

Labour protests in Egypt: causes and meanings¹

Rabab El-Mahdi*

Political Science Department, American University of Cairo, Cairo, Egypt

Egypt has experienced a wave of unprecedented labour protests since December 2006. Refuting moral economy and rational choice arguments as a basis for understanding labour unrest in Egypt, this paper argues that this wave of protests is an outcome of the rupture of the hegemonic ruling pact governing Egypt since 1952. As such, this movement, which includes both industrial workers as well as white-collar state employees, should be interpreted beyond its immediate material demands. Rather, the paper argues, the changing constituency, tactics, and internal organisation of the movement all point to the potential role that it can play in further eroding the corporatist–authoritarian structure governing state–society relations in Egypt. The paper concludes that this movement might be carrying the potential for wider democratisation.

Keywords: labour; Egypt; corporatism; protests; movement; authoritarianism

Introduction

During the past few years Egypt has witnessed, in its labour movement, ‘the largest social movement in over half a century’ (Beinin 2009, p. 77). For decades the idea of Egyptian labour as an active agent within the public sphere and civil society seemed little more than a myth or, at the very least, a legacy not supported by any visible action. And while there has been important labour action during the past five decades, this was both limited and sporadic, and did not expand to include workers outside the locale of contention (i.e. the specific plant or workplace). Subsequently, it did not result in new organisational forms of labour and certainly did not include white-collar state employees. In contrast, the recent wave of labour contention which was ignited in December 2006 in the biggest weaving and spinning factory in Egypt, in El-Mahalla town, marked the start of something that is quantitatively and qualitatively different.

The workers at Misr Spinning and Weaving Company in Mahalla al-Kubra, where nearly a quarter of all public sector textile and clothing workers are employed, went on strike when they did not receive a bonus payment which had been decreed by Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif. Their action marked ‘the largest and most politically significant industrial strike since a dispute in the same workplace in 1947’ (Beinin 2009, p. 79). After a week of complaining and organising small protests, 24,000 workers began a strike on 7 December 2006, when thousands of female workers in the plant left their work stations and walked over to where their male counterparts were working, chanting ‘Where are the men? The women are here!’² Joining ranks, women and men marched towards the centre of the

*Email: relmahdi@aucegypt.edu

plant, Tala't Harb Square. Over the following three days more than 10,000 striking workers occupied the factory round the clock, forming a strike committee to organise logistics of the strike, speak to the media and negotiate with the workplace authorities. 'On the fourth day of the occupation panicking government officials offered a 45-day bonus', more than double what workers had traditionally received (Beinin 2009, p. 80). Drawing inspiration from the action of the Mahalla workers, other industrial workers in both the state and private sectors, as well as white-collar employees (postal workers, educational administrators, tax collectors, transportation workers, the government information centre employees, and even physicians and pharmacists), would stage a series of protests, consolidating a movement that has not subsided since.

The current movement, while quantitatively significant (more than 1.7 million workers are estimated to have participated in actions between 2006 and 2009), also marks a qualitative leap from earlier labour action in Egypt. The overwhelming majority of these strikes and actions were organised by worker-leaders outside official union committees, which in a number of cases were rendered redundant as, in many of these locales of contention, workers and employees elected their own strike-committees with responsibility for managing ongoing action, representing workers in negotiations with the authorities and organising future action. They developed a whole new repertoire of contention tools, ranging from street protests and strikes to extended sit-ins at official buildings (Parliament and the Cabinet headquarters) and factory occupations. Such independent organisation reached its apogee with the real estate tax collectors forming an independent union in April 2009 – the first autonomous non-state union since the 1940s – following their successful but extended struggle, which started in December 2007.

However, alongside these successes were important cases where, despite persistent struggle, workers were either defeated (e.g. Mansura-Espana Garments factory, Information and Decision-Making Support Centre employees) or won only partial victories (e.g. ESCO Qalyub Spinning and Ora-Misr Asbestos factories). There are also many cases in which, rather than demonstrating confrontational class consciousness, signs and slogans at strikes and protests called on President Hosni Mubarak or some other government official to come and investigate workers' grievances. In addition, there were lengthy strikes (such as Indorama Shibin, Kitan Tanta factories) that were simply ignored by the state and in which the workers moved from points of high politicisation and confrontation with the state – staging extended sit-ins in front of Parliament and hanging effigies of the prime minister and other National Democratic Party (NDP) figures – to moving back to minimal demands and pleading with state officials for a resolution. However, despite the different outcomes and demands, in all cases there were new organisational features (specifically internal democratisation and the adoption of novel confrontational tactics) that are significant in understanding the continuity of the protests and their political meaning.

Thus, the rise of this movement lends itself to a lot of questions, both theoretical and practical. This paper focuses on two of these. First, where did this movement come from, i.e. what are the causes of the rise of this movement at this particular historical moment? And, second, what does the movement tell us about the changing macro-political landscape in Egypt, i.e. what does it actually mean? Unfortunately, the existing literature and available theoretical frameworks are inadequate for dealing with these recent developments in labour movement organisation. Indeed, while some recent literature provides excellent descriptions of the developments in labour protests, it does not delve sufficiently deeply into key episodes, or explore their meaning for the restructuring of state–society relations as such, being mostly policy and media reports (Beinin and El-Hamalawy 2007a, Beinin and El-Hamalawy 2007b, Beinin 2010, Clement 2009, pp. 100–116).

In addition, available theoretical paradigms used for the study of labour in Egypt do not provide sufficient grounds for understanding labour mobilisation at the current historical juncture. Hence, this article uses a Gramscian framework that looks at elements of domination and hegemony, to answer these research questions.

The article argues that the recent wave of labour protests cannot be understood merely in terms of economic demands by individuals trying to maximise utility (rational choice) or restore gains (moral economy); but, rather, that these economic demands both arise from, and contribute to, changes in the nature of the ruling pact which has emerged in the years since 1952. The labour movement is an outcome and a signifier of the neoliberal rupture of the post-1952 labour–state pact, both in its hegemonic (ideational) form and its domination (material) elements. Based on this dialectical relationship labour, which was a solidifying pillar for populist authoritarianism with its corporatist mechanisms for five decades, is now poised to become the most important social actor behind corporatism's demise and hence might be opening new paths for democratisation. As such, the article is an attempt to move beyond a dominant overly state-centric literature, with its elite-bias, which focuses on the role and strategic choice of elites and political leadership in understanding political transitions (see, for example, Brownlee 2007, Lust-Okar 2005, Rutherford 2008). In addition, it provides insights into the dismantling of populist state-corporatism – which provided an infrastructure for sustaining authoritarianism in the region for more than half a century since independence – from below (Bianchi 1986, Bianchi 1989, Ayubi 1995).

Classically, there have been multiple definitions of and differentiations in the literature between: white-collar/middle-class versus blue-collars/working class; proletariat versus lumpenproletariat, popular sectors etc. However, developments in capitalism during the past 20 years, and changes in the socio-economic matrix under neoliberalism, have made these dividing lines more complex and, in many contexts, rendered them redundant and misleading. Some industrial workers, for instance, are better paid, have better working conditions, and are more skilled than some white-collar workers. And both share common objective conditions, and similar subjectivity and relational positions within the neoliberal matrix, in opposition to the new ruling elite of 'technocrats' and business-owners. This has prompted what has been labelled the 'proletarianisation of the white-collars' (Hall 1997, Marshall 1997, Wright 1997). Hence, this paper understands *labour* to denote waged labour that has been excluded politically and economically from the new development matrix under neoliberalism, and which includes the majority of white-collar and blue-collar workers, and the lumpenproletariat. However, the examples and analysis used throughout the paper focus on two specific groups within the broader category of labour: state employees and industrial workers, both of which have traditionally been state allies and hence the underlying pillar of populist state corporatism.

Brief historical background

Although sporadic and episodic, contentious action by labour has been reported in Egypt since the beginning of the twentieth century. The first documented strike was in 1899 by the rolled-cigarette workers, which lasted three months and resulted in the first trade union in Egypt (Abbas 1973, p. 62). A number of labour unions known as 'workers' societies' were then formed as early as 1908 and, by the end of World War I, with the rise of Marxist parties in Egypt, these unions were amalgamated into the 'Workers Confederation' (Abbas 1973). Despite the changeable fortunes of these labour organisations and state attempts to clamp down on both the unions and their Socialist-Communist backers, Egypt could, by the second half of the 1940s, claim a strong independent labour movement

which became an integral part of the national liberation movement.³ Between 1946 and 1951, labour strikes and job-actions against British occupation, as well as business-owners, prompted different political parties to seek the allegiance of this movement, and the state to try to crush it. However, the existence and independence of this movement ended shortly after the 1952 *coup d'état*, which not only violently crushed labour riots in the Nile delta town of Kafr El-Dawwar a couple of months after the coup, but also executed two workers leaders – Mustafa Khamis and Mohamed Al-Baqri – in order to send a strong message to the movement as a whole.

Shortly afterwards, the seminal events of 1954 – in which Gamal (Jamal) Abdel Nasser overthrew the more liberal-leaning president, Mohamed Naguib, banned pluralist independent political organisation and created the monolithic Liberation Rally – ushered in a populist–corporatist pact between labour and the state. More broadly, this denoted an etatist model, in which ‘the state controls the bulk of the economic, political, and social domains, leaving little space for society to develop itself and for interest groups to surface, compete, and act autonomously’ (Bayat 2002, p. 1). As quintessential state corporatism, this model, which annihilated the labour movement of the 1940s, organised labour (along with other groups of society) ‘into a limited number of singular, compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories, recognised or licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate representational monopoly’ (Schmitter 1974, p. 86). The new regime established the General Federation of Egyptian Trade Unions (GFETU) in 1957, monopolising the workers’ unions, purging militants from the leadership, and co-opting remaining moderates. Ever since then, ‘trade unions have functioned as an arm of the state rather than as democratic representatives of workers, mobilising workers to demonstrate “popular support” for the divergent policies of successive regimes at the ballot box or in the street’ (Beinin 2009, p. 68). As a result of this reorganisation of state–labour relations, earlier labour mobilisation subsided throughout the 1950s and most of the 1960s, only to be resumed at particular moments during 1970s and 1980s, notably during the Iron and Steel factory workers actions in 1968, 1977 and 1989; events at Kafr El Dawwar Weaving and Spinning in 1995, and the railway workers strike in 1986.

However, it is important to note that this pact and the resulting circumvention of independent labour mobilisation were based not only on repression (as exemplified in the 1952 executions of labour leaders and later imprisonment of dissidents in the 1950s and 1960s), but also on co-optation incentives, including immediate material improvements in workers’ livelihoods (e.g. the socialist decrees of July 1961; free education for all; state-provided health care etc.), and an ideational consent in which both the regime and labour constituted a fighting bloc against imperial forces and their local allies – the bourgeoisie. This was due largely to the immense strength of the labour movement during the 1940s, which forced different political forces (including royalty, communists, nationalists, and Islamists) to compete for its allegiance, as well as the imperative of the new post-colonial state to *modernise* (read: industrialise) the economy (Beinin and Lockman 1987, pp. 449–461). Thus, while the regime moved labour organisation from pluralism to corporatism, it did so through political inclusion and selectively co-opting, rather than excluding, the working class from socio-economic development processes in order to secure its acquiescence.⁴ Similarly, the new regime guaranteed state employment to all university graduates; even at minimal wages, such guaranteed employment, garnering the allegiance of the rising middle class, has been correctly seen by many scholars as integral to the sustainability of the regime and a corner-stone in public consent for authoritarianism (Goldberg 1992, El Mikawy 1999, Pratt 2007). Thus, the working class, broadly defined (including

blue-collar workers and the majority of state white-collar workers), has been playing a role in shaping the ruling pact of state–society relations, even as it was itself conditioned by it. As the largest organised sector in society, its corporatisation set the ground for the pact governing state–society relations at large.

Changing labour dynamics

As recently as the beginning of the new millennium, it was suggested that ‘the economic restructuring of the 1980s has further undermined organised labour, as the public sector, the core of trade unionism, is shrinking because of closures, downsizing, and early retirements. Numerous reports point to the declining capacity of the region’s labour movements to mobilise’ (Bayat 2002, p. 7). However, Figure 1 shows that the number of contentious actions have soared since the El-Mahalla strike in 2006, amounting to more than the aggregate number of such actions in the preceding eight years – which, by the end of the 1990s, was already double the number of protests seen in any year throughout the 1980s (Paczynski 2009, p. 181). Contrary to predictions of the constraining effects of neoliberalism on labour militancy in the literature, therefore, it seems that there has been more contentious labour action – despite, or maybe because of, economic restructuring. The literature also falls short in its understanding of the changing nature of such contentious action.

According to existing paradigms in the literature, worker mobilisation in Egypt can be explained in one of two ways: First, via the moral economy approach, used by Marsha Posusney, among others; and, second, linking rational choice approach to structural variables, the route favoured by writers like Ellis Goldberg and Eva Rana Bellin. Starting with moral economy arguments, Posusney (1993) argues that:

Collective action is a response to violations of norms and standards to which the subaltern class has become accustomed and which it expects the dominant elites to maintain. Rather than

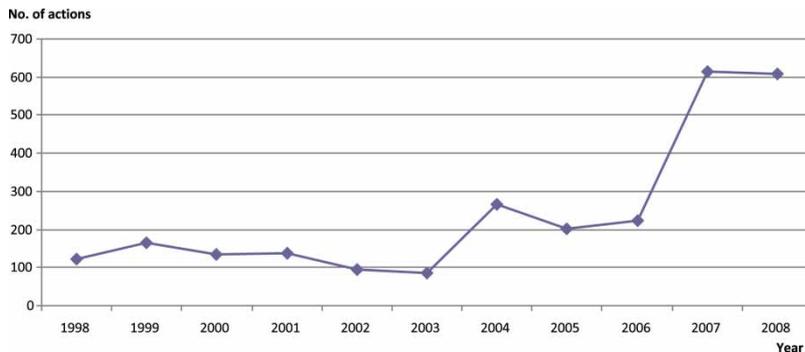


Figure 1. Contentious action by Egyptian workers, 1998–2008.

Note: The graph was compiled from the Land Center for Human Rights (LCHR), (<http://www.lchr-eg.org>) Economic and Social Rights Series nos. 5, 7, 13, 16, 18, 22, 28, 30, 33, 36, 39, 42, 49, 54, 56 and 58 (El-Mahdi 2010, p. 147). Some of the figures show discrepancies with the figures reported by the Trade Union and Workers Watch (received by email from the Hisham Mubarak Law Center). For example, the Watch reports 756 actions in 2007 versus 614 in the LCHR report. The discrepancy, which can be found in other figures and years, including the number of participants, can be attributed to the different definitions of ‘contentious action’ adopted by the two main labour monitors. While LCHR defines contentious action as ‘strikes, demonstrations, picketing, and gathering’, the Watch extends this to include ‘complaints and legal action’.

reflecting some emerging new consciousness, then, protests under a moral economy aim at resurrecting the status quo ante. The goal is not to negotiate and redefine the terms of exploitation but to reinstate them after they have been abandoned (p.85).

Hence, dissent by Egyptian workers is to be understood as 'restorative', aimed at reinstating a patron–client relationship with the state and the socio-economic privileges this entailed – and this at the expense of political rights. Similarly, in analysing workers protests in the 1990s, Pratt (2001, p. 112) affirms that 'workers' actions . . . do not represent a break from postcolonial state–labour relation. Instead, these actions attempt to maintain the pattern of relations existing before 1991.' That is, a pattern of patron–client relations, in which workers sacrifice autonomous organisation or mobilisation in return for guaranteed economic gains. Thus most recent action by industrial labour and state employees, in focusing on economic demands (wages and economic benefits), would appear at first glance to confirm this moral economy reading (the El-Mahalla workers, for example, first went on strike to regain instated economic rights which they had been denied). However, a closer look at the tactics adopted in recent protests shows that they differ from those adopted during earlier decades, in addition to being accompanied by the rise of new demands, such as the sacking of company management, replacement of union committees, or even the establishment of independent unions. This renders the moral economy argument inadequate, while lending a very different meaning to these recent protests and, consequently, their prospects.

In this respect, the recent wave of strikes marked a shift in the labour movement as a whole which contradicts earlier patterns of labour contention, even those observable as recently as the 1980s. Thus, moving away from moral economy demands, some 5000 El-Mahalla (Misr Company) workers had resigned from the state-controlled Textile Workers' Union by March 2007, in protest at its failure to support their strike, despite having had the economic demands they initially went out on strike for, 'reinstated'. In September 2007 they went on strike for a second time, to enforce the agreement reached at the settlement of the 2006 strike, while also demanding the removal of corrupt managers and trade union officials, and calling on the government to convene the National Wages Council to discuss raising the level of the national minimum wage (Interview, Haitham, 10 June 2009).⁵ Thus, the workers were moving away from solely trying to reinstate economic gains and privileges, to more directly *political* demands having to do with minimum wage and autonomous organisation.

This politicisation of demands was further reflected in the real estate tax collectors' struggle, which unfolded in December 2007. After 10 days of camping outside the Finance Ministry in downtown Cairo, the minister responded to their demands by raising their salaries by 325% (*Daily News Egypt* 2009). Yet, the struggle continued. Having formed an elected strike committee, the employees started collecting signatures, not just to sack their union officials but also to form an independent parallel union. According to Kamal Abu Eita, the elected chair of the strike committee and president of the first independent union:

We started holding meetings in all Egyptian governorates, to discuss the idea of an independent union. In each governorate an elected local committee shadowed the official union and started to collect signatures for the independent union. Even though people had gotten their financial demands that we initially went on strike for, we wanted more. We wanted our freedom. (Interview, 14 July 2009)

Deconstructing moral economy arguments even further, it is worth noting that striking real estate tax collectors, whose initial demands for equal pay with income-tax collectors

were met, still made more radical and politicised demands, eventually announcing the formation of an independent union in April 2009 with a membership of 37,000 out of a total population of 52,000 employees (Interview, Kamal Abu Eita, 14 July 2009). The Union of Real Estate Tax Authority Employees (URETAE), Egypt's first independent trade union since 1957, was formed a year and a half after the tax collectors' strike. Thus, rather than conforming to the 'stability–disruption–protest' pattern seeking to reinstate 'patron–client relationships' (Posusney 1993, p. 85), the tax collectors' struggle sketched out a different pattern – one of escalation (continuing protests even after workers had achieved their initial economic demands) seeking anti-corporatist relationships (resignation from the state union, sacking of officials and establishing an independent union).

Furthermore, Posusney (1993) refutes a Marxist explanation of growing class-consciousness as a reason for Egyptian labour action in the 1980s, in favour of moral economy explanations, contending that, 'if class consciousness is growing, we should expect workers increasingly to challenge the private sector, to show solidarity across plants, and to struggle for systemic change ... this was not what occurred' (p. 99). However, this was exactly what happened following the El-Mahalla strike in 2006, which 'triggered a wave of workers' protests across Egypt, crossing different sectors of the economy and industries – from Mahalla to Kafr al-Dawwar to Shubin al-Kum; from spinning and weaving to cement, to the railways, the metro and public transport workers' (Bassiouny and Said 2008, p. 3). Moreover, some of these strikes, such as that in Kafr al-Dawwar, overtly expressed solidarity with El-Mahalla workers. As one of the workers in Kafr al-Dawwar put it, 'Of course we expressed solidarity with El-Mahalla through a one-hour work stoppage ... their strike was very inspiring and reminded us of ways to get our rights' (Interview, Mourad, 18 June 2008).

Table 1 provides further evidence of rising class-consciousness, indicating how, rather than being restricted to the state sector, contentious action spilled over to include employers at large. It shows the number of contentious actions during 2006–2008, confirming that the percentage of actions in the private sector increased steadily (El-Mahdi 2010, p. 153). Such developments – even according to advocates of the moral economy – confirm a rising class-consciousness and, more importantly, mark the emergence of a labour movement that is not preoccupied solely with reinstating patron–client relationships.

Turning to rational choice, the second approach to understanding labour mobilisation, workers' action (or any action for that matter) is understood as the outcome of aggregated individual preferences shaped by the desire to maximise utility. In the case of workers this means that they protest only when expected benefits (pay and job privileges) exceed expected costs (forgone wages, job loss or repression). While both Goldberg and Bellin use sophisticated versions of this approach, the earlier factoring in the specificity of labour conditions in the South, while the latter uses structural variables (state dependence and workers' comparative privilege) as determinants to understand Egyptian workers dissent, they still utilise the same general logic of rational choice. Goldberg (1992), for

Table 1. Number of contentious actions by ownership sector.

Sector/Year	2006	2007	2008
Public sector	156	400	374
Private sector	66	214	235
Total	222	614	609
Private sector action as % of total actions	29.7	34.8	38.5

Source: El-Mahdi (2010, p. 153).

example, argues that the Egyptian economic regime after 1952 eliminated the risk of job losses, and that this was as an impediment to contentious activity, with the result that individual workers and state employees, who were the main beneficiaries of this system, had no motivation as rational individuals to protest. Similarly, Bellin (2000) argues that workers' contentious action is conditioned by their dependence on the state for viability and clout, as well as 'aristocratic privilege', the degree to which these workers are relatively privileged vis-à-vis the general population.

According to this logic, El-Mahalla dissent should have occurred under circumstances where the expected material gains of the strike outweighed the cost (because of a tight labour market, decline of state dependence and privilege, or reduction of repression), which was not the case.⁶ Even though some of these factors were present (e.g. declining state dependence) others were not (e.g. tight labour market, declining threat of repression), thus casting doubt on the explanatory value of utility-maximisation arguments. Moreover, some of the conditions favourable for strike action, according to rational choice arguments (e.g. loss of job security, declining state dependence), had existed for at least a decade prior to recent labour protests, dating to the advent of neoliberalism. Why, then, did the unprecedented rise in the scale of worker protests start only in 2006 and not earlier? Does this not raise questions about the uncritical belief in the assumption that protests are no more than calculated individual decisions aimed at utility maximisation when predicted gains outweigh losses?

In contrast to these approaches, it seems that a Gramscian understanding of the dual dynamic of hegemony and domination is much better able to explain recent worker protests in Egypt. Domination refers to the material armour of state coercion and the economic system of production–distribution, while hegemony delineates the super-structural elements of institutions shaping consciousness and socio-cultural norms in a way that cloaks domination–exploitation with consent.⁷ Specifically, I argue that neoliberal changes are redefining labour–state relations in four ways, and making labour mobilisation viable. In terms of domination, two changes are most significant: 1) the inability of the state to sustain earlier socio-economic provisions, both worker-specific (e.g. secure employment, subsistence wages) and universal (e.g. free education, health care), for which urban labour were the primary beneficiaries; 2) a restraint on the possibility of using coercion against protesting workers (because of the changes within the ruling elite, as well as the imperative for attracting private capital as the *modus operandi* of neoliberalism). These changes associated with domination are combined with changes in aspects of the ruling hegemony specifically; 3) the end of the earlier nationalism characterising the state and the regime (with specific turning points revealing this change such as the regime's position on the American invasion of Iraq and the Palestinian problem – which are perceived by many as anti-nationalist); and 4) the rise of the new media with an increasing role in circulating information more freely, even if not engendering class-consciousness.

Finally, reading recent worker mobilisation as a sign of rupture in the post-1952 ruling pact, I argue that the meaning of these protests lies well beyond their limited economic demands. Despite the fact that many of these actions have not managed to achieve their demands, while many others have appealed to regime icons (specifically President Hosni Mubarak and his son Gamal) for 'help', this recent wave of protests is breaching the existing populist pact and, in doing so, setting the stage for an alternative one.

Changing political and economic matrices

Where did all this contention, so qualitatively and quantitatively different from earlier labour action, come from? The answer lies in the neoliberal model, initiated by an

agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1991, and its restructuring of both the relations of production and the state apparatus. The model has changed labour–state relations, pushing labour into contestation and conditioning the state’s response to the latter in a way which allowed its continuation. The regime has, since 1991, endorsed economic restructuring which saw the axing of labour’s ‘most treasured advantage (job security)’, as well as a lot of the socio-economic privileges of public sector and state workers (including subsidised holiday trips, food products, transportation) (Bellin 2000, p. 204). During the 1990s, then, there was a doubling of workers protests compared to the 1980s, as industrial labour challenged neoliberal changes (Abdel-Kader 1998, El Shafei 1995). By the end of 2006, when the recent wave of protests erupted, Egyptian workers had already experienced more than 15 years of neoliberalism, during which there had also been a gradual increase in labour mobilisation. In particular, the appointment of the Nazif cabinet in July 2004 and its subsequent headlong pursuit of neoliberalism had, by 2006, created the conditions for the emergence of a larger and more entrenched movement.

The government, which was composed of openly neoliberal technocrats and businessmen, ‘promoted a second wave of privatisation and enacted other measures to encourage foreign direct investment’, raising well-founded fears about lay-offs and hastening a shift away from the 1952 labour–state alliance (Beinin 2009, p. 77). Unlike earlier governments, Nazif’s signalled a shift towards greater intensification of neoliberalism; not only was its composition telling, representing a shift away from state-bureaucrats and academics to technocrats and businessmen, but it also undertook a programme of divestiture of state assets during its first two years in office which was greater in scope than the cumulative total of all privatisation undertaken since the beginning of such programmes in the 1990s. The new cabinet stressed that their mission was to speed up privatisation and attract foreign investment in order to accelerate growth, changing laws and regulations to this supreme purpose. Prices, especially of food and transportation, experienced sharp and unprecedented increases, leading to heightened inflation despite a proclaimed increase in GNP (*Egyptnews.com* 2008). Moreover, successive statements made by Nazif about the need to reassess food and fuel subsidies, and for Egyptians to ‘grow up’ and stop depending on the state, confirmed popular suspicion about the regime’s move away from the earlier model of state-guaranteed socio-economic rights.⁸

By 2006, then, the regime’s propaganda about neoliberal economic changes not affecting workers had been put to the test and found wanting. As one labour activist put it, when asked why worker mobilisation only took place in 2006, despite neoliberal changes enacted as early as 1991:

Because by that time workers have seen first hand that the counter atrocity measures of neoliberal changes such as early retirement schemes, retraining, and loans for starting their own small business is a scam. They have seen how other workers who supposedly benefited from these schemes ended up with no source of income or a real safety-net because of inflation and rising prices which swallowed whatever severance payment they took. They could not find new jobs and prices were increasing systematically. (Interview, Fouad, 12 June 2009)

In other words, neoliberal changes adopted by the Nazif government eroded the material gains of state corporatism while not providing an alternative and, in the process, provided the impetus for the initial insurgency.

Equally important, the advent of neoliberalism conditioned the state’s response to rising labour militancy in multiple ways that encouraged its spread beyond El-Mahalla. The sheer

size of the El-Mahalla protest was reason enough to expect the state to deploy its repressive machinery to its fullest extent, something which did not happen until 6 April 2008. Nor was this attributable to the fact ‘that the regime feels less threatened because workers’ demands are not directly political – during the 1980s and 1990s workers’ protests raising much more modest demands were crushed by overwhelming force’ (Alexander 2008, p. 52). Rather, the explanation lay in the fact that, as a result of neoliberal changes between 2006 and 2009, the state was no longer the economic actor it used to be in the decades up to the 1990s. Driven by private economic actors, and dependent on foreign investment for its economic survival, the state could not risk alienating potential investors with the bad publicity which would have accompanied any attempt at state repression of protesting workers. As one activist put it, ‘they did not want to scare away the investors by invading plants with armoured cars and armed soldiers like they used to do . . . who would want to invest in such an atmosphere?’ (Interview, Hisham, 10 May 2009).

In addition, politically, the neoliberalising state apparatus was no longer dominated by hardcore bureaucrats and military ‘hardliners’ with their die-hard repressive approach. Rather, the advent of neoliberalism meant the rise of technocrats and business people to positions of prominence, both in the cabinet and the Policies Committee of the ruling National Democratic Party, led by the President’s son Gamal Mubarak. The technocratic and bureaucratic background of these ‘soft-liners’, including the Minister of Investment at the time, Mahmood Mohideen, meant that, unlike their predecessors, repression was not their default response to perceived challenges to state policy. Hence, the second of the two arms of populist corporatism, coercion and a show of force, was not demonstrated, further undermining this pact and giving greater confidence to the workers. Thus, politically and economically, the foundational (material) elements of the corporatist ruling pact that governed labour–state relations were shifting, despite the continuity of its institutional manifestation – the monolith GFETU – and other political elements (e.g. an entrenched security apparatus in an authoritarian regime).

Concomitantly, the sources and venues of ideational hegemony of the existing etatist model and populist–corporatist pact were also being challenged. The rise of new private media outlets, and the changing nationalist discourse adopted by the regime, contributed to a wiggling hegemony of the regime in its ideational and normative aspects. That is, the idea that the state and the regime are patrons or at least allies of workers’ interests has been contested and exposed. The first independent newspaper, *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, appeared in 2004, to be followed by *Sout Al-Ommah*, *Al-Fagr*, *Al-Doustor* and many others in the course of the following couple of years. In addition, blogs and satellite television channels also emerged and reported on protests and movements that the state-owned media channels remained silent on. For many workers, these newspapers served as ‘scaffolds’ in the Leninist sense, and were used to build the labour movement. Workers follow the news of different labour actions, expected moves, achievements and challenges via these newspapers. As one worker from El-Mahallah said, ‘we read these newspapers to know what the state is cooking for us, but also to send messages to the state and test the waters . . . more importantly our action would have gone unnoticed if it wasn’t for these independent media people’ (Interview, Mohamed, Misr Spinning Company, 15 June 2009). This view was repeated in all interviews, and during visits to striking workers over the last two years. Consequently, with the rise of independent and alternative media, the cost of using coercion, so integral to populist state corporatism, increased significantly for the state, given the risk of unwelcome publicity attendant on widespread press coverage of state attempts to suppress labour protests or strikes. Thus coverage, including footage, of the brutal clamp-down in El-Mahalla on 6 April 2008 made it into

major local newspapers, the Internet and the international media, a very different situation from that which occurred in the 1990s and early 2000s, when blogs – citizen journalism – and independent newspapers did not exist. The contagious confidence which widespread favourable or sympathetic news coverage generates in dissident workers cannot be overestimated.

Finally, one of the most important elements of the post-1952 hegemony, and the state alliance with labour, was its post-colonial ‘modernising’ tendency and rhetoric (see Pratt 2007, Beinin and Lockman 1987). Labour was not only co-opted through material gains and the threat of repression, but also through being wilfully subsumed within the nationalist movement and, later, the post-independence nationalist regime. Workers’ organisations and demands ‘became linked to the struggle against colonialism, thereby blurring the lines between class demands and national political demands’ (Pratt 2007, p. 35). Consequently, sacrifices could be demanded of people, and class tensions glossed over, by the ruling elite under the rhetoric of nationalism. But, with the state slowly abandoning both this rhetoric and its associated policy direction from about the mid 1970s (following the Middle East war of 1973, the negotiation of peace agreement with, and adoption of an open door economic policy toward Israel), and more forcefully during the past decade, the hegemony was weakened. In the event, the regime was deprived of its historic nationalist zeal by a combination of its stance on the Palestinian issue, the American invasion of Iraq, and the Israeli–Lebanese war in 2006 (all instances in which anti-regime street demonstrations abound), and its flaunting of its close ties with successive American administrations. Moreover, in 2004 and 2006, the regime signed two trade treaties (Qualifying Industrial Zones [QIZ] and export of Egyptian natural gas) with Israel, Egypt’s historic ‘enemy’. Hence, class tensions which were arising under neoliberalism could not be glossed over by an appeal to nationalism. As the hegemonic consent built on an anti-imperialist rhetoric was breached by the regime, workers were further liberated from their part of the pact.

Meanings: changing organisational forms and ideational frames

Unlike earlier protest movements in Egypt (the pro-*Intifada*, antiwar, or democracy movements), the labour movement proved the most sustainable. As Gramsci acknowledged early on, objective conditions alone – including state crisis – do not precipitate successful mobilisation, which is also influenced by ‘the degree of homogeneity, self-awareness, and organisation attained by the various social classes’, i.e. class-consciousness (Gramsci 1971, p. 181). Thus, while structural and superstructure factors discussed above can explain the rise of the labour movement, only a closer look at its organisational forms and tactics can fully explain its sustainability and meaning. In this respect, the rise and continuity of the movement becomes clear, only if events are seen as a continuum and in totality. In other words, the new independent tax-collectors’ union cannot be seen in isolation from the El-Mahalla strike any more than a current postal workers’ strike movement can be seen as unrelated to the achievement of striking tax collectors. A close look at the unfolding organisational patterns within this wave of protests reveals changes within the state–corporatist pact which indicate a dismantling of the basis of authoritarian dynamics from below. Thus, the changing dynamics of labour contention promise to provide a new push for democratisation from below by creating pressure on the state and rendering long-held patron–client relationships unviable.

In this respect El-Mahalla workers seem very important. The three-day Mahalla workers’ strike of December 2006 can be seen as a major turning point in the history of the Egyptian workers’ movement. As Bassiouny and Said put it, ‘It is possible to talk of

the periods “before the Mahalla strike” and “after the Mahalla strike” . . . the workers’ movement after December 2006 bore the imprint of the Mahalla strike in several key ways’ (2008, p. 7). That is, ever since the Nasserite era, public sector workers protested by staying at the workplace after hours and, in many cases, increased production (Posusney 1997, Pratt 2001, Bassiouny and Said 2008). Such a tactic was in line with the populist–nationalist pact discussed above, in which the workers identified themselves both as partners in the nationalist quest for ‘modernity’ and ‘anti-colonialism’, and as ‘clients’ to whom the state, as ‘patron’, had obligations but also rights. The El-Mahalla strike marked the first and largest shift from work-in tactic to work-stoppage. The introduction of work-stoppage was later adopted by strikers in both the industrial sector (e.g. Mansura-Espangia, Markarm Textile) and service sector (e.g. public bus drivers in August 2009), as well as by state employees (e.g. postal workers, tax collectors, nurses). The adoption of this tactic as an alternative to work-in clearly marks a shift away from the earlier relations of labour–state partnership assumed since 1952, even if workers do not consciously signal this shift.

In addition, workers’ actions were lasting for record durations. Before El-Mahalla, ‘workers’ protests were generally of short duration. Sometimes, the only news of a new protest would be the report of its suppression. The majority of workers’ protests lasted less than 24 hours (Bassiouny and Said 2008, p. 19). In contrast, the El-Mahalla strikes lasted three and six days, respectively. This change in duration dictated changes in the tactical and organisational repertoires used by workers. ‘A strike lasting several days opens up wide horizons for the workers’ movement to develop . . . it forces workers to develop mechanisms to stay overnight, provide daily meals and protect the workplace’ as much as it requires a leadership that can keep workers motivated and united for a longer time (Bassiouny and Said 2008, p. 19). It did not only mean an increased pressure on the state but, more importantly, required a higher level of organisation that set an example to other workers and dissent groups. Hence, El-Mahalla workers had to resort to the long-forgotten tradition of ‘strike-committees’; electing their own representative to negotiate with the authorities and designating individuals to speak to the press, arrange for supplies of food and shelter, and even night-watch teams to protect sleeping workers and machinery. This level of sophisticated organisation was later emulated by workers of Karf El-Dawwar in February 2007; Abul-Makaram textile company in Sadat City which lasted almost three weeks; the 10-day tax collectors’ strike in December 2007; and, most recently, the least successful but longest-lasting strike, Ketan Tanta, which went on for more than six months in 2009.

In contrast to the hierarchy and bureaucratic structures of the state-controlled trade unions, the recent labour protests have created new mechanisms from below that are slowly challenging the institutional basis of state corporatism. Soon after El-Mahalla’s first strike, the *de facto* worker leaders who emerged from the strike launched a campaign to impeach local union officials who had opposed the strike and who, according to workers, enjoyed close ties with the state security apparatus and were puppets of the GFETU. Eventually, over 13,000 workers signed a petition addressed to the General Union of Textile Workers demanding impeachment of the local union committee and the conduct of new elections (Interview, Haitham, Worker in Misr Spinning Company, 10 June 2009). Regime representatives, including GFETU chief Husayn Megawir, first refused to meet the workers, and were then forced to go to Mahalla to negotiate with the elected strike committee, by-passing the official trade-union committee. Thus, ‘while the Misr workers did not formally win their demand to impeach the trade union committee, they rendered it irrelevant’ (Beinin 2009, p. 84). Sidelining the official union workers’ committee, the chosen

strike committee had to operate democratically. 'Workers' representatives reported back to mass meetings of thousands of strikers on the progress of negotiations' (Alexander 2008, p. 56). Decisions, statements and tactics were based on collective discussions, making it more difficult for the authorities to break the strike from within. Later on, in the case of the tax collectors' strike, not only was the strike committee elected and operated according to principles of deliberative democracy, but there have been regular elections since the end of the strike in December 2007. This novel form of organisation contradicts the internal logic of state corporatism, set a precedent and sowed the seeds for independent organisation away from state-manipulated elections which had been so closely associated with organised labour since 1957.

Similarly, the emergence of more politicised demands as part of recent labour protests, including attempts at independent organisation during protests by real estate tax collectors (which actually succeeded), struggles by postal workers and administrators of the Ministry of Education, as well as demands for the renationalisation of privatised entities during protests at the Ketan Tanta plant and Karf El-Dawar textile plant, breached long-held state-labour corporatist 'norms'. The movement was adopting systemic and more overtly political demands. And, despite not being a linear or irreversible process, the rise of more politicised demands endorsed by hundreds of thousands of state employees and industrial workers, including national minimum wage and independent unions (even when not anti-regime per se), is definitely a break from earlier patterns of partnership with the state and the ruling regime.

These developments are as useful in demonstrating 'spill-over effects' within organisational forms, as in highlighting how organisational forms can be adopted and developed further within new sites of contention. However, this does not happen mechanically. Rather, it is a dynamic process in which the new organisational forms traverse sites of contention and manifest themselves variously in these different locations. Ultimately, the significance of both these new forms of organisation and the increased demands from the labour movement lies in their potential to reshape the social norms and practices binding labour to the state and the latter to society at large. The meaning of these new forms of labour protests cannot therefore be over emphasised, given the pivotal role that state-labour corporatism in Egypt has played in stabilising post-1952 populist authoritarian rule.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the workers' movement emerged from ruptures in the hegemonic relationship connecting workers to the state (both as an employer and a political ally). However, such a process is neither guaranteed nor inevitable. The absence of strong political allies is a challenge that the labour movement has been struggling with in its bid to realise its potential as an agent of macro-political change. Social movements (including labour) need to build alliances and exchange experiences with, and benefit organisationally and politically from, other entities within civil society and the wider political sphere. These 'movements are not distinct and self-contained; rather, they grow from and give birth to other movements, work in coalition with other movements, and influence each other indirectly through their effects on the larger cultural and political environment' (Meyer and Whittier 1994, p. 277). In Brazil, for example, the labour movement in the 1970s and 1980s benefited from coalitions with leftist parties and a landless peasant social movement (MST), while in the US the feminist movement capitalised on the earlier civil rights movement. Such reservoirs are not available to the Egyptian labour movement, which explains why the numerous labour actions in the period since 2006 have not culminated

in more structural systemic changes, at least regarding labour conditions. In this regard, the Egyptian labour movement bore the brunt of years of continuous corporatist authoritarianism, which did not only co-opt labour, but succeeded equally in weakening and co-opting oppositional forces from different walks.

The combination of El-Mahalla events in 2008 – the widest popular uprising in Egypt since the 1977 bread riots – and the rise of the first independent union for real estate tax collectors, does raise questions about the potential of the labour movement as a catalyst for wider socio-political change. Certainly, a movement which involved more than 1.7 million Egyptians in an impressive episode of mass mobilisation had to have left a mark on society as a whole.⁹ Nonetheless, because of an absence of links between the middle-class democracy movement and the workers' movement, the latter cannot be expected to play a direct role in regime change during the cycle of parliamentary and presidential elections in 2010–2011. Indeed, the demonstration effect of the workers' movement ought to be seen as much in the movement's challenge to existing state–society relations of corporatism as in its suggestion of how alternative forms of organisation based on internal democracy can be developed.

Through their protests, strikes and other actions, workers and state employees are hastening the rupture of the populist–corporatist ruling pact which has bound successive Egyptian regimes to society since 1952. By challenging the hegemony of the state-dominated union, and pushing for demands beyond moral economy, labour is nurturing a different and more vibrant civil society based on collective organisation in place of one dominated by professional organisations (non-governmental organisations) and state-run unions. Moreover, such challenges point to the importance and possibilities of mass organisation, particularly when compared to the 'closed door' tactics adopted by established opposition parties and political movements. Finally, the threat of state repression notwithstanding (worker transfers, pay cuts, arrests, and fully fledged coercion in El-Mahalla uprising), the sustainability of the workers' movement is definitely reshaping the political economy, both by setting an example to potential actors and by wearing down the regime's capacity for diverting dissent, both in terms of co-optation and potential repression.

Note on contributor

Rabab El-Mahdi teaches politics at the American University in Cairo. Her research focuses on social movements in the Middle East, including women's movements, Islamists, and pro-democracy movements.

Notes

1. This paper was written and submitted for publication in June 2010, before the Egyptian Uprising of 25 January 2011 which toppled the Mubarak regime.
2. Repeated in all interviews with El-Mahalla workers. All names of workers interviewed have been changed at their request.
3. For an excellent account of the rise and development of the labour movement before 1952, see Beinín and Lockman (1987).
4. For more details, see Posusney (1997), Goldberg (1992), and Marbo and Radwan (1976).
5. This worker's pay was cut and the worker was transferred to Cairo because of having participated in the strikes.
6. For example, El-Mahalla workers who started the protest movement are among the few maintaining their 'aristocratic privileges' in terms of wages and work conditions. See American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt (2004, p. 33), Beinín (2009, p. 75), and Workers and Trade Unions Watch (2007, p. 234).

7. This distinction between domination and hegemony is characteristic of earlier parts of *The prison notebooks*, although it is later conflated to make hegemony inclusive of both coercion and consent (see Gramsci 1971). For an excellent synthesis, see Anderson (1976).
8. See for example *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 24 September 2008, 2 December 2007, p. 1; *Al-Wafd*, 4 February 2006.
9. Although there is no precise count of workers involved, Benin (2010), has compiled statistics which put the number of workers involved at 1.7 million.

