à conférence de cette édition souligne la nécessité d'une démarche anthropologique qui continue de repérer les systèmes de représentation qui sous-tendent le changement social et l'innovation issue de contingences de 'crise' plutôt que la pratique d'une anthropologie militante et/ou appliquée. Cependant, la complexité des thèmes abordés à Maynooth reflète, une fois de plus, le décalage entre l'enregistrement ponctuel des nodalités de transformation sociale transversale et hétérogène accéléré et les faibles retentissements de la discipline auprès des institutions, des médias et, en général, de l'arène sociale et politique. Pour ne citer qu'un exemple, l'endurcissement des politiques sécuritaires en Europe s'est traduit, en Italie, par l'avancée du consensus populaire à l'égard de la Ligue du Nord et de sa politique xénophobe d' 'hygiénisation' de la société italienne. Cela s'est traduit par une tendance nationale de discrimination répandue et, souvent, inconsciente.<sup>6</sup> L'omniprésence du message xénophobe de la Ligue du Nord dans les médias et, surtout, les stratégies rhétoriques qui l'accompagnent, déterminent, finalement, une inversion du sens des faits humains. Cette inversion, résultant de ruse politique et d'ignorance des rapports relationnels, véhicule un message déviateur et simplificateur d'autant plus puissant que l'*intelligentsia* semble ne pas trouver de canaux de communication efficaces.<sup>7</sup> Paradoxalement, si l'on peut concevoir, justifier ou refuser, une « Embedded anthropology » pour les contextes de guerre, l'on a du mal à

trouver des modèles anthropologiques viables dans le coude-à-coude quotidien du paysage des micro-pouvoirs sociaux et politiques de chez soi. L'atelier 042 *Engaging anthropology in practice: pedagogical exchanges with media practitioners*<sup>8</sup> a posé une série de questions dans cette direction: de quels outils l'anthropologie dispose-t-elle pour joindre le grand public et pas seulement le public académique? Peut-on 'communiquer' la théorie? Dans quels termes l'anthropologie peut-elle contribuer à un dialogue interculturel et interdisciplinaire à travers les canaux des média? Dans quelle mesure peut-elle accroître la qualité des produits médiatiques?

Pour conclure, au-delà de quelques bavures logistiques, la conférence EASA de Maynooth a été fort utile, surtout aux jeunes chercheurs, pour réfléchir, dans une perspective transversale et empirique, autour de sujets porteurs du débat anthropologique actuel tels que les effets contemporains du contrôle politique et le rôle des représentations dans la mise en place de stratégies de maintien ou d'évitement des pouvoirs institutionnels en place. Un débat ouvert et médiatisé sur l'apport de l'anthropologie dans la société entre les membres de l'EASA et des représentants de média nationaux serait le bienvenu en perspective de la prochaine conférence biennale.

### Note sur l'auteur

Cristiana Panella travaille au Département d'Anthropologie Culturelle du Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale. Depuis 1991, elle étudie le marché international de l'art africain, en particulier, le trafic d'objets archéologiques. En 2002, elle a soutenu une thèse en Sciences Sociales : *Les terres cuites de la discordie. Déterrement et écoulement des terres cuites anthropomorphes du Mali. Les réseaux locaux*, Leiden : CNWS. Actuellement, elle est en train de rédiger un ouvrage d'approfondissement théorique du commerce illicite d'objets d'art et s'intéresse aux représentations politiques de l'illégalité.

### Notes

1. Richards avait remarquablement analysé ce thème dans l'article : « An accidental sect: how war made belief in Sierra Leone » (Richards 2006).
2. A la suite d'un contre-temps, Berardino Palumbo a été représenté par Madeleine Reeves (Université de Manchester), discutante de l'atelier.
3. Au niveau méthodologique, l'on doit remarquer une attention excessive pour les témoignages vécus et, en général, pour l'approche empirique des contextes de migration internationale et le manque assez criard d'apports théoriques et comparatifs.
4. Sur ce thème, l'on signale aussi les ateliers 005 « At the margins of Islam in Europe », 011 « Imagined Europe under siege », 036 « Aspiring migrants, local crises, and the imagination of futures 'away from home' », 081 « Crisis, pain and well being : the imagining and bearing of refugee/migrants social, moral and existential crisis », 111 « Immigration, security and surveillance » et 115 « In-migration, indigeneity and imagination: or class, community and crisis in Europe ».
5. Parmi les ateliers qui se sont orientés sur le rôle de l'anthropologie, l'on cite le 004 « Diverse anthropologies with multiple publics: Crisis or imaginative responses? [WCAA workshop] », 026 « Applied anthropology, crisis and innovation in health and medicine », et 042 « Engaging anthropology in practice: pedagogical exchanges with media practitioners ».
6. L'omniprésence du 'Soleil des Alpes' et de la couleur vert drapeau, symboles de la Ligue du Nord, dans la conception et l'équipement d'une école communale de la province de Brescia récemment inaugurée témoigne de l'enracinement du discours de la Ligue sur le territoire national, en particulier dans le Nord-Est du pays. L'anthropologue Annamaria Rivera a cité des passages saillants des discours publics racistes, voire anthropophobes, qui ont accompagné, au cours des quinze dernières années, l'ascension politique de la Ligue du Nord et, par conséquent, la progressive réduction du migrant 'extra-communautaire' à « nuda vita » (à une vie nue) (Rivera 2009). Comme les communications de Maynooth l'ont relevé, la condition d'aliénation de « nuda vita » est commune à plusieurs parcours migratoires internationaux.

7. Un cas emblématique de cette inversion du sens a été la confrontation entre le journaliste Fabrizio Gatti, auteur d'enquêtes bien argumentées sur l'immigration clandestine, et l'actuel président du Piémont, Roberto Cota (Ligue du Nord) sur les émeutes des ouvriers agricoles qui se sont produits dans la ville de Rosarno, en Calabre, début janvier 2010. (Séance du 14 janvier 2010 de l'émission télévisée 'Annozero', Rai Due).
8. Présidents : Caroline Gatt (Université d'Aberdeen), Rachel Harkness (Université d'Edinburgh), Thomas Hylland Eriksen (Université d'Oslo), Joseph Long (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology).

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Identity economics: social networks and the informal economy in Nigeria**, by Kate Meagher, Oxford, James Currey, 2010, 224 pp., £16.99, ISBN 9781847010162

This book is an ethnographic study of social networks within the informal economy in southeastern Nigeria. The content manifests the expertise of the author in the areas of the informal economy and non-state governance in Africa. A general picture that emerges is the importance of understanding both the form and function of social networks if we are to appreciate how relevant social networks can be in different spatial and historical frames. At every point relevant questions are asked and thought-provoking answers are provided. What I find most interesting is how Meagher is able to link various themes of development interest: issues of ethnicity, politics of exclusion, accelerated economic liberalisation, institutional and infrastructural decay, and political opportunism that have been associated with politics and development in Nigeria. She also raises the pertinent question of the vulnerability of the informal economy to policy failure and state neglect.

The book is made up of nine chapters. Chapter 1 looks into ‘Social networks and economic ungovernance in Africa’, with particular reference to southeastern Nigeria. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on informal economic networks and questions of governance. Chapter 3 takes a historical perspective to examine economic networks among the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria from pre-colonial through colonial to the early years of Independence.

Chapter 4 addresses the experiences of informal-economy workers in the era of economic restructuring. The focus here is on the challenges of economic restructuring, and the impacts on production networks in the shoe and garment clusters. The book pays particular attention to supply and marketing networks within the informal economy and subcontracting networks with the formal economy. Chapter 5 turns to the restructuring of informal enterprise networks characterised by the weakening of various social ‘ties’, including gender and personal ties. Chapter 6 examines the place of popular associations in filling gaps arising from the weakening of ties based on business interests/networks. Chapter 7 explores how the quest for accumulation and survival has been linked to differentiation, exclusion and network fragmentation. Chapter 8 examines the place of producer associations in the garment and shoe clusters, providing in each case a brief account of their history, organisation and functions. This is followed by a section on the development and disbanding of the Bakassi Boys Vigilante Group. The Bakassi Boys developed as a grassroots response to the breakdown of security and managed to bring a semblance of security, but later suffered state capture when the original cause was abandoned due to political manipulation and political imperatives at the state and federal levels. This brief account provides a context for understanding the connection between youth involvement in violent conflict and its impact on the informal economy and Nigeria’s economic and political development. The last chapter turns

to questions of development, focusing centrally on social networks in the informal economy and general concerns about economic development in terms of linkages with the formal economy, international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the state.

One can only marvel at how this book adds to recent attempts to break from the essentialised constructions of the informal economy. The book adds new insights regarding the difficulties of organising the informal economy in general, and in relation to the positioning of the informal economy in processes of global economic structuring since the 1980s. The historical account challenges the thinking which understands the existence of networks in the informal economy as a new phenomenon, often linked in mainstream literature to the liberalisation of economies, and the consequent reduction in trade-union membership due to retrenchments in the 1980s and 1990s.

The strongest aspect of the book is its clear structure. The book has a very attractive title; its organisation into chapters, sections and subsections is logical; and the language is crystalline. The book displays a good balance between presentation of empirical detail and theoretical abstractions. The cover photo depicting shoemakers in front of their stalls is well chosen. The lucid structure makes for pleasant reading. The book is a useful reference for graduate students, but also a source book for the multidisciplinary range of scholars interested in the implications of economic informalisation for development and democratisation.

The breadth and length of the book reflects intensive fieldwork accomplished between 2001 and 2007 during which the author applied a triangulation of methods including in-depth interviews, survey methods, life histories, social mapping and discussion. Drawing on these methods the book contributes towards a

better understanding of the changing character of the informal economy in Africa.

I agree with the author's analysis of informality as a response to vulnerability as it is also about being able to identify alternative forms of order. However the question is, vulnerability from whose perspective? Or, what is the reference point here? If the people involved in the informal economy claim that what they do represents creative enterprise, do scholars have to interpret that as vulnerability? Here is room for re-examination of the subjective experiences of the actors. Here also is the need to appreciate that the reality of scholars may be different from that of the actors.

The final chapter presents a number of factual conclusions and recommendations that should prove very valuable to policy makers at both state and federal level in Nigeria. The main recommendations relate to the need for synergy between informal enterprise and the state, as the author puts it, rather than continuing to pretend that social networks and cultural values should be able to fill the widening gaps in state provision (p. 177). Second is the need to strengthen the capacity of informal operators and their associations to represent informal economic interests from below. I find the second recommendation rather ideological given the problems of representation where those entrusted with leadership positions seek first to promote personal interests rather than group interests. Working with NGOs and trade unions has also proved futile given problems of leadership. At the end of the day power struggles in the trade-union movement, for example, exacerbate the already precarious situation in the social networks in the informal economy.

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Global agro-food trade and standards: challenges for Africa**, edited by Peter Gibbon, Stefano Ponte and Evelyne Lazaro, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 256 pp., £60.00 (hardback), ISBN 9780230579514

The central premise addressed by this book is that ‘Africa is screwed by standards’ (p. 238). Standards refer to the process/product requirements that suppliers have to meet to sell into certain markets. The fear for exporters from developing countries is that they will lack the capacity to become compliant. In this way, standards would operate as non-trade barriers, effectively replacing tariffs and subsidies as a means of protecting developed countries from imports of agriculture and food. This threat is of particular concern to Africa since most countries on the continent lack the infrastructure, institutions, equipment and expertise to easily adapt to the new regulatory requirements. Moreover, to the extent that certain firms do adapt, it is expected that it will be those that are bigger and better-resourced, resulting in an industry ‘shake out’ of smallholder farming and artisanal fisheries.

This gloomy premise is assessed against the experiences of African firms exporting to the European Union. The book draws together 13 researchers based in East Africa and seven based in Denmark to look predominantly at the implementation and welfare impacts of standards ‘on the ground’ in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. It also feeds into two of the editors’ over-arching research agendas on the governance of global value chains.

Manifest in their 2005 publication *Trading down: Africa, value chains and the global economy*, Gibbon and Ponte’s work on the increasing importance of lead firms in buyer-driven chains and the limited opportunities for upgrading by suppliers provides the book’s theoretical backdrop. In this light, the proliferation of standards is seen as a result of lead firms’ attempts to differentiate their products based on competing quality claims. Thus the traditional food-safety requirements are now accompanied by standards on the organic, ethical and environmental characteristics of production. This has ‘frayed’ the value chain into multiple threads, expanding the application of standards horizontally across different issues and vertically throughout the production and distribution chain.