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From resistance to governance: Eritrea's trouble with transition

Dan Connell*

Departments of Communications and Political Science/International Relations, Simmons College, Boston, US

Nation-building in Africa was hobbled by the inheritance of centralised, authoritarian 'states' prior to the consolidation of nations within them. Armed liberation movements overcame this to some degree by constructing common identities out of the struggle to throw off foreign rule. Yet the degree and kind of control inherent in such a militarised project fuelled despotism in the post-war state. Eritrea seemed to break this mould, with its high level of popular participation in its war effort, its engagement in social transformation during the fighting, and the participatory constitution-building process that followed its victory. Yet less than a decade on, the liberation front shut down the press, jailed its critics, and turned the country into a political prison. This article will situate this reversal within the transition from colony to independent state, explore its specific characteristics, and consider the prospects for a more democratic outcome.

Keywords: Eritrea; EPLF; PFDJ; political opposition; civil society; alternative media; human rights; transition

The consolidation of dictatorship

Eritrea showed uncommon promise of dynamic, egalitarian growth in the 1990s after winning a 30-year independence war against successive US- and Soviet-backed Ethiopian governments, with few of the social fault lines or economic fetters that had constrained most postcolonial African states. The victorious Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) had successfully mobilised support across ethnic, religious and gender lines, and it began its post-war transition with remarkably low levels of crime and corruption and an educated diaspora eager to help with reconstruction (Connell 1997, Doombos 1999, Iyob 1995, 1997). It had also made a public, though as yet untested, commitment to political pluralism. But even as the country embarked on a three-year, highly participatory constitution-making process, (Bereket 2003), it simultaneously waged a series of regional conflicts capped by a border war with Ethiopia in 1998–2000 that plunged it into a cycle of military mobilisation and political repression which both stymied its development and reversed the apparent progress toward democracy (Gilkes and Plaut 2000, Jacquin-Berdal and Plaut 2005).

Throughout this transition, two trends competed over the shape and structure of the new political landscape. One was more democratic than the other, though both had roots in the liberation front's authoritarian culture. The man who had commanded the EPLF and now served as the state's interim president, Isaias Afwerki, and a small circle of military and

*Email: danconnell@mac.com

political leaders loyal to him, were committed to what they called ‘guided democracy’, a highly centralised form of control through which they proposed to reconstruct and develop the economy and to unify and transform society before relinquishing the reins of power. Democracy in this view had more to do with participation (voluntary or not) than accountability. In the tradition of state-centred authoritarian socialism, they relegated political democracy to the status of a luxury, appropriate to Eritrea only after substantial economic growth and development.

Contesting this outlook were critics within the EPLF/PFDJ (People’s Front for Democracy and Justice) leadership whose commitment to an open society had either been on hold during the struggle or had evolved (Plaut 2002); members of rival nationalist organisations eager to return to Eritrea and participate in the construction of the state; new institutions in Eritrea’s fragile civil society; and prominent individuals associated with the constitution-building project, as well as artists, entrepreneurs and others who had tasted liberty in their personal or political lives and believed in its value without having a fully formed ideology. However, though they were travelling in the same political direction, they rarely talked with one another, were not organised, had no clear strategy (or at least no effective one), and were thoroughly isolated from one another. Those who challenged the emerging autocracy were easily identified and quickly crushed. The outcome, once the struggle was joined in earnest, was the quashing of all democratic initiatives and the consolidation of dictatorship (Connell 2009a, Mengisteab and Okbazghi 2005).

Two decades after winning its *de facto* independence, Eritrea’s constitution, ratified in 1997, has yet to go into effect, and there have been no national elections. Critics, including top government and party officials, have been jailed in their hundreds, independent organisations banned, and the non-state press shut down altogether. Meanwhile, the confrontation with Ethiopia has come to dominate the political discourse to the point where all dissent is branded as treason under the leadership of former EPLF commander, now president, Isaias Afwerki, who justifies his brutal dictatorship by the fragility of the nation over which he presides, even as he perpetuates the threats to it (Connell 2004, 2009a, Kibreab 2008, 2009, Hedru 2003, Hepner 2007, Reid 2005, Tronvol 2009). As dramatic and all-encompassing as this turn of events was, however, it was by no means the first instance of extreme intolerance in this movement. Nor was it, as some opponents argue, merely the product of one bad leader which could be easily excised with his removal.

The roots of the present despotism lie within a movement that arose under conditions of unrelenting political repression necessitating secrecy and subterfuge for its very survival, that came under attack at one time or another from nearly every major regional and global power, and that, like most of its liberation movement contemporaries, drew on Leninist traditions of highly centralised authority for its inspiration. In Isaias’s case (Eritreans traditionally go by first names), this was reinforced by training in China at the height of the Cultural Revolution, during which he received intensive exposure to Maoist doctrine whose themes of extreme ‘voluntarism’ and populism continue to define his world view (Connell 2001, 2009a). Acknowledging this heritage – and owning it – will be an essential part of getting beyond it.

Gaim Kibreab’s analysis of the poisonous obsessions with control that plagued both the EPLF and the original independence movement, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) from which the EPLF split, is instructive. Each front tried to monopolise the national movement. In the ELF’s case, this began with the eradication of the rival Eritrean Liberation Movement in the 1960s, followed by an unsuccessful three-year effort to crush the breakaway factions that evolved into the EPLF in the 1970s, all the while insisting that ‘there can be no more than one struggle, one organisation and one leadership in our country’ (Kibreab 2008,

p. 173). A decade later, the EPLF turned the tables and – with the help of its ally, the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) – drove the ELF out of Eritrea. It has steadfastly refused to allow the ELF – or any other organised political force – to return ever since, leaving the victors, now calling themselves the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), the only show in town. Kibreab’s point – one too often overlooked – is that the drive for a political monopoly was not exclusive to the EPLF, even if the EPLF perfected it.

Challenges to this autocratic tendency occasionally surfaced, but they were repeatedly suppressed in the interest of maintaining the unity and discipline needed to win the war – a difficult argument to refute when new enemies kept popping up from every geographical and political direction imaginable. A defining moment for the EPLF came in 1973–74 with the brutal suppression of a dissident political trend calling for greater internal democracy and limits on Isaias’s authority whose members were known as *menqae* (‘those who move about at night’ – bats) and accused of being ‘ultra-“left”’. Isaias ordered the execution of its leaders and the imprisonment of dozens of fighters deemed sympathetic to them. Among those killed was one of Isaias’s childhood friends and long-time allies, Mussie Teklemichael, who bore the scars of a capital ‘E’ carved onto his upper arm where in 1965 he had taken a blood oath with Isaias and another comrade to commit their lives to Eritrea. Kibreab calls the crushing of the *menqae* a seminal event ‘that has left a lasting impact on the psychology and subsequent behaviour of the EPLF/PFDJ leadership, particularly on Isaias’s attitude toward any form of dissent or opposition to his method of leading the Front, and now the country’ (2008, p. 278).

The *menqae* crisis led to a resuscitation of a clandestine Marxist-Leninist party that Isaias and a handful of other comrades had formed in 1971 – the Eritrean People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP) – but which had been dormant since then. Once re-established, it controlled the EPLF throughout its existence. Operating behind the scenes, the party drafted the front’s programme in secret, chose its leadership prior to elections, and managed its day-to-day affairs by covertly manipulating its formal leadership structures (Connell 2001, 2004, Makki 2002). It also carried out extensive surveillance on EPLF members to identify – and snuff out – any signs of dissent or disloyalty before they could develop, using a newly formed internal security force known as *halewa sowra* (‘shield of the revolution’) to enforce its judgments. Set up during the *menqae* crisis, *halewa sowra* was initially headed by Solomon Woldemariam, who was himself imprisoned and later executed in a purge of another dissident trend known as *yameen* (‘rightists’). Though the EPRP was officially dissolved on Isaias’s orders in 1989, its utterly opaque top-down management style has been systematically replicated within the new state structures. In this respect, little changed in the form of control. However, the transition from resistance to governance was accompanied by a series of moves that further distanced the leadership from the base and that required ever more coercive measures to sustain.

Though the clandestine EPRP was hardly an example of popular democracy at work, it was nonetheless a framework for strategic planning and decision-making that involved a degree of consultation within its leadership, and among its members, that acted as a check on arbitrary action at the top. However, it peaked in the 1970s and steadily declined during the 1980s as the party and front expanded, both in size and scope of operations. Still, the party’s abrupt dissolution at the end of the decade severed a limited form of communication and accountability within the dominant political movement. The concomitant decision to dissolve the mass organisations of workers, women, peasant farmers, youth and students was even more dramatic in this regard, as it severed communications links between the leadership and large sectors of the population. And the decision shortly after the war ended to abandon the practice of having villagers elect leaders to their people’s

assemblies (*baitos*) – albeit in party/front controlled selection processes – completed the disconnect. Taken together, they represented a major rupture.

With the formation of new state institutions in 1991–93, the reorganisation of the EPLF into the PFDJ in 1994, and the relaunch of the mass organisations, or national unions, as they were called, loose links with the general population were re-established but they were far more centrally controlled and served mainly as one-way channels for implementing decisions taken in the capital. As the most experienced community organisers were absorbed upward into the state and party machinery, their skills, their knowledge of conditions at the base of society, and their ability to grasp and respond to these conditions atrophied, much as has happened in other such transitions (Connell 2002, Marais 1998).

The National Assembly, which, like the Cabinet of Ministers, has met only when called into session by the president, was at best a rubber stamp for proclamations drafted in the president's office, no longer makes a pretence of functioning and has not convened a formal session in years. The judiciary lacks independence and is routinely bypassed through a system of 'special courts' and clandestine prisons that now hold thousands of suspected dissidents, draft evaders, and others. All media are controlled by the state. No political parties or non-governmental organisations are permitted apart from the PFDJ and its satellites. The result is a façade of institutional normalcy that masks a remarkably efficient tyranny.

Now, as during the liberation struggle, hidden networks are far more important than visible institutions. In this and other respects, Eritrea functions less as a modern state than as a guerrilla movement headed by a single charismatic figure holding a liberated zone. The two most important power centres over the past decade were in the armed forces and the PFDJ. Individuals have been more important than offices, topped by Isaias, who brooks no competition and who rewards personal loyalty over competence. Control rests almost entirely with the man at its centre, who has spent decades manoeuvring to reach this point, aided by a shifting coterie who either shared his values or tolerated them in the naïve hope of one day transcending them. The inner circle today consists primarily of top-ranked military officers and a handful of advisors in the presidential office, the security services, and the upper tier of the PFDJ, though this last group has recently faded in importance, too, as the president has begun once again to empower another set of lieutenants to check the influence of those he tapped in the early 1990s. For its part, the party maintains a system of informers and enforcers that reaches into every village and town through party-run neighbourhood committees called *kebeles* as well as into diaspora communities through an overseas network of PFDJ supporters who monitor dissent among Eritreans living abroad and report on them to their local embassies (Connell 2004, 2009a, Kibreab 2009, Reid 2005, Tronvol 2009).

The crackdown on political dissent began in July 2001 with the arrest of University of Asmara student union leader, Semere Kesete, after he publicly criticised the government for the inhumane conditions of enforced 'national service' during the summer. He remained in prison for months before escaping with the help of sympathetic security guards. Hundreds of other university students were rounded up that summer and sent on a work project to contain the rising protest on the campus. Leaders of the student union were among the government's main targets for detention (though none were formally charged), as the organisation was disbanded and replaced by the party-controlled National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students (NUEYS). Parents who protested the treatment of their children – several of whom died – were also arrested (Kibreab 2009).

Then, on 18 and 19 September, after nine months of internal mobilisation that included lengthy party-run seminars to discredit those targeted for the purge, and with much of the

world's attention on events in the United States after the dramatic al-Qaeda attacks on New York and Washington, the Eritrean government initiated a sweeping crackdown on its high-level critics, arresting 11 of the 15 who had signed an 'open letter' to the president chastising him for anti-democratic behaviour and calling for structural reforms of the party and the state, as well as a full and open assessment of the Border War (one recanted and three were not in Eritrea at the time of the arrests). Next, the government closed all the private newspapers and began arresting others associated with expressions of dissent during the previous year. The justification was that those arrested – and the press – had been a 'fifth column' for Ethiopia, though no charges were brought, no evidence presented, no trials conducted, and no formal explanations ever offered. Soon after, the government began house-to-house round-ups of young people accused of avoiding national service, with many beaten in public places before being crammed into military trucks and taken away with no opportunity to contact family members or take anything with them but the clothes on their backs.

I was in Eritrea for much of the spring and summer of 2001, during which I interviewed several top-ranking dissidents before they were arrested – all of whom were fully aware of what was coming (Connell 2004). I also witnessed first hand the round-ups of young Eritrean men and women and the brutality visited upon them as they were trucked away. I returned three times in 2002, and was struck each time by the changed political atmosphere. Long-time confidants refused to express criticism of the regime in public places, even in whispers, for fear they might be punished. Nor would they voice criticism over the phone or in emails, as they believed all electronic communication was monitored. And few young people were visible in public places. Their anxieties were made more acute by the manner in which arrested dissidents and conscripted youth were treated. People who questioned the policies of the regime, including those who merely voiced such views to friends in public places and were overheard by government supporters and then reported for their indiscretions, or who refused to serve the regime, simply disappeared. No formal charges were brought against them, and no one had access to them once they were imprisoned (even their families). The lack of clarity on what would get one arrested engendered a pervasive terror of the authorities and a growing mistrust of friends, neighbours, co-workers and others within the general population. Not long after I criticised these practices in an interview with an externally-based Eritrean website, *Asmarino.com*, I was ordered to leave the country.

Since then, there has been extensive documentation of such practices by independent human rights agencies. Over the past decade, political and religious dissidents have been incarcerated by the thousands in secret prisons scattered throughout the country – in the basements of urban police stations, in caves in the rugged mountains of northern Sahel, and in unfurnished shipping containers in the desert lowlands along the Red Sea coast and on islands in the Dahlak Archipelago – where they are beaten and held for long periods with inadequate water and food. This has led to a significant number of deaths. In its 2008 World Report, Human Rights Watch said that many political prisoners:

are packed into unventilated cargo containers under extreme temperatures or are held in underground cells. Torture is common, as are indefinite solitary confinement, starvation rations, lack of sanitation, and hard labour. Prisoners rarely receive medical care, even when severely injured or deathly ill. Death in captivity is common.

In an April 2009 report Human Rights Watch said:

Those who try and flee the country are imprisoned or risk being shot on sight at the border. Refugees who fled to Malta, Sudan, Egypt, Libya, and other countries and were forcibly

repatriated have faced detention and torture upon return to Eritrea. Given the pervasive human rights violations in Eritrea and the risk of torture faced by those who are returned, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has advised against all deportations to Eritrea, including of rejected asylum seekers – and all refoulement of Eritrean refugees should end. (Human Rights Watch 2009)

Former prisoners and escapees tell disturbingly similar stories about torture techniques commonly used against political and religious dissenters, including the ‘helicopter’ in which the victim is stripped of his clothing, tied with arms behind his back and either laid on the ground face down or hung from a tree branch and left for several days and nights in succession. In one well-documented and widely publicised incident in November 2004, dozens of young conscripts were killed at a prison camp at Adi Abieto when they protested against their treatment. More than 160 were reportedly executed in 2006 when they tried to flee from the infamous Wia army camp in the blistering Massawa coastal lowlands, and at least a dozen died there in 2007, according to Human Rights Watch. In a 2008 report, Amnesty International wrote:

Torture by means of painful tying, known as ‘helicopter’, continued to be a routine punishment and means of interrogation for religious and political prisoners . . . Military offenders were tortured. Many were young people who had tried to flee conscription or who had complained of harsh conditions and the indefinite extension of their national service. (Amnesty International 2009)

Kibreab (2009) documents how this pattern of one-party domination extended into the post-independence economy, as the regime sustained itself on the basis of diaspora remittances and rogue business deals, coupled with the use of national service conscripts as cheap labour on party and state projects. Here, however, is one place where he misses a crucial aspect of the regime’s survival strategy when he decries the government’s treatment of international mining companies as ‘capricious’ and assumes the worst in future outcomes. As it happens, Eritrea is today on the brink of a gold rush that the government views as its lifeline and that has caused it to moderate (or at least disguise) its behaviour. The Canadian firm Nevsun Resources began production at the end of 2010, with a forecast that its Bisha mine will generate a million ounces of gold. The Australia-based Chalice Gold Mines is close behind, and nearly 30 other foreign firms are in Eritrea in the hope of cashing in on the windfall.

With the government due to break even on its investment in the mining sector by 2012, the future could hold unsettling surprises – for Eritreans, for Eritrea’s neighbours and, eventually perhaps, for the very companies that have hung tight to this point. As the regime closes in on this bonanza, it has tightened restrictions on the few international aid agencies left in the country – Norwegian Church Aid, Lutheran World Relief and the International Committee for the Red Cross – and put the United Nations on notice that its operations will be sharply curtailed after June 2011, while telling NCA and other NGOs to wind up their projects by the end of the year. It has also tightened the restrictions on diplomatic personnel based in Asmara in what appears to be a calculated move to diminish the leverage of outside powers over both its repressive policies at home and its capricious behaviour in the region.

Contesting dictatorship

Eritrea, like its neighbours to the north and east before they erupted in popular protest this year, shows none of the obvious signs of political instability, largely due to a sophisticated system of social control under which no public expression of difference or dissent is

tolerated. Many Eritreans are understandably cowed or discouraged by this. Others put up with it out of fear that cracks in Eritrea's unity heighten the risk of a loss of sovereignty to Ethiopia, an apprehension constantly stoked by the Isaias regime and given substance by Ethiopia's continuing efforts to manipulate the external Eritrean opposition. Nevertheless, popular dissatisfaction runs wide and deep as reflected in such indicators as the decline of remittances, the record outflow of refugees and asylum seekers, and the stagnation in much of the domestic economy, which is powered today by a shifting mix of diaspora 'tax' payments, loans against future mineral wealth, shady business dealings, and the semi-enslavement of much of the country's youth through open-ended conscription in the National Service (Human Rights Watch 2009). As pressure builds, questions loom: what will come next, how might a change come about, and who or what is positioned to help make it happen – or to ride the wave and steer the ship once change gets underway?

Opposition parties

The organised political opposition is based outside Eritrea, with parties and armed groups mostly headquartered in Ethiopia, and civic organisations and alternative media mainly active in Europe and North America, though they can be found across the Middle East and as far away as Australia. What opposition there is within Eritrea is invisible and difficult to measure as it either takes the form of passive resistance or ultra-clandestine organising, due to the absence of legal channels for airing grievances. The result is an appearance of calm that belies the country's structural fragility.

The core of the political opposition is the Eritrean Democratic Alliance (EDA), the third iteration of a loose coalition of externally-based forces opposed to the EPLF/PFDJ, that was first launched in March 1999 as the Alliance of Eritrean National Forces (AENF). It began with 10 organisations and grew to 13 by 2002, when it was renamed the Eritrean National Alliance (ENA), nearly all of whose members derived from the two main branches of the liberation movement, the ELF (itself now divided among several factions, one of which carries the original name) and the EPLF. At a January 2005 conference in Addis Ababa, the Alliance was expanded again and transformed itself into the EDA, which adopted a charter that assigned weighted votes to its members, based upon size, and set up a permanent leadership structure.

Two years later, however, the EDA was paralysed by an ELF demand that its vice-chair take over as Alliance chair. In the ensuing dispute, two blocs formed. The first was comprised of self-described secular nationalists, dominated by the ELF-Revolutionary Council (ELF-RC) and a breakaway PFDJ faction, the Eritrean Democratic Party (EDP). The second bloc was made up mainly of those drawn from identity-based constituencies, either religious or ethnic, or in some cases both, among which was the ELF. There were others outside these two blocs, but they were not themselves organised into a similar caucus. This rough division continues to define the Alliance today, though in 2008 the two blocs reached agreement on the EDA chair and expanded the Alliance to include several other small groups. Since then, many have been engaged in realignments and merger talks that reinforce the bifurcation that surfaced in 2007.

At the end of 2009, three secular-nationalist forces – the ELF-RC, by then reorganised as the Eritrean People's Party (EPP), the EDP, and another largely EPLF-derived faction, the Eritrean People's Movement (EPM) – combined to form the Eritrean People's Democratic Party (EPDP). In early 2010, the ELF, the Eritrean Federal Democratic Movement (EFDM) and two Islamist groups, al-Khalas and Islah, joined to form a coalition called the Eritrean Solidarity Front (ESF), dedicated to what it termed the 'restoration of

Muslim rights'. Two ethnic minority organisations, the Kunama-based DMLEK and the Afar-based RSADO, also formed a coalition – the Democratic Front of Eritrean Nationalities (DFEN) – which was joined later by a new organisation with a largely Saho constituency. This left a miscellaneous assortment of others yet to commit to one or another of the emerging political hubs.

For all the intensity of its internal struggles, however, the EDA did very little beyond providing a political umbrella for those groups determined to oust the Isaias government, failing even to agree on a strategy for doing so, or a programme to follow in the event they were successful. In 2008, the opposition website *awate.com* called it 'a dysfunctional parliament in exile'. A decade after its launch, the EDA appeared to be little more than an address for the resistance. It had no internal coherence, no substantive common programme, and few if any shared activities apart from congresses and conferences. It had no social or economic projects either, such as aid or education for the refugees in Sudan and Ethiopia, and no publications apart from a largely dormant website. Its main unifying feature was hatred for Isaias. It had taken a handful of decisions over symbolic issues – such as agreeing to accept the existing national flag – but it remained divided over such issues as whether to wage an armed or non-violent struggle and whether or not to embrace the existing constitution as a starting point for a post-Isaias legal system. It was also widely distrusted among Eritreans outside its immediate sphere of influence because of its reliance on Ethiopia. Nevertheless, the EDA was as an important point of intersection for what there was of an organised opposition and an arena of struggle for giving sharper definition to it. This has highlighted its primary division between the highland Tigrinya-speaking Christians who make up half the population and dominate both the government and the EPDP and the lowland Muslims from Eritrea's eight ethnic minorities that constitute the other half of the population and the social base for most of other EDA members.

Those making up the two armed EDA caucuses – the ESF and the DFEN – draw membership from particular ethnic and confessional constituencies and generally operate within the areas where they live. The four identified with the former take their support from the Beni Amer, one of Eritrea's largest minorities, who inhabit much of the Gash-Barka plains and the mountainous area of northern Barka, as well as swathes of eastern Sudan, where the largest Eritrean refugee camps are sited. During the independence war, this was the base area of the ELF, which broke up in the 1980s after being driven out of Eritrea by the EPLF and its Tigrayan allies. It is familiar territory to leaders of the ELF faction that today dominates the ESF bloc (the 'ELF'). For their part, the Eritrean Islamic Reform Movement (Islah) and the Eritrean Islamic Party for Justice and Development (al-Khalas) derive from what was once called Eritrean Islamic Jihad (patronised by Osama bin Laden while he was in Sudan), but whose ethnic base among the Beni Amer is as important as its religious orientation. The fourth, the Eritrean Federal Democratic Movement (EFDm), has its base among the mostly Muslim Bilen from the area around the city of Keren and is principally concerned with minority rights.

The DFEN bloc consists mainly of the Democratic Movement for the Liberation of Eritrean Kunama (DMLEK), whose social base lies along Eritrea's northwestern border with Ethiopia and overlaps with Ethiopia rather than Sudan and the Red Sea Afar Democratic Organisation (RSADO), whose base is primarily on the coastal plains stretching south from Massawa and the Dahlak Archipelago to Djibouti. They were joined in 2010 by the National Democratic Front for the Liberation of the Eritrean Saho (NDFLES), whose membership is drawn from the Saho minority in Eritrea's eastern highlands and in northeastern Ethiopia. All rely heavily on support from Ethiopia, though they draw from constituencies with genuine grievances for which there are no legal political channels to seek redress.

All three reserve the right to ‘self-determination’, which most interpret as an option to secede from Eritrea should they choose, and which raises the spectre of the creation of Somali-style mini-states in the event the centre collapses and the opposition were unable to offer a coherent, unified alternative. They are also the ones most closely identified with acts of armed resistance.

On balance, despite numerous setbacks, 2010 saw a lessening of the rampant sectarianism in the opposition camp. For its part, Ethiopia announced a significant shift in its policy toward Eritrean refugees, who by then numbered 60,000, by allowing them to live outside rural camps so long as they lacked a criminal record and were able to sustain themselves financially (UNHCR 2010), and Addis Ababa University set aside 100 places for Eritrean students. These moves were intended to damp down the hostility between the two peoples and signalled Ethiopia’s decision to strengthen its ties with – and control over – the EDA, by giving its members, with the exception of the EPDP, whose headquarters remained in Europe and which continued to push for non-violent alternative means of struggle, freer rein to recruit and operate, even while stepping up its support for them. In a speech in April 2011 to the Ethiopian Parliament, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi explicitly committed his government to regime change in Asmara.

Civil society

Many Eritreans distrust all these parties, which are led by people who have vied among themselves to dominate the national movement since the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, the younger generation, many of whose members have spent time outside Eritrea and experienced democratic societies firsthand, has declined to join EDA affiliates in significant numbers, focusing instead on building human rights organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), or simply tracking the situation through the numerous Eritrean websites and engaging on an individual basis. This trend too needs to be mapped and treated as an integral part of the emerging alternative.

Eritrea’s civil society blossomed in the late 1940s, during the second half of Britain’s interim administration, which is often described by Eritreans as their ‘golden age’. That decade saw the formation of independent political parties, trade unions and newspapers representing a broad spectrum of Eritrea’s diverse population. It also saw the establishment of Islamic institutions, like the Supreme Islamic Council, as religious identity began to coincide with political identity during the contest over Eritrea’s future political status.

Ethiopia’s suppression of Eritrea’s civil society began immediately after the imposition of the UN-sponsored Federation in 1952. Within two years, the most militant trade unions were suppressed. Eritrea’s main independent newspapers were closed. And independent political parties were harassed and then prohibited. Over the next decade, the territory’s cities were rocked by frequent protests and demonstrations, with the largest in March 1958, during a massive three-day general strike that drew as many as 80,000 people. The government’s violent response marked the death knell for civil society, as all trade unions were subsequently banned, together with a wide range of other organisations, leaving only a handful of faith-based associations.

Over the next three decades, the independence movement sought to mobilise its supporters at home and in the diaspora, particularly after it split into ELF and EPLF in the early 1970s. The former set up General Unions of Peasants, Workers, Women and Students, while the latter built ‘National Unions’ of the same constituencies, all of which were appendages of the parent movements. Diaspora Eritreans also established organisations, such as Eritreans for Liberation in North America and Eritreans for Liberation in Europe, but they

were soon incorporated into the fronts' networks and placed under their control. After the Derg seized power in Ethiopia in 1974, it, too, established mass organisations in Eritrea, but few Eritreans participated. Thus, there was a significant hiatus in Eritrea's experience of autonomous civil society prior to independence.

In 1989, as the end of the liberation war neared, the EPLF – by then the only armed force operating within the country – abruptly dissolved its national unions, taking many by surprise in what later appeared to be an effort to demobilise political organisations that might seek an independent role. After independence, the EPLF and its successor, the PFDJ, revived all but the peasants' union, turning them all into service branches of the new state with no advocacy role and no control over leaderships or programmes (the peasants were not reorganised on their own out of concern they might develop into a self-consciousness interest group at a time when the leadership had determined that small-scale, subsistence farming – much like pastoralism – was a drag on development and needed to be phased out). Several former fighters started new NGOs – notably the Regional Centre for Human Rights and the Eritrean Women War Veterans Association (Bana) – but the government quickly shut them down, claiming they duplicated the efforts of party-led unions (Kibreab 2009).

Meanwhile, new organisations arose in the diaspora, ranging from NGOs and professional associations to websites. New community centres also developed independently of the PFDJ in urban areas with high concentrations of Eritreans, providing cultural and language programmes along with other social and economic services. However, they, like the NGOs and the new media, became contested terrain during the political crackdown, and many were forced to close after 2001.

From this point forward, much of the growth in diaspora civil society took the form of rights-based organisations and advocacy groups. Among the latter were the London-based Citizens for Democratic Rights in Eritrea (CIDRiE), which brought together Eritrean intellectuals in Europe and North America in 2009 as a sort of global think tank and advocacy formation; the Eritrean Law Society in North America, launched in 2010 to promote the rule of law and assist Eritrean victims of human rights abuses; the South Africa-based Eritrean Movement for Human Rights and Democracy (EMDHR), which arose in 2002 among students sent abroad for advanced study and was fed by a steady flow of refugees who made their way south over the following decade; and Eritrean Global Solidarity, born out of a network of mostly US- and Canada-based civic organisations in 2007. Numerous small rights-based watchdog organisations and advocacy groups also appeared with specialised missions, ranging from the UK-based Eritreans for Human Rights and Democracy (2001) and Release Eritrea (2004), which focused on civic rights and religious persecution, respectively, to the Association of Disabled Eritreans in France; the Association of Eritrean Asylum Seekers in Stockholm and the Swiss Association for Eritrean Children, to name just a few. A Sweden-based Network of Eritrean Civil Societies-Europe brought together a dozen groups at the start of the decade, and that is just the beginning.

The alternative media

One measure of the energy and dynamism within the opposition, if not its numerical or organisational strength, is the vibrancy of the external Eritrean media, seen in its creative and original, if at times overly polemical, reporting; and the frequency and geographical diversity of hits on both independent and oppositional websites, and the spirited engagement of Eritreans in debates on them. The three most active websites to generate original material have been Awate, Asmarino, and Assenna, but there are others that post articles,

opinions and diatribes on the party in power, as well as on one another, and attract wide followings, not only in the diaspora but also, and often at considerable risk to the web surfer, within Eritrea.

However, the medium that reaches the most Eritreans within the country is radio. Several externally based broadcast initiatives have come and gone in recent years, including Asmarino's Voice of Delina, which carried programming by the South Africa-based EMDHR but had to close for lack of resources. Radio Erena ('Our Eritrea') has been broadcasting in Tigrinya via satellite from Paris since 2010, with the support of Reporters Without Borders, and is also carried over the internet by Asmarino. There is also an EDA operation, *wagheta*, that broadcasts in short wave out of Ethiopia, using Ethiopian facilities, and there is a part-time station called Radio Asena that puts out programmes in both Tigrinya and Arabic. A new station is slated to go on air from the Netherlands, and there are numerous Eritrean community-generated programmes broadcast locally and regionally in North America and Europe.

Print also remains an important medium, both because it provides an opportunity for in-depth critiques of past mistakes and transgressions, and detailed visions and programmes for the future, and because it preserves and passes on Eritrea's rich cultural and historical legacy. The most important vehicle for this outside Eritrea is the Red Sea Press, in Trenton, NJ, which, over the past 25 years, has brought out close to 150 titles related to Eritrea, and which continues to put out new titles, now digitised and printed on an on-demand basis, to ensure continued availability. This, together with the broadcast and online media, helps to keep a dispersed and discouraged population engaged with its homeland, and sustains a broad constituency for change, even as it nurtures a democratic culture in which a new politics can take shape and grow.

Prospects for the future

The only certainty is that Isaias is not forever. Should anything render him incapable of ruling, such as new health problems or personal injury, a scramble among those seeking to succeed him would quickly ensue, as there is no mechanism in place for succession. In the absence of a coherent opposition that could command the popular support to manage a transition peacefully – and neutralise the armed forces as an independent actor – the most likely prospect for the coming years is instability, possibly involving political violence rising to the level of civil war or devolving into a version of warlordism that would manifest itself in persistent localised conflicts. But we cannot rule out the possibility of a popular uprising that would thrust forward fresh leaders in the manner of those societies experiencing sudden upheavals this year in North Africa and the Middle East. In Eritrea's case, though, the driving force would have to come from within the military, as civil society has been so thoroughly gutted, and because so many young people, who might otherwise take the lead, are in the National Service.

In the absence of such an uprising, we are likely to see an escalation of low-level conflict involving Ethiopia-backed insurgents in the western lowlands and coastal plains, but also extending into the slope areas where much current mineral exploration is underway. This will not threaten the regime itself, but could disrupt mining operations and transport and slow the flow of mineral-derived revenue to the Asmara government; and, in so doing, add a fresh note of instability to the political environment. The placement of landmines along heavily travelled roads has been a hallmark of such groups, which enjoy tacit support from local populations, which rarely participate in such actions but do not assist the government in identifying perpetrators either.

On balance, it is clear that substantive threats with any chance of success will only come from within the country, where there is a growing disaffection within the state bureaucracy and in the armed forces, especially among the young conscripts, whose terms of service have been repeatedly extended, leaving thousands under arms or in menial jobs for a decade or more. A smoothly executed *coup d'état* is unlikely (though not impossible), due both to disunity among top officers and officials and to the web of security mechanisms set up to prevent such moves. Another possibility is an assassination attempt on Isaias that, if successful, would trigger a power struggle among the four most powerful military commanders. Against this backdrop, the main long-term threat to the unity of the country arises from the reinvigorated ethnic and religious identities that are a defining feature of the alliances developing within the armed political opposition, and which open the door for the penetration of new, more virulent forms of extremism from outside. Among the possible short-term (one-to-two-year) scenarios for Eritrea, three stand out:

- (1) The situation remains as it is, with the regime continuing to borrow against future mining revenue while presiding over an ever-tightening security state as the economy continues to decline. Regional relations remain tense but not explosive, despite South Sudan's emergence as a new state, and Eritrean opposition groups, internally divided, are unable to take advantage of the situation. The US prevails on Ethiopia not to intervene further and compensates it by strengthening its defences and assisting further in stabilising the beleaguered Transitional Federal Government in Somalia. In 15–18 months, Eritrea breaks even on its initial capitalisation in the mining sector and either reinvests in its badly eroded social and educational services, and demobilises large sections of its armed forces, or it goes on a spending spree to ramp up the capacity of its armed forces, after which it resumes its aggressive regional behaviour with renewed swagger. Either is possible, though experience suggests the latter is the more likely of the two courses.
- (2) Eritrean opposition groups, acting with Ethiopian support, escalate their attacks inside Eritrea, disrupting exploration and production at key mining sites. People in these areas provide varying degrees of support for the opposition forces (intelligence, food and water, temporary shelter), triggering intensified counterinsurgency measures against Muslims and ethnic minorities in these areas. This heightens tensions within the Eritrean armed forces and the wider society, which either triggers mutinies within the armed forces leading to some form of uprising and a rolling coup against Isaias, or Isaias, if he recognises the threat early enough, takes the country back to war with Ethiopia in order to regain control of the internal situation and then initiates a brutal purge of real and suspected opponents.
- (3) Isaias is incapacitated, setting off a crisis of succession. There is a violent struggle among the top generals, while Eritrean opposition forces increase insurgent activity. This ends with a 'palace coup' by lower-ranking officers who issue a call for a ceasefire, following it with a declaration of a state of emergency, while they try to draw together the various armed and unarmed political factions for a conference to establish a transition to national elections and constitutional rule.

Any one of these is possible, as are further variations. Among them: Isaias is imprisoned and held for trial, or other states intervene to halt the fighting – and shape the outcome. Among the least likely: Isaias steps aside voluntarily or dramatically changes his approach to governance and regional relations.

However this plays out, Eritrea appears headed for a political crisis that may or may not be violent but that will substantially alter or replace the present regime. For a transition to be peaceful and democratic, involving both the external opposition and elements of the existing state and armed forces, the opposition would need to achieve a much higher degree of organisational and political coherence than is now the case; as well as a far greater degree of public trust among Eritreans within the country, based on the articulation of a transitional programme that insiders and outsiders could buy into, including plans for a unity government (with people from the existing state and its armed forces) to serve as a caretaker for that process.

Above all, Eritreans need reassurance that a peaceful and democratic transition is possible. Given their experience, it will take a lot to convince them to take risks to make it happen – certainly more than mechanistic formulas based on an abstract faith that democracy cures everything, even as those propounding such a philosophy appear to contradict it in their own actions. Moreover, to rally people out of their cynicism and lethargy, would-be leaders need to articulate what they propose to do on the issues that most directly affect a population that has been staggering under the weight of this regime and the decade-long war-footing.

Questions abound: In the event of a constitutional conference as part of the transition, for example, what would be the starting point – the 1952 Constitution, the 1997 Constitution, some amalgam of both? What do the various political players and interest groups propose be amended and how? For example, how do they propose dealing with the critical issues of language and land ownership, the limits of executive authority, the triggers for a national state of emergency? What economic principles do they propose for restructuring the society, what role do they see for the public sector, what will they do with those sectors now controlled by the state or the PFDJ (or in some cases, both), and how will they compensate national service conscripts for years of underpaid work? Of utmost importance, how will a post-Isaias regime guarantee the rights of ethnic minorities and other structurally disadvantaged and disempowered groups without emasculating the central state and leaving the country subject to either external manipulation or disintegration?

A viable political alternative must have not only a compelling programme on minority rights but also a track record of respecting them in its own operations and structures. The rise of small, armed ethnic parties – whether or not encouraged by Ethiopia – is a response to the lived experience of domination, from personal insult and cultural chauvinism to discrimination and systematic exploitation and exclusion in the economy and politics. Inevitably, demagogues and external forces will exploit such popular dissatisfaction. But those who would counter them must come up with programmes that undercut their appeal so they can be isolated and marginalised. Only a demonstration of both sincerity and effectiveness will accomplish this, as Eritrean politics are replete with examples of soaring rhetoric and unfulfilled promises.

These and other questions do not need to be settled, but options need to be put out to stimulate public discussion and to demonstrate that those who propose to rule a post-Isaias Eritrea have the imagination and the sensitivity to do so in a manner that speaks to the deepest-held needs of the Eritrean people. Nothing would be more constructive than a vigorous public debate on these issues among leading opposition figures – one that not only showcased the positions of those involved but that demonstrated their capacity to carry out a debate without resorting to violence or coercion to determine the outcome. The people need hard evidence that those who propose to lead will be different from those they have today, not only in what they say but in what they do and how they do it.

Eritrea has a long way to go to achieve political stability and the democratic institutions to sustain it, as well as the political culture to nurture it over the long term. Widening the circle of those discussing this – and making it far more transparent – is the most urgently needed step today. New leadership is just as important in this process as new ideas.

Note on contributor

Dan Connell is the author of numerous books and articles on Eritrea, and teaches journalism and African politics at Simmons College in Boston.

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Towards more stringent sustainability standards? Trends in the cut flower industry

Lone Riisgaard*

Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen, Denmark

Sustainability initiatives have proliferated in many industries in recent years. This has led to an increasing number of standards that exist in parallel seeking to address more or less the same social and environmental issues. In this paper I explore whether parallelism has spurred a race to the bottom in flower standards seeking to regulate social conditions in the production of cut flowers aimed at the European Union market. The analysis suggests that while less stringent standards still dominate, so-called higher bar standards are gaining importance, as is the active inclusion of local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and trade unions in monitoring standard compliance – a practice which potentially could allow standards to address more locally embedded and hidden problems like for example discrimination or lack of freedom of association. Nevertheless, less stringent standards still predominate and although an ongoing multi-stakeholder harmonisation initiative has real potential to ‘scale up’ more stringent standards, so far it has mainly benefited developed – not developing – country growers and workers.

Keywords: cut flowers; sustainability standards; inclusive monitoring; enabling rights; trade unions

Introduction

The proliferation of ‘sustainability’ standard initiatives constitutes a new form of regulation where private actors such as NGOs and industry associations are involved in negotiating standards for labour and the environment, and for monitoring compliance with these standards. Companies are increasingly signing up to these new systems of regulation which have expanded rapidly across industries of interest to critical Western consumers such as garments, toys, forest products, oil and gas, agricultural products, chemicals and electronics (Gereffi *et al.* 2001, O’Rourke 2006, Utting 2008, Egels-Zandén 2009).

These new and private systems of regulation, however, remain highly disputed, particularly since the intended positive impact on producers, workers and the environment is by no means guaranteed. Standard initiatives have been criticised for implementing a Northern agenda on southern-hemisphere producers and workers, for not being sensitive to local specific conditions, and for providing consumers with a false sense of problem solving because they fail to reach marginalised workers, such as temporary or migrant workers, and fail to address more embedded issues like discrimination or the lack of freedom of association (Barrientos *et al.* 2003, Utting 2005, 2008, O’Rourke 2006, Barrientos and

*Email: lor@diis.dk

Smith 2007, Blowfield and Dolan 2008). Others argue that such private initiatives are more efficient than traditional labour or environmental regulation and moreover suit the current global production system (see for instance Bernstein 2001 or Carasco and Singh 2003).

The cut flower industry is a particularly interesting example of the emergence and proliferation of standards that seek to regulate the social and environmental conditions of production. The character of cut flower production and trade has set the frame for some highly criticised working conditions in the industry. The largest developing country exporters (Kenya and Colombia) in particular have been favourite targets for campaigns demanding better environmental and social conditions both locally and in Europe and North America. In 2006, developing countries supplied 22% of EU imports of cut flowers and foliage and 60% of US imports, and their share is increasing.¹ The seasonal nature of the cut flower trade, with demand peaking at northern-hemisphere festivals such as Valentine's, Mother's day and Easter, and lowest demand during the northern summer, makes labour demand in production highly uneven. Seasonality is a major force behind the employment of large numbers of temporary workers at times of peak demand. The increase in sales to large retailers has further intensified the need for a flexible workforce to meet the ever-changing requirements of retailers, whose orders are often adjusted on the day of delivery (Hale and Opondo 2005, Riisgaard 2009a). The perishability of the product means that workers often have to work long hours to complete critical tasks such as harvesting and spraying, but it is the heavy use of chemicals that constitutes the main health hazard to workers and the surrounding environment and communities.

The industry has reacted to criticisms of the working conditions by adopting a range of private social and environmental standard initiatives since the mid 1990s. Initially, the standards mostly covered technical issues such as chemical usage and environmental management. The social components of standards relating to workers' welfare are a more recent addition (cf. Barrientos *et al.* 2003). The majority of standard initiatives have been conceived and formulated in Europe, but in recent years a variety of standard initiatives have also been developed in producer countries. In all, at least 20 different social and/or environmental standards (international and national) exist for cut flower export (CBI 2007, Dolan and Opondo 2005, Riisgaard 2007, 2009a).