The major empirical contribution of the book is to suggest that the pessimism about standardisation is unwarranted. For example, one chapter based on a household-level study of smallholder organic certification concludes that ‘scheme participants received significantly higher mean net revenues from certified crops than control groups’ (p. 97). Likewise, another chapter argues that those people working in the artisanal segment of the Nile Perch export chain have superior livelihood conditions compared to ‘participants in other fishery chains also based on Lake Victoria but *not* linked to global markets through conformity with EU food standards’ (p. 163). Caveats are attached to these findings. For one, dependence on foreign donors to provide training to smallholders in the absence of meaningful public

support is acknowledged, as is the fact that beneficiaries of standardised supply chains tended to have greater resource endowments in the first place, thereby creating the possibility of selection bias. Nevertheless, it is argued that through the use of contract farming schemes or special provisions for group certification, the inclusion of small producers could be advanced and their marginalisation prevented.

The book's major analytical contribution rests with its blurring of some of the prevailing assumptions about agro-food standards. One example is the oft-cited dichotomy between public and private standards, in which public governance operates a 'rule-and-punish' system and private governance a 'self-regulating' system. Another chapter on the Nile Perch fisheries concludes that in the requirements set on minimum fish size 'the *content* of the standard was set by the public authority, the control of *conformity* with the standard is delegated to the private sector and [...] *sanctioning* reverts back to the public sector' (p. 201). The result is a hybrid 'market-and-punish' system of monitoring, which suggests an ongoing and evolving role for traditional state power in value chain governance. Another assumption relates to the motivation of firms seeking certification. In the case of the UTZ sustainability standards in the coffee chain, it is noted how many firms see compliance more as a means to reduce market risk, especially price shocks, rather than to gain market access *per se*. Furthermore, the prescriptions contained in such standards were

often interpreted and applied with a degree of flexibility. One consequence was that companies could learn to 'perform' compliance, simply promoting increased documentation and audit trails rather than monitoring systems that actively involved worker participation.

A challenge of studying agro-food standards is that they tend to overlap with one another and can be extremely scientific in detail. This often results in a legalistic and technocratic analysis, which, from the perspective of a politics scholar, leaves you somewhat feeling that you can't see the wood for the trees. Perhaps inevitably, certain sections of the book also succumb to this approach. I would wager that only the specialist would be interested in the methodological intricacies of carbon footprinting, or the details of Tanzania's different food-testing institutions, detailed in chapters two and three, respectively. Both of these in fact turn out to be of limited relevance to exports anyway, at least at the present time. That said, the editors do a fantastic job in the bookend chapters of summarising what is surely a growing trend in agro-food trade, and some authors, notably Riisgaard, offer valuable insights into the local politics of standards and how these are shaped by the continued power of Northern retailers within the value chain.

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Agricultural land redistribution: toward greater consensus**, edited by Hans P. Binswanger-Mkhize, Camille Bourguignon and Rogier J.E. van den Brink, Washington, DC, World Bank, 2009, pp. xxii + 464, US\$40, ISBN 9780821376270.

This is an unusual and intriguing book, as well as being informative about a range of land-reform experiences. It has something of a southern African emphasis, where two of the editors have done much work, but also provides handy comparisons with chapters on major cases: China, India, Brazil and the Philippines. There are also chapters on general themes such as land taxes, policy design, and monitoring and evaluation, as well as introductory chapters providing a comparative historical context.

It is unusual in that it is a World Bank (WB) publication, with the editors all associated with the Bank or its policies, and a couple of other WB staff contributing, but that among the other authors of chapters some have been known as trenchant critics of Bank proposals about land reform – Jun Borras (Editor of *Journal of Peasant Studies*), Sam Moyo from Zimbabwe, Karuti Kanyinga of Kenya and Edward Lahiff on South Africa. Other contributors include Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) staffers, and independent consultants.

The sense in which it is intriguing is evident in the subtitle of the volume and, in a different phrasing in that of the opening chapter, ‘The growing consensus on the importance of land reform’. This review is mainly organised around the questions implied: does the volume reveal

a consensus, and if so, over what? The one thing that all of these specialists on land redistribution, especially the ‘critics’, are likely to agree on is its *importance*. It would be welcome news if there were evidence that the Bank in its entirety now shares that view, clearly embraced by some of its representatives in this work. We can explore how far the book and the contributions of some of its own specialists indicate that, but the proof of the pudding of how far this priority is evident in the Bank’s wider practice, given the more general emphases on neo-liberal policies and limiting the role of the state, remains to be explored. The more crucial question is whether there is any coming together of some World Bank personnel and others on how actually to approach this important topic of land reform.

The one country where the volume might have tested the degree of consensus is South Africa, which is the subject of a chapter by a critic and by an existing and a former WB official and an ex-government official, as well as a regional comparative chapter by Sam Moyo. But the chance to compare perspectives is muffled when the second chapter on South Africa ‘does not attempt to develop an independent line of argument ... [just to] offer additional insights’ (p. 201). On scrutiny, the chapters agree in critiquing performance as enormously behind schedule, inappropriate models and lack of post-transfer support, leading to unsuccessful utilisation of the land transferred and inadequate provision of livelihoods. It is also probably true as the second chapter claims, that there is a ‘broad-based consensus’ on the urgent

need for a radically different approach, and even on some elements of a new strategy. The WB opinions partly go along with proposals for compulsory purchase rather than only voluntary market purchase; and contributors also agree in calling for a ‘smallholder strategy’. But they omit mention of one of Lahiff’s chapter’s prescriptions that such a strategy needs to reject the ‘bureaucratic imposition of collectivist models loosely based on existing commercial operators’ (p. 195). This contradictory outcome of the heavily ‘market-based’ approach, which he rightly picks out as a crucial cause of ‘failure’ and as a major constraint on ‘smallholderism’, is not picked up by the WB/government officials. They also avoid mentioning the one major institutional difference in how the same ‘willing buyer, willing seller’ approach pursued in Kenya and Zimbabwe was applied in South Africa: the avoidance of having a state institution acquire the land so as to sub-divide it. That part of the strategy was urged on South Africa in the mid-1990s by World Bank officials, and it is still advocated as a general

approach in the historical introductory chapter of this volume, ‘as it combines purchase and land allocations into a single step, *simplifying and accelerating* the process’ (p. 78, emphasis added). How can any informed writers make such a statement after 16 years of experience of the one case of this approach in Africa, which has been marked by the snail-like progress and bureaucratic complexity that has characterised South Africa?

This volume does at least present a number of different country experiences alongside each other, and does contain a range of perspectives, as well as an opportunity to engage with the World Bank. That such discourse is leading to a consensus beyond just noting the importance of land redistribution still remains to be proved, and the volume does not help, for it avoids any summarising conclusions.

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Empire, development and colonialism: the past in the present**, edited by Mark Duffield and Vernon Hewitt, Woodbridge, Suffolk and Rochester, NY, James Currey, 2009, 224 pp., £45.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781847010117

This edited collection emerged out of a series of workshops at Bristol University under the auspices of the two editors and the Department of Politics 'International Development Research Group'. As with all edited collections, the volume has its peaks and troughs but overall, and given its interdisciplinary nature, it makes a welcome addition to a variety of subject areas. The central theme of the book which unites the focus of the various contributors is an examination of contemporary discourses regarding humanitarian interventions, aid and development in comparison with their predecessors that emerged as justifications for the expanding European empires of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Thus the key question becomes one concerning continuity and change: to what extent can we locate the past in the present? Or does the attempt to read continuity in European imperialism misread the nature of this particular historical narrative? For example, do the activities of contemporary non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Africa bear any meaningful comparison to those of nineteenth-century missionaries?

Needless to say in a book of this kind there are mixed answers to these questions with some drawing striking connections between the two periods (Hewitt, Kothari, Keleman, Biccum) while others are

decidedly more circumspect (Smirl, Duffield). The overall flavour of the theoretical approaches adopted are those of post-colonialism and post-structuralism with most writers critical of the liberal developmental colonial ambition to promote universal emancipation. Foucault and Foucauldian concepts constitute, perhaps, the dominant theoretical discourse of the book, though not exclusively so. Whilst the racial basis of colonialism is now strongly rejected by most international institutions and national governments, other aspects of the liberal humanitarian ideal remain powerful – most obviously the need to intervene to solve social problems and to render life secure. As Duffield notes, this has led to the emergence of such apparently benign discourses as 'human security' which initially seemed to offer a progressive alternative to the orthodox approaches to security that had dominated geopolitics during the period of the Cold War. In essence, for writers such as Duffield and Noxolo human security is representative of the way in which security-development has become the central liberal discourse of the post-Cold War era, and for Duffield it becomes the 'human security state' (pp. 119–121). The social ills of underdevelopment become security threats to the core capitalist states through the threat of mass migration, the spread of infectious diseases, and the break-up of failed, now fragile, states. Living in an age of permanent emergency has meant the expansion of interventions on the basis of new wars that are low-level conflicts without clear boundaries, connecting vast and changing networks of fundraisers, criminal networks,

supporters and opponents in conflicts whose sites are often unclear and unstable, transcending state boundaries. Hence within this collection there is an emphasis upon issues of spatiality and its reconstruction in an era of complex global emergencies, such as the war on terror (see Smirl, Kothari, Johnson, Noxolo). Duffield and Hewitt's conclusions, as editors, are that 'there is little or no direct continuity between the past and the present. The connection is more in terms of resonances and echoes, unresolved antagonism and, especially, recurrent designs of power and urges to govern. Rather than colonialism constituting some form of heritage or memory, it is more the case that the will to power that shaped it lives on through new institutions and actors' (p. 14).

But is the book any good? It will certainly appeal to the expanding ranks of Foucauldian academics in disciplines such as International Relations and Development Studies. And, importantly, Foucault's work is subject to some useful critical interrogation by writers such as Noxolo. The stronger and more interesting chapters tend to be the ones that have more substantive empirical content as overall there is a tendency for theorising to dominate at the expense of historical analysis. This, I would suggest, is an inherent problem with edited collections, as authors tend to have insufficient space to develop their ideas and so, as in this case, the theoretical abstractions become somewhat repetitive and a little dull, unless, no doubt, you are particularly seduced by such language.

There is also a tendency, I would suggest, towards overstating the significance of liberalism as the ideological glue that cements the various colonial projects together. The fact that liberalism is difficult to pin down, is often contradictory and

elusive in its meaning, is also true of all political ideologies. Its utility for colonialism past and present as a source of ideological legitimacy and worldview is undoubted, but in the end core capitalist states pursue power by any means possible, regardless of whether or not liberalism can be seen to support their actions. In that respect the Hobbesian worldview that Foucault presents us with when he says, in 'Truth and power', 'one's point of reference should not be to the great model of language [*langue*] and signs, but to that of war and battle. The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning' (1980, p. 114) might have been one worth drawing upon here as much as his ideas of governmentality and biopolitics as means by which the liberal order is constructed. While Foucault may have rejected Hobbes' account of the Leviathan in *Society must be defended*, there is little doubt that at heart he shares Hobbes' world-view with regard to power and conflict; he simply shifts the focus on power from the 'sovereign individual' to, take your pick from: power/knowledge, circulating discourses, epistemic grilles. The extent to which Foucault's move is helpful in understanding the nature of power and domination in colonialism and development is another matter.

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## FILM REVIEW

**Moolaadé**, written and directed by Ousmane Sembène. Les Films Terre Africaine/Ciné-Sud Promotion, 2004. Made in Senegal: Bamabara and French dialogue; subtitled in English. 120 mins.

Ousmane Sembène's film, set in rural Senegal and featuring an amazing cast of local actors, explores how a male-dominated Muslim community comes to terms with questions of religion, culture and tradition. It tells the story of a Muslim woman, housewife and mother, Cole Ardo, as she confronts the forced practice of female circumcision (FC) supported by the 'cult' of mainly male village elders and submissive women allies. By refusing the circumcision of her own daughter, Binatou, years earlier, Cole became in the eyes of the village establishment a stubborn and erring housewife. However she became a local hero in the eyes of educated locals, young girls enlisted to be circumcised that season and their parents.