In the flower industry, we thus have a standard landscape with many schemes existing in parallel. These standards are not neutral mechanisms but institutional mechanisms that differ in the way they seek to implement their objectives and in the impact they have on intended beneficiaries. A growing pool of critical literature on sustainability standards argues that consistent forms of improvements for intended beneficiaries are only achieved by marginal standards applied in niche supply chains (Barrientos and Smith 2007, Macdonald 2007, Nelson *et al.* 2007, Reynolds *et al.* 2007). Some also point to a tendency for standard harmonisation attempts to spur convergence around a lowest common denominator (e.g. Mutersbaugh 2005). This paper examines overall trends in cut flower standards aimed at identifying whether (in terms of labour issues) there is a move towards more stringent standards or the reverse. In this regard, the paper examines how more stringent standards have converged around a specific flower base code, the International Code of Conduct for Cut Flowers (ICC). Although the ICC has been interpreted differently by different standard initiatives it has introduced the practice of active inclusion of local NGOs and trade unions in monitoring standard compliance. However, within the more stringent standards there are different interpretations of how to raise the bar. There are also differences in what kind of bar should be raised and who should reap the benefits. One attempt to harmonise existing flower standards, while showing real potential to 'scale up' more stringent standards, has so far mainly benefited Dutch growers and workers.

In this paper, I first present theoretical discussions of standard ‘parallelism’ and of the focus and function of standards (section two). In section three, I relate these discussions to flower standards and in section four, I discuss attempts at convergence around the International Code of Conduct for Cut Flowers. This is followed by a conclusion in section five.

The analysis presented in this paper relies on primary material gathered from 21 semi-structured interviews with representatives from flower standard schemes and other industry actors, including follow-up emails and phone communication (see Appendix 1 for details of the interviews). I also draw selectively on fieldwork carried out in the flower sectors of Kenya and Tanzania in 2006 and 2010. Cut flower exports from sub-Saharan Africa (led by Kenya) have increased from approximately US\$13 million in 1980 to almost US\$300 million in 2007, representing one of Africa’s most significant cases of non-traditional export development during the past two decades (UN Comtrade). Kenya is one of the top players in the world cut flower industry being the largest supplier to Europe, and here private social standards have been widespread since the mid 1990s. Tanzania is a newcomer with a much smaller industry that has only recently begun to adopt private social standards.

The function and focus of standards

Risk management and product differentiation

The key role of standards in agricultural value chains² is to facilitate coordination between firms by transmitting credible information on the nature of products and the conditions under which they are produced, processed and transported (Humphrey and Schmitz 2001, Ponte and Gibbon 2005, Henson and Humphrey 2008). Apart from reducing transaction costs, the literature on global value chains identifies two distinct motives for explicit coordination of activities between enterprises in value chains. The two reasons are risk management and product differentiation. Standards codify arrangements for handling risk and product differentiation (Ponte and Gibbon 2005, Hughes 2006, Henson and Humphrey 2008, Nadvi 2008).

Following the categorisations of Aragrande *et al.* (2005), Henson and Humphrey thus distinguish two categories of standard in agrofood chains. *Risk management standards* where the predominant role is to provide a level of assurance that a product is in compliance with defined minimum product and/or process requirements. And *product differentiation standards* where standards are mainly aimed at differentiating the firm and/or its products in the ‘eyes of the consumer’, most often through a consumer label.

According to Henson and Humphrey, it is possible to categorise most private standards into one of these two categories, although they recognise that some private standards have dual functions. Furthermore, the ratio between risk management and product differentiation is far from static. Henson and Humphrey suggest that there is an upward trend in the minimum level as consumer expectations and/or regulatory requirements are enhanced. Thus, the territory currently governed by product differentiation standards might cede ground to risk management standards, while product differentiation standards will shift their focus to new attributes (Henson and Humphrey 2008).

‘Parallelism’ and ‘forum shopping’

The diverging interests of different actors and the role that standards play in how lead firms are governing value chains make standards highly contested arenas. Consequently, we often

see a wide range of standard schemes working in parallel. Abbott and Snidal (2006) term this 'parallelism', describing the sometimes supportive, sometimes competitive relations among independent standard schemes working in parallel within roughly the same issue area. As they observe, parallelism opens up opportunities for forum shopping in two senses. First, actors (both NGOs and firms) can shop around for the standard scheme that they deem most favourable for them. Second, standard schemes themselves can 'shop' for business participation for example by adapting standard content or rules to attract specific businesses (Abbott and Snidal 2006).

This argument is picked up by Macdonald (2007) in her discussion of sustainability standards in the coffee industry, where she argues that the landscape of parallel standard schemes opens up a large discretionary space for buyers in which they can define the substance and scope of how they respond to activist demands for sustainability in production. According to Macdonald, this has consequences for the ability to realise consistent forms of empowerment for workers and producers in developing countries because the discretionary space allows multiple systems to coexist in parallel, with consistent forms of empowerment only being achieved by those participating in 'niche' supply chains (Macdonald 2007).

This position seems to support the notion that parallelism is counterproductive in terms of empowerment and thus leads to a race towards the lowest standards (at least within mainstream markets). Another study, also on coffee standards, by Reynolds *et al.* (2007) reaches a similar conclusion. Looking at the five major consumer labels in coffee, they ask if these initiatives largely hold the bar (i.e. halting the decline in social and environmental conditions caused by receding state regulations), or if they actually raise the bar (bringing about improvements in social and environmental conditions). While they do find that some standard initiatives raise the bar, they conclude that such standards are likely to be increasingly challenged by those that seek to simply uphold current standards (Reynolds *et al.* 2007). A similar conclusion is reached by Mutersbaugh in his study on harmonisation and mainstreaming in fair-trade and organic standards. He finds that there is a drive towards global standards and that this spurs a tendency towards 'a "lowest common denominator", minimising protections in national standards and displacing more comprehensive network-based standards' (Mutersbaugh 2005, p. 2039).

Ingenbleek and Meulenbergh (2006) examine the strategies that standard organisations pursue to put their sustainability objectives into practice. In their comparison of 10 sustainability standard schemes, they find that many strategic differences between schemes can be traced back to two types of standard organisations: those weighting principles over size, and those weighting size over principles. The most essential difference is thus found in the trade-off between the principles of sustainable production and the size of the programme, i.e. the number of farmers that adopt the standard. This is consistent with Macdonald's (2007) claim that high principles, or in her words, 'consistent forms of empowerment' (2007, p. 808), will only be achieved in marginal standard schemes. It also points to the difficulties inherent in trying to scale up certification to 'high principles' standards.

According to Ingenbleek and Meulenbergh, standard schemes follow either a differentiation or a lowest cost strategy when targeting markets. In a differentiation strategy (pursued by schemes that weight principles over size), a standard scheme enables primary producers to differentiate themselves from mainstream producers on the basis of sustainability, and communicate this to the end consumer. Standard organisations that weight size over principles apply lower sustainability requirements in their standards, and these standards are not communicated directly to the end consumers. This difference in strategies of standard schemes can be related to the difference between product differentiation and risk management standards pointed out by Henson and Humphrey (2008). Thus,

standard organisations weighting principles over size use product differentiation standards, and those weighting size over principles use risk management standards.

In terms of the social content and outcome of standards, a distinction has been drawn between standards that focus on ‘enabling rights’ versus standards that focus on ‘protective rights’ (Rodriguez-Garavito 2005). A similar division is developed by Barrientos and Smith (2007), who distinguish between standards which focus on ‘outcome standards’ versus standards that focus on ‘process rights’. Process rights (or enabling rights), for example the principles of freedom of association and non discrimination, describe intrinsic principles of social justice that enable workers to claim their rights. These process rights provide a route to the negotiation of and access to other entitlements and specified conditions of employment, such as a health and safety policy, minimum wages, working hours and deductions for employment benefits such as health insurance and pensions. These entitlements and specified conditions of employment are labelled outcome standards (or protective rights) (Barrientos and Smith 2007).

In a comprehensive study of the effects of social standards amongst suppliers to members of the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI)³, it was found that while standards were having an effect on outcome standards, they were having little or no effect on process rights, and furthermore failed to reach the most marginalised (often female) workers such as casual, migrant or subcontracted workers (Barrientos and Smith 2007, see also Nelson *et al.* 2007 for similar findings). The fact that most standards have more impact on outcome standards (protective rights) than process rights (enabling rights) is related to the way social standards are audited and reflects the dominance of a technical compliance perspective characterised by checklist auditing and self-assessments which is less capable of identifying problems related to enabling rights (Barrientos and Smith 2007). Conversely, the use of Participatory Social Auditing methodologies is argued to facilitate such identification and advance enabling rights (Auret and Barrientos 2004, Dolan and Opondo 2005). This methodology is based on thorough participation in the audit process by all groups of workers as well as local unions and NGOs and it includes the use of participatory interview techniques (such as focus groups or the use of drama or storytelling). Thus, a serious challenge for standard initiatives that seek to promote enabling rights is that they demand more resource-intensive and costly monitoring procedures. Furthermore, not all value chain actors are interested in promoting enabling rights, thus the scaling-up of initiatives focusing on enabling rights is a big challenge. See Table 1 for an illustration of the concepts linked in the discussion so far (although obviously some standards fit less well in these ideal typical categories).

The critical literature reviewed here argues that consistent forms of improvements for intended beneficiaries is only achieved by marginal standards and point at a tendency for standard harmonisation and mainstreaming attempts to spur convergence around a lowest common denominator, although there are more optimistic views (e.g. Bernstein and Cashore 2007). Utting (2008) is cautiously optimistic about the use of multi-stakeholder

Table 1. Types of standard schemes.

Type 1 standard schemes	Type 2 standard schemes
Schemes weighing size over principles	Schemes weighing principles over size
Focus mainly on risk management	Focus mainly on product differentiation
Focus on protective rights (outcome standards)	Focus on enabling rights (process rights)

initiatives and inclusive auditing processes as a means to continually ratchet up standards and procedures while challenging less stringent and less inclusive standards.

In the critical literature on sustainability standards there seems to be general consensus on the fact that multi-stakeholder standards using independent third-party auditing⁴ and participatory auditing methods (e.g. involving local actors and participatory interview techniques) are likely to lead to better social results compared to unilateral standards which employ first- or second-party auditing and a checklist approach to auditing (see for example Auret and Barrientos 2004, Utting 2005, O'Rourke 2006, Barrientos and Smith 2007, Blowfield and Dolan 2008, Tallontire *et al.* 2009). In this paper, I define stringent or 'high bar' standards as multi-stakeholder standards using third-party auditing and focusing on enabling rights. A focus on enabling rights here refers to standards which contain specific procedures aimed at enabling workers, such as demanding elected worker committees, using participatory interview techniques and inclusion of local NGOs and trade unions in implementing and monitoring. Discussions about the stringency of standards, however, should not divert attention from considerations about the limits of private standards as a means of improving working conditions in global production and particularly as a means of altering the power relations between labour and capital. Recently, the adverse effects of corporate buying strategies (particularly price cuts, short lead times and rapid turn-around) on labour conditions have been highlighted, and consequently the limits of standards which focus on production sites as sealed from the structural dynamics of the value chains they feed into (Barrientos *et al.* 2003, Utting 2005, Barrientos and Smith 2007, Riisgaard 2007, 2009a, Blowfield and Dolan 2008).⁵ This underlines the significance of unequal power relations in value chains such as the ones for cut flowers where buyers set the agenda and where producers are standard-takers.

Social and environmental standards in cut flowers

The landscape of flower standards

In Table 2, I have provided the basic features of standards aiming to advance social or social and environmental conditions in the production of cut flowers. The table, which lists a total of 13 standards, only includes examples of standards that have some element of social issues (e.g. excluding organic standards). The first standards that emerged in the industry were mainly set by buyers or producer groups and tended to be weak on social issues and rely mainly on internal monitoring. During the 1990s, there was a general development towards convergence around International Labour Organisation (ILO) core labour rights, the use of third-party monitoring and the emergence of new multi-stakeholder initiatives. Standards furthermore have tended to broaden from social or environmental issues to include both, and from only covering cut flowers to also include pot plants and foliage. Although most standards are beginning to cover foliage and pot plants, most sustainability certification still takes place in cut flowers, wherefore in this paper I limit myself to looking at cut flowers. Furthermore, I focus on standards that are present in the EU market, since this is where we see the largest proliferation of standards.

Flower standards can be argued to diverge on five key dimensions (see Table 3). These dimensions include the characteristics listed in Table 1 as well as monitoring procedures, actors involved in standard setting and how the standard is communicated: 1) private business standards (elaborated by buyers or producer groups) versus collective private standards (elaborated by multiple stakeholders including NGOs and/or trade unions); 2) third-

Table 2. Social and environmental standards in cut flowers.

Standard	Origin and structure	Release	Characteristics and cooperation
<i>Northern sectoral and corporate (examples)</i>			
GlobalGAP (flowers and ornamentals)	Coalition of European supermarkets	2003	Good agricultural practices with a small section on worker health, safety and welfare
Milieu Programma Sierteelt (MPS)	Dutch growers and auctions	1995	Environmental management (MPS A, B, C) with optional social qualification (MPS-SQ based on the ICC code) and MPS-GAP (benchmarked to GlobalGAP). MPS-A together with MPS-SQ has been benchmarked to FFP
Sainsbury's Code of Conduct for Socially Responsible Sourcing	UK supermarket chain Sainsburys	2000	Code on social responsibilities of suppliers based on the Ethical Trading Initiative's Base Code.
Morrison's Ethical Trading Code	UK supermarket chain Morrisons	?	Code of practice based on ILO core labour rights
<i>Southern sectoral (examples)</i>			
Kenya Flower Council (KFC) Code of Practice	(KFC) Association of Kenyan flower exporters	1998	Environmental and social certification system benchmarked to GlobalGAP and with a recognition agreement with Tesco's 'Nature's choice' from 2006. KFC is certified to ISO 65 guidelines
FlorVerde	Asocoflores (association of Colombian flower growers)	1998	Environmental and social certification system. Benchmarked to GlobalGAP
FlorEcuador	Expoflores (association of Ecuadorian flower growers)	2005	Environmental and social certification system
<i>Multi-stakeholder or NGO consumer labels</i>			
The Fairtrade Labelling Organisation (FLO) (flowers and plants)	Fairtrade labelling organisations and Fairtrade producer networks	2006	Principles of Fairtrade, including a minimum price and the Fairtrade premium. Until 2006, Fairtrade flowers were certified by Max Havelaar cooperating with FLP and MPS
Flower Label Program (FLP)	German importers and wholesalers, NGOs and trade unions	1996	Environmental and social certification system benchmarked to the ICC base code
Fair Flowers Fair Plants (FFP)	Union Fleurs (the International Floricultural Trade Association), NGOs and unions	2005	Environmental and social labelling scheme based on both the ICC and MPS-A criteria

(continued)

Table 2. Continued.

Standard	Origin and structure	Release	Characteristics and cooperation
Rainforest Alliance (flowers and ferns)	Environmental NGOs	2001	Certification system for conservation of biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods
<i>Multi-stakeholder base codes (no certification system)</i>			
International Code of Conduct for Cut Flowers (ICC)	Developed by a coalition of European NGOs and the International Union of Food and Agricultural Workers (IUF)	1998	Base code with criteria on human rights, labour conditions and basic environmental criteria
The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI)	An alliance of UK companies, NGOs and trade unions	1998	Social base code (not restricted to cut flowers)
The Horticultural Ethical Business Initiative (HEBI)	Kenyan flower growers and labour NGOs	2003	Base Code on Social Accountability for The Flower Industry based on the ETI. It is unclear whether HEBI is still functioning (see Tallontire <i>et al.</i> 2009)

party monitoring versus first- or second-party monitoring; 3) standards focusing mainly on risk management (and size) versus standards focusing mainly on product differentiation (and high principles); 4) standards that are communicated to consumers (consumer labels) versus business-to-business standards; 5) standards focusing on protection rights versus standards focusing on enabling rights. Furthermore, some standards are national in scope (mainly those created by developing country producer associations) while other standards are international.⁶

In terms of market coverage, social and environmental standards have become mainstream for flowers imported into the EU. A rough estimate assesses that between 50% and 75% of imported flowers adhere to one or more of the standards mentioned in Table 3. However, the vast majority of these standards are business-to-business standards (governed by business and not communicated to the consumer). Of the standards aimed at the EU, Milieu Programma Sierteelt (MPS), GlobalGAP and retailer codes are by far the biggest in terms of number of producers certified. It is not known how many producers are certified under GlobalGAP or retailer codes, but any producer exporting to British retailers will have to prove compliance.⁷ MPS has almost 4000 certified growers – although most under their environmental or GAP schemes only. These standards are business standards (MPS is owned by the Dutch auctions and flower growers which account for half of total production value in the EU,⁸ while GlobalGAP was initiated by a group of large European retailers).

In terms of the earlier discussion on whether standards seek to raise the bar on social issues or merely hold the bar (i.e. Type 1 versus Type 2 standards as listed in Table 1), Table 3 suggests that large standards (in terms of number of producers certified) are not aimed at raising the bar. While there have been developments towards convergence around ILO core labour rights and increased use of third-party monitoring, these standards still focus mainly on risk management and protective rights, not enabling rights (cf. Tallontire *et al.* 2009). The standards that aim at raising the bar are mainly consumer labels operating in niche markets. Thus the current state of affairs seems to confirm the findings from

Table 3. Key dimensions of diversity.

Standard	Number of certified growers ¹	Business standard	Collective standard	Third-party auditing	First/second-party auditing	Mainly risk management	Mainly product differentiation	Protective rights/ Outcome standards	Enabling rights/ Process rights	Business to business	Consumer label
Retailer codes ²	?	x			x ³	x		x		x	
GlobalGAP	?	x		x		x		x		x	
MPS-(A,B,C,GAP)	3800	x		x		x		x		x	
MPS-SQ	115	x		x			x		x	x	
Kenya Flower Council (KFC)	50	x			x ⁴	x		x		x	
FlorVerde	108	x		x		x		x			x
Flor-Ecuador	92	x			x	x		x		x	
Fairtrade Labelling Organisation (FLO)	42		x	x			x		x		x
Flower Label Program	58		x	x			x		x		x
Fair Flowers Fair Plants (FFP)	165		x	x			x		x		x
Rainforest Alliance	35		x		x		x	x			x
International Code of Conduct for Cut Flowers (ICC)	NA		x	NA	NA		x		x	x	
Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI)	NA		x	NA	NA		x		x	x	
Horticulture Ethical Business Initiative (HEBI)	NA		x	NA	NA		x		x	x	

Note:
¹ As appear on standard websites as of January 2009. Unfortunately the number of certified growers does not say anything about the volume or value of certified flowers. In developing countries the largest farms are most often certified and often to multiple standards.
² The analysis of retailer codes is based on the top five UK supermarkets: Sainsbury's, Waitrose, Morrison's, Tesco and Asda.
³ Several retailers do use third-party auditing of high risk suppliers but risk assessments are based on supplier self-assessments.
⁴ KFC also has a gold standard which requires third-party auditing. Nine farms are certified to the gold standard.

other agricultural commodities set out above in the section on the function and focus of standards (Mutersbaugh 2005, Macdonald 2007, Raynolds *et al.* 2007).

The standards, that are communicated through a consumer label characterise a much smaller portion of the market (no exact figures exist, but an estimate puts their market share between 5% and 10%, depending on the country).⁹ These standards tend to be collective standards focusing mainly on product differentiation and enabling rights. However, the share of consumer-labelled flowers has been rising quite rapidly over the last years (sales of Fairtrade flowers, for example, increased by 66% from 2006 to 2007).¹⁰ Furthermore, the ambitious harmonisation initiative carried out by Fair Flowers Fair Plants (FFP) (as will be discussed below) has potential to significantly increase the market share of labelled flowers. Thus it can be argued that standards seeking to raise the bar on social issues are becoming more important.

The introduction of sustainability-labelled flowers at the Dutch auctions

Simply put, the flower value chain for import into the EU entails two distinctive strands (the direct strand and the auction strand). The Dutch flower auctions¹¹ (owned by the Dutch flower growers) have historically been the most important channels through which flowers are distributed to European wholesalers and retailers. But lately the proportion of flowers imported into the EU that is directly sourced by large retailers is increasing (in 2006, the auctions had an estimated 40% market share of flowers, while large retailers had an estimated market share of 25–30%) (CBI 2007).¹² For Tanzania and Kenya, a rough estimate places around two-thirds of exports still going to the Dutch auction halls while approximately one-third of total exports is supplied directly to individual wholesalers and/or retailers, particularly in Germany and the United Kingdom (Riisgaard 2007).

Social and environmental standards are one of the governance tools through which retailers seek to reduce risks, minimise costs and differentiate their products. Certification to social and environmental standards is most often a requirement for producers exporting through this channel. Social standards so far have not played a significant role for flowers sold through the auction. Until 2007, the only standard differentiated at the clock auctions (i.e. with descending price) were MPS-A, B and C (the environmental standards owned by Dutch growers, who also own the auctions).¹³

The FFP standard initiative, however, has managed to negotiate an agreement with the FloraHolland auctions (FloraHolland represents 98% of the turnover at the Dutch auctions). From January 2007, the auctions started indicating FFP certification at the clock front and in their supply systems so that auction buyers were for the first time able to differentiate products certified to a social standard (Interview 9, 2008). Given that approximately 40% of all flowers go through the auctions and the fact that FFP is backed by very influential industry actors (uniting producers and traders covering an estimated 80–90% of the EU flower market), this development could increase the overall market share of labelled flowers and at the same time flowers certified to a standard focusing on enabling rights (Interview 19, 2008).¹⁴ In the remainder of this paper, I take a closer look at developments within the 'high bar' category of flower standards and illustrate the importance of asking for whom is the standard seeking to raise the bar.

How to raise the bar

The International Code of Conduct for Cut Flowers (ICC) is a base code (it has no standard organisation behind it) that can be adopted by any standard scheme. The ICC aims to

guarantee that flowers have been produced under socially and environmentally sustainable conditions, with implementation mechanisms designed to include the meaningful participation of workers, local organisations and unions (ICC 1998, Interview 12, 2008).

The ICC code has formed the basis for the social content of most of the 'high bar' standards (FLP, FFP, MPS-SQ [Socially Qualified], FLO and HEBI. However, within this category of standards there are different interpretations of how to raise the bar. There are also differences in what kind of bar should be raised and who should reap the benefits. As will be illustrated in the following two sections, this has quite different implications for different stakeholders.

Trade union empowerment and the International Code of Conduct for the Production of Cut Flowers (ICC)

The ICC was developed by a coalition of European NGOs and the International Union of Food and Agricultural Workers (IUF) in 1998 and represented the beginning of trade union involvement in private standard setting in flowers.¹⁵ Preceding its involvement with the ICC, the IUF had tried to run traditional organising campaigns in flower-producing countries. These were ultimately found to be based on insufficient union strength at national level. At the same time, a plethora of standards (mostly unilateral) were emerging that favoured employers rather than unions. In this context, the IUF decided to challenge unilateral business codes of conduct (weak in content, scope and monitoring), constructively engage in private standard setting and build its own multi-stakeholder model standard, the ICC (Interview 12, 2008 and Interview 13, 2006).

The ICC formed the centrepiece of a campaign to regulate work and employment in flower production. Initially, importers in Germany were targeted, with success, to accept the ICC. In 1999 the Flower Label Program¹⁶ standard was benchmarked against the ICC. Shortly after the German campaign, the Dutch MPS¹⁷ initiative was targeted, and this led after several years of discussion to the development of the MPS Socially Qualified standard (MPS-SQ) also based on the ICC (Interviews 1 and 12, 2008). The ICC has also indirectly formed the basis for the FLO¹⁸ Fairtrade standard for flowers¹⁹ and the social criteria for certification to the FFP label are those of the ICC.

Even though several standard schemes are based on the ICC code, the interpretation of how to actively involve workers, NGOs and trade unions differs significantly between standard schemes. A section on implementation in the ICC code, on the involvement of NGOs and unions states: '1. To overview the implementation of the Code of Conduct an independent body, accepted by all parties involved (for example trade unions, NGOs, employers), shall be formed. 2. This body will set the terms for an independent process of verification of compliance with the Code of Conduct' (ICC 1998). Adjoining the ICC code are the ICC guidelines which interpret how the code should be read. The first version of the guidelines does not elaborate on the participation of NGOs and unions. In 2003, FIAN (FoodFirst Information and Action Network) Germany, Switzerland and Holland updated the guidelines of the ICC²⁰ which now state that 'during the audit, a trade union and/or NGO representatives are present as observers' (Both ENDS 2005).

Thus, NGOs and trade unions were involved in setting the ICC standard, which stipulates that a body accepted by all parties shall overview standard implementation and that local trade unions and NGOs shall participate in all audits. In particular, the practice of securing local trade union and NGO participation in audits constitutes a unique strategy. In section two, I related findings which strongly suggest that social auditing – while having an effect on the more visible aspects, such as health and safety and working

hours (protective rights) – is having little or no effect on more embedded issues such as discrimination and freedom of association (enabling rights). Seen in this light, audit shadowing by local NGOs and trade unions (although not without problem)²¹ might help to remedy this serious shortcoming of social auditing in several ways: First, it secures the inclusion of local knowledge about the sector and the particular flower farm which potentially greatly increases the possibility for uncovering more hidden problems; second, it gives local organisations access to farms and workers in the flower industry and potentially aid organising efforts and the sustainability of any improvements that might come about as a result of standard implementation; third, it gives local organisations the possibility of contesting audit results and voicing their recommendations.

But even though this base code has been adopted by several standard schemes, the way they adopted it differs. MPS-SQ and later FFP have institutionalised audit shadowing as recommended in the ICC guidelines version II. In the Flower Label Program, participation of unions and NGOs is guaranteed in the institutional structure of the organisation and is implemented in the auditing procedures as follows: ‘Workers, trade unions and NGOs have the right to join the inspections’ (FLP 2007). However, the Flower Label Program does not automatically inform unions and NGOs about the inspections (nor do they pay allowances for observers), but unions and NGOs are free to ask if they can join the inspections (Interviews 6 and 7, 2008).²²

The FLO standard for Flowers and Plants for Hired Labour²³ (although indirectly based on the ICC), does not mention the inclusion of local trade unions or NGOs (Interview 10, 2008). In FLO, the only issues explicitly concerning trade unions are the provisions in the FLO generic standard for hired labour relating to the right to organise and to collective bargaining. There is no institutionalised connection to trade unions or local NGOs – either in the standard organisation or in implementation. As commented by a FLO representative, ‘FLO standards don’t really have anything to do with unions, the weight in FLO standards is put on other issues such as the trade contracts and the premium committee’ (Interview 10, 2008). Thus, while in the FLO standard emphasis is not placed on active inclusion of local NGOs and unions, it does actively include workers through the Fairtrade premium committees, thereby potentially empowering these actors.

The discussion of how different standard schemes (all seemingly based on the ICC code) interpret the requirement in the ICC code on worker, NGO and trade union involvement illustrates that interpretation is important and affects which stakeholders are empowered. FFP, MPS-SQ and the Flower Label Program institutionalised active inclusion of local NGOs and unions in standard setting and monitoring (although the Flower Label Program in a weaker form). For the FLO Fairtrade standard, emphasis is not placed on active inclusion of local NGOs and unions but on active inclusion of workers in implementing the standard (through the Fairtrade premium committees) and on addressing terms of trade through contractual requirements.

The only flower standard initiative to incorporate local civil society organisations in standard setting and implementation as well as demanding the use of participatory interview techniques is the Kenyan Horticultural Ethical Business Initiative (HEBI) established in 2003. The UK-based Ethical Trading Initiative (of which most UK retailers are members) was particularly active in the establishment of HEBI, and the HEBI code was soon endorsed by both the Fresh Produce Exporters’ Association of Kenya (FPEAK) and KFC (the two Kenyan business associations with flower grower members). However, in practice HEBI’s participatory social auditing methodology has been effectively sidelined by the local flower industry. Indeed, the auditing procedures of the FPEAK and KFC standards remain modelled on international technical audit procedures, which are

not participatory in nature. This way FPEAK, KFC and ETI retail members have been able to be seen as acting to redress civil society calls for more participatory governance structures while in practice not changing anything substantial. Recently HEBI seems to have ceased to function altogether, and UK retailers are increasingly demanding that suppliers submit audit data to SEDEX, the Supplier Ethical Trade Data Exchange – a system for the exchange of audit data which dictates an audit format that is quantitative and far from participatory in nature (Tallontire *et al.* 2009, Riisgaard 2010).

The fate of HEBI reminds us that in practice the outcome for different local stakeholders varies not just according to standard content and monitoring methodology but also according to local interpretations of standard implementation and the relative strength and positioning of local stakeholders. Research conducted in Tanzania and Kenya investigated labour responses to (mainly) multi-stakeholder standards that attempt to place greater emphasis on enabling rights in the cut flower industry. In 2006, approximately half of around 150 flower farms in Kenya were certified to one or more sustainability standards. Approximately a quarter of certified farms were certified to a standard focusing on enabling rights. In Tanzania 3 out of the 10 existing farms were certified, all to standards focusing on enabling rights (as larger export farms tend to be certified this correlates to a larger percentage of total flower export in both Kenya and Tanzania) (Riisgaard 2007).

Several difficulties have been experienced in implementing these standards, particularly where they focus on enabling workers to claim their rights. Apart from exporters resisting participatory monitoring (as happened with HEBI), in some countries, national labour organisations are not interested in engaging with standards, as they consider them ‘Northern driven’. In Kenya, trade unions have perceived standards as a threat to their position. Thus, where adoption has occurred, there has been little labour union participation, no significant increase in unionisation, and actually worse relations between national unions and national NGOs promoting labour rights (Riisgaard 2009a). However, in other circumstances where national trade unions have engaged with standard initiatives, standard implementation has enhanced union organisation and facilitated the adoption of collective bargaining agreements. In Tanzania, this occurred through constructive interaction between the Tanzania Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union (TPAWU) and the FLP standard, whereby FLP requested union assurance that freedom of association and collective bargaining rights were in place before certifying farms. Ensuing activity resulted in collective bargaining agreements on the two largest farms. This facilitated access by TPAWU to the rest of the sector and now the ICC base code is routinely integrated in the text of farm-level collective bargaining agreements (Interview 21, 2009). Below, I discuss a particular attempt to scale up and harmonise flower standards around the ICC base code, to illustrate that it is important to ask for whom the standard is actually raising the bar.

Fair Flowers Fair Plants (FFP)

FFP was initiated in 2002 by Union Fleurs (the International Flower Trade Association uniting national producer, importer and traders’ organisations) but early in the process NGOs, unions and other standards were involved, particularly MPS and the Flower Label Program (Interview 5, 2008). FFP is a consumer label launched in 2005 and so far present in 10 European countries in supermarkets, florists and flower chains. FFP consists of a social and an environmental part and demands that growers are certified to a standard equivalent to the International Code of Conduct for Cut Flowers (ICC) and to the Dutch MPS-A standard. Thus FFP is a label based on existing standards benchmarked to the criteria of FFP. This way, the idea is to keep all existing standard schemes but to harmonise

them through benchmarking to the FFP criteria and unite them under one consumer label (Interviews 1–5, 2008).²⁴

This modular approach is interesting in relation to the distinctions between standard functions discussed in section two. FFP is combining a product differentiation standard (the ICC) with a risk management standard (MPS-A) and at the same time combining a standard that weights principle over size, focusing on enabling rights (the ICC), and a standard that weights size over principle (MPS-A). FFP is growing rapidly, and if growth continues, this modular strategy will possibly lead to existing risk management standards (like the producer association standards) being transformed into product differentiation standards. It also means that FFP might have found an answer to the dilemma of how to scale up ‘high bar’ standards which focus on enabling rights. However, although the number of FFP participants has increased rapidly (with 4593 members in January 2010),²⁵ of the 159 members which are flower growers, 134 are situated in the Netherlands and only 27 in developing countries. Consequently, scaling up in this particular initiative has so far mainly reached northern (particularly Dutch) workers and workplaces.

Interestingly, FFP has also changed the competitive strategies available to the Dutch flower growers (who account for half of total production value in the EU) (CBI 2007). The Dutch flower growers have been threatened by increasing imports of flowers from developing countries. Moreover, most Dutch growers are co-owners of the auctions and are obliged to sell all their produce through the auctions.²⁶ Before FFP, the only social consumer label available to developed country growers was the Flower Label Program aimed almost solely at the German florist market (the label only has one certified producer from a developed country, while the Fairtrade label is only available to developing country producers). Thus, before FFP came into existence there was a market (small but growing rapidly) for socially certified flowers, which the Dutch growers were not able to enter: a) because of restrictions inherent in existing standards and b) because they are obliged to sell through the auctions where previously product differentiation by a label was not possible. For the Dutch growers, FFP offers an opportunity to enter the market for flowers differentiated by social certification, which earlier was restricted to southern producers such as the ones from Kenya and Tanzania.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have explored whether parallelism has spurred a race to the bottom in flower standards. The answer is not an ‘either/or’. For standards aimed at the EU market, risk management standards (focusing on protective rights), such as retailer codes and GlobalGAP, still dominate in number, but ‘higher bar’ standards (focusing on product differentiation and enabling rights) are gaining importance. ‘Higher bar’ standards are converging around the ICC base code and adopting innovative auditing practices and are expanding and entering new value chain strands (the ‘traditional’ Dutch auction strand). The FFP harmonisation attempt, if it gains currency with consumers and other standards schemes (particularly with some of the not very stringent developing country producer association standards), has potential to scale up ‘higher bar’ standards by benchmarking risk management standards to the FFP criteria, thereby turning them into product differentiation standards and multiplying the practice of active inclusion of local NGOs and trade unions in monitoring standard compliance. On this basis, the analysis carried out in this paper suggests cautious optimism about developments in flower standards.

While it is indeed promising and inspiring that the innovative practice of audit-shadowing by local NGOs and trade unions is gaining ground among flower standards, there are

still serious concerns to be addressed. For example, such practices are not yet adopted by mainstream standards, and none of the functioning flower standards have yet extended inclusive auditing to encompass participatory worker interview techniques. Growers from Kenya along with other southern-hemisphere growers tend to chose the less stringent national producer association standards, if any standard at all, and only adopt 'higher bar' standards when pressured to do so by their buyers. Furthermore, most flower standards still do not address the terms of trade (e.g. low prices, increasing quality demands, and retailer practices such as just-in-time ordering) which constrain suppliers' ability to comply with social standards.

The analysis carried out in this paper shows that even though 'higher bar' standards are converging around the ICC code, within this category of standards there are different interpretations of how to raise the bar. There are also differences in what kind of bar should be raised and who should reap the benefits. For production-end stakeholders, it matters whether a standard focuses on active inclusion of local NGOs and unions (empowering these stakeholders and potentially addressing more hidden problems like for example discrimination or exploitation of subcontracted, casual or migrant workers) or whether a standard focuses on addressing the terms of trade (aiming at empowering producers via contractual requirements) and worker inclusion (via involvement in spending a Fairtrade premium).

Furthermore, while the FFP harmonisation attempt has potential to scale up enabling standards, it also illustrates some of the difficulties in navigating between the objectives of 'size' and 'principles'. 'Fair labelled flowers' in the minds of many consumers will spur images of 'a fair deal' for southern workers and southern producers. However, in practice only few southern workers and producers are yet involved in this particular initiative and thus the deal for southern producers is perhaps less clear since producers for example from Kenya or Tanzania now have to compete with developed country producers for whom certification is perhaps less of a challenge. The analysis thus draws attention to a relationship that deserves further research, namely that changes in the market for standards can shape competition in the market for goods. In this paper, this has been illustrated via the FFP harmonisation initiative which effectively has altered the terms of participation in the growing market segment for socially labelled flowers, where northern growers are now able to compete in a market which before was restricted to Southern producers.

Note on contributor

Lone Riisgaard holds a PhD in International Development Studies from Roskilde University, Denmark. She is currently a Project Researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS). She has researched and published on sustainability standards, labour rights issues and Global Value Chain analysis, with focus on the cut flower value chain originating in Kenya and Tanzania.

Notes

1. Market shares for developing countries vary between flower types, e.g. in the EU, developing country carnations have a share of 61%, foliage 46% and roses 39% (CBI 2007).
2. The term value chain here refers to how linkages between production, distribution and consumption of products are globally interconnected in value chains (Gereffi and Korzeniewicz 1994).
3. The ETI is a UK initiative to promote and improve the implementation of corporate codes of practice which cover supply chain working conditions.

4. First-party auditing represents forms of internal corporate self-regulation. Second-party auditing involves a company auditing its suppliers against its own code or an external standard, while in third-party auditing a company is audited by an independent and external body.
5. The FLO Fairtrade standards do to some degree address terms of trade, and the Ethical Trading Initiative has established a project group on purchasing practices which addresses the way in which retailers purchase constrains suppliers' ability to meet codes of practice. Available from: <http://www.ethicaltrade.org/Z/actvts/exproj/purchprac/index.shtml#docs> [Accessed 4 February 2009].
6. Some standards are aimed solely or mainly at the EU market, while others mainly target the US market but also have presence in the EU, as is the case for FlorVerde, Flor-Ecuador and the Rainforest Alliance standard.
7. The UK is the biggest flower consumer in the EU and the retailer share of flower sales there is 60–70% (CBI 2007).
8. MPS is a national association of all the Dutch flower auctions, the Federation of Agricultural and Horticultural Organisations, Netherlands and the Glasshouse Cultivation.
9. This estimate is based on figures from the Flower Label Program (which has a 3% market share in Germany) as well as on estimates provided by representatives from the Fairtrade Labelling Organisation and Union Fleurs (Interviews 7 and 19, 2008).
10. See: <http://www.fairflowers.net/flowers.html> [Accessed July 2008].
11. The Dutch auctions basically function as a distribution centre, absorbing large quantities of flowers that are repacked and sold to buyers (mainly wholesalers) from all over the world.
12. Also franchise florists (or florist chains) and Internet flower sale is capturing market share rapidly (Filho 2008).
13. Around 55% of flowers supplied to the auctions comply with an MPS standard (Interview 9, 2008).
14. The forecast growth potential of FFP is furthermore based on a rapid increase in FFP participants, with a 414% increase in membership from 2007 to 2008 (Flower News 2008).
15. The ICC was negotiated by the IUF, the Flower Campaign Germany (Bread for the World, FIAN, Terre des Hommes), IG BAU (Trade Union for Construction, Agriculture and Environment, Germany), FNV (Trade Union Confederation, Netherlands), OLAA (Organisatie Latijns Amerika Activiteiten, Netherlands), INZET (Netherlands), Fair Trade Centre (Sweden), the Flower Coordination (Switzerland) and Christian Aid (UK) (ICC 1998).
16. The Flower Label Program was created in 1996 as a business-to-business code between the German importers' association and the Association of Flower Producers and Exporters of Ecuador, but in 1999 it developed into a multi-stakeholder organisation with NGO and trade union representation. The Flower Label Program is now a social and environmental consumer label sold through florists in Germany, Switzerland and Austria.
17. Milieu Programma Sierteelt (MPS) is a business-to-business standard system owned by the Dutch auctions and Dutch growers' associations. It certifies companies to MPS A, B or C depending on their environmental performance on a range of indicators. The MPS scheme has gradually expanded and now offers a range of certificates including MPS-GAP (benchmarked against GlobalGAP) and MPS-SQ (certificate for social aspects developed in close cooperation with Dutch NGOs and unions).
18. Fairtrade Labelling Organisations International (FLO) involves 23 member organisations including labelling initiatives and producer networks. FLO awards a Fairtrade label to products that have been produced in developing countries according to the principles of Fairtrade, including a minimum price and a Fairtrade premium that the producer in agreement with worker representatives must invest in projects enhancing their social, economic and environmental development.
19. Until 2005 Max Havelaar Switzerland was the only certifier of Fairtrade flowers and they used MPS-SQ or the Flower Label Program certification as a requirement (Interview 11, 2008). In 2005 FLO centralised its certification procedure through FLO-CERT. FLO benchmarked the Flower Label Program and MPS-SQ schemes (and thus indirectly the ICC) against FLO standards and the result was the FLO standard for flowers (Interview 10, 2008).
20. The ICC founders disagreed on whether or not audits had to be done with the participation of local trade union and NGO observers (Interview 14, 2008). The new guidelines were published by Both ENDS in 2004/5 (Interview 14, 2008). The original guidelines can be found at <http://www.flowercampaign.org/code-of-conduct/implementation/> [Accessed 29 January 2009].

21. There might for example be issues of rent seeking, internal rivalry or corrupt trade unions (see e.g. Riisgaard 2007 or Tallontire *et al.* 2009).
22. Contrary to this, FFP and MPS-SQ pay the expenses of the observers. The Flower Label Program does, however, always ask unions to participate when they arrange worker seminars, and furthermore they often consult unions before first audits and conduct unannounced visits in response to complaints.
23. See: http://www.fairtrade.net/fileadmin/us...owers_and_Plants_HL_March_2007_EN.pdf [Accessed 3 January 2009].
24. Harmonising existing standard schemes under one FFP consumer label has, however, turned out to be difficult (see Riisgaard 2009b).
25. Of these 159 are growers, 197 are traders and 4227 are sales outlets; see <http://www.fairflowersfairplants.com> [Accessed 10 January 2010].
26. Seventy-nine percent of the Dutch flowers are traded through the Dutch auctions (van Hemert 2005).

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Appendix 1

Interviews with the representatives from the following organisations were conducted between July 2008 and December 2009 (apart from Interview 13 which was conducted in 2006):

Interview 1: OLAA (FFP), Amsterdam 13.08.2008

Interview 2: Both Ends (FFP), Amsterdam 13.08.2008

- Interview 3: Secretariat of the FFP review committee, Amsterdam 13.08.2008
- Interview 4: FNV Bondgenoten (FFP), Amsterdam 13.08.2008
- Interview 5: FFP, Honselersdijk 14.07.2008
- Interview 6: MPS/ECAS, Honselersdijk 14.07.2008
- Interview 7: FLP, Cologne 08.09.2008
- Interview 8: FIAN and FLP, Cologne 08.09.2008
- Interview 9: FloraHolland (Quality Division), Honselersdijk 14.07.2008
- Interview 10: FLO (Bonn), phone 29.09.2008
- Interview 11: Former FLO (East Africa), questions answered in writing 19.09.2008 and 22.09.2008
- Interview 12: IUF (Global), Geneva 17.10.2008
- Interview 13: IUF (Africa), Kenya 12.04.2006
- Interview 14: OLLA (FFP), phone, 17.11.2008
- Interview 15: Jens Holst A/S (Danish wholesaler), Copenhagen 18.11.2008
- Interview 16: Kenya Flower Council, phone 20.11.2008
- Interview 17: Expoflores, phone via interpreter 08.12.2008
- Interview 18: Asocolflores, phone 28.01.2009
- Interview 19: Union Fleurs (and Swedish wholesaler) phone 13.12.2008
- Interview 20: Jens Holst Holland (wholesaler) phone 31.01.2009
- Interview 21: Tanzania Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union (TPAWU), Dar es Salaam 03.12.2009

BOOK REVIEW

Development without freedom: how aid underwrites repression in Ethiopia, by Human Rights Watch, New York, 2010, 105 pp., \$10.00, ISBN 1564326977

For those who know Ethiopia this report will have come as no surprise. It will also have been no surprise to the various official donors, both bilateral and multilateral. What they won't have liked is the publicity. During the period June to December 2009 Human Rights Watch (HRW) investigators interviewed over two hundred individuals in Ethiopia, including peasant farmers, *kebele* (village or neighbourhood) and *woreda* (district) officials, teachers, representatives of major donors and government officials. In the course of interviewing many who had been excluded from the benefits of five major projects, including the Protection of Basic Services and the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), the investigators heard accounts of regular systematic political bias by officials which led to the exclusion from the programmes of many whose political views were not those of the ruling coalition party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF); members of opposition political parties were particularly vulnerable. Many of those interviewed had been told that access to programme benefits was conditional on them joining the EPRDF or one of its member parties. Such micro-level incidence of exclusion and political pressure was, and is, possible because of EPRDF party influence throughout the local government system of *kebeles* which extends down to the smallest villages in the countryside and to local districts in

towns and cities. HRW argues that donors are well aware of such abuses, a number of their representatives having spoken off the record, but they neither condemn them publicly nor introduce monitoring for political bias into their programmes. Most donors are reluctant to challenge the Ethiopian government on human rights issues.

One suggested reason is the prioritisation given by donors to meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), where some progress in aggregate terms has indeed been made in Ethiopia, and that this has taken precedence over issues of human rights; hence HRW's conclusion that it has been 'development without freedom'.

Following its investigation HRW sent a detailed letter to the Development Assistance Group via the Ethiopia Country Director of the World Bank summarising their findings and offering a number of proposals for donors to adopt to neutralise politically-based exclusion in the provision of assistance to individuals and households. The published report reproduces the response from the Co-Chair of the Development Assistance Group (DAG) in Ethiopia, its detailed content perhaps reflecting the international standing which HRW has gained over the years while also engaging in a deflection exercise. The DAG response was not so much to refute the findings as to attempt to place them in a more positive context, assisted by an array of surveys and figures; one example being that 88% of households surveyed on the selection process for the PSNP found the process to be fair. On each side of such data gathering exercises, of course, there are uncertainties. In official surveys, for instance, how willing

are people to criticise a programme from which they are actual or potential beneficiaries, when the administrative system is as politicised as it is in Ethiopia? Or in the case of the HRW survey what proportion of respondents were disgruntled farmers who actually hadn't met the formal qualifications for a particular programme, regardless of their political affiliation?

Of course the DAG can easily respond, as it did, that standard monitoring and evaluation processes are not designed to pick up political biases in the allocation of aid. To a degree this reflects a technocratic ethos permeating the issue of aid effectiveness, creating an impression of being value free, or at least free of political intervention by host country agencies while in reality reflecting what Mark Duffield has termed 'aid as a technology of control' (Duffield 2002). There are many reasons why this is unlikely to change, and HRW risks being seen as naïve in expecting donors to be more up-front in exposing host country political biases. Moreover, for many aid workers on the ground, including the senior managers, keeping quiet is accepted as a necessary strategy to protect humanitarian programmes that could otherwise be put at risk if the host government believes it is being used as a vehicle for opposition. There is another, often overlooked, reality, which is that donor agencies such as DFID, CIDA, DANIDA, USAID and so on are frequently struggling to maintain their own institutional identity within their home government and its foreign affairs ministry. In such internal battles there will be no rocking of the policy boat.

Most importantly, however, in the Horn of Africa donors are operating within a wider agenda than the simple relief of poverty, a phenomenon only acknowledged in passing in the HRW report. Ethiopia, in particular, is a key regional ally of the West in the 'War on Terror' and, in its position as the most powerful state in the Horn,

one where stability is more important to the interests of the West than human rights. With much of neighbouring Somalia (at the time of writing) still under the control of the Islamist group, Al Shabaab; with Eritrea to the north governed by a regime which has supported Al Shabaab; with Yemen, directly across the Gulf of Aden, harbouring Islamist militias operating in the north; and with uncertainties over the future of a divided Sudan, the political significance of the Ethiopia-Djibouti-Somaliland axis to the USA in particular is considerable. In this context, as in Iraq and Afghanistan, the imperative of the 'securitisation' of aid will outweigh any concerns over human rights.

Finally, to the degree that official donors are inevitably subject to the same overriding national policies which determine diplomatic objectives then the commercial interests of the donor countries will also take precedence over any criticisms of host governments that are likely to affect these adversely. Nevertheless, and taking all the above into account, the work of HRW, Amnesty International and other human rights organisations, including those which struggle against great odds inside many countries, is an invaluable resource to all those for whom human rights should never be sacrificed on the altar of that false god, the 'national interest'.

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Roy Love
School of Oriental and African Studies, UK
 Email: roylove439@btinternet.com

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BOOK REVIEW

Famine and foreigners: Ethiopia since Live Aid, by Peter Gill, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, 280 pp., £ 14.99 (hardback), ISBN 9780199569847

Ethiopia in the year 1984 exhibited much semblance to the oligarchic society which George Orwell portrayed in his novel aptly titled *Nineteen eighty-four*. The country faced one of the worst famines in living memory with conservative estimates putting the number of dead at more than 400,000. It was also a year when the ruling Marxist junta, gripped by intensive insurgency war in the north of the country, was preparing to lavishly mark its tenth year at the helm of political power. For many, the 1984 famine in Ethiopia caused a significant change in the international aid landscape, not least because of the emergence of the big international non-governmental organisations. The British journalist, Peter Gill, was one of the few journalists allowed into the country at the start of the famine. When Gill visited Ethiopia 25 years later, it was to find out if hunger was becoming a thing of the past.

In order to assess if Ethiopia was on track to make a break from a history of recurrent hunger and famine, Gill sought the views of several high level officials, scholars, representatives of non-governmental organisations, local private media publishers as well as people directly affected by chronic food insecurity episodes. The book, which is organised in four parts and 12 chapters, begins with Gill going back to the epicentre of the 1984 famine, the town of Korem. His discussions with people in the area from all

walks of life paints a vivid picture of the scar left by the famine and the rather subdued hope they entertain about avoiding a future recurrence of such calamity.

Famine is neither endemic to Ethiopia nor unavoidable. It is this theme that is reflected in the discourse Gill had with prominent scholars on the subject including Mesfin Wolde Mariam, Alex de Waal and Tony Voux. While recriminations are thrown from all sides with regard to the slow and, at least initially, rather lacklustre response of the international community to the unfolding crisis in Ethiopia, there appeared to be a general consensus that the misguided policies of the military regime were responsible for the famine in the first place. Not surprisingly, this notion was pushed forcibly by the then rebel commander, now Ethiopia's Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi. According to de Waal, the 1984 famine in Ethiopia prolonged the war, a notion seconded by Meles.

When famine hit the country again in 2002–03, questions were raised about whether policies followed since the coming to power of Meles had borne fruit. In the second part of the book titled 'Transitions', Gill gives a detailed account of the disharmony in policy preferences between Ethiopia's major donors, particularly the IMF, and the government of Ethiopia as well as several relief measures run by the government. Control of population growth is highlighted in the book as being one of the most critical areas for containing the threat of hunger in the country.

For the first time in its history, Ethiopia conducted a hotly competed multiparty election in May 2005. As voting results began to

trickle in showing massive gains for the opposition, including a clean sweep of the capital Addis Ababa, the government of Meles Zenawi declared a state of emergency. The resulting post-election violence led to the death of more than two hundred demonstrators while thousands were sent to prison. What happened then remained a point of contention between the government, the opposition and the European Union observer mission led by Ana Gomez. The government also enforced a crackdown of the private press and non-governmental organisations by passing draconian laws. The third part of the book captures not only these events but also sets the scene in Ethiopia's present hot spot, the pastoralist areas in the Ogaden region.

What are the prospects for ridding the country of hunger? This last part of the book begins by elaborating the uneasy relationship between the government, which tried to push for a changed image of the country, and the relief organisations. This played out in the aftermath of the 2008 famine which came about as Ethiopia was preparing to enter its third millennium. Gill sees some hope in the Chinese model in which aid and governance are assuredly delinked. Finally, without subscribing to the views of either side, Gill finishes by underscoring the polarised nature of politics in the country.

The breadth of political and social issues in Ethiopia which the book tackles is immense. The way in which the main research question is framed indicates an

underlying assumption by the author that hunger is still a reality in Ethiopia. The book also comes at a very opportune time amid a highly charged discourse on the effects of aid among scholars and policy makers. That said, Gill's dismissive assertion regarding the aid sceptics appears to be uncalled for. Additionally, Gill admitted to have relied extensively on government officials to organise field visits and interviews. This method seems to be a double-edged sword. Whilst this approach allowed Gill to access otherwise difficult areas, such as the politically volatile Ogaden region, it, nevertheless, risked an underrepresentation of the views of dissenting voices on the subject. For instance, Gill relied extensively on interviews with the Prime Minister and former Chief of Staff of the army, Tsadkan Gebre-Tensae, to narrate the history of TPLF. Nevertheless, their account is known to be widely disputed even by their former comrades such as Seye Abraha and Aregawi Berhe. Another weaker point of the book is the author's portrayal of Chinese investment in the country. China's extremely conspicuous engagement in Ethiopia, which is driven by *realpolitik*, should not be construed as a better *modus operandi* to fight hunger in Ethiopia.

Michael Seifu
Dublin City University, Ireland
Email: michael.seifu@dcu.ie
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BOOK REVIEW

Popular politics and resistance movements in South Africa, edited by William Beinart and Marcelle C. Dawson, Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2010, 360 pp., R223 (paperback), ISBN 9781868145188

Charles Tarrow once observed that a burst of protest and social movement activism could either ‘sputter out like a roman candle or ripen into a cycle of contention’ (1998, p. 141). This collection, edited by William Beinart and Marcelle Dawson, includes cases of protest ranging from key moments in the ripening of anti-apartheid and labour protest in South Africa, to more recent bursts surrounding HIV and AIDS activism and the privatisation of basic services, via longer running struggles over land reform which have tended to sputter erratically rather than swell tidally.

The volume draws upon postgraduate student research from the University of Oxford, and the chapters are consistently richly textured, well-written, innovatively researched and illuminating historical case studies. They all draw upon a range of sources, including archive material, interviews, and other primary sources such as songs, adverts and television footage. Both individually and en masse, they represent a significant original contribution to the study of ‘old’ and ‘new’ social movements in South Africa.

Beinart’s introductory chapter provides a historiographical overview of popular politics and resistance movements in South Africa between 1970 and 2008, and engages with a much broader literature on social movements, resistance and protest

than the subsequent case studies. The central concern of the volume with continuity and change is established when he asks whether the recent social movements and community protests are ‘a new form of politics, or [do they] stand as a direct descendent of the insurrectionary impulses of the late apartheid era?’ (p. 1).

The first two case studies, by Julian Brown and Tracy Carson, deal with strikes in the 1970s, in Durban and Cape Town respectively. Both chapters examine key moments in the development of the independent trade union movement in South Africa, and their relation to the broader liberation struggle. Brown shows how the framing of the Durban strikes as ‘non-political’ facilitated a non-violent resolution, whereas Carson argues that it was only through a wider community boycott that striking workers in Cape Town in 1979 managed to achieve their limited success. The significance of supermarkets as sites of protest in 1979, involving students spoiling Fatti and Moni bread, flour and pasta products on shop shelves, has its echoes in protests in 2009 when crowds began eating products from the shelves in branches of Shoprite and Pick n Pay.

The next two chapters deal with aspects of the ANC’s role in the broader struggle. Thula Simpson considers the impact of the underground ANC and the MK (Umkhonto we Sizwe, the military wing of the ANC) in the township protests of the 1980s, while Genevieve Klein examines the use of Mandela iconography by, among others, the anti-apartheid movement in Britain. This is a theme taken up by Mfaniseni

Fana Sihlongonyane in his exploration of the politics surrounding the establishment of a Nelson Mandela Museum in Alexandra Township, which for some residents meant forced removals in a manner reminiscent of the apartheid era.

Chapters by Chizuko Sato and Tim Gibbs focus on rural politics: land reform policies and protests in KwaZulu-Natal, and state–society interactions in the Transkei, respectively. Struggles against HIV and AIDS in the 1990s and 2000s are the focus of chapters by Rebecca Hodes and Mandisa Mbali. The former looks in detail at the narratives and images presented by the popular SABC (South African Broadcasting Corporation) TV programme *Siyayinqoba/Beat it!*, whilst the latter contextualises the rise of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) in the light of pre-existing activist organisations. The medical theme is continued by Simonne Horwitz in a fascinating account of six separate strikes involving black female nurses at Baragwanath Hospital, Soweto, in 1949, 1958, 1985, 1992, 1995 and 2007.

The final two chapters address two of the most frequently discussed ‘new’ social movements: the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) and the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF). Kelly Rosenthal’s chapter compares the SECC’s ideology since 2000 with that of the Soweto Civic Association (SCA) since 1976. Michelle Dawson’s chapter discusses the songs, slogans and marches of the APF as inherited repertoires of protest. Both Rosenthal and Dawson argue that one of the key differences between the earlier movements and the post-apartheid social movements is that the latter are more explicitly and consistently socialist. This argument is not shared by all authors within this collection, however, and Beinart’s introduction signals his disagreement (pp. 12–13), noting both that the ideological diversity within the anti-apartheid struggle was considerable, and that there is far greater ideological diversity within the ‘new social

movements’ than is sometimes suggested by interviews with prominent activist-intellectual leaders. TAC, as shown by Mbali and Hodes, has a very different ideological and political outlook to the SECC and the APF, just as do environmental justice, shack-dwellers, and anti-gangster movements. Even within the APF and SECC there are those who rail against the ANC as the tool of neoliberalism one day, whilst praising them as the scourge of apartheid the next. The ideological and political content and meaning of terms like ‘socialism’ are probably more contested and ambiguous in contemporary South Africa than these latter two chapters imply at times.

Most of the chapters in this volume however contribute to understandings of South African social movements without losing any of this ambiguity and nuance. Indeed, as a collection its strength is the richness of the detail and the vividness of the historical material. In places the historiographical or political implications of the arguments could be made more explicit, and underlying research questions could be answered more directly. The willingness of contributors such as Dawson to engage with existing secondary literature on South African social movements – such as Richard Ballard *et al.*’s *Voices of protest*, and Nigel Gibson’s *Challenging hegemony* – was welcome, even if the argument was not always persuasive.

Overall, the strength of the collection lies in its historical detail, rather than broader theoretical or revisionist arguments. There are of course other topics and themes which could have been included; Beinart himself notes that these are ‘essentially modernist essays’ (p. 29), and the similarities or differences between mainstream struggle histories and neo-patrimonial, animist, spiritualist, or Pentecostalist forms of resistance and protest would have been a fascinating further theme to explore. In that respect, this book highlights both the continuing

richness of existing seams of historical and contemporary research into South Africa's new and old social movements, as well as pointing, both implicitly and explicitly, towards further sites and repertoires of struggle. The strength of this collection, and the contours of recent South African history, implies that the study of such forms of contentious politics will continue to swell and ripen, rather than sputter and fade away.

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Carl Death
Aberystwyth University, Wales
Email: crd@aber.ac.uk
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BOOK REVIEW

Creating memorials, building identities: the politics of memory in the Black Atlantic, by Alan Rice, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2010, 244 pp., £65.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781846314711

Through a set of broad, diverse and provocative investigations Alan Rice seeks to ‘dialogise’ the history of Atlantic slavery with other forms of remembrance and accounting, especially biography, folklore, memorials and artistic representations. Rice is clearly opposed to the essentialising of the experiences of Atlantic slavery for the purpose of producing narrowly nationalistic narratives, whether that implies the triumphal remembering of British abolitionism or the commodification of the middle passage by African American entrepreneurs. Instead, Rice is keen to recover the circum-Atlantic weave of these experiences and, through this, to promote an alter-remembering of Atlantic slavery in the various public spheres of the circum-Atlantic world. This ‘guerrilla memorialisation’ works to rewrite the stories of slavery from the bottom up, to reflect a more accurate and human face of the enslaved, and above all to rescue the experiences of slavery from their antiquarian documentation so as to testify to the way the legacies of slavery resonate affectively and effectively in the contemporary world.

Rice embarks upon a dazzling set of engagements with various forms of guerrilla memorialisation. In Lancaster, where civic memorials focus on the merchant class of the slaving era, Rice draws attention to the various prose and poetries that reanimate Sambo, the unknown slave who

occupies a lone grave in the town. Seeking to commemorate the enslaved rather than the merchants, Rice documents the activities of the Slave Trade Arts Memorial Project. Rice then explores the subversion of permanent collections in various museums and galleries of the north-west of the UK. He investigates the work of various artists who recontextualise the official representations of the past by inserting links between the objects of curators and the Atlantic world of slavery. Deepening this focus on the north-west and its connected history to New World slavery, Rice examines artworks that weave together cotton and cloth to expose the relatively linked fortunes of freed (European) and coerced (African) labour. Often documented in opposition to each other, Rice shows how artwork can retrieve the radical past of Manchester labourers regarding their support for abolition and Lincoln’s North during the US civil war.

Rice then moves to other locales and, in a key chapter, focuses upon the circum-Atlantic resonance of jazz as both trope and subject. Engaging primarily with Toni Morrison, Rice explicates the jazz aesthetic as a form of guerrilla memorialisation to the extent that the practice of improvisation constantly renews the dialogue of the slave past with the post-emancipation present. By exploring the work of Jackie Kay, Rice also reveals how jazz acts kinetically to connect the experiences of the African diaspora in less examined locales such as Scotland. However, Rice injects a note of caution with regard to the dangers of African-American voices overriding the experiences of others in the diaspora, and

I shall return to this point presently. Subsequently, Rice turns to the contribution of African diaspora troops to the Allied struggle in World War II and charges the official memorialisation with separating this struggle from those against segregationist policies of the Allied powers. Rice mobilises contemporaneous poetry and contemporary novels to retrieve the struggle against Jim Crow segregation of African-American troops in the UK so as to expose the way in which black troops effectively fought a 'double war' for democracy at home and abroad. Finally, Rice turns to artistic explorations of the African diaspora that, by situating their representations within the water of the Atlantic itself, refuse to be either nationally bound or categorically separated from African shores.

On this note, I would like to push Rice to explore further the importance of African shores for guerrilla memorialisation. Even though he is aware of the dangers in doing so, Rice focuses primarily upon the African-American experience and the way in which it resonates through the Atlantic world. By doing so, he possibly over-represents the African diasporic experience through the tropes common to cultural studies of African-American modernity and dominant in the US-centred Western academy. Consistently, Rice primarily evokes images of hybridity and flux. It is not that these evocations do not capture some fundamentals of the African diasporic experience – they do. Yet there are others. What if Rice had incorporated a chapter that focused solely upon Caribbean tropes, especially those arising not from jazz but from reggae and in particular the Rastafarian imaginary? For in this trope the emphasis slides more towards African roots than it

does towards American hybridity. Must the guerrilla memorialisation of Atlantic slavery necessarily affirm the tropes of Western modernity, or can it also affirm something perhaps more radically subversive of the Western public sphere: un-modern tropes that grasp African roots for the redemption of humanity?

Nevertheless, Rice's book is of immense value, both in terms of its content and method. In fact, Rice's argument can be read as an implicit critique of political economy. As historians of Atlantic slavery have increasingly argued, the representation of those made invisible and silent in official records requires not so much a categorical turn away from, but a creative complementing of empirics with other 'sources', be they oral histories, folklore, art forms, spiritual expressions, or poetry and prose. And while much has been written and contested regarding the economic significance of New World slavery to European industrialisation, it remains the case that the ledgers of slave traders and insurance companies do not directly reveal the fundamental experiences and actions of the enslaved, nor the way in which the resonances of these experiences effectively triangulate the beating heart of the modern world market. Rice's book focuses upon the UK and, in the main, the USA; but it invites an in-depth engagement by scholars of African political economy with the method and substance of 'guerrilla memorialisation'.

Robbie Shilliam

*Victoria University of Wellington,
New Zealand*

Email: robbie.shilliam@vuw.ac.nz

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BOOK REVIEW

The rise of China and India in Africa: challenges, opportunities and critical interventions, edited by Fantu Cheru and Cyril Obi, London and New York, Zed Books, 2010, 276 pp., £21.99 (paperback), ISBN 9781848134379

Offering an innovative synthesis of the literature on the growing presence of these two emerging Asian economic powerhouses on the African continent, *The rise of China and India in Africa* is a volume that is most welcome. Edited by Fantu Cheru and Cyril Obi from the Nordic Africa Institute, its 17 chapters display a great diversity of theoretical perspectives and a plurality of disciplinary backgrounds, with researchers from International Relations, Development Studies and Foreign Policy Studies, as well as South Asian, African (mostly South African) or Chinese studies. Authors are attached to institutions located in a wide scope of countries, many located within the areas here under scrutiny.

The volume is divided into six sections. part one offers an overview, a ‘big picture’ of the issues and challenges at stake; part two gives historical insights about the Indian and Chinese presence in the African continent; part three focuses on the recent economic growth surge of both nations in Africa; part four attempts the difficult task of balancing the development initiatives of both countries with conflict-ridden local situations; part five gives well deserved attention to issues surrounding the quest for resources (especially oil) on the African continent; part six concludes with a chapter about role of the New

Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) in countering ‘new imperialism’. While the scope of issues addressed is quite extensive, some themes are recurring and deserve particular attention.

First, many chapters highlight the fact that in the era of the post-Washington Consensus, the opportunities provided by the growing presence of China and India in Africa are more obvious than ever. The rise of a multi-polar global order in which emerging countries (especially Brazil, Russia, India and China) are called upon to play a greater role appears as the framework for new tactical opportunities and strategic alternatives for African countries. In order to turn such a diversification of trade opportunities into concrete benefits for African societies, various contributors pinpoint the need for enhanced continental unity as the main challenge facing African countries. In short, if ‘the rise of China and India is both a threat and an opportunity for Africa’ (p. 97), African countries must join forces in order to make the best of the emerging scenario. Only a united Africa can really take advantage of the opportunities offered by the new global economy to increase its level of independence toward the West. Contributors nevertheless note that such a shift towards greater continental integration is unfortunately not yet obvious, most countries preferring to deal on an individual basis with either China or India. Another recurring issue is the fact that both China and India tend to avoid the aid discourse traditionally associated with the Western presence on the continent. They rather use the idiom of South–South cooperation, referring to

solidarity in terms of win–win partnerships between emerging nations. Clearly, China and India try to stay away from any paternalistic labelling.

China's growing influence in Africa is certainly the object of the most contrasted positions among the contributors. While some argue against the triumphant picture of China's engagement with Africa, others highlight the fact that such criticisms may well be informed by the apprehension of the major powers at having to face up to new powerful competitors. What seems quite obvious is that China's involvement in Africa is not homogeneous; rather, it is ambiguous and problematic on many accounts. Chinese enterprises show great flexibility in building policies specific to each country's needs while fulfilling China's high expectations, mainly in terms of natural resources. While the breakthrough of Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in many sectors of the African economy is buttressed by massive financial support from the Chinese state, India's rise as a trade partner in Africa is mainly driven by the private sector. If such a growth still has very little to do with the intensity of China's incursion within the continent, India's presence in Africa is long standing and its lately accelerated economic involvement is clearly just a beginning. The India–Africa Summit held in April 2008 is representative of India's will to establish an enduring economic and political relationship with Africa. India emphasises its long-standing tradition of cooperation with Africa and is clearly stating a renewed intention to bring these relations to the next level. While authors emphasise the gap between China and India in terms of their actual capacity to invest in Africa, to reach for resources and play a major role at the developmental

level, many think that in the long run India will have the comparative advantage over China: 'its strong diaspora community on the ground in Africa, its proximity to the continent, its first-class educational system and its enduring democratic tradition will all make it more competitive than China' (p. 4). India clearly tries to find its own way to do business in Africa, mixing its development strategy with broader economic and geopolitical ambitions while underlining its will to emphasise capacity-building expertise (in areas such as information and communication technologies [ICTs], health, and education) over a mere quest for natural resources.

In many respects, the growing presence of India and China in Africa reflects local dissatisfaction with years of structural adjustment policies and a global economic system considered to be unfair. The effects of such a growth are only beginning to show but it is already obvious that if the emerging world order is to bring any substantial benefit to the African economy as a whole, change will first of all have to come from within African governments and civil society. The impact of China's presence (often described as either disastrous or a blessing) has been the object of a lot of attention in recent years, while scholarship on India's African venture is still in early stages as it remains difficult to gauge its potential benefits and dangers. This book is an important step in this direction and should be of interest to scholars and students in fields such as International Development, Economics, Political Science, Sociology and Anthropology.

Vincent Duclos
Université de Montréal, Canada
Email: vincent.duclos@umontreal.ca
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BOOK REVIEW

The early morning phone call: Somali refugees' remittances, by Anna Lindley, Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2010, 179 pp., £14.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781845456443

Much of the scholarship authored by expatriates on Somalia over the last two decades lacks serious theoretical engagement with the political-economic issues and provides no systematic field data that reflect the historical underpinnings of everyday life. Dr Lindley's book is partially a departure from such consultancy-driven production in at least one way: *The early morning phone call*, which is the first book-length assessment of the internal and external dynamics of Somali remittance/refugees, has unique and rich ethnographic field data on remittance. The book has six chapters whose content is a mixture of broad theoretical discussion on migration–development literature sprinkled with somewhat detailed personal stories of remitters as well as recipients. Field data for the book's argument come from field sites in Hargeisa, Nairobi and London.

Chapter 1 provides a thoughtful presentation and critique of the migration–conflict–development literature. Here Lindley is able to show the limitations of this scholarship using real-world experiences of individual refugees, remitters, recipients, and the structures of power that circumscribe refugee livelihoods. Chapter 2 is an attempt to provide a historical/cultural context for the book's argument. It broadly covers three themes: first, it is a condensed effort to lay bare aspects of Somalia's social, political and historical context that pertain to mobility and remittance, while the second theme

provides a good description of the money transfer business. The final section is focused on the state and development debates and shows the author's preference for Somali regionalism rather than nationalism. Overall, the chapter has some useful materials, but lacks the kind of critical theoretical edge present in Chapter 1. Chapter 3 is an articulation of remittance flows and the role of the household in Hargeisa. It also maps the role of remittance in development and politics. Despite the value of this description there is a dearth of conceptual ideas dealing with politics and development and that makes the chapter tedious to read. An excellent opportunity to tease out insightful ways of seeing these relationships seems wasted here.

Chapter 4 examines the challenges Somali refugees face in Kenya and the remittance dynamics from Nairobi's Eastleigh Township where Somalis have become a vital economic force. The chapter has much useful information, some of it heart wrenching, but the author allows the reader to plunge into the details without providing a theoretical guide that enables him/her to make sense of the stories. A belated effort is made, at the end of the chapter, to pull the threads together but that effort comes too late. Chapter 5 delves into the 'North–South divide' and is a narrative of Somalis' migration to the UK, the harrowing journeys many endured, and the factors that induce individuals to remit despite towering economic difficulties. The treatment of affective bonds as a central force in remittance is well noted and is a key contribution to Western understanding of the seemingly irrational Somali behaviour. There are other

factual nuggets about the ‘North–South’ divide, but here again the chapter fails to see life in London beyond the ‘remittance pressure’ such as the educated younger generation who are taking part in remittance as well as the world beyond. And finally, here the author appears as an apologist for the political fragmentation of the country in part because of her shallow and limited reading of the history and politics of Somalia.

The book’s conclusion revisits the introductory theoretical remarks regarding the migration–development nexus. The narrative is on solid ground in the criticism it levels against the dominant literature and shows how careful ethnographic research can advance our understanding well beyond the macroeconomic models. But the policy propositions laid out are populist and may be a bit naïve.

In a nutshell, *The early morning phone call* is a timely and productive intervention in the debates on migration, remittance refugees and development. The ethnographic narrative is rich (though at times repetitive) and provides an excellent counterpoint to the general understandings of the role of remittance in development. The extensive details provided about remittance in three locations are unmatched in the literature, and the challenge the book poses to the literature on remittance and migration on the basis of the lived experiences of remitters and receivers is convincing. Finally, and disappointingly, the author’s superb understanding of these literatures is unmatched by her superficial grasp of Somali

culture, political economy, and history. First, the author is oblivious to Egal’s strategic intervention in turning around the so-called Borama Conference of 1993. Linley is blind-sided in this matter because of her primary dependency on literature which is either out of date or politically partisan in the Somali conflict. Second, she accepts the notion that the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) was dominated by a particular ‘clan’ without checking the facts. Thus, Lindley fails to bring the same sharp theoretical insights to bear as she has done on the migration–development discourse. Third, the author deposits the infamous ‘clan’ map on page 21 to authenticate some of her clanist interpretations without any appreciation of the fact that it is historically and cartographically poor. Fourth, the Somali terms used are often misinterpreted, such as *xawaala*, *caydh*, and *dhaqan celis*. *Xawaala* does not mean ‘transfer of debt’ but simply means ‘transfer’; *caydh* does not mean ‘free money’, it means charity; and lastly *dhaqan celis* is not a nickname, but means cultural re-immersion. Finally, the author does not seem to understand the problematic nature of using terms like clan, clan economy, Somaliland, Dir, polygamy etc. without any consideration of contentious debates surrounding these and their political and policy implications.

Abdi Ismail Samatar
 University of Minnesota, USA
 Email: samat001@umn.edu
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EDITORIAL

Humanitarian imperialism

This issue of *ROAPE* reflects on many of the dynamics that have underpinned revolution in North Africa and conflict and resistance in the Sahara. It also explores the external challenges to democratic deepening and the threat of return to authoritarianism posed by local reactionary class and social forces. The optimism of recent struggles for political reform and the ousting of dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt are tempered by imperialist intervention and threat of counter revolution. The international financial institutions (IFIs) continue to apply pressure for continued policies that created the conditions for revolutionary upheaval in North Africa. Thus a so-called Marshall Plan of action agreed by the G8 for North Africa in May 2011 encouraged market reform, promotion of foreign investment, cutting food and energy subsidies and reducing public spending. Egypt's foreign debt, run up by dictator Husni Mubarak and his cronies, of almost US\$32 billion has not been cancelled. And there has been little encouragement for the development of local domestic markets for sustainable development and expansion of regional trade. The G8 and the IFIs thus encourage continued neoliberal reform that helped erstwhile elites plunder national resources in Tunisia and Egypt. Patrick Bond in this issue examines recent IMF intervention in the region and what the implications are of the IFIs trying again to implement disastrous neoliberal policy. Economic subordination of Africa, however, is only one dimension of imperialism. North Africa is also experiencing ideological and military intervention. Neoliberal hegemonic debate highlights the generosity and benefit of globalisation. It stresses the need for Africans to 'wait and see', as development will inevitably emerge with patience and as local power holders create appropriate investment climates and deliver Western ideas of democratic governance. There is, after all, donor competition to boost overseas development assistance which will deliver Gleneagles promises made in 2005 to increase official development assistance (ODA) once the corner of capitalist recession is turned. This soft image of Western interest has been challenged by revolution in Egypt and Tunisia. The 'Arab Spring' has revealed Western collusion with the deposed autocrats, military support for the repressive and bestial state apparatus of law and (dis)-order and IMF-style economic reform strategies that have worsened poverty and increased inequality.

The reality of imperial interests is most clearly demonstrated by NATO war planes rushing to bomb Libya to promote regime change. And in Côte d'Ivoire, French and UN troops have defended imperialist interests by promoting regime change with the ousting of Laurent Gbagbo. Whatever one thinks about the impact of the reactionary and brutal leaderships of Mu'ammar al-Qaddafi or Gbagbo, their removal by Western military force undermines the capacity of local forces to deal with local despots.

Imperialist military intervention has followed the attempt by the US and EU to 'catch up' with the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. Imperialist forces want African leaders with whom they can do business. Western corporations and governments had been able to do exactly that in Côte d'Ivoire and Libya but neither head of state was considered reliable or predictable. Washington and Paris have been unhappy with the unconventional and

idiosyncratic behaviour of Qaddafi and with Gbagbo's refusal to repay debt and his flirting with non-Western oil companies. President Obama used warm words in the UK in May 2011. He offered long-delayed support to encourage democracy as a universal human aspiration and the removal of dictatorship. The contradiction is that declared support for political liberalisation took place alongside NATO bombing in Libya, with significant US military assistance. Imperialism requires political leaderships and forms of democracy in Africa that conform to Western interests (Chomsky *et al.* 2011).

Imperialist intervention uses the language of humanitarianism to justify its use of force. But it is unclear how the bombing of people and their homes, whether it is in Afghanistan, Iraq or Libya helps to protect them. Military intervention is more likely to create the atrocities and casualties, death and destruction NATO and US policy makers say they are intervening to stop. Since the 2005 UN World Summit, the 'international community' has adopted the idea of the 'responsibility to protect' (R2P). The central rhetorical concern of R2P is the desire to protect people from human rights violations. In the wake of revolutionary struggles in Tunisia and Egypt, the intervention in Libya authorised by UN Security Council Resolution 1973 (2011) called for a ceasefire in Libya and an 'end to the current attacks against civilians', which might constitute 'crimes against humanity'. The resolution imposed a no-fly zone over Libya, sanctions against the government and authorised 'all possible force' to protect civilians (UN 2011). R2P was used in the Libyan case as a *pre-emptive* rationale for intervention to prevent greater loss of civilian life after some had died in state violence, while in Syria thousands of civilians have *actually* been slain by security forces and repression in Yemen, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia has reinforced state power against demonstrators calling for political reform.

The Security Council has effectively been privatised by the US, UK and France (Mazover 2011). The credibility and reputation of the UN as an impartial arbitrator for defence and promotion of human rights and defender of international law is further damaged. The institution was already struggling to project even-handedness after it orchestrated the theatre of lies justifying intervention in Iraq. And Secretary General Ban Ki Moon failed in Sri Lanka to question human rights abuses at the end of the country's civil war. Only 10 members of the Security Council voted for Resolution 1973 while five abstained – Russia, China, India, Brazil and Germany. In other words the 'representatives' of the majority of humankind did not support military intervention in Libya. Regional actors Egypt and Turkey were also not keen about the terms of military intervention. And although the Arab League initially supported the resolution it quickly changed its mind when the scale and ferocity of bombing commenced and the removal of Qaddafi was identified as the priority. The Arab League requested a motion for a no-fly zone over Gaza too, but this was not reported by international media or discussed by the Security Council. Ignoring the Arab League's suggestion to limit Israel's militarisation of the Middle East is not surprising, as the US had not set limits on Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 2006 and Obama's continued support for Zionism during Operation Cast Lead in Gaza 2008–2009.

Oil and political collapse

The Western media onslaught supporting NATO bombing against Qaddafi's regime presents the case as universal and one dimensional: it is about the enduring struggle for Libyans to realise human freedom. There has not been any questioning as to why Libya became the target of imperialist aggression in 2011 after Qaddafi had been rehabilitated as someone with whom the West could do business. And why were the French so keen to remove Laurent Gbagbo from office? One thing is certain: the interventions have not

been about saving the lives of innocent civilians whether in Libya or Côte d'Ivoire. If international humanitarianism was the concern of Obama and Cameron, Sarkozy and Berlusconi there would certainly be more than just a condemnation of Syrian atrocity and more than just a mild rebuke of dynastic rule in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. To understand military intervention we need to understand a little more about the imperial project in North and West Africa.

After World War II, Eisenhower viewed the Middle East as the 'most strategically important region of the world' (cited in Chomsky *et al.* 2011). US foreign policy is not reducible to oil and energy demands but it is an important dimension of it. Libya, moreover, has an important geo-strategic position on the North Africa coast, seen increasingly by the EU as crucial in its strategy to maintain 'fortress Europe' in the defence of borders from African immigration. Libya was also seen as a stable authoritarian regime that opposed radical Islamism. Libya is the seventeenth largest world oil producer and the third largest in Africa. It is likely to also have the largest oil reserves on the continent (and significant natural gas reserves) and its crude oil is of high quality low sulphur content with 85% of production exported to Europe, and 5% to the US. One important dimension of the Libyan conflict is that eastern Libya where the rebellion originated is also the centre of oil production and refining and the rebellion has challenged persistent underdevelopment from the authoritarian Libyan regime. A key question, however, is why the rebellion erupted in eastern Libya in 2011, why are the EU and Washington supporting the 'rebels' when little is known about them and why are some authoritarian states tolerated and not others?

Since 2006, US State Department rhetoric has not distinguished between stability and democracy. As George W. Bush once noted, the difficulty for the US is its dependence on oil imports from countries whose populations are hostile to the US. Washington is particularly concerned about a Shia belt of resistance in the northern Gulf where most of the Middle East oil is located. And of course the US 5th fleet has its base in Bahrain. But why has Washington's view of Libya come full circle? Qaddafi was the personification of evil from the 1970s but became an ally against terror from 2003. In May 2006 the US restored diplomatic relations only to lead the charge against Qaddafi in 2011. It should not be forgotten that Qaddafi crushed an armed Islamist opposition in Benghazi in the early 1990s and he issued perhaps the first international warnings against Usama Bin Laden and al-Qaeda in 1998.

Networks of secret police and informants make doing research and uncovering the character of politics and society in Libya very difficult. Alison Pargeter in this journal (2006) reviewed internal struggles for political and economic reform in Libya and the contradictions of challenging authoritarian politics. One such obstacle for the Libyan government was oil price volatility and the difficulty Qaddafi had ensuring the delivery of spoils politics at a time of economic decline. How could wealth be distributed without alienating local tribal and regional interests? And how could this be done in one of Africa's biggest countries – 1.7 million square kilometres with a population of less than 7 million people? Benghazi rebels are unhappy that Qaddafi failed to invest in the oil producing regions – a problem that is not peculiar to Libya. The difficulties of what has been called a 'curse of resources', the underperformance of countries where high levels of income accrue from resource rents, was exacerbated in Libya following attempts to rebuild after 11 years of UN sanctions between 1992 and 2003.

Sanctions against Qaddafi may have served the regime in the short term. The extent of international opposition to his *Jamahiriyah* or 'State of the Masses' had a unifying effect on the people of Libya. Yet the economic cost of sanctions for Libya was at least US\$30 billion and there was a political cost too. As Luis Martinez has noted, 'The revolutionary artifice of

the Jamahiriya crumbled under the impact of sanctions. The revolution was lost to view, amidst violence and corruption'. 'The Jamahiriya became an empty shell', national disenchantment grew and 'The 'tribalisation' of the government gave rise to unease over the bases of the national community: was Libya a nation-state, or a state of tribes?' (Martinez 2007, pp. 1–2). Imperialist intervention now offers the spectre of dividing Libya between pre colonial Tripolitania in the west and Cyrenaica in the East. The Benghazi opposition denies this is part of their agenda although it is difficult to see just what the opposition agenda is other than ridding the country of Qaddafi and aligning a new government to Western interests.

Qaddafi flirted with political reform and sanctioned economic liberalisation in the 90s and early 2000s. He was resistant to accusations that Libya had funded terrorist attacks, notably the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie in December 1988 and the DC10 UTA Flight 772 that exploded over Niger en route to Paris from Brazzaville in September 1989. The 'conversion' of Libya from a rogue state to an ally in the US war on terror followed 9/11 (Martinez 2007, p. 4). Qaddafi halted Libya's programme of Weapons of Mass Destruction and supported the defeat of Saddam Hussein. Qaddafi understood very well the difficulties of appeasing Western interests and also of preserving his tribal power base enforced by a strong security apparatus (not a national army). Political and economic reforms, especially following the appointment in 2003 of reformist Prime Minister Shukhri Ghanem, a close associate of Seif al Islam Qaddafi, were short-lived. The PM was sacked in March 2006 after overseeing trade reform and an influx of foreign banks to Libya, but Qaddafi and state bureaucrats were wary of losing positions of power and economic largesse. Domestic reform needed to be extensive enough to assure international capitalist interests that Libya was ripe for business, but they could not be so extensive that they undermined Qaddafi and local power brokers. And the confidence held by the international community in the reforming zeal of Seif Qaddafi was short lived as he mounted vicious attacks against local dissent.

Opposition in Benghazi offers Washington the opportunity for regime change. It offers an opportunity to install a Tripoli government that will be predictable, will accept neoliberal reform, the opening of Libya's oil and gas sector and a military platform in a geo-strategically crucial part of Africa.

The colonial roots of crisis in Côte d'Ivoire

French and UN intervention in Côte d'Ivoire is comparable with the bombing of Libya. In both cases there is a prioritisation of economic interest of the West and a failure to understand local politics. And in both interventions there has been rhetoric of a humanitarian emergency. As Mark Duffield notes, the post cold war period highlights how the idea of 'emergency' has provided the basis for new forms of trusteeship, intervention and international sovereignty to be reasserted in formally independent nations: 'Emergency has provided a means of penetrating the world of peoples, ignoring existing laws or conventions, colonising new countries and deepening a presence within existing spheres of operation' (Duffield 2007, p. 48).