The film shows the influence of radio in advocating the ills of FC, enlightening the community and uniting those opposed to it, and demonstrates the stakes and stakeholders in the practice of female circumcision. On the one hand are those who cherish and support FC: village elders (mainly men) and 'incisors' (women whose trade is to circumcise girls). On the other hand, are those who oppose FC: Cole Ardo (the local housewife) and her 'silent supporters' – her fellow housewife (Adjatou), sympathetic middle-aged women and, to a lesser extent, her husband who kept mute at the time when Cole opposed the circumcision of their daughter.

Cole becomes a sudden threat when she gives asylum to young girls who run to her house seeking shelter from a gang of incisors who are out to catch all eligible girls for forced circumcision. When, after a village-wide search, Cole is asked to produce the children, she invokes the hallowed tradition of *Moolaadé* – named after an evil spirit rooted in an evil king of the land who reigned in the past. This occult practice involves a superstitious blockade imposed on the doorstep of a house which casts spells on anyone passing through. Thus the entire village except members of Cole's compound will incur the wrath of the *Moolaadé* if they disobey the blockade. As the one who invoked the *Moolaadé*, only Cole (a woman) can disable the blockade and its wrath through a counter-ritual.

In an emergency meeting of the village Council of Elders prompted by the incisors, Cole is told to perform the ritual to disable the *Moolaadé*, an instruction she refuses to obey. Cole's husband returns from a trip to the city to find a bitter commotion engulfing the whole village. Cole's husband is confronted by his senior brother, one of the village elders and a member of the Elders-in-Council, who insist that he call his wife to order.

The husband invites his two wives, Cole and Adjatou, to a closed-door family meeting. He rants with absolute authority, cursing Cole for provoking the wrath of the village, and telling her to immediately perform the ritual to lift the blockade. In a mild gesture of refusal Coles asks permission to explain her position, but her request is denied. Early the following

morning Cole's brother-in-law arrives at the compound to invite Cole and her husband to meet the Elders-in-Council. Secretly, he hands a hide-stroke to his younger brother instructing him, as allowed by his power of seniority, to 'smack the hell out of Cole, if she refuses to obey your command before the Council'. When, in the village square, Cole refuses once again to heed to the demands of the Elders and the instructions of her husband, the husband lashes Cole under the gaze of the entire village. This violent act continues until the husband can no longer raise his hands and Cole is nearly unconscious.

Cole's public punishment divides the village: those in support of the *status quo*, the village elders and incisors, shout 'keep beating her until she revokes the *Moolaadé!*'; those in support of change, especially young women, encourage Cole to 'keep up the resistance and endure the pain of change!' However, it is those in support of the *status quo* who seem to carry the day. As elders and wealthy members of society, they have the resources and influence to dominate public opinion and foist their interest and perceptions on society.

An important event is the wanton confiscation and burning, by the elders, of every radio in the village. The village establishment saw that radios served as an instrument of public enlightenment, community action and anti-establishment organising. The so-called 'talking technology' is accused of being the medium through which the heretic Cole was 'brainwashed' and indoctrinated into refusing the circumcision of Binatou. It is perceived to carry the risk of misleading other members of society into rejecting age-old traditions.

In the thick of such communal rancour, the village anticipates the return from France of the son of an influential family in the neighbourhood. He arrives with a lorry-full of exotic western souvenirs – TV sets, wrappers, shirts, shoes – to be given to friends and neighbours. He receives

a heroic village-wide ceremony; the local jester praises him: 'a true son of the village has indeed returned from grace; you have conducted your France adventure in style.' With his Western education and exposure, he soon develops interest in Binatou – the uncircumcised daughter of a stubborn woman! His father forbids him from having anything to do with a girl who is 'unfit for marriage', threatening to disown him if he disobeys. The boy leaves the village in anger and frustration. Sembène leaves his audience in suspense; we are not shown what happens to the boy.

In *Moolaadé*, one sees an astounding dramatisation of everyday life in rural Africa. Consider the following: (1) the role of religion and tradition in supporting and reproducing harmful health practices; (2) the role of elders, including women elders, in supporting the *status quo* (female circumcision); (3) the role of local artisans – in this case local incisors – whose livelihood depends on the sustenance of harmful traditions and who work hard to win the support of local elders; (4) the influence of Western technology and media (especially radio) in challenging local customs and enlightening peoples' perceptions and practices: such technologies usually get better reception from younger generations and the underclass; and (5) the influence of foreign cultures especially education, as demonstrated by the liberal approach of the French-educated 'son of soil' who, on return from his studies offers to marry the only uncircumcised girl in the village.

Sembène died in 2007, but this film will surely immortalise him with its awesome depiction of life in rural Africa and how local people are coming to terms with harmful traditional practices, as well as the power politics that undergird them.

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## EDITORIAL

### Poverty reduction and the chronically rich

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) has become the main way in which development policy is articulated in much of Africa.<sup>1</sup> The PRSP connects a number of agencies together: national governments, some civil society organisations, creditors, donors, and consultants and auditors. The PRSP effectively mainstreams poverty reduction into development-policy practice.

It is no coincidence that the PRSP has become the *lingua franca* of orthodox international development politics especially in regards to Africa. More than any other world region, Africa has become the signifier of poverty. The connection between Africa and poverty is often close to homology or elision: Africa/poverty. Other aspects of the international architecture of development practice affirm this connection: the way the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are discussed, and the new poverty vocabulary of chronic poverty, voices of the poor, and so on.

It is a material fact that Africa is an impoverished continent: outside of South Asia and China, there is no other space in which so many people suffer such a paucity of livelihoods. For all of the justifiable cynicism about international economic indices and the rankings they create, Africa is at the bottom of a certain hierarchy: 24 of the world's 26 poorest countries are in Africa if one takes gross national income (GNI) per capita as a very rough but roughly indicative measure.<sup>2</sup>

Poverty is political. This is so in myriad ways: not only in its measurement and its integration into policy initiatives, but also in the naming, 'seeing' (cf. Scott 1999) or categorisation of the poor. Like the term 'development', we can see how in part poverty is a categorisation that enables intervention by a range of agencies, as one can readily identify in the emergence of an international poverty agenda since the Monterrey Consensus in 2001, the 'Development' G8 meeting in 2005 accompanied by Make Poverty History, or the endlessly stalled World Trade Organization (WTO) Doha 'Development' Round.