The end of the cold war erased any vestige of neutral humanitarian assistance and replaced it with interventions dictated by Western interests. This was evident in Sierra Leone and Liberia, Afghanistan and Kosovo where: 'The new humanitarianism involve[d] a shift in the centre of gravity of policy away from saving lives to supporting social processes and political outcomes' (Duffield 2001, p. 67). And we have noted how the UN

in Libya is integrated as an advocate for *Western* interests and NATO militarisation. This has also been the lamentable outcome of intervention in Côte d'Ivoire.

The attention of the world media and international community to the politico-military conflict in Côte d'Ivoire has evaporated since Laurent Gbagbo was deposed. And there has been very little attempt to explain or interpret the nature and the causes of the conflict which date back at least to 2002. Laurent Gbagbo's presidency certainly expanded ethnic division and tension. It also fuelled corruption and the absence of governmentality, strengthened para-military militias and the power of warlords that institutionalised forms of neo-patrimonial politics.

But preoccupation with the authoritarian character of Gbagbo's politics only emphasises the internal dynamics of conflict. There is a broader set of imperial interests that shaped Gbagbo's politics and the way in which UN and French intervention emerged to depose him. Those interests relate to the political economy of natural resources and the historically defined geo-political and geo-economic dynamics at the international level. Côte d'Ivoire was a French protectorate in the 1840s and a colony after the carve-up of Africa at the Berlin Conference in 1884.

The colony was central to the consolidation of *Francafrrique* and the extraversion of the colonial economy involved the establishment of agricultural monocultures of cocoa, coffee, palm oil, and groundnuts for export on the international markets. Agricultural labour was forcibly recruited between 1910–1940 from Upper Volta with the collaboration of traditional leaders. Workers were brought to toil on plantations in the South with the complicity of syndicates of landowners (Amin 1967).

The French model of colonial 'assimilation' created African elites. They were trained in French universities and became the representatives of colonies in the French parliament. A hierarchical mosaic of ethnic political identities was moulded on the premise of the superiority of the Akan ethnic group over the Kru, Gur and Mande groups. Independence in 1960 consolidated the cult of personality of Felix Houphouët-Boigny. It was organised around the one-party Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire, Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI), reproducing a social compromise with colonial roots and challenging the emergence of a nation state identity. The Africanisation of political cadres and the partial and uneven distribution of economic benefits in post-independence Côte d'Ivoire strengthened the role of political and intellectual domination of landowners of the Baoulé aristocracy. At the same time it enhanced the colonial division of labour, incentivising foreign workers to settle permanently, with access to land, education and health services. Eighty per cent of Côte d'Ivoire's workforce in the first decades of independence was drawn from surrounding countries (Campbell 2003, p. 30). By the 1970s, this post-colonial pact was using labour from neighbouring states in large and medium plantations. These agricultural export crops helped to produce 7% rates of growth – similar to Japan and Brazil (Fauré 1982, p. 45).

A series of 'privileged' economic and political relationships with France locked the Ivorian economy into the economic and military embrace of the colonial power. Eighty per cent of import–export trade was with France, preserving unlimited profit repatriation to the ex-colonial power. There was also a consolidation of military cooperation with Paris, training of African security forces and the presence of pre-deployed French troops in Côte d'Ivoire. France in addition held 65% of Côte d'Ivoire's foreign exchange in Paris. These constraints shaped the neo-colonial character of the post-colonial regime.

Dependence upon agricultural exports made Côte d'Ivoire vulnerable to the vagaries of the international market. Falling prices for raw materials fuelled the economic recession of 1983–84 and increased debt. This led to structural adjustment and selective austerity

measures to avoid exacerbating a fiscal crisis of the state. The Caisse de Stabilisation et de Soutien des Prix des Produits Agricoles (CAISTAB), the public sector organisation that regulated and stabilised agricultural goods and prices, was dismantled, depriving thousands of small and medium producers of subsidies and protection from market instability. State income declined and this undermined the capacity for patronage, ultimately eroding the base of power of the PDCI. Dissent grew, especially among young unemployed, trade-unionists and public functionaries.

In 1994 the devaluation of the Franc CFA further reduced the prices of cocoa and coffee on the international markets. This enhanced the burden of debt, which increased from 196% of GDP in 1990 to 243% in 1998. It undermined rates of investment which decreased in the same period from 20% of GDP to 8% (Akindes 2004, p. 19).

Ethnicity, imperialism and political transformation

Economic austerity and neoliberal restructuring of the 1980–90s culminated with the death of Felix Houphouët-Boigny and the transition to multi-party politics. The post-Houphouëtist phase is built around three political personalities: Konan Bedié, leader of the Houphouëtist socio-political block; Laurent Gbagbo, prophet of the rupture with Houphouëtism and leader of the Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI); and Alassane Ouattará, representative of Northern Muslim populations and founder of the Rassemblement des Républicains (RDR). The struggles for political domination in a context of economic austerity and externalisation of the fragmented economy encouraged one political contestant in particular to articulate a xenophobic and reactionary ideology. The notion of *Ivoirité* was introduced by Konan Bedié in 1993 with the goal of eclipsing his political competitor, Alassane Ouattará, and besmirching his credibility by referring to his Burkina Faso origins. Article 35 of the Constitution of 2000 indicates that someone can be considered Ivorian only if they have been born in Côte d'Ivoire and both parents were Ivorian. The candidate to the presidency of Côte d'Ivoire must also have Ivorian origins and be born of Ivorian parents (Constitution de la République de Côte d'Ivoire, Article 35, 2000).

The idea of *Ivoirité*, however, went beyond the pragmatic agenda to gain electoral support. It was also a strategy to maintain the privileged positions of hegemonic groups. The rhetoric of *Ivoirité* generated a preoccupation with the dichotomy between indigenes and immigrants. The elections of 2000 were held despite the contested exclusion of Ouattará on the base of *Ivoirité* and led to Laurent Gbagbo's victory. This event marked a watershed in the politics of Côte d'Ivoire.

After the 2000 electoral defeat Northern populations agitated for and engaged in military opposition. The Forces Nouvelles were comprised of mercenaries coming from Liberia, Mali, Burkina Faso and financed and armed by France through the cooperation of Blaise Compaoré and Amadou Toumani Touré, respectively presidents of Burkina Faso and Mali. Incursions began with looting in the north-west part of the country and established a force of occupation.

International diplomacy brokered peace between the forces in Linas-Marcoussis in January 2003. With France's intermediation Gbagbo was forced to accept the presence of two 'rebels' in his Cabinet as ministers of defence and the interior. In Abidjan, however, Gbagbo initiated an anti-French campaign. Paris was accused of interference in the political sovereignty of Côte d'Ivoire and groups of patriots and militias were encouraged to respond to the French attempt at destabilising the country.

Military conflict culminated with France bombing the headquarters of the Ivorian air force and led to attempts at a negotiated settlement mediated among others by the erstwhile

president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, in 2004. Through a series of diplomatic agreements in Accra, Pretoria and Ouagadougou, a plan emerged for disarmament of warring factions and a commission to prepare for internationally assisted elections through UN resolution 1633, 2005. Notwithstanding an agenda aimed at demilitarisation, the country was still geographically fractured into two parts: the South in the hands of the Ivorian army and pro-Gbagbo paramilitary militias, and the North controlled by the Forces Nouvelles. The northern forces survived through continuous looting of local populations, check-point extortion and the exploitation of natural resource trade in the Moyen Cavally on the border with Liberia that included forestry exploitation and wood smuggling. The possibility of developing a new electoral roll in a demilitarised country was almost impossible. The task of identification of those with the right to vote could not be implemented in the north. Local councils were empowered to develop lists of eligible voters with reports that identity cards were sold for 15,000 Francs CFA (€25). Yet elections took place amid numerous reports of fraud in the northern areas. France, the UN, the EU and the African Union nevertheless promptly declared Ouattará the legitimate electoral winner and president elect. The Constitutional Court, however, revoked the verdict, proclaiming Gbagbo president of Côte d'Ivoire.

Laurent Gbagbo had antagonised French geo-strategic and economic interests. Most of the cocoa produced in Côte d'Ivoire traded through Burkina Faso. Gbagbo favoured non-European and non-US oil companies to explore in the newly discovered oilfields at the border with Ghana and off the coast of the Gulf of Guinea. He had encouraged involvement of Chinese, Indian and Russian companies. Additionally he refused to make a payment of US\$2.3 billion on Côte d'Ivoire's dollar bonds to foreign investors, to pay the interest on the country's foreign debt. And he pursued nationalisation of foreign banks that had suspended their operations. The refusal to pay the debt heavily impacted on the value of eurobonds that had fallen from 62.875 cents to the dollar before the elections to 16.646 afterwards. Western powers had become anxious about Gbagbo's facilitation of Chinese, Indian and Russian access to Côte d'Ivoire's natural resources. And this was in a context where the US had been exerting enormous pressures for greater military and resource control of West Africa through the development of United States African Command (Africom) and the linked establishment of an anti-terrorism alliance. In this context of external intervention the notion that Gbagbo was deposed as part of an African solution to an African problem is misleading. Gbagbo may have been arrested by Ouattará forces responding to internal pressures, but that took place in an international context of hostility to Gbagbo and French and UN military intervention.

During the political and military crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, France declared itself the even-handed arbiter of the conflict representing its role in the area as one of peace-keeper. Yet French capital continued during the conflict to preserve monopolistic control of trade and transport (Bolloré), of construction, production and distribution of water and electricity (Bouygnes), of telecommunications (France Telecom), of insurance and the banking sector (Société Générale, Paribas and Crédit Lyonnais). Defending French corporate interests and the attempt to reassert financial control of state funds through the BCEAO (Banque Centrale des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest) appear to be crucial motivations behind the removal of Gbagbo – although, of course, the rhetoric was of a humanitarian intervention. Testimonies of local activists and NGOs reported that the French army, the Licorne, and the United Nations troops in Côte d'Ivoire were heavily involved in the bombing of civic areas and the provision of logistic and intelligence assistance to the rebels from the north. This helped facilitate the attack in Abidjan on Gbagbo's residence that led to his arrest.

In January 2011, shortly before Ouattará's seizure of power, Bloomberg announced that 'Eurobonds may be Africa's best performing sovereign debt if the dispute is resolved'. In the words of Stephen Bailey-Smith, a London-based market strategist at Standard Bank: 'what we need is a Ouattara government that is seen as a completely new start and one that has a leadership that is clearly more attuned to the needs of international financial capital' (*Bloomberg Businessweek* 2011). Clearly such statements reveal the confidence of international investors that Ouattará would help with the interests of international capital. In such a context the international *coup d'état* against Laurent Gbagbo and the installation of Ouattará, ex-Deputy Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, confirmed the cementing of a US–France alliance in continuity with the intervention in Libya.

The geo-political and geo-economic centrality of Côte d'Ivoire in the African continent is further displayed by the potential of 200,000 barrels of oil a day projected to be produced by the end of the decade. In this context such intervention fits extremely well with the priorities of US energy policy of having reliable governments in each of the states that provide oil for them – Nigeria, Angola and Gabon.

While the Ivorian conflict is labelled as resolved, evidence on the ground suggests otherwise. There continues to be ethnic persecution with indiscriminate murders, mass killings and rapes pursued not only by militias but also by Northern young people that joined the march to Abidjan. The future for Côte d'Ivoire remains problematic as ethnic conflict persists and the space for privatisation and neoliberal expansion looms large.

Military intervention in Côte d'Ivoire and Libya confirms that imperialism will strike with force when economic and geo-strategic interests are threatened. It has done so under the guise of humanitarian intervention. The use of force by actors from outside Africa reduces the opportunity of local conflict resolution or pan-African diplomacy and it supports the entrenchment of domestic class and social forces that deepen neoliberal hegemony.

* * * * *

The articles in this issue examine many of the details of imperialist intervention in North Africa as well as the tremendous strength of local and national forces that drove the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia. Angela Joya offers an analysis of the Egyptian revolution and the tension between the continuing role of the military and challenges that confront a radical transformation after the ousting of the erstwhile ruling National Democratic Party. Rabab El-Mahdi, whose paper was written before these events, provides an important part of the background to them through her analysis of the increasing frequency and strength of the Egyptian labour movement's strike actions after 2006. Sami Zemni and Koenraad Bogaert remind us of the need to go beyond the rhetoric of the reforming Moroccan monarch to examine the consequences of recent neoliberal 'urban renewal'. And Habib Ayeb, in his briefing later in the issue, details the emergence of the revolution in Tunisia and the importance of understanding the context in which it developed.

The other papers in this issue are not concerned with recent events in North Africa, but they do nevertheless deal with similar issues in different contexts, namely imperialist intervention, post-transition trajectories, and the implications for Africa of its insertion into global neoliberal markets. Dan Connell examines Eritrea's post-independence trajectory a decade on, during which time military mobilisation and political repression have trumped the democratic political possibilities opened up in the immediate post-war period. The final paper in this issue, by Lone Riisgaard, looks at sustainability initiatives

in the production of cut flowers for the EU market, in which the predominance of less stringent standards has to date benefited growers and workers outside Africa.

Ray Bush

School of Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds

Leeds, UK

r.c.bush@leeds.ac.uk

Giuliano Martiniello

Independent scholar and activist

juliangrimao@msn.com

Claire Mercer

Department of Geography and Environment, London School of Economics

London, UK

c.c.mercer@lse.ac.uk

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The Egyptian revolution: crisis of neoliberalism and the potential for democratic politics

Angela Joya*

Department of Political Science, York University, Toronto, Canada

This paper argues that the Egyptian revolution of 25 January 2011 has to be understood in the context of neoliberal economic shift. The two decades of economic liberalisation policies were accompanied by authoritarianism while at the same time these policies opened up opportunities for crony capitalism. Post Mubarak Egypt has witnessed positive developments such as the rise of political parties, independent trade union federations and other social groups aiming to participate in rebuilding a democratic society. The paper explores the potentials for, and challenges against, building a democratic society in Egypt.

Keywords: neoliberalism; protests; revolution; military; Muslim Brotherhood; democracy

Introduction

On 11 February 2011, after 18 days of mass protests across the country, Egyptian citizens brought down the government of Hosni Mubarak which had ruled the country for 30 long years. The uprising that began on 25 January 2011 rejected torture, poverty, corruption and unemployment. An unprecedented event in the history of Egypt, the revolt brought to the streets millions of people from all walks of life, to make political, economic and social demands. Indeed, the revolt marked the end of a long period of public fear from an authoritarian regime and its police.

Since Mubarak's downfall, Egyptians have witnessed the formation of new political parties, a federation of independent trade unionists, and a coalition of political and social groups hoping to influence post-revolution Egypt. All of these are positive developments that can contribute towards the building of democracy. The desire of Egyptian citizens to participate in the political life of their society was reflected in the high turnout of voters for the constitutional referendum. The referendum held on 19 March found 77.2 % of the 18 million voters in support of the proposed changes. Nonetheless, challenges still remain for Egyptian workers and protestors. The military has openly refused to undertake any radical reforms. Workers have been asked to go back to work, and strikes and public protests have been made illegal. Struggles by workers, students, women, peasants and other social groups continue across the country despite military orders criminalising protests.

*Email: ajoya@alumni.yorku.ca

For researchers of the Middle East, the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions and the ongoing mass uprisings against the authoritarian regimes of the Middle East and North Africa have posed an important challenge to the way scholars have explained the dynamics of change in these societies. Indeed, the fact that few scholars predicted these events has exposed the limits of theories that explained the resilience of autocratic rulers. How do we understand the balance of social forces in Egypt? How strong is the opposition of the workers, peasants, students and citizens? What possible scenarios might emerge in the coming months? In order to understand the full meaning of the revolution, there is a need to provide some historical context. The revolution is a product of decades of neoliberal economic policies that were carried out with the use of political repression by the state security forces. The social polarisation created by Mubarak's economic, political and social policies resulted in the breakdown of his regime and the opening of space for possible democratic change in the coming years. In this paper, I provide a background for the rise of social movements and the outbreak of protests that have occurred in recent times. Next, I outline the protestors' main demands and compare them with the demands of the workers' movement that has been emerging in recent years. Third, I explain the political, economic and social factors – especially the changing balance of social power under Hosni Mubarak – that galvanised Egyptian citizens and brought them to the streets in their millions. Finally, I discuss two possible scenarios coming out of the current struggles and what these would mean for Egyptian politics.

The lead-up to the uprising of 25 January 2011

The uprising took not only Western powers and media outlets by surprise but also the Egyptian elite (Sharrock *et al.* 2011). Even academic experts could not have predicted the timing of this uprising given the way the regime had suppressed protests and strikes in the past few decades (Brown, N. 2011). A coordinated national effort to oppose the regime of Mubarak and then bring it down after only 18 days was indeed unimaginable. Just days prior to the unrest, the Egyptian elite rejected any possibility of a Tunisian style uprising in Egypt (Ramadan and Daoud 2011). Nonetheless, they introduced precautionary economic and social aid packages for urban and rural areas (Ezzat 2011, El-Fiqi 2011).

The uprising was the result of a build-up of many years of strikes and protests in various parts of Egypt. There were clear signs that there was a potential for a mass uprising, although no one was sure when such a mobilisation would take place. Warning signs of a social upheaval were everywhere. In a special report in the July 2010 issue of *The Economist*, Max Rodenbeck drew parallels between the 1952 revolutionary moment and that of 2010 arguing that both periods shared rising social tensions and a huge wealth gap where the benefits of economic reforms had flowed to 'a cosmopolitan elite that was out of tune with the street' (Rodenbeck 2010, p. 4). The polarisation of wealth was also displayed in the organisation of living space as the rich were shielded in their gated communities outside of crowded cities and the poor continued to live in dilapidated buildings and slums (Joya 2008, Mitchell 2002, p. 274, Altorki and Cole 1998, pp. 191–195). As recently as January 2011, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned that rising food prices, high levels of unemployment and the uprising in Tunisia would mean that the Egyptian state would have to increase subsidies and social welfare in order to maintain social stability (Wahish 2011).

Michaele Browers traced the rise of the current protest movement in Egypt to 2000 during the second Palestinian Intifada (Browers 2009). Following this, in 2002, the Cairo Conference was convened in an effort to organise various social groups who shared two main stances: anti-war and anti-neoliberalism. The Kifaya – the Egyptian

Movement for Change – then formed in 2004. Its followers and supporters ranged from leftists to nationalists as well as moderate members of the Muslim Brotherhood (Browsers 2009, p. 113, El-Mahdi 2009, pp. 91–92). The Kifaya movement opposed Hosni Mubarak's rule and the succession of his son, Gamal Mubarak. Given the diversity of its membership, the Kifaya group felt it could not press ahead with any economic demands as these tended to divide its supporters and followers; instead it focused on political demands (Browsers 2009, p. 127).

Since 2004, a whole host of other social protest groups have emerged in Egypt including Students for Change, Youth for Change, University Professors for Change, Workers for Change, Artists for Change, and the People's Campaign for Change. The intellectual brain behind the People's Campaign for Change was Tariq Al-Bishri who outlined his demands in a 2004 letter titled 'I call upon you to disobey'. Al-Bishri was appointed the head of the Constitutional Reform Committee on 15 February 2011. Protests against Mubarak continued in 2005 and after. Indeed on 21 February 2005, the Kifaya group staged a massive anti-Mubarak protest at Tahrir Square. Since then, demands for political reforms continued as both Kifaya and the Muslim Brotherhood remained excluded from the political process (Browsers 2009, p. 114, see also El-Mahdi 2009, pp. 89–90).

Further demands for constitutional reforms were put forward in June 2005 by a group of Egyptian intellectuals who formed the National Assembly for Democratic Transition. After the presidential elections of September 2005, protests for political reforms peaked after the Judges Club refused to endorse the results of the elections (Browsers 2009, p. 117, Human Rights Watch 2010). The most notable alliance of social groupings that transcended the religious-secular divide in this period was that of the Revolutionary Socialists and moderate members of the Muslim Brotherhood who intended to form a mass movement against the state (Browsers 2009, p. 126). Another notable umbrella group, the United National Front for Change, was formed in October 2005 by political groups and parties that included Kifaya, Karama, al-Wasat al-Gadid (1996–2006) and the Muslim Brotherhood. Further protests by activists, lawyers and journalists who represented all parties in support of judicial independence, an end to Mubarak's rule and the Emergency Law continued in 2006 (Browsers 2009, pp. 109–110). There has been a tremendous degree of dialogue among various social and political groups in Egypt which provides the backdrop for the united front observed in Tahrir Square (Amar 2011a).

The protests were organised mainly by the 6th April Youth Group (named after the labour strikes in Mahalla of 6 April 2008) and the 'We Are All Khaled Said' Facebook group as well as other groups and parties including the Wafd, the Nasserist Party, the Tagammu Party, Al-Ghad Party (Kifaya) and a broad association called the National Association for Change (NAC) led by Mohamed ElBaradei. The Muslim Brotherhood kept its distance from the protestors, although its members participated in the revolts (Dreyfuss 2011). Other groups behind the uprising included the Popular Democratic Movement for Change (HASHD), the Justice and Freedom Youth Movement, and the Revolutionary Socialists. The protesters came from all walks of life, including workers, students, lawyers, teachers, bankers, activists for human rights, unemployed youth as well as thousands of Bedouins. The protests gained momentum and culminated in the March of Millions on 28 January 2011. The protests, although concentrated in Egypt's main urban centres of Cairo and Alexandria, were spread out across the country. Violent clashes between workers and protestors and the police occurred in Suez, Ismailia, Luxor, Aswan, and Wadi al-Gedid in Upper Egypt (El Wakil and Sarant 2011, *Al Masry Al Youm* 2011d).

The 25 January protesters can be characterised broadly as two groups based on their demands: political reforms and economic reforms. The latter were pursued mainly by

workers while the former were demanded by a wide range of social groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood, leftists, nationalists as well as journalists, judges and youth groups. Political demands have focused on constitutional reform, the end of Mubarak's rule and opposition to Gamal Mubarak's succession. They also demanded an end to police repression and specifically an end to arbitrary arrests that were facilitated by the emergency law enacted in 1981 (Shahhat 2001, pp. 24–25, The Human Rights Center for Assistance of Prisoners 2003, Rodenbeck 2010, p. 13).

Workers have demanded economic and social rights since at least 1998. Through a wave of strikes, protests and factory occupations, workers have demanded better wages, lower food prices, affordable housing, the right to adequate health care and a better educational system (Essam El-Din 2010a, 2010b, Beinun 2011, Ajl 2011). These demands gained momentum as Egyptians felt the effects of neoliberal budget cuts in various aspects of social and economic life. The persistence of the workers' struggle has encouraged other Egyptians to take to the streets and demand their rights (Charbel 2011b).

The socioeconomic and political background

The revolution was a response to many years of neoliberal policies that radically transformed Egyptian society by transferring social power to the hands of an elite while disempowering workers and dispossessing the peasantry. Neoliberal policies followed a period of deep economic crisis in the 1980s characterised by declining oil revenues, reduced earnings from the Suez Canal and a shrinking level of remittances sent back by Egyptian migrant workers. All of these factors led to an expansion of foreign and public debt and an increasing fiscal strain on the state.

In 1990 Egypt received debt relief from Western powers in return for its support for the Iraq war. The relief was arranged by the IMF and with the intention of enabling Egypt to repay the remainder of its foreign debt by restructuring its economy according to free market principles. As stipulated by the Post-Washington Consensus the role of government is to provide suitable conditions for the smooth functioning of the free market, including the encouragement and facilitation of the private sector through liberalising the economy and privatising state owned enterprises (Joya 2010, p. 226). In 1991 Egypt implemented a major Economic Restructuring and Adjustment Program (ERSAP) which entailed the privatisation of public sector enterprises, the liberalisation of trade and prices, the introduction of flexible labour legislation and the removal of progressive social policies (Farah 2009, p. 42, Ikram 2006, p. 61, Momani 2005, Ayubi 1995, p. 346). The privatisation of state enterprises transferred public resources into the hands of a new economic elite. This new elite found allies within the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) and Mubarak's son, Gamal. The two decades of liberalisation increased collusion between businessmen and bureaucrats, increased the role of businessmen in policy making and turned the state into an active promoter of business interests. Increasingly, businessmen took charge of policy circles as the number of businessmen elected to Egypt's parliament increased from 8 in 1995 to 150 by 2005 elections. Under Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif (2005–2011), six of the important portfolios in the cabinet were held by six of the big businessmen in the country: trade and industry, housing, transportation, health, agriculture and social welfare (Farah 2009, pp. 48–49). As Salwa Ismail has recently pointed out, in a country of almost ninety million 'Only a thousand families count in a country that Mubarak and his cronies regard as their fiefdom' (Ismail 2011). Western-trained economists and businessmen who determined Egypt's economic policies were well versed in the rules of global capital accumulation and knew how to manipulate those rules to their own advantage.

These included Rasheed Ahmed Rasheed, Minister of Foreign Trade and Industry (2004–2011) who controlled Egypt's main food brand 'Fine Foods', and engaged in public–private joint ventures; Youssef Boutros Ghali, a senior economist with the International Monetary Fund before becoming Egypt's Minister of Finance (2004–2011); Mohie-Eddin, Minister of Investment and Ahmed Nazif, Prime Minister (Menza 2005).

Economic liberalisation benefited foreign and domestic investors as investor-friendly laws were passed. The Ministry of Investments created in July 2004 was assigned the task of speeding up the privatisation process. This was not difficult to achieve as the tax structure facilitated the prospects of bankruptcy amongst public sector firms. Law 91 of 2005 cut personal and corporate income taxes by 50% while imposing a 20% flat tax on both. The public sector, however, was subjected to a higher 40% tax rate. As more public sector firms faced crisis, the pace of privatisation picked up. Between July 2004 and March 2006, the Ministry of Investments sold 80 public sector companies (Farah 2009, pp. 49–50). A further positive gesture towards investors was the passing of Investment Law No. 8, which exempted investors from state regulations, offered five to ten years of tax holidays and complete foreign ownership of local projects. Other incentives included permanent exemption from taxes, duties and customs in free zones, to activities ranging from land reclamation in the desert, industry and mining, air transportation and tourism (Momani 2005, pp. 68–71).

The political outcome of economic liberalisation was a strengthening of ties between the NDP and the landlords and businessmen who had acquired monopoly control of important sectors of the economy (iron, steel, cement, telecommunications, food and beverages) (Farah 2009, p. 81). Rather than relying on economic competitiveness, investing in research and development and involving the population in the economy, the wealth and power of these 'crony capitalists' was the product of the state sponsored appropriation of public resources facilitated by the IMF-led privatisation programme.¹ As Farah (2009, p. 50) pointed out, privatisation of public sector firms was 'in essence subsidising the private sector at the expense of the nation as a whole.'

A prominent example of crony capitalism who also symbolised corruption and embezzlement under Mubarak was Ahmed Ezz. Ezz monopolised the steel industry, controlling two-thirds of the steel market and thus determined the price of an important construction material. His control over the market was directly linked to his political power within the ruling NDP as he was a close friend of Gamal Mubarak and played an important role in the budget committee and in the Egyptian parliament. As a symbol of the corrupt politician-cum-businessman that the Mubarak regime had fostered, it was no surprise that the protestors set his house on fire during the protests. Thus, what was projected as a competitiveness drive by the Egyptian business community masked deep-seated corruption and cronyism by redefining the embezzlement of public resources as entrepreneurial initiative. This marked the beginning of a new form of patronage that was masked in the language of the free market.

Despite the neoliberal discourse of a reduced role for the state and a bigger role for the private sector, in reality the privatisation process led to the emergence of industrial and rural elites who were dependent on the state for access to public resources and services (Farah 2009, p. 80). This process was actively organised through partnerships between bureaucratic elites (e.g. Gamal Mubarak who controlled the Policy Unit) and the new industrial and rural elites.² Embezzlement of public resources reached new heights under the neoliberal cabinet of Ahmed Nazif. Loans provided by state banks were used by the private sector to acquire state enterprises, often backed by false guarantees. Investors continued to keep ownership of state companies even after they defaulted on their loans (Farah 2009, p. 81).

The military

The Egyptian military is the second dominant group that plays an important role in the economy. Under Hosni Mubarak, military men have been appointed as provincial governors, village headmen and heads of state companies or other important bureaucratic posts (Rodenbeck 2010). These appointments in turn provided guarantees for Mubarak's regime and his ruling party to secure electoral outcomes during his thirty-year rule. According to a WikiLeaks cable from 2008, the Egyptian state has granted the military ownership of vast tracts of land in the Nile Delta and the Red Sea Coast in exchange for loyalty (*The Guardian* 2011). Law 143/1981 extended the power of the Ministry of Defence over state property and its development for 'strategic use' (Cole and Altorki 1998). Over the past three decades, the military has engaged in land expropriations in various provinces, the most recent case being that of the northwest coast (Cole and Altorki 1998, pp. 201–202).

Through its factories and companies, the military plays an extensive role in the economy. It is involved in manufacturing, agriculture, construction, consumer industries, hotel and gasoline industries (Mitchell 2002, p. 241). Since Nasser's time, the military has played an important role in the construction of infrastructure and public housing projects and this role expanded to include land development projects for tourism under Sadat and Mubarak (Abu Lughod 1971, p. 234). In the construction sector, the Ministry of Defence continued to build its own military cities around Cairo and by 1986 these numbered 13, each with a population of 150,000 to 250,000 (Mitchell 2002, pp. 241–42). Indeed, the largest builder of the city of Cairo is the Ministry of Defence. The military also engaged in coastal resort development and tourist services, as a result of which it has been identified as a class of its own by Robert Springborg (cited in Mitchell 2002, pp. 241–242). For a long time the military has benefited from keeping its business dealings secret, not paying taxes, and having access to a secure and controlled labour market mainly constituted of conscripted labourers (Kirkpatrick 2011). The military's assets, comprising land, factories and hotel businesses amount to millions of Egyptian pounds, yet there is no disclosure of their revenue and therefore no accountability (Droz-Vincent 2009, p. 225). Paul Amar writes that these patronage policies of the state have shaped the military:

into an incredibly organised interest group of nationalist businessmen. They are attracted to foreign investment; but their loyalties are economically and symbolically embedded in national territory. . . . And it seems that the military, now as 'national capitalists,' have seen themselves as the blood rivals of the neoliberal 'crony capitalists' associated with Hosni Mubarak's son Gamal who have privatized anything they can get their hands on and sold the country's assets off to China, the US, and Persian Gulf capital (Amar 2011a).

Given their foothold in various economic sectors, the military was fearful that the neoliberal shift would challenge their interests. These fears were somewhat realised as businessmen began to control both economic and political decision-making processes. With the waves of privatisation in the 1990s, state enterprises quickly passed into the hands of crony capitalists. As neoliberal reforms deepened, the military experienced tough competition from their neoliberal counterparts with links to global and regional capital. As noted in one of the WikiLeaks cables from 2008, 'privatisation has forced military-owned companies to improve the quality of their work, specifically in the hotel industry, to compete with private firms and attract critical foreign investment' (*The Guardian* 2011).

Contestation by workers and peasants

Economic liberalisation had an adverse impact on workers and peasants. Overall, the process of economic restructuring introduced a trend towards flexible labour laws, mergers and monopolies. While investment in the public sector shrunk, the private sector did not step in to fill this gap and thus the Egyptian economy and society relies on a deteriorating infrastructure and declining services (Ikram 2006, p. 74, Mitchell 2002, p. 277). Employment growth slowed down as public investment in employment creation was cut down under pressure from the ERSAP (Farah 2009, p. 44). As state enterprises were privatised, massive layoffs followed. In the decade of 1993–2003, 197 public enterprises were privatised and their workforce were either laid off or forced to retire (Farah 2009, p. 45, Beinin 2009, p. 76). Workers, who defended their jobs, were faced with violence by the state. For instance, in September of 1994, 7000 workers from Kafr al-Dawwar Spinning and Weaving Company were locked out because of their strike action. On 2 October, state security forces used live ammunition against the striking workers, killing four and injuring 120. Ninety people were arrested. Farah highlights the rapid pace of job losses as public sector firms were privatised: ‘Major strikes took place at the Misr Helwan Spinning and Weaving factory in 1998. The entire workforce of 8,700 was given three weeks’ leave, but only 2,800 workers were allowed to return’ (Farah 2009, p. 46).

Under these conditions of jobs loss, the prices of basic commodities and staples skyrocketed, rents were liberalised and wages either remained stagnant or lost most of their value due to inflation (Wallis 2006). Furthermore, in July 2006, the government increased the prices of transportation, electricity, and communication, placing further pressure on workers’ limited incomes (Farah 2009, p. 51). Workers who had experienced extensive benefits from the Nasserist period were witnessing a withering away of those benefits under neoliberal reforms. Under Nasser, workers’ benefits ranged from extensive labour rights such as high wages, public pensions, sick leave, child bonuses, fixed rents and price controls of basic commodities. Whether these policies were sustainable or not, what is important is that the urban population of Egypt had experienced such citizenship rights (Posusney 1993, p. 88). The abandonment of workers’ rights under Mubarak was seen as a violation of the gains made after the 1952 revolution.

Workers who have been striking for years have demanded living wages so that they can afford the rising cost of food, housing, and health care. The year 2010 witnessed massive protests by workers who demanded an increase in the monthly minimum wage from \$100 to \$240 (Ismail 2011, Rodenbeck 2010, p. 13). The scale and number of strikes and protests increased over the past decade after the Egyptian government implemented a series of neoliberal economic reforms (Beinin 2009, pp. 77–79). The last two years (2008–2010) witnessed a radical increase in the number of demonstrations, protests, sit-ins and strikes with estimations of around 300 actions by the Land Center for Human Rights.³

Rural Egyptians had benefited from secure tenure and fixed rents as well as a popular programme of land redistribution under Nasser’s rule. Under Mubarak’s neoliberal economic policies, 1.3 million peasants (or 6 million individuals including families of the peasants) became landless as rural land was privatised and turned into large estates. Land Law 96 of 1992 liberalised the agriculture sector by removing tenancy protection and allowing the free market to determine rents (Farah 2009, p. 46). King captured the intentions of the Egyptian government behind the agricultural reforms facilitated by Law 96:

The Egyptian government chose winners and losers in this instance, weakly backed by claims of increasing productivity. By formulating Egypt’s agricultural crisis as a crisis of ownership rather than access, security of property rights for owners rather than security of rights for

tenants and employment opportunities for the landless and near landless, law 96 accelerated rural social differentiation, marginalized female-headed households, and promoted a return to indentured child and adult labour. (King 2009, p. 119)

Consequently, 60% of land in rural Egypt was controlled by large landlords (Farah 2009, p. 81). The commodification of land as a result of Law 96 created a new set of power relations in rural Egypt whereby the peasantry lost the autonomy to reproduce themselves while the rural elite increased their power (Bush 2002, pp. 192–193).⁴

The state carried out violent rural dispossession. Hundreds of Egyptian citizens who defended their rights to land were murdered, thousands were injured and many thousands were incarcerated (Bush 2009, p. 61–62, Saad 2002, pp. 107–108, The Land Center for Human Rights 1999). As Prosterman has noted, peasants with secure tenure rights were transformed into landless sharecroppers or migrant labourers. Power relations in rural Egypt resembled the period prior to 1952 as landlords had regained the power to evict tenants at their pleasure, while tenants were subjected to short-term contracts, and rent levels were decided at the will of the landlord. Land prices were liberalised, making it impossible for peasants to purchase land. By the end of the 1990s, average land rents had reached 22 times the land tax, causing many tenants to become indebted or to lose their land (Prosterman 2011, Bush 2002).

The outcome was a rural population that resented the government and its local representatives in various governorates. With the loss of livelihood, rural populations were ready to fight back. King has pointed out that despite sporadic protests, the peasantry were faced with severe challenges to self-organisation, because under Mubarak the formation of independent unions in rural Egypt were banned (King 2009, p. 100). Rural Egyptians expressed their anger against tourists, which resulted in attacks on tourists on numerous occasions. The government, often keeping a Western audience in mind, painted these attacks as being perpetrated by Islamists as opposed to the dispossessed expressing their anger at the Egyptian government. As recently as February 2011, there was evidence of the expropriation of farmland by the government in Luxor (El Wakil and Sarant 2011). Since its implementation in 1991, ERSAP has gone hand in hand with repression in rural and urban Egypt, and indeed, these policies could not have been implemented had the regime been more democratic.

After more than two decades of neoliberalism, Egyptian society has become more unequal in terms of social power and wealth while levels of social conflict have increased every year along with a rise in the cost of living (rent, health care, education and food), a stagnation of wages and a rise in unemployment. Levels of poverty have intensified as a result of the mass privatisation of state enterprises and declining levels of subsidies for basic commodities. According to M. Riad El Ghonemy, the number of poor increased from 27.8 million in 1996 to 32.7 million in 2000 (El Ghonemy 2003, p. 5). At the beginning of 2011, 40% of Egypt's population lived below the poverty line of less than US\$2 a day, with unofficial unemployment levels reaching as high as 25% (Rodenbeck 2011). The 25 January uprising was thus the culmination of years of frustration by Egyptian workers and citizens who experienced economic austerity coupled with police brutality (Amar 2011b).

Possible outcomes of the uprising and the implications for neoliberalism

Some analyses of the revolution have already considered it to be a failure. For instance, Western powers, including the US, have expressed concern about the possibility of the

post-revolutionary electoral success of the Muslim Brotherhood, which they consider to be linked to al-Qaida, thereby endangering US strategic and economic interests in the region (Escobar 2011). However, neither the Americans nor European leaders expressed any support for the radical reforms that would resonate with the legitimate grievances of the Egyptian protestors. Instead they called for a transition that would maintain stability and peace in the region and in Egypt. Similarly, Robert Springborg, in his piece in *Foreign Policy* wrote that the military dominance of the Egyptian state after Mubarak leaves no room for democratic alternatives (Springborg 2011). Samir Amin argued that given the absence of strong workers' and peasants' organisations, it is very likely that Egypt might witness an alliance between the military and the Muslim Brotherhood (Amin 2011).

The threat of an Islamist turn in Egypt is not a serious one, but rather an implausible one that reflects the bias of the West which sees the region as a hub of Islamist activity. In reality, the Egyptian military, which receives annual military aid from the US, will not allow an Islamic shift in Egyptian society given its regional interests and close ties with the US. This is reflected in the fact that the Armed Forces Supreme Council announced a ban on religious parties on 28 March (*Al Masry Al Youm* 2011h). The military has assured Israel and the US that it will respect all past international treaties signed by Egypt (Egypt State Information Service 2011).

The Muslim Brotherhood, in a more democratic political environment, would have to adapt itself to increasing ideological competition as new political parties enter the political scene (Stein 2011, El-Hennawy 2011b). Mona Makram-Ebied suggests that the Brotherhood might evolve along the same lines as Europe's Christian Democratic parties (British Broadcasting Corporation 2011a). The Muslim Brotherhood has always been a proponent of the free market and therefore will not obstruct the current transitional government or a future government so long as its members are allowed to participate freely in the government. The Brotherhood has announced that it will form a political party – the Freedom and Justice Party – modelled after the Turkish Islamic Justice and Development Party. In the past two decades, businessmen linked to the Brotherhood have become integrated into the economy and will have a stake in any future government that allows it political and economic space.⁵

A recent positive development has been the re-emergence of the al-Wasat al-Gadida Party which existed as an illegal party from 1996 until 2006. The party is the alternative to the Muslim Brotherhood and is constituted by the more moderate members of the group. Their membership includes both Muslims and Christians and their vision of Egyptian society is an inclusive one, as opposed to the Muslim Brotherhood's main group. Their leader, Abou Elela Mady, recently stated the organisation's position as follows: 'We want freedom for Islamists and secular people, for believers and atheists, for men and women, for Muslims and Christians, for women who wear the headscarf and those who don't' (Reuters 2011b).

Given the unlikelihood of an Islamist takeover of the Egyptian state, I would suggest two possible scenarios that might come out of the current revolution. First, there is a potential for some form of corporatist rule where the military will continue to play an important role in the economy, but will at the same time purge the state and economy of corrupt businessmen and corrupt practices. A second scenario would be a radical transformation of economic and political arrangements and a larger role for workers and peasants in society. The second scenario would depend on a highly organised and sustained demand for change by social groups.

First scenario: the military's new role in post-revolutionary Egypt

Given the military's obsession with stability and order and given its important role in the transitional government, it seems likely that we will see a slowing down of the pace of neoliberal reform, if not an outright retrenchment of neoliberalism altogether. The fate of neoliberalism in Egypt depends as much on the military rulers' openness to protestors' demands as it depends on the mobilisation of the workers. According to a WikiLeaks cable from 2008, the Egyptian military is a 'force that generally stifles free market reform' (*The Guardian* 2011). In other instances, military leaders have been portrayed as 'old and resistant to change' which is also seen as contributing to the military's negative attitude towards free market reforms (Kirkpatrick 2011, Borger *et al.* 2011). In reality, it is not so much their opposition to the free market, but rather what they perceived to be the negative results of Egypt's emerging 'crony capitalism' that has shaped the military's attitude towards neoliberalism. The military believes that neoliberalism has bred corruption and has destabilised Egypt by intensifying poverty and social conflict. They have expressed their distrust of and disagreement with the ministers around Gamal Mubarak (Osman 2011a).

In the coming months, the military will continue to play an important role in redirecting the economy. It had previously intervened to put a halt to free market reform after the bread riots of 1977 under Sadat. More recently, Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, the Minister of Defence and Military Production and currently the head of the Council of Officers ruling Egypt, has strongly advocated government control of prices and production given the high levels of poverty and unemployment that brought millions to the streets of Egypt (Kirkpatrick 2011). It is possible that the military would curtail the role of crony capitalists in the economy. With the downfall of Hosni Mubarak, many past ministers in crucial posts of the government have been either arrested or are under investigation while their assets have been frozen (Osman 2011a, *The Guardian* 2011).

Twenty-eight businessmen have been accused of the illegal acquisition of state lands and the unauthorised conversion of desert farmland into tourist resorts in the West Delta region. Thousands of acres of land across Egypt fall under these cases (*Al Masry Al Youm* 2011b, Reuters 2011c). The military is also investigating the personal profits gained from the sale of state enterprises by Egyptian politicians and businessmen of the Mubarak era. Egypt's Illicit Gains Authority (IGA) has requested that the accumulated wealth of Hosni Mubarak and his family as well as the following ministers be investigated: Ahmed Ezz, the steel tycoon, former Tourism Minister Zuhair Garana, former Housing Minister Ahmed el-Maghrabi, Minister of Agriculture, Amin Abaza, Local Development Minister Othman Mohamed Othman, former Interior Minister Habib el-Adli, former Finance Minister Youssef Boutros Ghali and former Trade Minister Rachid Mohamed Rachid as well as a number of other ministers and NDP officials who have all been charged with profiteering (Kirkpatrick 2011; for a full list of names see El Badry 2011).

That said, the military cannot be seen as an agent for radical change towards a Nasserist style of socialism in Egypt, as some scholars have claimed it to be (Paul Sullivan cited in Kirkpatrick 2011). While the military did not take action against the protestors, neither did it show tolerance towards those demanding economic reforms. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) issued a warning against labour strikes stating that 'Noble Egyptians see that these strikes, at this delicate time, lead to negative results' (Charbel 2011b). Despite the Egyptian military's opposition to neoliberal reforms, they are nevertheless fundamentally supportive of the system of private property. One of the acts after the fall of

Mubarak was to forcefully evict residents who had occupied 650 housing units in the tourist resort of Hurgada and Ras Ghareb (*Al Masry Al Youm* 2011b). Thus a more realistic outcome might take some form of corporatist rule with the military offering bargaining rights to workers. Some Egyptian businessmen, who have gathered their wealth through public sector industries have also expressed agreement over a new deal that would revive the Egyptian economy (*Al Masry Al Youm* 2011f, Amar 2011b).

Since taking power, the military has had to make some concessions to the pro-democracy movement. For instance, Ahmed Shafiq, who was appointed prime minister by Hosni Mubarak during his last days in power, was replaced by Essam Sharaf, a former transport minister who spoke out against corruption during his time in power and who joined the protestors at Tahrir Square (British Broadcasting Corporation 2011c). The appointment of Sharaf was welcomed by January 25th supporters, as they saw his appointment as a fulfilment of one of their demands: namely having a civilian without a history of corruption in the post of prime minister (*Ahram online* 2011). The cabinet shuffle at the end of February 2011 resulted in a new cabinet made up of members of the Leftist Tagammu Party, the Wafd Party, and the Democratic Front Party (linked to Al Baradei), as well as two ministers sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood and critical of the Ahmed Nazif's neoliberal policies (Shehab 2011, Nassar 2011). In an attempt to take the protestors' demands into consideration, the army replaced 13 unpopular governors who were appointed by Hosni Mubarak. Besides appointing a progressive cabinet, Sharaf has purged the state owned media of Gamal Mubarak's friends and supporters (Osman 2011b).

Earlier, in the month of February 2011, the SCAF's appointment of Tareq Al-Bishri, an independent retired judge who headed the Constitutional Reform Committee, was seen as welcoming news to the pro-democracy protestors since Al-Bishri is a progressive judge who called for public disobedience in 2004 and supported the People's Campaign for Change (Browsers 2009, p. 114, Reuters 2011a).

The appointment of Samir Radwan as Egypt's Finance Minister cannot be seen as a very positive sign for workers who demand better wages and a reform of labour rights and pensions. Radwan was the senior economic advisor at the Egyptian Financial Supervisory Authority during the last government of Hosni Mubarak. He is no critic of neoliberal reforms and thinks that they should not be compromised in the coming months. He has suggested using public spending to launch a series of infrastructure projects that would create some of the badly needed jobs in the short term (Han 2011). In the long run, he believes that job creation will have to rely on an increase in the levels of foreign direct investment (FDI) (Radwan 2010). Recently Radwan asked the EU to write off Egypt's debt and extend unconditional loans in order for the transitional government to meet some of the demands of the workers and protestors (*Al Masry Al Youm* 2011d).

In short, it is doubtful that the Egyptian army and the current transitional government would support any radical redistribution of wealth in Egyptian society, unless the momentum by workers and protestors continue. Their investigation of the wealth of crony capitalists is an attempt to stabilise the revolutionary process, possibly through some form of populist redistributive policies. While some are doubtful of the intentions of the military and are sceptical about its desire to start a democratic process in the country, others are openly expressing their support for them believing that they can purge the country of corruption: 'We trust them', said Walid Rachid, a member of the April 6 Youth Movement that helped set off the revolt. 'Because of the army our revolution has become safe' (Kirkpatrick 2011).

Second scenario: potential for radical change

Another possible scenario is that a coalition of workers, peasants and various social movements will emerge that might push the revolution in a radical direction. There are a number of factors that might lead to this scenario. First, the uprising of 25 January brought to the streets people from all backgrounds and professions presenting a united front to the Mubarak regime. Their strength and unity throughout the 18 days was the force that ended the 30-year rule of Mubarak on 11 February 2011. These are remarkable developments in a society that has been under Emergency Law since 1981. The uprising itself marks the beginning of a radical social transformation whereby citizens have decided to actively participate in the politics of their society. The protestors' organisation and their strength in terms of numbers will continue to remain a force that the military cannot easily crush or ignore. The revolution has marked the beginning of a new dawn whereby the people have effectively expressed their will against their rulers. It seems that the revolution has already marked the beginning of what Paul Amar has called a 'new political society' which in itself is historically unprecedented (Amar 2011a). This new political society has been taking shape since February 2011. New political parties are being established, coalitions with common interests and goals are emerging and a new federation of independent trade unions has been formed.

In the 18 days of the revolt, workers across Egypt threw their support behind those protesting in Cairo and Alexandria demanding the end of Mubarak and his regime. Workers from the Ministries of Health and Aviation, from banks, from the State Atomic Agency, from Al-Azhar Hospital as well as public transportation workers actively participated in the protests (Rashed 2011, Azouz 2011). The protests and strikes of workers demanding better wages and working conditions continued all over the country even after Mubarak was deposed (British Broadcasting Corporation 2011a, McGreal 2011b). Workers also targeted their attacks against the official union (the state-controlled Egyptian Trade Union Federation, ETUF), demanding its dissolution and the investigation of its leaders, including the union president Hussein Megawer who was also 'a member of the Board of Directors of Suez Cement Company which yielded millions of Egyptian Pounds for him every year' (CTUWS 2011, see also Charbel 2011b).

While the army's seizure of power might have signalled a return to normalcy for some Egyptians, others have just begun their fight for change. Workers from a wide range of sectors have engaged in strike action. Emboldened by the removal of a corrupt head of state, bank workers have demanded the removal of their corrupt bosses, while demanding better working conditions and an increase in their wages. Workers from various ministries and economic sectors have also demanded wage increases and better benefits (*Al Masry Al Youm* 2011i). Even police officers have attempted to take advantage of this opportunity and transform the institution of the police by demanding living wages so that they would not have to resort to taking bribes.

The main accomplishment of the workers during the Days of Anger was the formation of a broad federation of independent trade unions on 30 January 2011. This was only the second independent trade union, CTUWS, which was born on 26 March 1990 following the strike of railway workers (1986) and steel workers (1989). On 19 February 2011, workers from various sectors, including pharmaceuticals, construction, transportation, information, health, postal services, public sector workers, military factories, and tax collectors published a list of their demands: raising the minimum wage and pension and offering unemployment benefits, all adjusted with rising prices; narrowing the gap between minimum wage and maximum wage so that the latter does not exceed 15 times the

former in order to stay true to the spirit of social justice as a pillar of the revolution; freedom to organise and form unions; job security, protection from arbitrary dismissals and an end to temporary contracts; renationalisation of privatised enterprises; removal of the corrupt managerial class who were involved in the sell-off of public sector enterprises; opening job opportunities for younger workers; price controls on goods and services to protect the poor; the rights of workers to strike and demonstrate; health care; and finally the dissolution of the official trade union (ETUF) and the investigation into the wealth of its leaders and other member unions. Workers have stated that without fulfilling these demands, the revolution would be a failure. The following excerpt from the declaration of the workers captures the significance of the revolution for workers in Egypt and why it is crucial to achieve economic rights alongside political rights:

It is our opinion that if this revolution does not lead to the fair distribution of wealth it is not worth anything . . . The right to vote is naturally dependent on the right to a loaf of bread. (Arabawy 2011b)

Thus for workers, economic rights go hand in hand with political rights. In post-Mubarak Egypt, protests have spread (Aswan, Ismailia, Mahalla el-Kobra in the Nile Delta, Qalyoubiya, Manoufiya, Damietta, Daqahliya, Kafr el Sheikh, Suez, Amriya, Alexandria, Beni Suef, Port Said, Cairo, Bahariya Oasis) with workers demanding job security, better wages and working conditions, regulation of environmental hazards, investigations into the regime's land policies and poor living conditions in the mines (*Al Masry Al Youm* 2011k, Shadid 2011). Strike action has been taken by public transport workers, Helwan Steel Mill workers, Helwan Al Nasr Company workers, sugar factory workers, oil workers, the Suez Canal workers, textile workers, steel workers, miners, pharmaceutical workers, chemical industries workers, Cairo airport workers, bank employees, minibus drivers, teachers, medical researchers as well as university students (Arabawy 2011a, *Al Masry Al Youm* 2011e).

There does not seem to be any sign that the military law passed on 28 March 2011 banning protests and strike action will slow down the pace or number of strikes. Indeed, they might increase in the coming days and weeks as protestors return to their work places with a renewed spirit of revolt against corruption, illegal practices and unfair wages and working conditions (Afify 2011). There is a potential for more progressive and democratic reforms given that protestors oppose the current dominant role of the military in the government and instead favour an increased role for civilians as well as demanding a new constitution (McGreal 2011a). Other possible positive outcomes could include free party politics, a new constitution that will embody the demands of workers and peasants, and the accountability of government officials through the curbing of corruption, increased monitoring of public expenditures, and the repatriation of stolen public wealth from abroad. The revolution is still in its early phases and Egyptians have already witnessed the arrest and investigation of past ministers and corrupt officials and businessmen, as well as the former president and his family. These investigations are unprecedented events not only in the country but also in the region.

Challenges ahead of the revolution

Challenges still lie ahead for the social forces seeking radical change. The lack of strong leadership remains a major weakness within the pro-democracy movement and will have a decisive influence on whether the movement can effectively challenge military rule/corporatism. This weakness can be exploited by the military in its attempts to derail the

revolution and undermine the interests of workers, peasants, and the unemployed. Strong leadership and a coherent ideology are needed as preconditions for forming democratic demands and pursuing those demands in the face of strong opposition from conservative forces in society (El-Hennawy 2011a). Recently the formation of an umbrella organisation – the Egyptian National Congress, or Egyptian Congress to Defend the Revolution – is a positive sign of cooperation and collaboration among the progressive forces that want to hold Egypt's military leaders accountable during this transition phase.

In his article titled 'Will the revolution turn right or left?', Egyptian journalist Amr Adly has provided a sober assessment of the class bias of the protests and how that could possibly determine the outcome of the reforms under the current military government. He writes that the protests were mainly organised by urban middle class cyber-activists who mainly demanded political rights. The military can more easily extend a series of political rights, but what worries the military is labour's demand for economic rights. If the revolution is stifled and conservative forces dominate its outcome, the chances are that labour will not gain much and instead the military will extend some political rights over economic and social rights. This might move Egypt more towards a Turkish form of democracy, where free elections provide space for Islamists and other centre-right parties while the military remains in control of its own economic interests and acts as a guardian of the constitution. If no strong, independent labour movement or political party representing the interests of such a labour movement emerges out of the recent spate of labour struggles, then it is likely that political divisions will be drawn 'along identitarian lines' such as religious sectarianism (Adly 2011).

The threat of counter revolution has been looming over Egypt ever since Mubarak was ousted from power. The increasing sectarian clashes in recent weeks has been interpreted as a clear sign of a counter revolution supported either by remnants of the Mubarak regime and/or by the Saudis who are fearful of any potential revolutionary outcomes.⁶ This fear has been aggravated by Egypt's opening towards Iran.⁷ Other conservative Gulf States are worried about the spillover of revolutionary change from Egypt to their countries. Therefore, the rich oil states have been using their investments to shape the course of the revolution. More importantly they want to prevent Mubarak from being brought to justice as it would set a precedent in a region where absolute monarchs and authoritarian rulers have ruled for decades. The power of these conservative states is considerable, with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait constituting three of the largest investors in Egypt, and as destinations for Egyptian migrant workers (Massad 2011, Strasser 2011). The United States and the IMF are also potential counter-revolutionary actors. In his speech of 19 May 2011, beside the one billion dollar of debt relief, President Barak Obama announced an aid package for Egypt tied to the promotion of the private sector. He also stated that he had instructed the IMF and the World Bank to arrange an economic recovery plan for Egypt in the next Group of Eight (G8) summit at the end of May 2011. These attempts of the US to 'buy off' the transitional government clearly disregard the will of those Egyptians who protested against the neoliberal policies promoted by the IMF and enacted by Mubarak.

There are further concerns. The plight of rural Egyptians also remains a grave concern. Despite the geography of the protests spanning across Egypt, it seems that the goals and demands of the uprising were determined by the urban educated youth and did not reflect the demands of rural parts of Egypt (El Rashidi 2011a).⁸ The weight of urban revolt depended on the large number of educated youth who could march in the streets and pose a threat to the stability of the regime. In rural Egypt, as Rodenbeck writes, the police and the power of the *ancien régime* remain intact (Rodenbeck 2011a). With the rural population continuing to remain unrepresented in Cairo, and a labour movement that has had very little experience with independent trade unionism, challenging the neoliberal economic structures put in

place during the past 20 years will not be an easy task in the coming months and years. Another important concern relates to the role of women in post-revolutionary Egypt. The constitutional committee has excluded women from participating in constitutional changes that will affect their lives, a concern that was expressed on the occasion of International Women's Day (Brown, W. 2011). Finally, pro-democracy activists and new political parties have expressed concern about the timing of the parliamentary and presidential elections to be held in September and November 2011 respectively. They argue that they will have very little time to prepare and launch effective campaigns. The election timing might work to the advantage of existing politicians and parties and those with sufficient funds to finance quick and successful campaigns (El Rashidi 2011b, Osman 2011c).

Conclusion

In this paper, I have suggested two potential scenarios emerging out of the current struggles in Egypt. The first scenario would see a slowing down of neoliberalism, with a limited number of reforms in the interest of workers. A second scenario would entail ongoing mobilisation and pressure by workers, students, and peasants across Egypt demanding a radical retrenchment of neoliberalism.

The Egyptian people rejected neoliberalism when they took to the streets with a united voice and demanded Mubarak's resignation and the end of his regime on 25 January 2011. It is undeniable that these protests and revolts are unprecedented in that they mark the beginning of a new era in mass mobilisation and anti-government protest after 30 years under an autocratic regime. The Egyptian people confronted the authoritarian regime by getting rid of their fears of the state and its oppressive arm, namely the Ministry of the Interior and its police force. Police stations were attacked and destroyed. The symbol of state oppression, the state security apparatus, was dismantled on 5 March, signalling the end of public silence against torture and arbitrary power of the state.

The revolution has shaken up Egyptian society and unleashed a social force that demands democratic rights to determine who governs Egypt. As Slavoj Žižek aptly put it, the Egyptian revolution was a 'universal revolution for dignity, human rights, economic justice – universalism at work' (*Aljazeera English online* 2011). Indeed, the revolution demonstrated that for people of Egypt and for Arabs in the Middle East, the choice is not necessarily between autocratic dictatorship and radical Islamism. People's democracy is about freedom and dignity. By opening up space for popular struggles and mass protests the revolution carries the potential for building a progressive, democratic society.

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Note on contributor

Angela Joya is currently completing her doctoral dissertation on the changing patterns of property relations (focus on housing) under neoliberalism in Egypt.

Notes

1. In the case of Egypt, crony capitalism refers to a coalition of new ruling elite that was constituted of former state bureaucrats and rent seeking urban and rural elites who benefited from a process of

- free market reforms due to their privileged access to political networks of power within the state (Henry and Springborg 2001, pp. 154, 162, King 2007, pp. 439, 446. For crony capitalism under Sadat see Waterbury 1983, p. 432, and Sadowski, 1991 who examines the role of crony capitalism in the development of agribusiness, especially in the 1980s in Egypt).
2. During the Second Cairo Investment Forum (9–10 December 2007) attended by the author, these links were quite apparent as different panels made up of agri-business, land developers and government officials including Gamal Mubarak agreed about the direction of economic policy and presented a united front on stating the goals of industry and agriculture. See <http://www.iktissadevents.com/events/CIF/2/profile>
 3. Amira Howeidly reported that others sources estimated the number of dissent action against the Mubarak regime in 2010 anywhere from ‘900-1,000, maybe more’ (Howeidly, 2010–11).
 4. In 1997 when Law 96/1992 took effect, a Saudi Prince Al-Walid purchased 100,000 acres of land at a cost of LE50 per acre or less than US\$10 per acre, a deal facilitated by then minister of agriculture, Youssef Wali. Called as the Toshka Project, this mass of land was supposed to launch a successful agri-business providing local jobs through export of vegetables. However, in 2010 investigations found out that the project, despite consuming unlimited resources and public financing for infrastructure, had failed to fulfil its initial promises. Recently, the military rulers of Egypt forced Al-Walid to return 75,000 acres of the land to the Egyptian state (*Al Masry Al Youm* 2011).
 5. In a recent article on the Muslim Brotherhood, Philip Marfleet has stated that the Brotherhood benefited from Sadat’s policies of liberalisation and in the course of the 1980s they increased their economic power. Currently they control ‘40% of all private economic ventures’ (Marfleet 2011, Naguib 2009, p. 115). The Brotherhood’s openness to free market policies was also emphasised by Mohammed Habib, then Deputy Supreme Guide of the Brotherhood (Author’s interview with Mohammed Habib. Cairo, January 2006).
 6. Sectarian clashes first appeared in November of 1972 under Anwar Sadat. Sadat had groomed fundamentalist Islamist groups which he used to crush the Nasserists and leftists. By the time his political rivals were defeated, the Islamist groups too had become autonomous and began pursuing their own agendas. For more on this history, see Ansari 1986, pp. 175–176.
 7. Israel too has been watching Egyptian developments closely as Cairo united the two Palestinian factions in early 2011. Egypt’s plan to permanently open the Gaza–Egypt border is also worrying Israel.
 8. In the recent months, the Land Center for Human Rights has documented the case of two villages (Moses and ElKhadr) in the governorate of Fayoum where 10,000 villagers decided to form a union. Since their announcement, the village authorities have cut off water, health services and electricity while restricting access to food. The villagers are determined to pursue the formation of a union, but they are afraid of being starved by the village authorities because of their decision and have thus appealed to the military rulers of Egypt (Land Center for Human Rights 2011).

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DEBATE

Achieving equitable water use in the Nile Basin: time to refocus the discourse on collective human security?

Janot Mendler de Suarez*

Independent consultant

Introduction

The steadily declining waters of Lake Victoria – shared by Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, and fed by Rwandan and Burundian river systems, link East Africa's great lakes as headwaters of the White Nile. From Lakes Kyoga, and Albert – with its catchment shared with the Democratic Republic of Congo – it flows into Southern Sudan and through the capital city, Juba, continuing north. The Blue Nile rises from Lake Tana and river-fed headwaters in the Ethiopian highlands and Eritrea, descending to a visible confluence with the White Nile in northern Sudan at Omdurman near Khartoum, and the combined waters flow on through Egypt to the great Nile delta in the Mediterranean. With the independence of Southern Sudan in 2011, the Nile river now links 11 countries sharing the basin.¹ While water itself remains the most vital, obvious and historically shared resource provided by this massive eco-hydrological system, its largely colonial-era allocation arrangements (including military enforcement) fail to equitably or sustainably address the needs of the growing populations, developing economies, evolving socio-political ecology and climate-related constraints of today's independent riparian states. Whether upstream

or downstream, the social and political discourse of security has the potential to either unite or incite, and nowhere is the duality of conflict potential versus cooperation potential more volatile than in the Nile basin in the wake of the independence of Southern Sudan, the Egyptian revolution and wider transitions of the Arab Spring.

This is the right moment to examine over a decade of dialogue and investment (largely from outside the region) in participatory processes as a sort of practical method of building trust, through cooperation in programmes and projects designed to increase shared benefits from the use of Nile basin resources, which have been primarily aimed at building foundations for regional economic interdependence. Yet these processes have been unable to mobilise significant civil society 'demand' for cooperation, or to effectively engage the populations of the Nile basin countries in a shared vision sufficient to actually reduce the risks of regional conflict over increasingly scarce natural resources. While the role of Egypt remains pivotal to, and could still trigger dissolution of years of hard-won progress in Nile cooperation, Egypt's revolution reveals latent impetus for the kind of pluralistic engagement required to realign perceptions of national security with a more promising collective human security. This could serve to transition 'water security' which from a negotiating standpoint has been termed a 'non-legal, indeterminate, and potentially

*Email: JanotMendlerF98@alumni.tufts.edu

disruptive concept'² (also inherently militaristic) into a broader social and humanitarian discourse in which basin cooperation contributes to comprehensive human security through enhanced food security, health, livelihoods, energy, environmental and social adaptive capacity and resilience. This more integral framing, supported by the collective nature of the growing threats of climate change impacts, could help to constructively refocus a new discourse of the 'common good' in the Nile Basin.³ This paper further suggests that emerging trends in wider Islamic dialogue may offer a unique contribution that could help to revitalise a more participative and pluralistic path to cooperation, social and environmental resilience, durable peace and prosperity among all Nile basin riparians.

Two steps forward, three back?

In the wake of strides made in the 1990s, notably in the creation of a regional network of hydrometeorological expertise and a focus on scientific and technical cooperation to improve the fisheries and management of East Africa's great lakes, coupled with a resurgence of interest in strengthening regional economic communities on the African continent, the time was ripe for the Nile basin-wide dialogue process which was to forge a 'shared vision' of cooperation. With significant guidance and support from the World Bank, the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) was established in 1999 by the Water Affairs ministers of Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda (with Eritrea as an observer) as a partnership 'to achieve sustainable socio-economic development through the equitable utilisation of, and benefit from, the common Nile Basin water resources.'⁴ Implicit was the eventual development of a regional river basin authority, but the lessons of failed 'top-down' development

initiatives were then fresh, and the NBI championed a balanced approach to implementation of this shared vision through the articulation of an action programme that would build trust through cooperation in the generation of substantial new social and economic benefits (such as power-sharing), to promote regional peace and security. This was driven by an unprecedented level of support from the World Bank,⁵ which rallied the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the European Union (EU), the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and a coalition of international environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as the International Consortium for Cooperation on the Nile (ICCON). Its first convening, in Geneva in 2001, raised US\$140 million in initial aid. Basin-wide projects were designed to establish foundations for trust and cooperative action, with two 'subsidiary' investment programmes geared respectively to the countries sharing the Blue Nile and to those sharing the East African lakes catchment, both ostensibly to promote economic development and environmental management for the benefit of all the peoples of the Nile Basin.

The 'shared vision' of a much broader spectrum of existing and potential benefits, to be realised through a regional programme of actions, was ultimately aimed at building the social and economic infrastructure of interdependence, while at the same time enabling progress towards a negotiated River Nile Cooperative Framework Agreement. This agreement would reflect a functionalist consensus on advancing regional development and security – and thus succeed the fragmented and largely colonial-era water-sharing agreements which can no longer meet the exigencies of the independent states of the basin region today.

Egypt, almost totally dependent on the Nile (which provides 95% of its water needs)⁶, is experiencing the impacts of a changing climate, including the looming

prospect of dramatic declines in Nile delta agriculture due to sea-level rise and saline intrusion, compounded by serious water shortages predicted within the present decade. Under the terms of the 1929 Nile Water Treaty, revised in 1959 with riparians then under British colonial rule, Egypt is guaranteed 55.5 billion cubic metres a year – about two-thirds of about 84 billion cubic metres mean annual flow. Ethiopia is the source of about 85% of this, with the balance draining from the Nile Equatorial lake systems and Sudan's (significantly lesser) quota allocations, which are also maintained under the terms of the colonial treaty. While Egypt has long asserted the Nile to be its primary source of fresh water, in 2010 former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's water minister proclaimed Nile water a matter of 'life and death', contrasting Egypt with other Basin states that have 'plentiful alternative water sources'.⁷ However, Kenya credits Lake Victoria with more than half of its surface water resources, and lake riparian states share deep concerns about falling water levels which are generally attributed to increased evaporation due to global warming.⁸

Although historically the most economically powerful Nile state, many Egyptians believe their country to be the most vulnerable to water stress.⁹ This perceived insecurity has periodically prompted the threat or exercise of military superiority to (successfully) dissuade upstream riparians from challenging Egypt's historical water quotas.¹⁰ In addition, this periodic posturing, whether in official pronouncements or with the mobilisation of troops, serves to entrench an unfortunate skewing of public perceptions concerning water security. Water security based on river water flows cannot actually be achieved without managing the hydrological system responsible for the flows in an integrated and sustainable manner. This is really a matter of environmental security. In order to balance the multiple benefits which can be

derived from the multiple and potentially conflicting uses of river basin resources, cooperation is required among different users and sectors to fairly meet the needs of all people. Hence the environmental security of the basin as a productive resource system is actually a key element in the collective human security of the people living in and the countries dependent upon the resources of the Nile river system.

The 1994 United Nations Human Development Report defined human security as a concern with human life and dignity – not with weapons (UNDP 1994). The 1999 International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change definition of human security as a flux 'where people and communities have the capacity to manage stresses to their needs, rights and values' includes both the root causes of vulnerability and the means to address them (Barnett *et al.* 2003):

Human security . . . is achieved when and where individuals and communities have the options necessary to end, mitigate or adapt to threats to their human, environmental, and social rights; have the capacity and freedom to exercise these options; and actively participate in pursuing these options. (cited in Barnett *et al.* 2003)

In the contemporary context water security is a narrowly framed misnomer which invokes military defence of entitlement to a guaranteed quota of Nile river flow, and thus conflates the more significant (and little acknowledged by any Egyptian government to date) issue of Egypt's human security in the face of multiple factors – including growing populations with changing demographics, unplanned development, bad management and degradation of natural resources, lack of agency or weak institutional and legal setups, and a changing climate.¹¹

Notwithstanding this, Egypt has been an active and committed proponent of the

NBI process to achieve a greater common good through collaborative exploitation and distribution of benefits derived from the Nile basin as a common and regenerative resource system. Egypt, with all of the basin states, has also engaged creatively in over a decade of negotiations dedicated to the joint articulation of a Nile Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA). But for a few bracketed words in a single 'water security' clause – reserving to Egypt and Sudan the right of veto on any Nile basin projects which could affect the status quo of their quotas – consensus was reached in 2010 on the principles and articles of a draft Cooperative Framework to establish an inclusive legal and institutional transboundary regime. Egypt and Sudan strenuously opposed moving forward until the disputed security clause could be resolved, while the upstream countries argued in favour of moving forward in order not to stall progress in establishing a basin commission (with a legal framework within which the issue could presumably be further deliberated to reach resolution).

In May 2010, seven of the upstream countries decided to open the Agreement on the Nile River Basin Cooperative Framework for signature, for a period of one year, until 13 May 2011. The decision was rejected by Egypt and Sudan on the grounds that the NBI States had agreed in previous meetings of the Council of Ministers (NILE-COM) to negotiating rules which specified that a text would be adopted and opened for signature only with consensus of all basin states. Signatories Ethiopia, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya viewed opening of the CFA for signature to be, in the words of the Ethiopian minister, 'a landmark event, the realization of a goal toward which we all have been working for over a decade now [which] marks the long distance we have cooperatively traversed to reach a level of trust and confidence that has enabled us to achieve a historic Framework

Agreement that is fair, benefits all of us, harms none of us and leaves none of us out' (NBI 2010a). Uganda's minister asserted that 'considering that all the principles and articles of the draft Cooperative Framework were discussed by the countries and consensus reached on all except for one clause under Article 14b on Water Security it is appropriate that this document is opened for signature to pave the way for establishment of the Nile River Basin Commission' (*ibid.*) The alternative proposed by Egypt and Sudan – to move forward on formal establishment of the Nile Basin Commission, and to continue negotiating the terms of the disputed articles of the CFA – was rejected by the upstream countries. Egypt considered the signing by five upstream states of a draft text to be a unilateral action in breach of the agreed NBI procedures and principles, and responded by transferring responsibility for Nile cooperation from the Irrigation and Foreign ministries to the National Security Authority, and reportedly froze all cooperation with the basin countries that signed (Hussein 2010).

The Nile Ministers in charge of Water Affairs from nine basin states convened a month later and agreed to address the request of Egypt and Sudan to discuss the legal and institutional implications of signing the draft CFA. The convening purpose of the meeting, however, was to review progress on NBI activities and approve the work plan and budget for the fiscal year 2010/2011 – which Egypt and Sudan declined to approve. In November 2010 the Nile Basin Trust Fund (NBTF) met to review NBI's progress, both in the implementation of basin activities and towards financial sustainability. With the end of the NBI Institutional Strengthening Project in 2012 approaching, and closure of the Trust Fund in 2013 to follow, Uganda's minister for water and environment alluded to an already perceptible impasse in appealing to NBI's 10 development partners to financially support a

revival of confidence-building activities among the NBI member countries.¹² The fifth in a Strategic Dialogue series was soon organised 'to strengthen the engagement between the Nile Technical Advisory Committee members and Development Partners' and to provide NBI with 'strategic guidance and technical support on key issues', indicative of growing anxiety as to the continuation of external financial support, without which the momentum of the CFA is extremely unlikely to be sustainable (NBI 2010b).

One elephant in the room has been the history of Egyptian aggression in response to any perceived threats to its Nile water entitlement. While Egypt is perceived to be prepared to secure its water rights with troops if need be, the relative military might of Egypt could be said to have served well as a deterrent to infringement. Over the decades since Africa's independence era, it would appear to have been particularly effective in deterring Sudan from contemplating any deviation from the status quo. Another pachyderm is the independence of Southern Sudan, which as a new basin state would have been entitled to sign the Agreement while still open for signature until mid May 2011. An analysis commissioned by UNDP and published by the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) in December 2010 determined that independent Southern Sudan, with many more pressing issues, could perhaps best take a 'wait and see' position to observe for a time how the CFA and NBI processes advance. The SIWI report anticipated a posture of silence in the short term as the best strategy to buy valuable time in order to assess the benefits of alignment with either the downstream or upstream countries. Southern Sudan might benefit from maintaining historical cooperation with Egypt, in particular with respect to possible infrastructure investment in the development of its Nile River resources. On the other hand, Southern Sudan has already established

strong ties with the East African Economic Community countries, which are its most important trading partners (Granit *et al.* 2010).

The risk that could stampede the Nile CFA herd is largely in the hands of Egypt's new government. In hailing a new era of cooperation and a relaxation of tensions with Ethiopia over water quotas (based on promises of Egyptian cooperation in a major Ethiopian dam project which has for all intents and purposes bypassed the CFA), Egypt's water minister was reported on 3 May 2011 to have said that 'we can expect increased cooperation between Egypt and Ethiopia in all areas' and that 'Egypt is concerned not to refuse any project that is in the benefit of Ethiopian and the other Nile Basin countries as long as such projects do not negatively affect its water quota' (Ahrmonline 2011). This would seem to be an invitation to join and reinforce a downstream coalition of CFA-spurners, who implicitly agree to solidarity in maintaining status quo flow quotas. The implied rewards would be Egyptian support for projects which might benefit Ethiopia, Sudan, or Southern Sudan – while protecting Egypt's existing water quotas from renegotiation. The benefits to Southern Sudan in particular of trade and cooperation with the upstream East African basin countries may risk being manipulated into competition with a downstream coalition (Nicol and Cascão 2011). This manner of factionalising could seriously erode the fragile foundations for basin-wide cooperation which the 10 Nile basin countries have managed to achieve, with significant international assistance, in over a decade of joint work.

In welcoming a European Commission delegation on 4 May 2011 to the NBI secretariat in Entebbe, the NBI executive director (a rotational position held by Dr. Wael Khairy of Egypt) pleaded with the European Commission to continue to provide financial and technical support to

the NBI beyond the end of its Trust Fund in 2013, noting that:

The current political context has slowed the pace of the technical track of the NBI including the progress of activities, the implementation of the NBI programs and projects, as well as the NBI operation, contractual commitments of several consultants contracts . . . and the rift among the riparian countries has also affected the execution of the Subsidiary Action Programs particularly at the Eastern Nile. (NBI 2011b)

Virtually all achieved to date would appear to be at risk of dissolution.

Listening to the discourse in the basin

The focus of this paper is on a new avenue of pluralistic discourse that could at once derive lessons from the fragility of the current state of Nile cooperation, and also help to open space for a more inclusively pluralistic platform to forge new alliances. There is a need to effect coherence among different constituencies facing seemingly disparate yet interlinked threats to human security, many of which can best be managed through coordination, cooperation, and collaboration at the scale of the shared hydrographic system – yet if mismanaged will assuredly aggravate instability, insecurity and human suffering throughout the basin for decades to come.

The clear and present need for joint efforts to increase stakeholder participation as a means to enhance cooperation along the Nile was highlighted in a January 2010 regional multi-stakeholder forum, co-organised by NBI with the Nile Basin Discourse (NBD)¹³ and the Global Water Partnership (GWP).¹⁴ Priority development needs that can be met through cooperation and shared benefits were identified: challenges to policy and practice; opportunities for cooperation in the management of Nile Basin resources; the need for shared plans and strategies to come to terms with the

priority challenges of climate change and development. These are certainly pragmatic issues around which cooperation has and can certainly be further rallied. Given the fragility of NBI, at a time when donors may be reluctant to step up without a clear path through the political stalemate (which is blocking progress towards the establishment of a basin commission), an intentional strategy to eschew the political arena may be the best way to revive the shared vision approach. It is important to avoid situations where no one can back down without losing face. In the words of Ethiopia's water minister 'a treaty cannot be unsigned' (Lirri 2011) – and a government which has characterised its non-signature as a matter of national security cannot risk the political fallout of appearing to give in. The purpose of this paper is to suggest that another perspective altogether may be needed to consolidate and expand civil society engagement, one which can reframe the issues through a wider and more inclusive human security discourse concerned with principles of development and social justice.

The Nile Basin Discourse held a sub-regional forum in March 2011 in Cairo to discuss the benefits of cooperation and costs of non-cooperation under the theme: 'Shared Waters, Shared Opportunities'. Serious concerns for the sustainability of the Regional Integrated Watershed Management Programme were revealed. Questions as to community benefits, lack of meaningful community participation in implementation, and inadequate compensation to local communities for their contribution to critical aspects of watershed management were cited. Similarly, the Regional Cooperation and Institutional Strengthening Programme (ISP) was found to still lack consensus among some riparian countries in the process of advancing Nile Basin Cooperation. Additional problems identified were failure to mainstream the role and place of civil society in the institutionalisation of the Nile Basin

Cooperation, and low awareness and uncertainty on the transition process after the lapse of the ISP (Weddi 2011). The Nile Basin Shared Vision Programme, complemented by its subsidiary action programmes, was expected to generate the institutional, technical, knowledge and communications, transportation, market, energy and physical infrastructure for integrated management of the natural capital stocks of the Nile basin system. This was in turn expected to unleash the shared benefits of development across multiple sectors fuelled by multiple uses of water and a wider spectrum of basin resources. After over a decade of effort to forge cooperation under this aegis, poverty and food security remain chronic problems while water scarcity, economic and climate security are arguably of greater concern to greater numbers of people within the Nile Basin today than in 2001 when the donor community celebrated the ‘unprecedented level of cooperation’ in launching the Nile Basin Initiative.

To reinvigorate Basin cooperation from the ground up, increased efforts need to be made to address the shortcomings identified through these stakeholder dialogues. Specifically, a focus at the national level to ensure the meaningful inclusion and participation of local communities, including women and the most marginalised, in Nile Basin Initiative processes. Without addressing these failings identified by recent stakeholder dialogues in the subsidiary basin regions, the political process will remain a non-starter.

What constitutes meaningful inclusion, and what are the barriers that must be overcome to achieve it in the context of basin cooperation for human security?

Social, cultural and spiritual drivers: a return to first principles

A pragmatic focus on building interdependence through shared economic benefits is unlikely to unlock the political deadlock.

To bridge the gulf in perceptions of what constitutes water security between upstream and downstream states, a shift in the discourse is also needed. The motivational roots of collective human security are of a more social, cultural and spiritual nature, which might offer a way forward that is also a key to making more meaningful inclusion possible. Social discourse on shared values and the principles they reflect is likely to be provocative, but is at the root of human security, and might just open a creative path for deep trust to flourish among people in the basin states – and is therefore worthy of serious consideration.

By focusing on shared values and the cultural and spiritual roots that anchor social norms, a new kind of common ground can perhaps be cultivated, from which confidence in a more broadly and actively shared vision of peace and prosperity for all in the Nile basin region can grow. One source of passionate cohesion (as well as conflict) is religion, and rather than avoid the subject of Islam as potentially incendiary, in light of the events that have begun to transform society in Egypt and other countries in the Muslim world, this may be precisely the right time for a fresh look into relevant Islamic principles and for interfaith dialogue around fairness and equity as a new lens through which to refocus and mobilise greater public and civil society participation in Nile Basin cooperation.

The revolutions in early 2011 which swept Egypt and other Islamic countries almost overnight are fundamentally concerned with equity and social action for the common good. This has opened a fresh and inclusive space for creative and pluralistic dialogue. Why not take the opportunity to call for upstream/downstream discussion both among Muslim constituencies within the basin, and between members of the many different faiths that inspire and influence the motivations of people in the basin to engage in social

action? While the top-down political process is stalled, the importance of opening new entry points for civil society to carry the Nile cooperation discourse on the common good forward is particularly important. Exploration of shared values and principles that transcend differences offers a means to bring new impetus and clarity to the meaning of ‘shared vision’ at the grass-roots.

Islam and the social ecology of religion

Islam has much to say about the two basic questions with which we are confronted as individuals and as organised societies: how to get along with each other, and how to do so without degrading our life support system – the earth’s environment. Some Muslim scholars assert that Islamic law establishes values and principles that should govern the use of land, water, vegetation, livestock and wildlife, but that modern Muslim societies have forgotten these aims, principles and institutions (Foltz *et al.* 2003, Khalid and O’Brien 1997, Rauf 2004). Some of these vital yet little-recognised areas of Islamic law include:

- A basis for human rights for women in the context of ecological justice, to promote equal access to natural as well as social resources (Foltz *et al.* 2003).
- *Ihya* whereby a person who revives degraded land may take possession of it.¹⁵
- *Iqta* provides for the state to grant unclaimed or state-owned land to those willing to take responsibility for reviving and cultivating the land for the benefit of themselves or the community.
- *Ijarah* allows for the contractual leasing of land by its owners in order to make specific improvements or to cultivate specific crops.¹⁶

- Zones around water resources are known as *harim* which can be individually owned (around a well) but the banks of watercourses are generally managed by the state for the public good.
- Areas of land protected for the public good are known as *hima* and could presumably include aquifer recharge zones.
- *Waqf* is a kind of public trust whereby land can be dedicated as a charitable endowment for the public good, and to be successful require standards for good management.
- *Hisbah* is the office responsible for the inspection and enforcement of standards, and would thus require specific expertise, for example in the construction of dams or irrigation systems. Water resources are subject to classification under Islamic law, and large permanently flowing rivers may be freely used by anyone, with smaller rivers subject to the proviso that no harm is done to local people (depriving them of their water) (Khalid and O’Brien 1997).

Resource allocation is thus subject to local circumstances. Ascertaining local water rights would seem to offer a basis for discussion of the ethical and fair rights of riparians to the use of Nile water using these principles. Such Islamic principles could also apply to discussion of the restrictions which have been imposed on use of the resources of the Lake Victoria and other East African lake basins, the sustainable management of which are contingent upon transboundary cooperation. The Islamic principle of doing no harm is also a key element in the UN Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses, to date signed by none of the Nile Basin states. A key lesson from the United Nations Commission for Europe (UNECE) is that a sound legal

framework, which the Nile CFA is a foundation of, is essential to stable and reliable cooperation (Bernardini 1997).

Islam offers a novel platform for discourse concerned with collective human security in that there is no separation between the 'laws of nature' and those of a moral character that govern human society. The same (divine) reality is reflected in both. However, in contrast with nature, humans have the ability and freedom of choice, to obey or disobey this natural law. The struggle in every moment of decision can be construed as the essence of *jihad*: the moral obligation to choose to do the right thing, to do that which will cause no harm to nature or other people (Nasr 1996). It has been suggested that through a revival of Islamic principles relevant to human relationships with each other and with nature, a sort of 'green jihad' could arise, animated by a renewed responsibility for stewardship of nature, symbolised by Islam's most exalted colour, the colour which symbolises the Prophet Mohamed, which is green.¹⁷

Conclusion

In any faith tradition, the expected outcome of dialogue is a heightened sense of connection to and understanding of the natural order, and the reaffirmation of the link between ourselves and the human family with whom we share both the responsibility to steward, and to share equitably the benefits of, the natural world. Discussion about values and principles across different faiths enables us to see from the perspectives of others, the sacred, both in nature and in people akin to and different from ourselves. This motivates the desire to engage, to treat each other and our natural resource systems with a dignity and respect fundamental to human security, and also reminds us how precious is each part of a unified and yet infinitely diverse whole.

There is potential for Islam to play either a disruptive or a revitalising role in the processes of Nile Basin cooperation. By the same token, the pro-democracy uprisings in Islamic countries may contribute to either entrenching, or triggering divestiture of, the trappings of culture and tradition that restrict civil liberties and obstruct regional cooperation at the basin scale.

Insofar as the discourse of some leading Muslims in North America has begun to espouse democratic principles as inherent in Islam, there is potential for a similarly liberating thought process to catalyse a new understanding that can inspire unity of purpose within the Nile basin. In the melting pot of the United States, Muslims converging in communities composed of people with vastly different cultural backgrounds begin to discover that some restrictive practices which have come to be attributed to Islam may actually be rooted in pre-Islamic tradition, and have no place in today's Islam. Some of these are for example the loss of the rule of law or an independent judiciary, and the oppression of women. A thoughtful imam in New York makes the case that when Muslims from diverse backgrounds find themselves free to live and express Islam in an open and democratic society, they are likely to discover that Islam in fact supports social cohesion and cooperation for the common good – in ways that can inspire collective responsibility for stewardship of shared natural resources and genuine cooperation across all faiths and ethnicities, including working for social inclusion and gender equity (Rauf 2004). If this is the case there may good reason to create intentional dialogue around the social equity and environmental principles and values of Islam both among disparate Muslim constituencies and among different faith groups within the Nile Basin. Of course, inclusive and pluralistic dialogue should be specifically designed so that

secular participation in such discourse is explicitly welcome.