Furthermore, the poor might exist statistically, but not socially. Measures of income per person, nutrition, infant mortality and so on create aggregations of people which are in a sense entirely abstract. Unlike a class, ethnic, age or gender identity, 'the poor' is a thin social categorisation. Where poor people live and work, their poverty is couched in 'thicker' social references: ethnic marginalisation, social injustice, senses of powerlessness, predatory state practices and so on.

In detailed studies where the signifier 'poor' is used, we can readily see how poverty is embedded in a moral economy or social relations. In South Africa, Ashwin Desai (2002) shows how the social identity of 'the poors' is constructed out of a sense of social injustice during the post-apartheid period which endeavours to negate the ethnic and racial signifiers the country is still struggling to negotiate. David Anderson and Vigdis Broch-Due's edited book *The poor are not us* (2000) explores the ways in which pastoralists in East Africa have been categorised as poor in ways that do violence to the social realities of their livelihoods.

Poverty is political; and poverty is relational. Poverty is not an innocent or original condition; it is the outcome of a history of deleterious social encounters with others.

Where poverty exists, it is not a result of some being ‘left out’ of something progressive, it is the outcome of marginalisations, dispossessions, assertions of control, acts of deception, and a range of contingent and accidental interactions (including misfortune).

The relational aspects of poverty are extremely important. Scaling up to the international level, one could be forgiven for associating Africa’s poverty image with an ideological representation of globalisation as a neoliberal universalising force in which poverty is a residuum rather than an integral component. Africa’s poverty seems to be a result of Africa’s failure to integrate; poverty is Africa’s fault; neoliberal globalisation does not in itself produce poverty. Consider the following text specifically addressed to the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) ‘Challenges of Globalisation for Africa’: ‘countries that fail to participate in this trend toward integration run the risk of being left behind’ (Ouattara 1997, no page).

Africa has been pathologised as much as it has been exploited. Indeed the two go together in what might be called an ideological act in which Africa is impoverished twice: in the first place through the damaging effects of a global capitalist system and secondly through the impoverished images produced of Africa, represented as a place of little else than poverty and violence at the margins of a supposedly beneficent globalising mainstream.

Thus, we need both to recognise a real mass poverty in Africa (not simply a postmodern ‘poverty’ signifier) whilst treating poverty as nothing more than an indication towards specific social relations embodied in peoples, institutions and spaces. PRSPs themselves are poorly equipped to make much of an impact on poverty, although that is not to deny them some palliative effects that might emerge through some recovered spending on social provision. Levels of poverty are so high in many African countries that it is only a slight exaggeration to claim that *everyone* (outside of a nexus of politicians and business-people) is engaged in attempts at poverty reduction, from middle-ranking civil servants down to the land- or labour-scarce rural household, the struggle for a basic standard of living constitutes much of social and productive life. When carrying out fieldwork in a small market town in Tanzania, I was discussing the ownership of the small number of all-terrain cars in the town. One belonged to the director of a small Tanzanian non-governmental organisation (NGO) that had enjoyed international NGO support for a time. Laconically, my research colleague commented that the director ‘was reducing his own poverty’. Using the donor leitmotif of poverty reduction ironically, the point was that poverty reduction was a national pursuit. The NGO director was not wealthy, although he was clearly richer and more secure than the majority of people in the district. But, the international NGO support his organisation had received had ended and the NGO was now all but defunct. He was engaged in a range of activities to secure money elsewhere. His position was neither affluent nor secure.

Also in Tanzania, the Economic and Social Research Foundation publishes *Quarterly economic reports*, one of which contains a pie chart of income distribution (April–June 2009). Along with the chronically poor, there is a segment titled *chronically rich*. This segment is defined as those who have remained rich for ten years, but one might take from the literature on chronic poverty that chronic wealth is that which is difficult to ‘escape’ from and that is symptomatic of a broader social dysfunction. A kind of wealth that is anti-social.

If poverty of the kind found in much of Africa – as well as other parts of the world – is both morally and politically unacceptable, and if poverty is relational rather than an ‘innocent’ or ‘original’ situation, then we might think about poverty reduction and wealth reduction as interlinked. What is wrong with a Wealth Reduction Strategy Paper (WRSP)?

The richest 10% of the world's population hold one-half of the world's income (Held and Kaya 2007, p. 1). The poorest 800 million people continue to suffer from malnutrition; there are 946 billionaires with assets worth over US\$3.5 trillion (Dauvergne 2008, p. 110). Clearly, any WRSP would need to be focused on a global social group whose addresses might be found in a Forbes wealth index or a recipient list of the US government's Troubled Assets Relief Programme (TARP) rather than the offices of a poor African state. Might it constitute a more equitable form of contract between institutions such as the World Bank or IMF and African states if the latter requested that adherence to PRSPs and their related donor/creditor programmes be accompanied by WRSPs implemented within and amongst those states where the concentrations of wealth – for all the equalising talk of globalisation – still resides?

A couple of thought experiments might bring this into clearer relief. The net asset worth of the world's Forbes<sup>3</sup> listed dollar billionaires in 2010 was US\$3.5274 trillion. Redistributing these assets to the world's poorest billion (generally seen as those below the global poverty line of a dollar per day) would provide them with a cash/asset extra wealth of about US\$3,500. If this were distributed over a ten-year period at US\$350 per year, it would be likely to put into motion broader processes of poverty reduction which might actually move the world into something like a 'world free of poverty'.

The US government TARP is a Treasury fund to buy 'troubled' assets of large banking complexes. With an initial budget of US\$700 bn, it constitutes a staggering redistribution of wealth from the poor (low-income, indebted taxpayers, many of whom were hit very badly by the sub-prime loans collapse and many of whom are African-American) to the chronically rich chief executive officers (CEOs), fund managers and shareholders of private financial institutions. The money has been paid out on the basis of misleading information about the sustainability of recipient banks and operationalised through private agencies, which again has generated a sense of secretive mass-asset redistribution. TARP is a striking exemplar of the profoundly anti-social nature of chronic wealth: the 'great predators' (Bracking 2009) who rely on state support, evasive, speculative and vulture-like asset mobility, and the occasional philanthropic gesture.