Examination of the common and fundamentally religious principles that underpin the issues of concern to human security – dignity, integrity, fairness, justice, gender equity, inclusion of the marginalised, respect for all fellow human beings and personal responsibility for natural resource systems as part of the shared and divine order of nature – can inspire social action and may prove to be the discourse that can transcend the divisiveness and dead-end traps of dressing water cooperation in the wolf's clothing of national security.

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Note on contributor

Janot Mendler de Suarez dedicated 11 years to participative peer learning and knowledge-sharing dialogue for water cooperation supported by the Global Environment Facility. She serves on the Council of Advisors for the University of Massachusetts–Boston Collaborative Institute on Oceans Climate and Security, and co-chairs the Global Oceans Forum working group on Oceans, Climate and Security.

Notes

1. Eritrea is technically a catchment riparian, but has only been included with observer status in Nile Basin negotiations.
2. Mekonnen (2011) further suggests that the introduction of the discourse of water security is 'an unwarranted move pushing into further obscurity the already

intractable Nile waters question, at best, and a logical cul-de-sac in the decade-long negotiations which have arguably fallen prey to the hegemonic compliance-producing mechanism of "securitization" sneaked in under the veil of "water security", at worst.'

3. The platform of 'common good' is of interest to the Global Water Partnership – Eastern Africa, with offices embedded in the Nile Basin Initiative secretariat in Entebbe, Uganda.
4. This is the defining statement of the Nile Basin Initiative. <http://www.nilebasin.org/>
5. Then World Bank President James Wolfensohn committed to raise \$20 billion in support over 20 years to achieve the poverty reduction, environmental protection and peace-building mission of the Nile Basin Initiative.
6. See: <http://watersecurity.wordpress.com/2011/02/23/mubaraks-fall-and-the-future-of-the-nile-basin/>
7. Quoted in <http://watersecurity.wordpress.com/2011/02/23/mubaraks-fall-and-the-future-of-the-nile-basin/> [Accessed 14 May 2011].
8. Personal conversations with the executive secretary of the Lake Victoria Basin Commission.
9. What many Egyptians may not know is that Egypt is actually second to Burundi, which has been found to be 50% more water stressed according to standard hydrological water stress indicators (WSI). Furthermore, a study which applied social water stress indicators (SWSI) based on UNDP Human Development Report (HDI) data to incorporate measures of adaptive capacity, found Burundi to be about four times more socially water stressed, and due to its relatively higher social adaptive capacity, Egypt ranked fifth for social water stress of the eight basin countries compared (Ohlsson and Applegren 1998).
10. See, for example, <http://ethiopiaforums.com/egypt-military-preparing-for-war-with-ethiopia> [Accessed 14 May 2011].
11. Barnett (2003) warns that positing climate change as a security issue risks making it a military rather than a foreign policy problem, and an issue of sovereignty rather than a global commons problem.
12. CIDA, Denmark, the European Commission, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and

- the World Bank have provided a total amount of US\$191.54 million, with a net investment income of US\$9.87 million.
13. NBD enables the civil society organisations working on Nile Basin Cooperation and Development issues to add value to the inter-governmental programmes and processes. NBD is a network of civil society organisations with its secretariat base in Entebbe, Uganda. NBD works with national partners, its membership understand national issues, and provide NBD with the skills and support to help it set up and manage practical and sustainable projects that meet the real needs of the communities. The national members are the National Discourse Forums in the 10 riparian states (Burundi, DRC, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda). NBD also works regionally and internationally to change policy and practice and ensure that issues of Nile Cooperation and Development are brought to fore and play a vital role in reducing poverty in the Nile Basin. Available from: <http://www.nilebasindiscourse.org/> [Accessed 15 May 2011].
 14. GWP's regional Nile Basin partnership is embedded in the NBI.
 15. So long as the general welfare of the community and environment are not harmed.
 16. This includes the development of public works such as water systems as well as the supervision of sensitive lands to protect or restore them.
 17. Attributed by Denny (2004) to Kaveh L. Afrasiabi, 1995. Toward an Islamic ecotheology. *Hamdard Islamicus*, XVIII (1), p. 40. Frustrated with the traditional theological practices of many contemporary Muslim thinkers, the author calls for an 'alternative Islamic theology' or perhaps even a 'theological detour' based on Qur'an and Prophetic Tradition (Hadith) that are not shackled by the 'common obliviousness, on the part of leading Shi'ite jurisprudents [and by extension to other legal schools], to ecological insights.'
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BRIEFING

Neoliberal threats to North Africa

Patrick Bond*

*Centre for Civil Society, University of
KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa*

A 2008 incident in Carthage spoke volumes about power politics and economic ideology. As he was given the country's main honour, the Order of the Tunisian Republic, on account of his 'contribution to the reinforcement of economic development at the global level', International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Dominique Strauss-Kahn returned the favour, offering Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's dictatorship a warm embrace. 'Economic policy adopted here is a sound policy and is the best model for many emerging countries,' said Strauss-Kahn. 'Our discussions confirmed that we share many of the same views on Tunisia's achievements and main challenges. Tunisia is making impressive progress in its reform agenda and its prospects are favourable' (Phillips 2011, p.1).

In late May 2011, just days after Strauss-Kahn resigned (following charges of sexual assault), the IMF (2011a, pp. 1–2) outlined a new set of opportunities in Tunisia and neighbouring countries:

The spark ignited by the death of Mohammed Bouazizi has irretrievably changed the future course of the countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). But each country will change in its own way and at its own speed.

Nor will they necessarily have a common political or economic model when they reach their destination.

Specifically for Egypt, that destination included two words, 'social justice', which began appearing frequently in official statements. The IMF's US\$3 billion loan offer to Egypt on 4 June would have added to an existing US\$33 billion in foreign debt inherited from Hosni Mubarak's regime, which a genuinely new, free democracy would have grounds to default on because of its 'Odious' nature in legal and technical terms. To legitimise that debt requires new loans that have an aura of relevance. However, to everyone's surprise on 25 June 2011 the IMF loan was rejected in favour of financing by the Gulf Cooperation Council and Islamic Development Bank.

IMF Mission Head in Egypt Ratna Sahay (2011, p. 1) had claimed on 2 June, 'We share the draft budget's overarching goal aimed at promoting social justice. The measures go in the right direction of supporting economic recovery, generating jobs and assisting low income households, while maintaining macroeconomic stability.' Three days later, acting Managing Director John Lipsky (*IMF Survey* 2011, p. 1) reiterated, 'We are optimistic that the programme's objectives of promoting social justice, fostering recovery, and maintaining macroeconomic stability and generating jobs will bring positive results for the Egyptian people.' The same day, said

*Email: pbond@mail.ngo.za

Sahay (*IMF Survey* 2011, p. 1), ‘Following a revolution and during a challenging period of political transition, the Egyptian authorities have put in place a home-grown economic programme with the overarching objective of promoting social justice.’

Egyptians may disagree, for the following week, the new government of Essam Sharaf began implementing a controversial law banning strikes. Minister of Finance Samir Radwaan promised a continuation of neoliberal policies and on 9 June cancelled a proposed capital gains tax after pressure from the stock market. It is not known whether the IMF was surreptitiously involved in these decisions a few weeks prior to the rejection of the institution’s US\$3 billion loan.

Beyond the incongruous rhetoric embracing democracy and social justice, there appears to be very little difference in what is being advocated to Arab democrats today and what was advocated to Arab dictators yesterday. For in September 2010, *IMF Survey Magazine* (Toujas-Bernate and Bhattacharya, 2010, p. 1) praised Ben Ali for his commitment ‘to reduce tax rates on businesses and to offset those reductions by increasing the standard VAT [value added tax] rate.’ A few weeks later, on 27 December, informal street trader Mohammed Bouazizi was subject to a police attack – his fruit cart was overturned, which caused such frustration he publicly self-immolated – presumably because he was not contributing to the 18% VAT rate with his survivalist home-production business. There may have been other reasons, but this is typically one rationale offered by authorities for disrupting street traders across the world, and Tunisia’s informal sector has been measured at nearly half the Gross Domestic Product in recent decades (Easton 2001, p. 22).

If the IMF leadership praised the dictatorship, insisted on austerity and advocated squeezing poor people for more taxes, what business does it have today in giving

similar decisive advice in Tunisia, or anywhere in the Middle East and North Africa, or for that matter Europe (from Ireland to Greece) or anywhere at all? What can we learn about IMF thinking in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya? And should we be made hopeful by the Egyptian military’s rejection of the loan?

Tunisia as ‘best model’

In its 2010 Tunisia review, called an Article IV Consultation, the IMF (2010a, pp. 1, 12, 13) approved Ben Ali’s policies of ‘enhancing its business environment and improving the competitiveness of its economy’, including a preferential trade agreement with West Africa and ‘free trade agreements with the Central African Economic and Monetary Community. Bilateral negotiations with the European Union are also under way to extend the Association agreement to services, agricultural products, and processed food; the agreement currently provides for free trade for industrial products.’ In addition, the IMF (2010a, p. 13) appreciated Tunisia’s ‘reforms to labour market policies, the educational system, and public employment services that will serve to facilitate labour mobility’. The IMF applauded the Tunis authorities for ‘reforming the social security system’ (i.e. payment cuts to retirees that might ‘buttress the pension system’s financial sustainability’), exploring ‘ways to contain subsidies of food and fuel products’, and ‘undertaking reforms to make the tax regime more business friendly’ including, as noted above, commitments ‘to reduce tax rates on businesses and to offset those reductions by increasing the standard VAT rate’ (the VAT is a consumption tax and thus explicitly regressive insofar as low-income people are hit by the state for a larger share of their income).

A further IMF (2010a, p. 14) objective was ‘consolidating the financial strength of banks, enhancing the role of banks in the economy, restructuring the public banking system, and bolstering the

presence of Tunisian banks abroad. The aim, ultimately, is to transform Tunisia into a banking services hub and a regional financial market.’ That in turn required ‘inflation targeting’ (a technique to depoliticise monetarist policy especially for the purpose of raising interest rates) and ‘convertibility of the dinar and capital account liberalization by 2014.’

This was economic liberalisation without much disguise, at a time of declining tourism revenues and textile trades. In contrast, there was no IMF conditionality aimed at reforming the dictatorship and halting widespread corruption by Ben Ali and his wife’s notorious Trabelsi family, or lessening the two families’ extreme level of business concentration, or ending the regime’s reliance upon murderous security forces to defend Tunisian crony capitalism, or curtailing the hedonism for which Ben Ali had become famous. According to WikiLeaks (Cole 2011), even the notoriously lax-on-dictatorship US State Department was disgusted by the consumption norms of the Ben Ali and Trabelsi families, and their control of half the national economy. In this sense, the typical way in which African ‘IMF riots’ degenerated in prior decades was avoided, as a deep democratic social movement emerged (in a parallel to similar movements of the 1990s in Latin America). Whether or not it is strong enough to prevent the post-dictatorship government from adopting neoliberal measures at its core remains to be seen.

Egypt

The IMF (2010b) offered a strikingly similar line of argument in Egypt in its April 2010 Article IV Consultation statement, praising the Mubarak dictatorship for implementing neoliberal policies prior to the global financial meltdown, and then after a brief moment of rising budget deficits and loose monetary policy, insisting

on a return to the Washington Consensus forthwith. On the one hand the IMF (2010b, p. 10) document complained about the crisis-induced postponement of ‘key fiscal reforms – introducing the property tax, broadening the VAT, and phasing out energy subsidies’, but offered an upbeat endorsement of the ruling regime:

Five years of reforms and prudent macroeconomic policies created the space needed to respond to the global financial crisis, and the supportive fiscal and monetary policies of the past year have been in line with staff’s advice. The authorities remain committed to resuming fiscal consolidation broadly in keeping with past advice to address fiscal vulnerabilities . . . Such adjustment will be crucial to maintain investor confidence, preserve macroeconomic stability, and create scope for future countercyclical fiscal policy. (IMF 2010b, pp. 1, 4)

In addition to expanding Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs, a euphemism for services privatisation and outsourcing), the IMF (2010b, p. 4) named its priorities: ‘adopting as early as possible a full-fledged VAT, complementing energy subsidy reform with better-targeted transfers to the most needy, and containing the fiscal cost of the pension and health reforms.’ Although the IMF (2010b, p. 24) noted just once that ‘Transparency International cites accountability and transparency, and weaknesses in the legal/regulatory system as key reasons for Egypt remaining 111th of 180 countries on its Corruption Perception Index’, it immediately followed this observation with a non sequitur:

Decisive action to continue the earlier reform momentum should focus on addressing the remaining structural weaknesses. In addition to sound macroeconomic policies, efforts should focus on: Resuming privatization and increasing the role of carefully structured and appropriately priced PPPs should assist fiscal adjustment and mobilize private resources for infrastructure investment.

The word governance does not appear in the IMF (2010b, p. 35) document, nor, interestingly, did the IMF express concern about Egypt's then US\$32 billion foreign debt: 'The composition and small size of Egypt's external debt makes it relatively resilient to adverse external shocks.' The IMF (2010b, p. 44) also noted, in 2010, that 'the relationship between Egypt and the World Bank Group has been transformed and markedly improved over the last few years as a result of the progress Egypt has made in implementing reforms.'

So it was that in Egypt in early 2011, just as in Tunisia, the IMF was caught flat-footed by the popular uprising and, relatedly, by the immediate problems of rapid capital flight and fiscal/financial stress that resulted. By late May 2011, in its G8 report, IMF (2011a, p. 9) staff had recovered and conceded:

The January revolution has raised the aspirations of Egypt's population at a time when the economy is taking a hit from domestic unrest in the short term, the ensuing uncertainty, and large global and regional shocks (e.g. the rise in commodity prices and the violence in Libya). The political shock triggered substantial capital outflows, which in addition to the decline in tourism revenue, remittances, and exports, have led to a loss of foreign exchange reserves of about US\$15 billion in the four months to end-April.

In that document, IMF (2011a, p. 9) staff worried that 'managing popular expectations and providing some short-term relief measures will be essential to maintain social cohesion in the short term', and that this would come at a price: 'external and fiscal financing gaps of US\$9–12 billion ... which would need to be filled with exceptional support from Egypt's multilateral and bilateral development partners, particularly given the limited scope for adjustment in the short term.' The 'limited scope' reflected the breath of democracy in Egypt, but the assumption seemed to be that investments of US\$1 billion in debt

relief (leaving US\$33 billion to repay) and additional grants would permit Cairo to restore good relations with Washington and to get over the hump of the democratic revolution with its 'reform' agenda intact. And even if the US\$3 billion IMF loan was rejected after deliberation and protest, the other Gulf states that will step in with financing have the same basic interests in status quo political economy.

As political economist Adam Hanieh (2011, p.1) concluded just after the G8 summit and allied Arab states pledged US\$15 billion to Egypt:

The plethora of aid and investment initiatives advanced by the leading powers in recent days represents a conscious attempt to consolidate and reinforce the power of Egypt's dominant class in the face of the ongoing popular mobilizations. They are part of, in other words, a sustained effort to restrain the revolution within the bounds of an 'orderly transition' – to borrow the perspicacious phrase that the US government repeatedly used following the ousting of Mubarak.

At the core of this financial intervention in Egypt is an attempt to accelerate the neoliberal program that was pursued by the Mubarak regime ... If successful, the likely outcome of this – particularly in the face of heightened political mobilization and the unfulfilled expectations of the Egyptian people – is a society that at a superficial level takes some limited appearances of the form of liberal democracy but, in actuality, remains a highly authoritarian neoliberal state dominated by an alliance of the military and business elites.

Libya

The same neoliberal pro-dictator narrative was established in Libya, for example, in the IMF's (2010c, p. 7) October 2010 pronouncements in which Muammar Gaddafi's mass firing of 340,000 civil servants was celebrated: 'About a quarter have reportedly found other sources of income and are no longer receiving transfers from the state budget. The mission recommends that the retrenchment program be accelerated.'

The IMF's last full Article IV Consultation for Libya was published on 15 February 2011, just before civil war broke out. Implying that Gaddafi was safe from the Arab Spring, the IMF (2011b, pp. 2–3) noted that 'Recent developments in neighboring Egypt and Tunisia have had limited economic impact on Libya so far', and flattered Tripoli on a variety of fronts:

An ambitious programme to *privatize banks and develop the nascent financial sector is underway* ... Structural reforms in other areas have progressed. The passing in early 2010 of a number of far-reaching laws bodes well for *fostering private sector development and attracting foreign direct investment* ... Executive Directors agreed with the thrust of the staff appraisal. They welcomed Libya's strong macroeconomic performance and the progress on *enhancing the role of the private sector* and supporting growth in the non-oil economy. The fiscal and external balances remain in substantial surplus and are expected to strengthen further over the medium term, and the outlook for Libya's economy remains favourable. [emphasis added]

This optimistic report and others like it annoyed two *New York Times* reporters (Briancon and Foley, 2011):

Less than two weeks ago, the IMF's executive board, its highest authority, assessed a North African country's economy and commended its government for its 'ambitious reform agenda'. The IMF also welcomed its 'strong macroeconomic performance and the progress on enhancing the role of the private sector', and 'encouraged' the authorities to continue on that promising path. By unfortunate timing, that country was Libya. The fund's mission to Tripoli had somehow omitted to check whether the 'ambitious' reform agenda was based on any kind of popular support. Libya is not an isolated case. And the IMF doesn't look good after it gave glowing reviews to many of the countries shaken by popular revolts in recent weeks.

MENA economies under Washington's thumb

Although not objecting to the IMF's neoliberal ideology, the *Times* reporters cited similar upbeat language in its reviews of Bahrain, Algeria and Egypt, worrying that 'the toppling of unpopular regimes will make it difficult for their successors to adopt the same policies. In the future, the IMF might want to add another box to check on its list of criteria: democratic support' (Briancon and Foley 2011). Indeed, Tunisia, Egypt and Libya were not isolated mistakes, but reflected an approach to the entire Middle East and North Africa region. As Masood Ahmed (2010, p. 1), IMF Director for the Middle East and Central Asia Department, argued in the November 2010 *International Economic Bulletin* of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the countries in his portfolio

Must, first and foremost, boost their competitiveness. Sound macroeconomic policies – in particular, fiscal consolidation – will help, but governments will also need to make greater efforts to improve the business climate. Unfortunately, many of these countries are still characterized by burdensome regulatory systems, weak institutions, and a dominating public sector. Countries must also enhance labor market functioning by improving education (to better match the supply of, and demand for, certain skill sets) and ensuring that wages better reflect market conditions. Finally, trade tariffs need to come down. While they have been streamlined and lowered – mainly under the auspices of trade agreements with the European Union and the United States – they remain high, averaging over 12 percent in 2009. Most importantly, with the region's traditional advanced-economy trading partners now growing more slowly, MENA countries should seek new export markets.

Of course, this kind of dogmatic Washington Consensus advice was often balanced, in the IMF's 2010 Article IV Consultations

with language to the effect that ‘pro-growth reforms’ and ‘shared’, ‘pro-poor’ development and social policies would also be pursued. But as the World Bank’s (2011a, pp. 27–28) MENA Regional Economic Update of May 2011 showed, the support for social policy was within tight fiscal limitations, which many MENA countries were breaking:

As governments want to reduce unemployment and ease the burden of high commodity prices, social protection has expanded rapidly in the region. While some measures are desirable, especially those targeted at protecting the most vulnerable, there is a risk that many of these policies are broad and will be very costly. In particular, expansion of public sector employment is costly and difficult to reverse. More effective employment policies are likely to involve short-term employment in public works. In addition, raising minimum wages, public sector wages, and/or unemployment benefits, as has been done in a few countries, will likely reduce equilibrium employment in the absence of other changes. To the extent that fuel is subsidized this creates a distortion and steers resources towards fuel-intensive industries, which tend to be capital intensive. These policies may have the undesirable consequence of reducing employment prospects for those outside the public sector.

However, the harsh reality (borne out through social revolutions) that growth was weak and not being shared meant that by May 2011, the IMF’s (2011a) new language was much more sober:

In MENA, prolonged instability, resulting from unmet political and social targets or spillover effects and lack of clarity about the future political transition, is the most serious risk to the short-term regional economic outlook. Prolonged tensions would amplify the negative impact on capital inflows and domestic financial exchanges, tourism receipts and remittances, and in turn on investment, output, and employment. Construction, manufacturing, tourism and financial

institutions are most likely to suffer losses with further deterioration of the situation. A renewed loss of investors’ confidence would translate into increased cost of capital further dampening growth prospects. Prolonged unrest would also threaten MENA’s social policy design and fiscal health, as revenues would remain weak and expenditure would be elevated, especially if commodity prices remain strong. Already, as governments want to reduce unemployment and ease the burden of high commodity prices, social protection has expanded rapidly in the region. While some measures are desirable, especially those targeted at protecting the most vulnerable, there is a risk that many of these policies are broad and will be very costly. In particular, expansion of public sector employment is costly and difficult to reverse. More effective employment policies are likely to involve short-term employment in public works. In addition, raising minimum wages, public sector wages, and/or unemployment benefits, as has been done in a few countries, will likely reduce equilibrium employment in the absence of other changes. To the extent that fuel is subsidized this creates a distortion and steers resources towards fuel-intensive industries, which tend to be capital intensive. These policies may have the undesirable consequence of reducing employment prospects for those outside the public sector. Moreover, it is important they are used to complement and support government reforms, and not as a substitute.

But imposing a new round of Washington Consensus policies risks what even World Bank (2009, p. 1) Chief Africa Economist Shanta Devarajan in 2009 termed ‘the spectre of political instability and social unrest’, a point we take up again in the conclusion. For Devarajan, ‘market-based reforms, which were painful in the first place but which African countries implemented because they could see the impact they were having on growth, are likely to lose political support because they no longer deliver results.’ At the same press briefing, World Bank Africa Vice President Obiageli Ezekwesili

worried, 'It is precisely in a season of crisis like this that African governments must stay the course of market-based reforms' (World Bank 2009, p. 1).

The possibility of MENA governments not taking Ezekwesili's advice and diverting further into Keynesian territory, including imposing exchange controls, was sufficiently strong (especially in North Africa) that a journalist at the April 2011 IMF (2011c) spring meetings dared pose it to Strauss-Kahn: 'Do you have any fears that there is perhaps a far left movement coming through these revolutions that want more, perhaps, closed economies?' For Strauss-Kahn, this was a 'Good question. Good question. There's always this risk, but I'm not sure it will materialize.' For Strauss-Kahn, the bottom-line slogan for his questioner was predictable enough: 'We're in a globalized world, so there is no domestic solution.'

The Bretton Woods Institutions and the G8

For anyone worried about the ways neoliberalism will undermine popular aspirations in the Middle East and North Africa, the World Bank and IMF documents released in late May give enormous cause for concern. The two institutions have long been implicated in Third World corruption, to the extent that Odious Debts owed by poor economies are increasingly subject to questioning (the way that Ecuador did in 2009 while defaulting on US\$9 billion in loans it should not have had to repay). But while repaying foreign debt under conditions of crisis is one of the central tasks that the Bank and IMF paymasters have taken on since the early 1980s, there is also a crucial ideological role played by the two in continually reinventing neoliberalism, which in the case of MENA in 2011, requires a conflation of political and economic 'reform'.

The World Bank's (2011b, p. 4) 27 May document, 'Towards a new partnership for

inclusive growth in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region' is exemplary, if only to illustrate either amnesia or chutzpah:

Economic reforms had started in several countries during the last decade. But in the context of declining state legitimacy, low levels of political participation, nepotism, perceptions of corruption and predation, and little accountability, reforms were too partial to take real hold or to transform sclerotic intuitions. Often they were perceived to increase inequality, and benefit the politically-connected elite.

A more honest rewriting of this paragraph might be:

Economic austerity was imposed by the IMF and Bank starting in several countries during the 1970s, and was amplified subsequently across the lower income MENA countries. Political corollaries to Washington's support for the ruling regimes included their declining state legitimacy, low levels of political participation, nepotism, perceptions of corruption and predation, and little accountability. Austerity was implemented by the societies' sclerotic ruling intuitions, so as to increase inequality and benefit the politically-connected elite.

Because the politically connected elite will take extreme measures to remain in power, as the Gaddafi family showed in the weeks after February 2011, the World Bank probably knows that socio-political and environmental problems in the Arab world will intensify and that citizens' movements will oppose the kinds of policies that drove Mohammed Bouazizi to suicide. A summary of Bank (2011b, p. 4) findings presented to the May 2011 G8 meeting in France is as follows:

Citizens are challenging authorities across MENA with the unifying refrain for 'Dignity, Respect and Freedom' and an end to the Arab exceptionalism which has denied rights enjoyed elsewhere.

However, the political nature of the change should not underestimate the role played by economic factors. Countries have been unable to sustain shared economic growth at levels necessary to generate the quantity and quality of jobs expected by a rapidly expanding labor force, notably young men and women.

Economic reforms had started in several countries during the last decade. But in the context of limited accountability, reforms were perceived to increase inequality and benefit the politically-connected elite.

The public engagement emerging today in several MENA countries opens an opportunity for the people of the region to carry out the kind of reforms needed to overhaul the development paradigm. Greater government accountability and public participation will be essential elements.

As government legitimacy deepens, there is also likely to be more effective regional cooperation in the Arab world, based on solidarity among peoples, and a desire for greater inclusiveness, both regionally and globally.

The Arab Spring creates significant opportunities for the MENA Region and for the world, but there are also challenges and risks. Food and energy price shocks, and in general the global economic environment, could challenge the economic and political reform process. In some countries, there are risks that governments will be driven by populist demands or that necessary reforms stall due to popular backlash. Political risk perceptions may rise, deterring the domestic and foreign private investment needed to create employment, and government budgets may shift away from investment towards consumption to cool popular discontent. Timely external support for countries to address their peoples' aspirations may fall short of needs.

A crucial issue in the sustainability of the governance transition will be the availability of adequate public and private funding for short-term financing needs, and for the medium-to-long-term investments which will generate the bulk of much-needed jobs, particularly in the private sector.

Innovative financing and risk mitigating mechanisms to support private

investment and access international financial markets will be critical to the transition... In the same vein the opening of external markets – for goods, services and labor – will be fundamental to the success or failure of the transition. Ultimately this will matter more than external financial support. The G8 countries have a major role to play in this regard.

The Bank's (2011b, p. 24) main objective appears to be making Arab economies more vulnerable:

The wave of self-confidence and self-assertion now sweeping the Arab world, and the refutation of any notion of Arab 'exceptionalism', could lay the foundation for an even deeper partnership between the Arab countries, the World Bank Group, and other partners in the Arab World Initiative. The time could be ripe for Arab regional cooperation, and for the more vigorous pursuit of inclusive globalization.

In general the agenda of Washington in both political and economic terms is to use state instability created by popular protest to lock in more extreme forms of neoliberalism via globalisation. The IMF (2011a, p. 3), for example, argues that:

Close to 60 percent of MENA exports are directed to Europe – reflecting proximity and long-standing linkages – which implies that MENA has not inserted itself into the global economy and has not been benefiting from the high growth rates achieved in other emerging markets.

If the new governments pursue this path, then very short-term increases in state spending to quell unrest will be permitted by the IMF (2011a, p. 7), it appears:

With mostly limited fiscal space, MENA oil importers confront the immediate challenge of preserving macroeconomic stability while building social cohesion. Additional spending in the short term is understandable and necessary to ensure

social cohesion. Nonetheless, oil importers cannot afford to strain public finances, in order not to derail – over the medium term – the pursuit of the new inclusive growth agenda. To this end, they will need to partially offset some of the additional cost of higher subsidies and other support measures through cuts elsewhere. In the same vein, they will also need to avoid introducing measures that would raise spending on a permanent basis. To preserve market confidence and prevent further escalation of the cost of funding, governments should detail credible plans for unwinding emergency measures.

Those plans, according to the IMF (2011a, p. 8), should include:

- revisiting the role of the public sector and providing space for a vibrant private sector;
- improving further the business climate;
- developing financial systems with a wider reach;
- fostering trade integration; and
- strengthening the functioning of labour markets.

Interestingly, the IMF (2011a, p. 15) offered one brief *mea culpa* in its May 2011 document:

The success of such a partnership will require the international community to draw lessons from the shortcomings of previous approaches that generated weak country ownership and resulted in scepticism amongst many stakeholders in the region. For the IMF, this means addressing important socio-economic dimensions that thus far have not been sufficiently brought to the fore in its policy advice, and to work with other stakeholders to build broader support within the region.

Yet the authors of the report appeared to have added this as a formality, because the ‘socio-economic dimensions’ will worsen if neoliberal policies are implemented, and moreover, there was no *mea culpa* on the IMF’s support to tyrants.

As a result of these multiple attacks by the IMF and World Bank on North Africa and the entire region, democracy activists will fruitfully compare notes and unite to forcefully challenge Washington’s political and economic agenda. After all, the World Bank (2011b, p. 27) Regional Economic Survey of May 2011 linked resistance quite explicitly to neoliberal policy (albeit with ‘unmet targets’ as a discursive substitute for dictatorial behaviour):

In MENA, prolonged instability, resulting from unmet political and social targets or spillover effects and lack of clarity about the future political transition, is the most serious risk to the short-term regional economic outlook. Prolonged tensions would amplify the negative impact on capital inflows and domestic financial exchanges, tourism receipts and remittances, and in turn on investment, output, and employment. Construction, manufacturing, tourism and financial institutions are most likely to suffer losses with further deterioration of the situation. A renewed loss of investors’ confidence would translate into increased cost of capital further dampening growth prospects. Prolonged unrest would also threaten MENA’s social policy design and fiscal health, as revenues would remain weak and expenditure would be elevated, especially if commodity prices remain strong.

Prolonged unrest

The prospect for a new round of political protest centred on economic justice is therefore worth taking seriously. Such protest is especially important given that the world’s mainstream media has apparently bought into an increased role for the IMF and World Bank in ‘supporting’ the Arab Spring. When Strauss-Kahn began reacting to the crisis in January, this was a fairly typical, uncritical report (from Philip Lim, 2011, at Agence France Presse):

As Egyptian protesters gathered in their thousands demanding the departure of

President Hosni Mubarak, Strauss-Kahn said: 'The IMF is ready to help in defining the kind of economic policy that could be put in place.' In a speech in Singapore, he said rampant unemployment and a growing income gap was a 'strong undercurrent of the political turmoil in Tunisia and of rising social strains in other countries'. Nationwide demonstrations last month led to the ouster of Tunisian strongman Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, and massive street protests are raging in Egypt seeking an end to Mubarak's more than 30-year rule. 'As tensions between countries increase, we could see rising protectionism – of trade and of finance', Strauss-Kahn said. 'And as tensions within countries increase, we could see rising social and political instability within nations – even war.'

The Western media exhibit a relatively low awareness of the 'social and political instability' threat from neoliberalism. Austin Mackell's (2011) *Guardian* report on 25 May was one of the few to express concern:

The new loans being negotiated for Egypt and Tunisia will lock both countries into long-term economic strategies even before the first post-revolution elections have been held. Given the IMF's history, we should expect these to have devastating consequences on the Egyptian and Tunisian people. You wouldn't guess it though, from the scant and largely fawning coverage the negotiations have so far received.

The pattern is to depict the IMF like a rich uncle showing up to save the day for some wayward child. This Dickensian scene is completed with the IMF adding the sage words that this time it hopes to see growth on the 'streets' not just the 'spreadsheets'. It's almost as if the problem had been caused by these regimes failing to follow the IMF's teachings ...

Beginning in the 1990s, IMF-led structural adjustment programmes saw the privatisation of the bulk of the Egyptian textile industry and the slashing of its workforce from half a million to a quarter-million. What's more, the workers who were left faced – like the

rest of Egypt – stagnant wages as the price of living rocketed. Though you wouldn't know it from western coverage, the long and gallant struggle of these workers, particularly the strike of textile workers of Mahalla el-Kubra, is credited by many Egyptian activists as a crucial step on the Egyptian people's path towards revolution.

This failure to appreciate the revolutions as a rebellion not just against local dictators, but against the global neoliberal programme they were implementing with such gusto in their countries, is largely a product of how we on the western left have been unwitting orientalist, and allowed the racist 'clash of civilisations' narrative to define our perceptions of the Middle East. We have failed to see the people of the region as natural allies in a common struggle.

It is this blindness that makes the revolutions appear as instantaneous explosions, like switches suddenly flicked, rather than as events in a continuum. A good place to start the story, if you want it to make sense, would be the Egyptian bread riots of 1977, which came following an initial round of economic liberalisation (which was as much a part of Sadat's change of cold war allegiances as his salute to the Israeli flag in Jerusalem). It should not have surprised us that as people's struggle to survive grew more and more grinding following the IMF-led reforms of the subsequent decades they would rise up once more.

Nor should we be surprised at the moneyed fightback, which will no doubt be attempted. During this transition period, forces like the IMF will seek to lock in and enlarge the neoliberal project before there is an accountable government to complain about it ...

These new loans from the IMF threaten to bind the newly democratic Egypt and Tunisia in much the same way. Once more, local elites could collaborate with the institutions at the helm of global capitalism to screw the broader population. If this occurs, these revolutions will be robbed of much of their meaning, and a terrible blow will be dealt to the broader Arab spring.

Predictably, the *New York Times* (Alderman 2011) reported on the Bretton Woods

Institutions' capacity to 'stabilise' MENA countries just after the G8 meeting:

At a series of working sessions that lasted until the early morning hours Friday, representatives of the Group of 8 expressed concern that the democracy movement in the Arab world could be 'hijacked' by Islamic radicals if the West did not help stabilize the economies of the two countries that touched off the Arab Spring ...

How much aid the Western powers would ultimately provide, and how effective any aid would be during volatile political transitions in the two countries, remained uncertain. The group's official communiqué promised \$20 billion, which would be a major infusion of funds ...

Democracy, the leaders said, could be rooted only in economic reforms that created open markets, equal opportunities and jobs to lower staggeringly high unemployment rates, especially among restless youths ...

Officials cautioned that the projected \$20 billion in aid from international financial institutions would come in phases and be contingent on democratic and economic reforms. The pledge, an aide to President Obama said, was 'not a blank check' but 'an envelope that could be achieved in the context of suitable reform efforts'.

To be fair, the *New York Times* reporter (Alderman 2011) did add, 'There is a fear, shared by both the American administration and democracy activists, that plunking down large dollar pledges upfront would risk funnelling money into the hands of institutions, including the Egyptian military, which could misuse or simply siphon it off.' But as for the actual policies suggested by Washington, there is no dispute, as noted above in the *Times* report on IMF favouritism to dictators.

To expect or demand more from the IMF and World Bank is to miss the point: they are still instruments of global corporate policy, and indeed also of Western geopolitical interests. As Iranian revolutionary Mohammad-Reza Shalghooni (2011) put it

in his series on Revolution and Counterrevolution in the Arab World, in Egypt and Tunisia:

the military establishment has generally proceeded in harmony with general US policy vis-à-vis the Arab Revolution, and their main objective has been to prevent (or abort when possible) any radicalization of the revolution ...

It was the US that decided to remove the military in both these countries from an all-out confrontation with the millions-strong masses of people, and to keep them intact (as institutions), to be preserved as levers for controlling the situation in the subsequent stages of the revolution. Of course, we must not forget that the start of the revolution and its escalation in Tunisia and Egypt were so sudden and accelerated that they caught Obama's administration completely by surprise. Due to reasons I have already explained, American leaders knew that an all-out confrontation with the millions of rebellious people who have had enough would be hugely costly, and would jeopardize American long-term interests in this very sensitive region. Consequently, while pressing these dictatorships behind closed curtains to avoid blood baths on a mass scale, in the final analysis, they decided that in order to preserve the ruling regimes, they would sacrifice the dictators themselves.

What forces might overthrow the ruling regimes, with or without dictators, in the event that North African neoliberalism gathers pace? There is certainly awareness amongst the current army elites that the earlier round of neoliberal 'reform' was a factor in the recent revolts, according to Emad Mekay (2011) of Inter Press Service:

Anger at Egypt's privatisation programme, involving the transfer of billions of dollars worth of public assets to private hands, aided the Egyptian revolution that elbowed the Western-backed Hosni Mubarak out of office in February, a top army general said. Major General Mohammed al-Assar, a leading member of the Supreme Council of the Armed

Forces, a group of top military generals who are running the country until a civilian leadership is elected, said the military brass were deeply opposed to the privatisation programme. That in turn eased their decision to side with the Egyptian public against the 30-year autocratic rule of Mubarak. Al-Assar told state television on Wednesday that the army has been against the ‘plans to sell Egypt’ and viewed them as a threat to social peace. He said that Field Marshal Mohammed Tantawi, the council’s President and Minister of Defence, had repeatedly raised objections to the privatisation programme, as shown in the minutes of several cabinet meetings he attended. His opinion was often over-ruled by Mubarak and other top officials who had favoured following economic prescriptions from Western countries.

Many of those officials stood to gain from the sale of public enterprises. Prodded by the Washington-based trio – the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), World Bank, and International Monetary Fund (IMF) – Egypt under Mubarak adopted an aggressive programme to sell public companies to both local and foreign investors since the early 1990s. The programme peaked between 1996 and 1999 with the sale of at least some 30 profitable public companies a year.

Even if this sort of analysis is not widely considered by most Western commentators as logical within the context of North Africa’s democratic revolution, the need for genuine (not IMF) social justice is often remarked upon by the region’s activists and writers. For example, Joseph Massad (2011) warns:

Moves to limit economic protests and labour strikes are ongoing in Egypt and Tunisia. Once elections are held to bring about a new class of servants of the new order, we will hear that all economic demands should be considered ‘counter-revolutionary’ and should be prosecuted for attempting to ‘weaken’ if not ‘destroy’ the new ‘democracy’. If, as is becoming more apparent, the US strikes alliances with local Islamist parties, we might even hear that economic protests

and opposition to neoliberal imperial economic policies are ‘against Islam’. The US-imposed ‘democracy’ to come, assuming even a semblance of it will be instituted, is precisely engineered to keep the poor down and to delegitimise all their economic demands. The exchange that the US hopes to achieve by imposing some form of liberal political order on Egypt and Tunisia is indeed *more*, not less, imperial pillage of their economies and of the livelihoods of their poor classes, who are the large majority of the population. The ultimate US aim then is to hijack the successful uprisings against the existing regimes *under the cover of democracy* for the benefit of the very same local and international business elites in power under Mubarak and Ben Ali.

For Samir Amin (2011), the opportunity to contest Washington’s agenda represents continuity in potential, thanks to the revolution’s profound socio-economic roots:

The workers’ strikes in 2007 (the strongest strikes on the African continent in the past fifty years), the stubborn resistance of small farmers threatened with expropriation by agrarian capital, and the formation of democratic protest groups among the middle classes (like the ‘Kefaya’ and ‘April 6’ movements) foretold the inevitable explosion – expected by Egyptians but startling to ‘foreign observers’. ... The youth and the radical left sought in common three objectives: restoration of democracy (ending the police/military regime), the undertaking of a new economic and social policy favorable to the popular masses (breaking with the submission to demands of globalized liberalism), and an independent foreign policy (breaking with the submission to the requirements of U.S. hegemony and the extension of U.S. military control over the whole planet). The democratic revolution for which they call is a democratic social and anti-imperialist revolution. Although the youth movement is diversified in its social composition and in its political and ideological expressions, it places itself as a whole ‘on the left.’ Its strong and spontaneous expressions of sympathy with the radical left testify to that.

One webzine supporting the revolution, *GlobalFairNet* (2011), reported of the proposed US\$3 billion IMF loan that 'Egyptians were largely skeptical, with the deal receiving negative feedback from online citizens and activists.' And indeed as one small reflection of the potentials for wider conscientisation, a Facebook group was started in early June, 'dedicated to resisting attempts to hijack our new republic through imposing monetary, economic, or political regulations on Egypt via the IMF or any other lending institution.'¹ Those attempts were rebuffed, according to *Christian Science Monitor* journalist Dan Murphy (2011):

Among the leftist activists who helped organize and drive the Egyptian revolution, there were howls of fury over the IMF loan when it was first agreed (and over ongoing contacts between Egypt and the World Bank). These folks view both organizations as tools of economic imperialism, and any ties with the institutions as threats to Egyptian sovereignty.

It's unclear how popular the left will be at the ballot box. But the growing importance of labor unions in Egypt in recent years, the fact that some of the most effective protest organizers around Tahrir Square during the revolution were from the left, and the general drift of Egyptian society indicates they'll have a much bigger voice than they've had in decades.

If I had to guess, I would say Egypt's ruling military junta decided it wasn't worth it to have a confrontation over the IMF loan.

By late July, Radwan – sacked from his job due to youth pressure two weeks earlier – explained Egypt's rejection of the loan (which he had himself negotiated) in explicitly political terms: 'People are still affected by the past, when the IMF used to impose harsh conditions. . . The military council said it doesn't want to burden the democratically elected government with debt.' Protest leader Wael Khalil explained: 'For years we have been told that this is the IMF doctrine: cut budget deficits, reduce

spending and liberalize markets' (Shahine and Rastello 2001).

This is a hopeful sign of potential power. Nevertheless until now, moving from social media to a more thorough-going social revolution has been a step too steep for Africans since the era of structural adjustment, notwithstanding the leaps taken by so many Latin Americans the last decade. Perhaps 2011 will be seen as the year that step became possible, as the popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt were followed soon by major socio-economic protests in various other African countries, including Senegal, Uganda, Swaziland, Kenya, Botswana and South Africa. In Zimbabwe, 45 arrests occurred in February when Robert Mugabe's police force broke up a meeting (International Socialist Organisation of Zimbabwe) in which films from Tunisia and Egypt were shown, with six leaders held for a month and tortured. This is the kind of tribute to North African democratic revolutions which reminds of the inspiration of a marvellous example.

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Note on contributor

Patrick Bond, co-editor of *Zuma's own goal* (Africa World Press 2010), is director of the University of KwaZulu-Natal Centre for Civil Society, but on sabbatical in 2011 at the University of California-Berkeley Department of Geography.