If course, stating a case for a WRSP leads directly to the question of utopian thinking: it might be nice to imagine such a thing, but it is completely irrelevant to the conditions of the present day. This critique is both too obvious to be very interesting, and also misleading because of the way in which it denigrates the purpose of utopian thinking. Any radical thinking requires a tension between the optimism of the will and the pessimism of the intellect, as Gramsci put it. But, also, the purpose of a utopian idea such as a WRSP is to serve as a 'missile concept' (cf. Fournier 2008, p. 531) – a way of challenging what orthodoxies would call the 'real world', a speech act that defends as well as describes current conditions. In other words, without some utopian thinking, how can we exercise any flexibility concerning historic possibilities which are not simply slight extrapolations of the present day?

Additionally, what kind of utopia is this? In an important sense, it is a very *moderate* one. A WRSP would not involve revolution; it would involve mass dispossession; it would not undermine the existing structural dispositions of power embodied in capitalism and the state system. Imagine a redistribution of wealth (which might involve any combination of income, property, savings, assets) of the richest few thousand families calculated to leave this tiny minority with good jobs, remuneration and a basket of assets. It is about the chronically rich being made to suffer no more than the indignities of comfort. It is a sobering diagnostic of our times that a WRSP would be decried as ludicrous and utopian when compared with the *real dystopia* of mass chronic poverty in African countries and elsewhere.

The modalities of a WRSP are difficult to specify – not only because the wealthiest people are – by definition – also extremely powerful. Downstream of any act of progressive redistribution there are many questions about how the money might be used. For the last 20 years there has been a great deal of energy expended regarding how aid might be put to best use: the relative efficiencies of NGOs as service providers; aid, governance and ‘political will’; techniques of expenditure tracking, direct budgetary support; demand–response mechanisms such as those employed by the Global Fund and some privately supported foundations. There is likely to be considerable merit in thinking again about this considerable body of evidence and practice in light of a possible substantial infusion of extra resource.

Joseph Hanlon, Armando Barrientos and David Hume (2010) moot the possibility of direct cash provision to the poor, on the grounds both of efficiency as ‘value for money’, and also on the premise that it is most likely that the most poor will know best how to reduce their own poverty. Over time (consider the thought experiment above of US\$350 per year for a decade for the poorest billion) this would lead to socio-structural change in which global poverty changes significantly. This argument is again both radical when seen in the context of contemporary structures of power and political possibility but, set against existing social conditions, perfectly feasible and humane. And, it would also allow possibilities of escaping the cloying intellectual imperialism of Western aid frameworks which cannot but project their own utopias onto societies struggling to define and assert their sovereignties.

Poverty and wealth are mutually defining; they are also relational. Although it would be a crude simplification to argue that ‘the West’ is rich because ‘the South’ is poor, nor can we deny that, however complex the commodity chains, the unlevel playing fields, the imperialist power projects, and the historical legacies, there is a substantive justice case for a WRSP based in the notion that Western affluence and African poverty are connected and that this evokes duties upon Western states. Thomas Pogge (2007) argues that anyone with a belief in human rights can move straightforwardly towards a case for global redistribution not in the name of charity but in the name of justice. For all of its utopianism, a WRSP would serve as a moderate, just, and potential highly effective way of moving beyond the PRSP.

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Dereje Feyissa’s article provides a fascinating account of a kind of ‘resource curse’ which is removed from the largely rational choice analyses of oil in West Africa. Looking at the Afar region in Ethiopia, Dereje’s work delineates the political economy of claims to salt production, claims that evoke arguments about this region’s relations to Addis Ababa, as well as efforts to generate capitalist coalitions that might gain access rights to salt. As is so often the case with subterranean resources located in marginalised areas, the revenues from salt are not going to the general population of the area that Dereje studies in some detail (Afdera).

Bernd Mueller argues that the agrarian question – as developed in no small part within the pages of this journal – provides a vital way to understand social change in many parts of rural Africa. The key issue here is how the expansion and intensification of capitalist social relations reproduces and transforms the ways that households work – both on the field and elsewhere. Using a survey from Lushoto district in Tanzania, Mueller shows how complex the interpolations of capital can be: between the genders, within segmented wage labour markets (and especially the highly exploitative *kibarua* labour market), and between farming/wage labour households. Mueller also adds his critical voice to those who have identified the inconsistencies in the ways that Western agencies such as the World Bank

have represented rural development, largely because of their inability to face squarely the differentiating and dispossessing aspects of agrarian change.

If Mueller argues that simplistic ideas about agricultural development miss the complexity of the impact of capitalism, Franklin Obeng-Odoom reinforces this insight in his study of water provision, waste management, and privatisation in Accra. Once again, donors, governments, and much of the research looks at provision through headline figures (number of standpipes, flow volume of water and so on), but the process of privatisation runs deeper than the legal mechanisms of a public–private partnership. Obeng-Odoom shows how market hierarchies have emerged in which the wealthy gain enhanced access to water and might also then sell water on to the poorest, making a profit in the process. Privatisations are not simply rolling back the state; they are creating new or intensified privations of societies. Furthermore, Obeng-Odoom shows how headline statistics obscure serious performance failures by private agencies in terms of reliability and maintenance – something that seems to be pretty much the rule across Africa’s privatised social provision.

Luke Sinwell’s article analyses social movements in South Africa and moots the extent to which they might be understood as a sign of independent revolutionary politics. Radical tactics might emerge in pursuit of relatively restrained objectives, focused on eliciting more or less discretionary social provision from the state. Underpinning this analysis is a key feature of South African politics more generally: the increasing dominance of the African National Congress (ANC) party-state. This leads to social movements maintaining substantial loyalty to the ANC even if protest might resemble something more independent and radical. Of course, keeping in mind the extreme social deprivation and social inequality that characterises South Africa’s political economy, thinking innovatively about both the potential and restraints of current social movements is vital.

Relatedly, this issue carries a series of essays which review the legacy of radical nationalist struggle in southern Africa. This set of essays (by Patrick Bond, Henning Melber, John Saul, Richard Saunders and David Sogge), initially brought together by John Saul for the e-zine AfricaFiles (<http://www.africafiles.org/>), considers the problematic and generally disheartening dénouement of the political projects of the region that were based on ideals of revolution, socialism and national self-determination.

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## Notes

1. I am grateful to Ray Bush, Caroline Ifeka, and Gary Littlejohn for comments on this editorial.
2. See: [http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.PP.CD?order=wbapi\\_data\\_value\\_2009+wbapi\\_data\\_value+wbapi\\_data\\_value-last&sort=asc](http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.PP.CD?order=wbapi_data_value_2009+wbapi_data_value+wbapi_data_value-last&sort=asc) [Accessed 30 November 2010].
3. Source: [http://www.forbes.com/lists/2010/10/billionaires-2010\\_The-Worlds-Billionaires\\_Rank.html](http://www.forbes.com/lists/2010/10/billionaires-2010_The-Worlds-Billionaires_Rank.html) [Accessed 13 December 2010].

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Peace versus justice? The dilemma of transitional justice in Africa**, edited by Chandra Lekha Sriram and Suren Pillay, Scottsville, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009, 373 pp., R 244.95, ISBN 9781869141738

Africa has represented one of the principal laboratories of transitional justice since the 1990s. The continent has witnessed the creation of an international criminal tribunal (for Rwanda), several truth and reconciliation commissions (TRCs) (the best known being the South African TRC), a ‘hybrid’ court made up of domestic and international justice officials (the Special Court for Sierra Leone), and local conflict-resolution and reconciliation mechanisms derived from traditional practices (in Rwanda, Mozambique or Uganda). Finally, African countries also represent the totality of the cases currently before the International Criminal Court in The Hague. For these reasons, *Peace versus justice? The dilemma of transitional justice in Africa* is a welcome and necessary contribution. Not only does it consider the full range of mechanisms employed in Africa’s transitional justice processes, but it also provides a (self-) critical analysis by African scholars and practitioners who were personally involved in them.

The volume is divided into five parts: the first providing a general overview of the challenges of transitional justice in the African context; the second focused on truth and reconciliation processes; the third on war-crimes tribunals; the fourth on indigenous justice; and the fifth on the International Criminal Court. Several

themes cut across the various case studies considered. As the book’s title highlights, a key issue is the balance between ‘peace’ and ‘justice’ in the African context: the difficult decisions characterising post-conflict situations and the new governments’ attempts to address the legacy of human rights abuses, war crimes and genocide — but without jeopardising a fragile peace often ensuing from a negotiated settlement. A second cross-cutting theme is the importance of local ownership of transitional justice processes. This emerges particularly clearly in the chapters on Sierra Leone and Rwanda, where both the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) and the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) in various ways disempowered local actors and societies who were meant to be the principal recipients of the justice these courts were providing. A third important theme concerns the ultimate aims of transitional justice, particularly the notion of ‘reconciliation’ through justice and truth-telling mechanisms. Here, local responses — like internationally driven ones — have been found to fall short of the lofty aims they declared as their ultimate justification: bringing about healing, forgiveness, ‘nation-building’ and social consensus about the past. The critiques provided in the volume raise the question of whether greater modesty in proclaiming the aims and more measured expectations of transitional justice are necessary, in Africa as elsewhere.

As recognised by the editors, *Peace versus justice?* showcases the ‘large footprint’ of the South African TRC as a model for truth commissions in Africa

and beyond. Alex Boraine, the former vice-chair of the TRC, examines the impact of the South African case on the establishment of other truth commissions in Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste and Peru. Other authors focus more specifically on the constraints under which the South African TRC operated and the critiques that have been levelled at it. Other than the issue of the amnesty – which remains contentious both in South Africa and elsewhere, despite the TRC's argument that it was necessary to ensure a peaceful transition and was conditioned on specific criteria, including the full disclosure of the individuals' involvement in human rights abuses – Yasmin Louise Sooka and Charles Villa-Vicencio (both former TRC members) note in their chapters the failure of the TRC to address apartheid's legacies of structural racism and economic injustice. Building on the critiques by Wole Soyinka and Mahmood Mamdani, Villa-Vicencio thus writes that '[t]he limitation of the South African TRC was that it had neither the mandate nor the time nor, perhaps, the will to address the underlying problem of racism and privilege that underpinned the gross violations of human rights that it sought to uncover.' (p. 53) Such critiques of the TRC confirm the claim made by many analysts that, in South Africa, the goal of rectifying injustice was ultimately subordinated to the pursuit of peace and the discourse of national reconciliation.

Justice was, of course, the primary imperative of tribunals set up for Rwanda and Sierra Leone and of the International Criminal Court. Kingsley Chiedu Moghalu, a former Special Counsel and Spokesperson for the ICTR, makes a case for trials being the best transitional-justice mechanism for post-conflict societies, despite recognising that in some cases amnesties or truth commissions may represent a necessary first step. However, some of the case-study chapters challenge this view. Wambui Mwangi highlights local ownership as a

big problem for the ICTR, particularly in regard to acquittals. John L. Hirsch contrasts the case of Sierra Leone with its 'hybrid' Special Court to that of Mozambique, where 'traditional rituals, local community practices, the churches and civil society replaced Western models of justice'—noting that only in the latter 'a significant measure of reconciliation was achieved' (p. 202). His argument that domestic processes are more successful than internationally generated ones is echoed in the other chapters on Sierra Leone, where international involvement in the Special Court overshadowed and sidelined the national judiciary and the country's truth and reconciliation commission, and interfered with regional attempts at negotiating the country's transition. In a similar vein, Chandra Lekha Sriram notes that the International Criminal Court may, in fact, hinder domestic peace-making and reconciliation processes – as, for example, in the Ugandan case when it decided to prosecute Joseph Kony despite a domestically agreed amnesty. The contributors confirm many of the problems with the existing, predominantly international, judicial instruments – without, however, dismissing the need for prosecutions *per se* or minimising their potential contribution to processes of reckoning with the past.

Although there is some repetition and overlap among the contributions, and some chapters are by now already out of date, all in all *Peace versus justice?* provides a thoughtful and nuanced account of transitional justice in Africa from an 'insider' perspective. It should be useful both to students of the various African case studies covered and to analysts of transitional justice and post-conflict peace building more generally.

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