Note

1. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/No-IMF-deal-for-Egypt-%D9%84%D8%A7-%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B1%D9%88%D8>

B6-%D8%B5%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%82%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1/216908718340174?v=info#info_edit_sections

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Urban renewal and social development in Morocco in an age of neoliberal government

Sami Zemni^{a*} and Koenraad Bogaert^b

^aCentre for Third World Studies, Ghent University, Belgium; ^bGhent University, Belgium

In this article we argue that Morocco has experienced fundamental political change over the past decades. This transition however cannot be understood in terms provided by the mainstream narratives linking economic liberalisation to democratisation. Rather, transition reflects a shift towards authoritarian modalities of neoliberal government. We focus on how political power has been reconfigured into new forms of ‘hybrid’ government where ‘state’, ‘market’ and ‘civil society’ interact in novel ways, by discussing the political dynamics of high-end urban development and the rationales underpinning social development policies to explain how ‘poor people’ are integrated into the realm of the market.

Keywords: Morocco; urban politics; political change

Introduction

The recent mass uprisings in the Arab world have created a new momentum in the study of political change in the region. While mass protests have led to the end of the rule of Ben Ali and Mubarak in Tunisia and Egypt respectively, in other countries such as Morocco, Syria, Bahrain and Yemen, people are also defying authoritarian rule and expressing their desire for change. As such, the current upheavals will certainly reinvigorate the debates on democratisation and authoritarian resilience that have dominated the study of political life in the region (see Valbjørn and Bank 2010). Today, there are many pressing and obvious questions about political change, democratic transition and the future of many Arab states, but we must not forget that the current pressures for change are rooted in the political transformations of the last 30 years. These transformations are the subject of this article. In the following contribution we focus on the case of Morocco. Over the last 30 years the country has undergone a fundamental political transformation that is intimately related to changes in global capitalism and the political economy of the ruling classes. The critical question therefore is not so much whether government in Morocco, or elsewhere in the Arab region, is authoritarian or democratic, but rather *how* (authoritarian) modalities of government have changed over the years and how these changes have an impact on the government of particular people and places, thereby creating and aggravating the historical conditions for the current social and class struggles.

Since the beginning of the 1980s, with the introduction and implementation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank-advocated Structural Adjustment

*Corresponding author. Email: sami.zemni@UGent.be

Plan, Morocco chose to reorient its economy along neoliberal lines. This major shift in the economic organisation of the country also led to important political changes that have remained largely unnoticed in mainstream debates on democratisation and post-democratisation (*ibid.*). The specific social impact and political implications of these specific forms of ‘actually existing neoliberalism’, especially in non-Western settings, need further clarification (Brenner and Theodore 2002). Moreover, general ideas about good governance measures (such as decentralisation, economic liberalisation, participation and empowerment) as vehicles for political change, have in fact obfuscated the political nature of the emergence of new forms of spatially differentiated government and class projects.

In contrast, we argue against the hypothesis, often taken for granted, that ‘the political and social cleavages between those who profit from globalisation and those who do not can be bridged by “modern” or “good” governance’ (Lemke 2007, p. 54). Contrary to this hegemonic narrative, the implementation of neoliberal reform does not bring forth overall economic growth and prosperity but leads to a geography of uneven development in which some places are privileged over others (Harvey 2006). In this account we will explore the contingent forms of neoliberal reform on the ground and the specific ways in which class agency shapes the possibilities and constraints of political life. Crucial to understanding neoliberal politics is its *exploitative character* and the concomitant relations of power embedded within class relations. David Harvey describes neoliberalism above all as *class strategies* (*ibid.*). Neoliberal reform, whether in Morocco or elsewhere, entails the increase of capitalist class power over subaltern classes and their social interests. Despite the fact that structural adjustment was not an option deliberately chosen by many political leaders in the Arab region, increasing market-oriented reform has not necessarily affected state power and the dominant position of political elites in Morocco (Catusse 2009). Quite on the contrary, a rather smooth synergy developed between neoliberal restructuring and the more particularly Moroccan institutional configurations and domestic political style of economic exploitation concentrated around the monarchy (Bayart 2007, pp. 41–42). Nevertheless, neoliberal reform and increasing linkages with foreign investors and corporations did create or extend the conditions for capitalist class formation alongside older neo-patrimonial and clientelistic formations of power that used to be mainly based on close ties with the rural land-owning class.¹ Through the changes in the political economy of the country, the monarchy extended its social base in the urban areas and incorporated a growing group of entrepreneurs and young businessmen into its sphere of influence (Catusse 2008).

It is on the urban and not the national scale that the scope and significance of these changes are most clearly revealed. Consequently, the city presents itself as the site par excellence to study the current political transformations in Arab political life. Of course, modern cities have always been the locus for both social inequality and economic opportunity. However, the neoliberal reforms pursued since the 1980s have exacerbated urban disparities and have increasingly turned cities into spaces of extremes (Bayat and Biekart 2009).

This article draws from different case studies looking at both ends of urban extremes. First of all we will discuss the political dynamics of high-end urban development schemes such as the Bouregreg project in Rabat and the Tanger Med project in Tangier. In recent years, cities like Casablanca, Rabat or Tangier are being redesigned and radically restructured in order to satisfy the desires and interests of global capital. Second, we will highlight the political rationales underpinning the social development schemes such as the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH) and the *Villes Sans Bidonvilles* project to explain how ‘poor people’ are being integrated into the realm of the market and – under the pretext of ‘participation’ – are involved in the creation of a specific

political world in which the ability to claim and articulate political rights are not only restricted by ‘the regime’ but also by the sanctions and incentives of the ‘free market’. At first sight these two different kinds of urban restructuring projects highlight the ways in which uneven development in urban space is produced and governed, and how the Moroccan city is subject to a broader political project in which public authorities participated in the attempt to prioritise the *exchange value* of the city (centred around the question: how can we sell the city?) over and above the *use value* of the city (how can we make the best possible city for our citizens?). Urban development, simultaneously encompassing luxury and high-end urban renovation projects as well as slum-eradication and/or upgrading schemes, has become an important terrain upon which state–society–market relations are being redrawn. When classic neoliberal models based on privatisation, structural adjustment, financial deregulation and the roll-back of direct state intervention in the domestic economy proved incapable of sustaining durable growth and poverty alleviation, the beginning of the 2000s witnessed a transformation in market-oriented government with a focus on participatory development and a clear concern with security. Both cases thus testify to the changing role of the state in market-oriented reform, either by the creation of new governmental agencies to directly influence the promotion and coordination of so-called urban mega-projects or by using state leverage and subsidies to support private initiatives in tackling pressing problems such as poverty, social marginalisation and urban security. In contrast to its role as a developmental state until the 1980s, the state now acts as a broker or referee, directing market policies and setting up new forms of cooperation between the public institutions and private actors.

Redesigning the city: high-end development schemes as a political economic strategy

The implementation of the first Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in 1983 generated radical reforms. It was the watershed moment from which the current political transformations and the concomitant Moroccan state-reformation process are to be explained (Catusse 2008). To begin with, the state bureaucracy and its public administration had to be downsized to meet the new requirements of neoliberal reform. The well-known formulae of market liberalisation, deregulation, fiscal discipline and the privatisation of industrial activities and public services constituted the new governmental toolbox to decrease the public deficit. While the Moroccan political economy contained characteristics specific to a developmentalist model until the 1980s (Catusse 2009), this changed after 1983, echoing larger changes in global capitalism. The third world debt crisis at the end of the 1970s marked the beginning of the end of developmentalism (the Southern variant of Fordism) and a definite turn towards the fundamentals of neoliberal globalisation mentioned above (Corbridge 2002). In that sense, structural adjustment can be seen as the beginning of an economic, but also a political and a social rupture. First of all, characteristic of neoliberal reforms is the reconfiguration of political and economic life so as to reflect market incentives and demands. Second, the processes of political change were not confined to the internal or domestic Moroccan political scene. Local ruling elites, international institutions, global corporations and investors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society and foreign governments are all embedded within growing networks and (transnational) political spaces, making government more a ‘global enterprise’ rather than simply a national one (Cohen and Jaidi 2006, p. 3, Zemni and Bogaert 2009).

In this political economic reform process, a lot of attention has been paid to the emergence of the ‘global city’ as a key locale in the regulation of the global economy and as

evidence for the declining significance of the national economy (Sassen 2000). But the impact of global capitalism cannot be reduced to the key role of a few global cities. It has generated far-reaching transformations which concern nearly every city in the world. No Moroccan city, for example, can claim that it is able to participate in, let alone determine, the direction and management of the global economy (Catusse *et al.* 2007). Nevertheless, in recent years, Moroccan cities are being intensively redesigned and repackaged to position themselves in the global market. This is a process that has become prevalent only during the last decade. Despite the radical economic restructurings since the 1980s, the Moroccan economy remained fragile for several reasons. Compared to other regions in the world, foreign direct investments in North Africa, while growing, remained low and reflected the subordinated position in the world economy (Bush 2004, White 2007). In the case of Morocco, the general economy was still largely dependent on the agricultural sector for economic growth and employment (Davis 2006). Yet, in order to break these patterns, the Moroccan monarchy tried to redirect its focus on urban development and the urban economy. Within the context of contemporary global market integration, the city has become not only a place to live but also a product in itself to attract foreign investment and stimulate economic growth. It was above all on the impulse of King Mohamed VI that Morocco positioned the city as the prominent site for the promotion of economic development and capital accumulation. Since his reign, Morocco has been busy catching up, preparing its cities to welcome more businesses, tourists and (real estate) investors. Massive infrastructural works are under way to upgrade the Moroccan urban areas and prepare them to globalise. In its recently published 'National Strategy for Urban Development', the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism underlines the necessity to prepare Moroccan cities in order to expand the country's share of global investments and financial flows (MHUAE 2009, p. 30) – and with relative success. Although Morocco's rural economy (agriculture, forestry and fishery) remains the biggest sector for employment (34.3%), the urban economy is now by far the most significant producer of national economic growth. Three-quarters of the national GDP is generated within the urban economy (*ibid.*, p. 21).

A typical strategy for the contemporary city in general and also in Morocco is the reliance on large-scale urban development projects or 'mega-projects'. These projects are part of local government's efforts to reinforce the competitive position of urban economies in a context of rapidly changing global competitive conditions (Swyngedouw *et al.* 2002). Several ambitious urban development schemes were launched in the first decade of Mohamed VI's reign. These projects are becoming the showcases of an 'urban revolution' – as the local press² boasts – with striking flagship projects such as the Bouregreg Valley, the Marina in Casablanca, Tangier City Centre and the Tanger Med project in the north. Furthermore, major infrastructural works – highways, tramways (in Rabat and Casablanca), a high-speed train connection (between Casablanca and Tangier), bridges, mega-malls, marinas – are being put in place in order to prepare the country's cities for further capitalist integration.

The attraction of 'global fixed capital investments' (infrastructural projects) and 'circulating capital' (e.g. tourism) are the components of a 'nearly universal economic development strategy' (Paul 2004).

Urban restructuring in Morocco since the 1980s cannot be reduced to the implementation of mere economic reform. On the contrary, neoliberal reforms coincide and are intimately intertwined with significant state-institutional reforms. One of the most significant expressions of new institutional state reform is the establishment of what Neil Brenner has called 'new state spaces': i.e. new institutional configurations in which political power has

been resituated in an attempt to influence the geography of capitalist accumulation (Brenner 2004, Bogaert 2011a). In Morocco, large-scale development projects are placed under the authority of newly established governmental institutions. Through these institutional reforms the Moroccan ruling elites have managed to pull important economic projects and developments out of the realm of control of the national and local elected government bodies. These new arrangements of state power are best understood as an *assemblage* of (public and private) political actors ‘lodged’ within a particular site (Allen and Cochrane 2010). As such, the new state space framework is not solely concerned with structural determinants but also focuses on questions of agency and strategy (MacKinnon and Shaw 2010). Consequently, a new state space such as the Bouregreg Valley (see below) should not only be viewed in terms of a rescaling of state power (spatial height) but also as a reassemblage of power in terms of ‘*spatial reach*’ (*ibid.*). Characteristic of the institutional arrangements that coordinate urban mega-projects is the involvement of foreign investors and global capital. But in the sense that neoliberal globalisation has pulled global or transnational capitalist relations into local politics, it does not necessarily mean that the state has lost authority or autonomy, but rather that these ‘external’ relations are drawn within reach. In other words, authority and government are not the result of a zero-sum game between local and global actors – as suggested by some (Strange 1996) – but they are shared and negotiated between various actors *on the field of the state* (Panitch 1998). State power and state regulation are still largely necessary to establish business connections, but also to establish the essential infrastructures and juridical conditions for a ‘good business climate’. Consequently, in the process of implementing neoliberal reforms, the Moroccan state has not withdrawn from the economy, but rather has restructured its relation to it (*ibid.*). If we want to understand Arab politics we should not only look at the behaviour of ‘the regime’ but consider how local politics are closely related to shifting power balances in global capitalism and how these shifts result in the ‘localisation’ of wider political interests and projects that involve local, national, regional and global actors (Smith 1998).

The political restructuring of the Moroccan city is now inscribed in a global political project that reflects and defends (global) market requirements and connects local business networks with the outside world. The new priorities within this competitive urban logic are real estate development, international trade and investments, offshore activities and of course tourism. Today, several large urban development projects are reshaping the cityscapes of Rabat, Casablanca, Tangier, Fez and Marrakech. The economic centre of the country, Casablanca, is currently being restructured with major projects such as Casa-Marina and the Casanearshore Park. The latter was the first Moroccan offshore park to be officially opened. At the moment it is the largest offshore zone in North Africa. Promoted as ‘the dream of every outsourcer’ it advertises top-notch, low-cost services to multinational firms (Zemni and Bogaert 2009). Casa-Marina, a prestigious seashore project right next to the historic pre-colonial city, was launched in 2007 and provides new high-end business, residential and leisure facilities in downtown Casablanca. Furthermore, five city regions in Morocco have developed or are preparing to develop offshore zones: Casablanca, Rabat, Fez, Tangier and Marrakech. These industrial free zones and offshore zones are newly reconfigured islets inscribed into the Moroccan national territory, where specific laws and regulations exist from site to site. But two projects in particular are worth attention here because they exemplify the creation of new state spaces in Morocco.

First of all, the Tanger Med project, a new international seaport with an industrial hinterland (Tangier Free Zone), is the most prominent flagship project and symbol of Morocco’s commitment to global market integration. Designed to exploit the strategic location of Tangier as a redistribution centre for international trade, the project ‘Tanger Med I’ was

launched in 2002 and aimed at a capacity of 3.5 million containers. This first section of the port became operational in 2007. By the year 2016 the port hopes to increase to an estimated capacity of eight million containers (Tanger Med II) and become a nodal point between the African, European and Asian markets. When Tanger Med becomes fully operational, it will be the biggest commercial port in Africa, and on the Mediterranean Sea. The project is accompanied by the development of an economic free zone, the Tangier Free Zone (TFZ), which was launched in 1999. It is located only 30 km from the port. With an area of approximately 500 hectares it is the biggest free economic zone in the country. Currently more than 475 foreign and domestic companies are settled in the TFZ, and an area of 60 ha is dedicated to the development of the 'Tanger Automotive City' that will support the further expansion of the Renault holdings in the country. In order to service the economic development of the city region of Tangier, highways between Rabat and Tangier and between Tétouan and Tangier are now under construction. To complete the transformation of Tangier, the authorities planned the development of the 'Tanger City Centre' (TCC), a new business district in the east of the city. On the TCC website we can read that 'Morocco is about to become very big business indeed, so the well informed investor can expect significant returns from this world class destination which is set to return to its former glories'.³

The international port of Tangier is governed by a powerful institutional configuration, the Tanger Mediterranean Special Agency (TMSA) (Planel 2009, Barthel and Planel 2010). The TMSA, established in 2002, is responsible for the planning, developing and management of both the Tanger Med complex and the TFZ, the industrial free zone hinterland of the port, and represents the institutional configuration which brings together both local and international political economic agency.

Second, besides industry and outsourcing, Morocco's urban economy and new investment strategies focus on its most valuable sector: tourism. Growth in the tourism industry has averaged a 9% contribution to GDP in recent years and sustained growth of 15% over the last decade.⁴ Currently, several large-scale and luxury projects are being developed, especially in the neighbourhood of Marrakech, targeting specifically the 'superconsumers' (Klein 2007). The Bouregreg project is probably the most salient example. It is one of Morocco's icons for waterfront development and 'showcase urbanism' (Barthel and Mouloudi 2009, p. 56). On 7 January 2006, Mohamed VI officially launched the ambitious project for the restructuring of the valley. This royal project is situated strategically alongside the Bouregreg estuary within the valley between the twin cities of Rabat and Salé. It covers an area of approximately 6000 hectares (including public beaches and Salé's former military camps). The valley was previously largely unpopulated and left fallow. Nevertheless, more than 50% of the territory was private property. The whole project will be implemented in six stages. Over the course of these stages, the project plans to build a port for cruise ships, two marinas, luxury hotels, apartments, villas, commercial centres, a conference centre, a museum, a theatre, offices, an amusement park, a science park, a golf course and eco-tourism facilities. The new state space of the Bouregreg Valley is governed by the Agence pour l'Aménagement de la Vallée du Bouregreg (Agency for the development of the Bouregreg Valley) (AAVB). The state-controlled AAVB was established by law 16-04, with the specific mandate to develop the Valley and giving that the agency exclusive authority over the project within its legally determined territorial boundaries. Moreover, all public competences related to the Urban Planning Agency of Rabat-Salé (AURS), the prefectures and the local municipalities have been transferred to the new state agency (for more details see Bogaert 2011a). The first stage, 'Bab al Bahr' (gateway to the sea), is currently under construction and will be finished in 2013. This stage is managed by

the Bab al Bahr Development Company, a joint venture between the AAVB and the Abu Dhabi-based property development company Al Mabaar. The other stages are still in their study phase or in the first stages of their development.⁵ Bab al Bahr is located at the mouth of the Bouregreg River. It is bordered by the two ancient *medinas* of Rabat and Salé and the historical fortress of the Oudaya, which is located in front of the medina of Rabat on the coast and dates back to the twelfth century. Together with Bab el Bahr, a new bridge (Moulay Hassan), two tramlines and a tunnel underneath the historic fortress of the Oudaya are under construction in order to improve access between Salé and the Moroccan capital. Every day, 650,000 people cross the Bouregreg River to go to work or for other purposes.

Developing the other urban extreme: violence, security and the urban poor

The urban has not only become an important place to attract investments, but as a site for new class politics it has also become a privileged terrain for violent action. This in turn has consequences for issues of development and governance (Beal 2007). During the last decade Morocco, like other countries in the region, has been hit several times by attacks and bombings. On 16 May 2003, the country was struck by a series of violent suicide attacks. On that day, several suicide bombers killed 40 Moroccan citizens in different locations in Morocco's biggest city, Casablanca. These attacks, as well as the following three suicide bomber incidents in 2007 and the 2011 Marrakech bombing, have induced a particular kind of response from the authorities. As the young people responsible for the suicide attacks all came from the slums around the city of Casablanca, several politicians and royal counsellors summoned the Moroccan captains of industry to consider new strategies for development and wealth creation, so that the 'root causes of terrorism' – quickly identified as poverty and social and economic exclusion – could be overcome. The attacks not only stigmatised the slums as a breeding ground for radical Islamists, but also negatively affected the city's 'unique selling proposition' and its image as a reliable destination for investment. As a result, the official discourse on slums or *bidonvilles* has changed significantly over the last two decades. From a stigmatised 'non-place' within the urban fabric inhabited by 'inferior' people, the inhabitants are now described as victims of socio-economic development or rather a lack thereof. This, presumably, makes these inhabitants 'vulnerable' to 'radical' political ideologies.

Since 9/11, the idea of the slums being breeding places for extremist Islamism has gained momentum. Poor neighbourhoods are readily seen as places of alienation, poverty and anomie that make their inhabitants easy prey for ideological indoctrination and political violence. Slums are further described as places of lawlessness that undermine traditional forms of family solidarity. In the context of the 'war on terror' the concern with the violence coming from people living in the slums of Arab cities – represented as 'Muslim' cities – has been conflated with debates on the nature of Islamist mobilisation. Since the 1990s researchers have described the poor residents of these neighbourhoods – based on fragmentary evidence gathered in Egypt and Iran – as the backbone of Islamist violent mobilisation. Today, the same informal neighbourhoods scattered around cities in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are seen as the breeding and recruiting grounds for the transnationally organised *jihadi* groups presumably linked to al-Qaeda. Yet, as Asef Bayat (2007) has argued for the Egyptian and Iranian cases, these assertions are based on assumptions that are empirically problematic on two accounts at least. He shows, first, that the key to the habitus of the urban poor is not anomie, lawlessness or extremism but 'informal life', i.e. a life that is characterised by flexibility, pragmatism and

negotiation. In addition, the urban poor's relation to the Islamists is an instrumental and contingent one. Second, he argues that the poor do not constitute a specific target group for Islamist activism. While Marxist and other 'third world' movements have tried to mobilise the poor as active political agents, the Islamists seem to approach them more as a 'moral category'.⁶

The May 2003 Casablanca bombings 'instilled an even greater sense of urgency into the commitment to eliminate slums as breeding grounds of antisocial behaviours', as a World Bank report stated (World Bank 2006, p. 11). 'Kamikaze cities', as several Moroccan newspapers dubbed them, were seen as places where there was a lack of social cohesion in which the culture of the *derb* (the traditional urban working class district) had withered away in the absence of any real economic activity (Belaala 2004). Non-liberal forms of regulation and social transformation, while commonly seen as a consequence of people and places being situated outside globalisation, are, on the contrary made possible precisely by globalisation (Duffield 2002). The rise of the Moroccan 'version' of *jihadi salafism*, an extremist form of Islamic militancy, is testimony to this insight. Moroccan *jihadi salafism* is in fact offering the young people and other slum-dwellers a new form of social cohesion and personal identification, as it reflects a form of actual development and wealth creation (shadow economies) as well as social regulation that resists liberal norms and values. As such, entirely this modern and global enterprise is seen as potentially destabilising and thus becomes the target of development and aid schemes.

The implementation nationwide of large-scale social and human development policies after a period of structural adjustment and economic deregulation during the 1980s and the 1990s is testimony to the fact that the Moroccan authorities understood that new social risks and urban poverty were associated with the perverse effects of earlier capitalist adjustment. In general, poverty in Morocco had risen sharply in the 1990s (Catusse 2008). In that sense, Morocco followed a global transition. Structural adjustment had made clear that market deregulation and price incentives were not enough to spur economic growth in developing countries.

Therefore, under the impulse of the then Chief Economist at the World Bank, Joseph Stiglitz, the idea emerged that supporting a free-market economy required a certain state capacity in order to adjust market failure and integrate those who were excluded from the market (Kapoor 2008, p. 29, World Bank 1997). This shift, which gave rise to the 'Post-Washington Consensus', recognised the important role of local governments in regulatory economic policy. Again, market reform in Morocco, as in other countries, went hand in hand with a reconfiguration of state power. As the political produced the 'free market', new logics of competition and privatisation were injected in social spheres that were, until then, somehow protected from direct market intervention.

The issue of the slums was incorporated in a larger vision to combat poverty. With several public speeches throughout 2003 and 2004, the new king stressed the importance of human development and in 2005 he officially launched the ambitious National Initiative for Human Development (INDH). This new programme sets out to address poverty and social problems through the setting up of a comprehensive framework of policy-making. It addresses social deficits through the promotion of local projects and civil society initiatives that attempt to improve access to social services, create employment opportunities and combat the poverty of the most vulnerable groups within society. A year earlier, as an immediate response to the Casablanca attacks, another prestigious development plan, the *Villes Sans Bidonvilles* (VSB, cities without slums) programme was launched. After the Casablanca bombings the Moroccan government, helped and backed by NGOs and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) as well as international organisations

such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, carried out an impressive number of studies, updating its database on slums, numbering and mapping them. The Ministry of Social Development, Family and Solidarity carried out several surveys to uncover the ‘social needs’ of the slums⁷, and the programme aims to eradicate all slums by 2012.⁸ Thus slums became the priority of poverty alleviation policies.⁹

Reconnecting the city: services or politics?

The separation between a ‘normal’ city where the rules of urbanism apply and the ‘irregular’ *bidonvilles* is etched in the reality of the Moroccan cities. Unemployment, poverty, and marginalisation are an essential feature of one part of the urban extreme. For a long time the slums have been tolerated as a way of maintaining stability and urban demographic pressures. Lamia Zaki (2008) argues convincingly how in the past slums were politically ‘managed *in absentia*’ by the authorities. The slums were more or less tolerated to preserve social peace as long as they retained the character of temporary and transitory settlements. This ‘management *in absentia*’ kept the slum dwellers in pseudo-illegality because they were never recognised as formal city-dwellers despite the fact that they did obtain some civic rights (such as voting). Nevertheless, and especially after the Casablanca attacks, this tolerance would give way to a more active government of the slums in an attempt to integrate the slum dweller into the formal city and its formal market economy. As a result, social development initiatives such as the INDH and the VSB programmes required state agencies to become more actively involved in the economic sphere to alleviate social inequality. Consequently, poverty and social inequality are seen as mere technical problems that can be resolved through market-oriented approaches that reflect the requirements of efficiency, expertise and the best cost–benefit analysis.

Within the INDH and more specifically the VSB project, the problems of the slums are not analysed from a structural point of view, nor framed in a specific discourse on economic and social injustice. Instead, the problems are visualised and made comprehensive in terms of the spatial metaphor of slums being only remotely connected to the city and its social and economic services. Globalisation, seen as the facilitation of the flow of goods, capital, services and labour and market integration, had to be brought to the slums and their inhabitants as a solution to their problems. The main goal of the VSB project was to relocate slum dwellers to social housing apartments. New modalities to improve the citizen’s participation in slum relocation projects (e.g. through public–private partnerships and state-directed NGO intervention in the slums) and specific arrangements to improve the slum dwellers’ access to capital to finance the move (e.g. state-guaranteed loans and micro-credit) were some of the techniques of social engineering that exemplified the top-down strategies to integrate the slum population in the formal city. However, this meant that the whole idea of ‘integration into the city’ was reduced to a housing question. The slum dwellers had no say in where they were to be relocated (mostly towards the peripheries of the cities) and once transferred many of them were confronted with new costs (e.g. bills for electricity, water, public transport) in addition to the obligation to repay their loans (for a more detailed discussion see Bogaert 2011b). The relocation of slum dwellers and their integration in a market economy (especially the social housing economy) are a crucial strategy in what Ananya Roy calls ‘the alliance that lies at the very heart of *poverty capital*’. This alliance brings together those who ‘control access to the poorest’ (e.g. microfinance providers, NGO teams intervening in the slums and the public operator) and those who ‘control access to capital’ (e.g. the commercial banks) (Roy 2010, p. 31). The actual purpose is to explore and exploit a ‘new frontier of capital accumulation’ through the inclusion of the urban

poor in the urban economy; i.e. those people who have not been served by financial systems and markets before (*ibid.*, p. 53). The complex but crucial question, according to Roy, is whether poverty capital will ensure the financial inclusion of the poor on fair and just terms, or whether these financial innovations are new ways to exploit them. More generally, is the support of the state in the VSB project – via subsidies, tax cuts and financial guarantees – a way of giving the urban poor new hope for the future, or is state support rather a convenient (class) instrument to privatise benefits and socialise risks and losses?

These types of intervention are far from neutral or apolitical, as they are often presented by local governments, international actors and NGOs. One of the major new features of both the INDH and the VSB is the incorporation of a participatory approach to development. The involvement of citizen participation and civil society organisations at the local level, as well as the integration of public, private, social and economic agents in a single process, seems to become the central methodological tool of local development. Yet, while Morocco stresses the importance of decentralisation and therefore advocates the (partial) transfer of power to local elected bodies, it is instructive that the INDH is vertically organised around the provincial governors (*walis*) who effectively control the Local Human Development Committees. It is also instructive that the INDH's financial planning and management has been allocated not to the Ministry of Finance that normally supervises all financial, budgetary and economic activities, but to the same provincial governors. The fact that the governors are not elected but directly appointed by the king proves a direct bypassing of local elected bodies in favour of a top-down approach in which the king and his 'agents of authority' call the shots. Also, in the VSB, local city contracts are concluded to map out all the different relocation operations and bring the different actors together under the authority of the local governor. As such, the Ministry of the Interior (which supervises the local 'agents of authority') remains the central locus of the regulation of the monarchy's power and acts as a way through which a restructuring of the (royal) authorities that bypass (or at least 'balance' the power of) elected local institutions is initiated. Therefore, the INDH and the VSB initiatives – while aiming to 'broaden the choices of the citizens' – are also ways of reorganising the control of the Makhzen (Berriane 2010). While the 'local authorities' or 'agents of authority' used to be the direct executives of royal power and the securitisation of the territory – referred to in Morocco as the eyes, ears and hands of the king – it seems that today they are reorganising themselves along more participatory lines. The logic of participation has become a matter of linking state institutions with 'non-state' experts, NGOs and other social and economic partners. This technocratic approach to development evacuates to a large extent the possibility of politics as conflict is translated into a development target that has a solution based on certain kinds of expertise and knowledge. Influenced by the new orthodoxies of development thinking and poverty alleviation schemes, the monarchy created institutions and foundations that are coordinating – in close association with the private sector and civil society organisations – the fight against poverty.¹⁰

Conclusion

Two decades ago, François Burgat (1990), with reference to Egypt, wrote that while there is no infallible way for political scientists to understand Egyptian politics, there are numerous ways to be deceived. He was criticising political and social science for being over-concerned with institutional approaches focusing on parties, elections, 'the regime', etc. With the end of the Cold War, and even more, after the end of the second Gulf War and the Oslo peace process, numerous observers believed that the Arab world would move towards political and economic liberalisation. After this short-lived period of optimism,

assuming that the third wave of democratisation was also hitting the Arab shores, it became clear towards the turn of the century that change was not occurring along the lines of the road maps and plans sketched out behind the office desks of international institutions or university seminars. These observers agreed that the Arab world had undergone major economic changes but they failed to understand the intrinsic political nature of them. Politics, and more concretely political power, were and are still very much associated with the Arab 'regime' or the Arab state and less with the changes related to the political economy of neoliberal globalisation. Consequently, scholars attempted, above all, to uncover the illiberal nature of the regime in order to describe a broader picture of political change in the region. As the different Arab countries – their differences notwithstanding – were not marching on the pre-formatted path to democratisation, they set out to pinpoint the presumed internal obstacles for genuine change and thus, by the same token, tried to 'label' and 'define' the current Arab state. Hybrid state, semi-authoritarian state, liberalised autocracy, deliberalised state – these were just some of the concepts vying to 'define' the Arab state (e.g. Brumberg 2002, Kienle 2003, Springborg 2006).

Morocco was an interesting case in this respect. At first, the kingdom was considered by many journalists and international observers as a promising test case for democratisation theory when the late King Hassan II and later his son Mohamed VI embarked upon a seemingly ambitious political and reform process in the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. By the end of the 1990s, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch argued that Morocco had dramatically improved its human rights record (Zemni and Bogaert 2006). On top of that, the World Bank lauded Morocco as being one of the 'success stories' of global market reform (World Bank 1990). Overall, the kingdom was seen as a model reformer in the region, an exception to the wider regional trend of authoritarian durability. Yet, the idea of a 'Moroccan exception' was shattered for the first time in 2003 with the suicide bombings in Casablanca. After the attacks, some argued, the monarchy reverted to more authoritarian modes of governance reminiscent of the past decades. Others, however, still thought of Morocco as a valuable case for democratisation theory to understand its gradual transition to a Western-style liberal democracy (Storm 2007). Even today, the pressures for political change that followed the events in Tunisia and Egypt, and the immediate answer of the king on 9 March 2011, ordering the establishment of a constitutional committee charged with the revision of the Moroccan Constitution and reviving the process of political reform, seemed to suggest that Morocco can still be a valuable case to study the gradual transition to democracy. The explosion in April 2011 at the Argana café on the very popular Djema'a al-Fna square in the tourist city of Marrakech, killing 16 persons, has prompted a harsher response by the authorities to the demonstrations and protests. However, the mass mobilisation against terrorism throughout the country and the official denial that the al-Qaeda Movement in the Maghreb (AQMI) was connected to the attack, have kept the pressure for reform alive.

In the margins of this debate, it became clear that socio-economic pressures have worsened in Morocco. Ever since the events in 2003, Morocco has experienced a series of local protest actions against the high cost of living, rising unemployment and increasing corruption, especially in smaller cities and villages, where citizens and different kinds of social organisations have been demanding social, economic and political change. These local actions were definitely a prelude to the broader protest movement in Morocco today (i.e. the 20 February [youth] movement), especially as many of the same actors are taking part (e.g. the Moroccan independent and leftist human rights movement Association marocaine des droits humains). Nevertheless, the predominant preoccupation with democratic transition in the Arab region has often failed to take into account the impact and political meaning of

these socio-economic pressures. Instead, the phenomenon of political freedom and reform has often been considered only in the light of a (possible) linear transition to (liberal) democracy, thereby ignoring the crucial interrelation between increasing capitalist development, neoliberal globalisation and local resistance. Narratives on the desired democratic reform and contemporary globalisation-tended to be framed by a sense of inevitability and the glorification of Western-style liberal democracy and free-market society. Consequently, the possible differences between countries and political systems around the globe were then explained as if some countries and/or systems are just 'behind' (Massey 2005). According to Doreen Massey, these kinds of political and academic narratives do not allow us to imagine other (non-Western) countries and political forces in the world to have their own specific trajectories, their own particular histories, and the potential for their own (different) futures. Additionally, these narratives also misunderstood that it was not so much a lack of economic reform that caused the increasing socio-economic pressures but precisely the manner of the integration of the region into the economic and political processes of global capitalism.

In this study we explored some of the directions and perspectives that enable us to understand political change in Morocco as a process that is, without a doubt, intimately related to the changes and shifts within global capitalism. If we look beyond the specific ideological packaging of social development schemes such as the cities without slums programme, with its focus on participatory development, the virtues of home-ownership etc., and mega-projects like the Bouregreg-project, with its focus on attracting investments, tourists, jobs and economic prosperity, then a political reality becomes perceptible in which it is not so much that poverty alleviation and socio-economic development *per se* really matter, but rather *how* these political objectives can be integrated in a neoliberal class project. In this project the exchange value of the city is privileged over the use value of the city. As a result, government now works primarily for investors, tourists and the rich while most other people are going to be pushed more and more to the peripheries of the cities, either under obligation (through the cities without slums programme) or by necessity (because city-life in the centre has become too expensive).

This opens up, for example, a radically different perspective on newly launched social development projects such as VSB and the INDH. As we argued in the paper, a programme like VSB is not just any social programme to alleviate poverty. It is a particular project that fits perfectly within a neoliberal rationale and, as a result, incorporates exploitative class relations. As a consequence, programmes like VSB fundamentally redefine social policy in Morocco according to free market requirements and should therefore be viewed more as new frontiers of capital accumulation than as real sustainable solutions to the pressing socio-economic problems of Morocco (Roy 2010). These kinds of programme are more likely to *reproduce* social inequality instead of alleviating poverty. Moreover, the specific neoliberal rationale behind development programmes such as VSB enables us to link these projects with other kinds of projects, which at first sight seem to have a completely different logic. This is what we have tried to do by considering the broader political transformations that are represented by both social development schemes and high-end urban development projects such as those in Rabat, Tangier and Casablanca. In contrast to a popular understanding of globalisation, often pictured as an unavoidable, even natural process to which we all have to adapt, we have described some of the urban politics that are implicated in the making of that globalisation. Current globalisation is thus essentially a *political project* which assembles the interests of local and global class forces and contrasts with the interests of the majority.

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Notes on contributors

Sami Zemni is professor at Ghent University (Belgium), based at the Centre for Third World Studies where he coordinates the Middle East and North Africa Research Group. His area of expertise is politics within the Middle East and North Africa region, with special reference to political Islam and issues related to Islam in Europe.

Koenraad Bogaert holds a PhD from Ghent University (Belgium). His area of expertise is politics in North Africa (Morocco) and, more specifically, issues of uneven development and urban politics.

Both authors contributed equally to this article. Their names are in no particular order.

Notes

1. This point is also mentioned by Harvey (2006, p. 42). In addition we should observe that Morocco already had some type of market-based economy before the implementation of a Structural Adjustment Program in 1983. So some kind of class formation was already established, especially during the 1970s with the *Moroccanisation* of the economy.
2. *Telquel*, no. 390, 2009. Available from: http://www.telquel-online.com/390/index_390.shtml [Accessed 10 October 2009].
3. See <http://www.tangercitycentre.com/project.html> [Accessed 24 September 2010].
4. Oxford Business Group, 2010. Newsletter on Morocco: tourism on the up [online]. Available from: <http://www.zawya.com/story.cfm/sidZAWYA20101010053818> [Accessed 8 October 2010].
5. For more information, see: www.bouregreg.com.
6. It is true of course that the urban poor on several occasions joined the rallies of the larger Islamist movements. During the Iranian revolution for example, the poor took to the streets in support of the revolution when it was already in its final phase. The populist rhetoric of the Iranian clergy referring to the *mustadha'afin* (the downtrodden) is also mainly post-revolutionary (Bayat 2007).
7. See: <http://www.social.gov.ma/fr>
8. Recently, there has been talk about a new deadline (2015) in the Moroccan press as it becomes clear that the previous goals will not be met.
9. In total, 270,000 households were seen as being in slums, 212,000 of which were in 886 slums scattered over 83 urban zones. Eighteen of these 83 urban zones include 82% of all slum residents. The coastal cities in the triangle between Casablanca, Fez and Tangier have the biggest concentration of urban slums. Out of 886 slums, 509 (58%) have fewer than 100 households, 280 (31%) have 100 to 500 households while 97 (11%) have more than 500 households. Casablanca houses 25% of the slum population (World Bank 2006).
10. The *Fondation Mohammed V pour la solidarité* and the *Fonds Hassan II pour le développement économique et social* were created in 1999 and are active in many development initiatives. In addition to these royal foundations, the *Agence de développement social* (ADS) was founded in 1999 by the government and plays an active role in engaging slum-dwellers in relocation programmes and mediating between them and technical government institutions and private partners.

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BRIEFING

Social and political geography of the Tunisian revolution: the alfa grass revolution

Habib Ayeb*

Social Research Centre, American University in Cairo, Cairo, Egypt

The Tunisian revolution has clearly constituted a real political surprise inside as well as outside the country. No specialist, observer or politician, Tunisian or non Tunisian, really predicted this revolution, either for Tunisia or for any other country of the region. Of course, many have anticipated social rebellions and outbursts of unrest in one country or another, particularly as a response to sudden price increases – as happened in Algeria at the end of 2010 – or to other governmental political decisions or actions. But no one expected a revolution.

This article explores some important aspects of the Tunisian revolution and in particular its two principal and determinant aspects: the first aspect deals with the geography of the revolution and consists in ‘reconstructing’ the process in time and space, with a close look at the series of events since January 2008, beginning with the strikes and demonstrations in the mining region of Gafsa (south west), and their distribution across the national territory. The second aspect deals with the roles and the discourses of the different social groups and classes during the whole process (since January 2008). The objective is not so much to show a supposed clear

rupture between the different regions and social groups of the country, but rather to prove that the spatial, economic, social and political marginalisation of one part of the country and society in favour of another was the direct cause of the revolutionary process that ended the mafia dictatorship of Ben Ali-Trabelsi. It was due to an ad hoc and conjunctural alliance of the middle classes¹ and the popular classes around a common demand: dignity, a major condition for the ability to be and to do.

It was not expected, but it could have been

The exploration of what happened and what is happening today in Tunisia reveals a process that began on 17 December 2010, if we consider only the recent sequence of events. It is a process that is profoundly transforming the country’s political cartography alongside the emergence of new political actors, discourses, spaces and topics of debate and action, at the same time as the political transformations that have reached right up to the head of state. Clearly, we are now awaiting a ‘refounding’ process of citizenship, ‘collective’ identity, rights, freedom, state and the nature and norms of the state’s relationship with its citizens. Such processes could not have been attained by even the most violent of revolts, such as Tunisia experienced in 1978 and 1984. Throughout this article, I refer to Sidi Bouzid, a

*Email: habib.ayeb1@gmail.com

marginalised region in the south of the country, and Sidi Boussaid, a richer region in the north of the country, as their polarity is a useful metaphor for the events that developed this process of revolution.

To answer the other recurring question of why Tunisia was the first Arab country to experience this revolutionary² process that ended what many called a ‘mafia dictatorship’, it was often argued that this related to the level of education in the country, considered the highest among the countries of the Arab League; to the freedom of women and the family code, adopted in 1956; to the general economic level; and to the middle classes and the youth ‘networks’ that had sprung up as a result of the spread of computers and the Internet, the latter desired by Ben Ali himself, and even turned against him by hundreds of thousands of bloggers and ‘Facebookers’, despite widespread censorship and the famous web error message *404 Not Found*, known to young Tunisians as *Ammar*.

However, these explanations are not enough to explain the phenomenon. Two arguments go against it: first, the ‘cultural’ level of the middle class is visibly not as high as is widely believed. In fact, almost all observers emphasise the general fall in levels of education and quality of public schools. Second, the Tunisian revolution was started not by the middle class or in the northern urban centres, but by marginalised social groups (the southern mining region workers and the unemployed, particularly graduates) from southern regions, which themselves are suffering from economic, social, and political marginalisation. We had to wait till the beginning of January 2011 to see the middle class intervening actively in the revolutionary process.

We could also think about it in the abstract and explain why the process did not take place in the other countries before Tunisia. In reality, if we do not limit the analysis to the last accelerated

phase of the revolutionary process (December 2010 to January 2011), and if we consider that the revolutionary process is an ‘accumulation’ of struggles, resistance movements and attempts to propose/impose new political alternatives, we have to remember that similar processes were, and are still, taking place over periods of several years in many different countries. There were, for example in Egypt, numerous strikes, demonstrations and protests, sometimes quite violent, particularly in 2006 and 2008. Other attempts took place in Yemen, Lebanon, Algeria, Jordan and Morocco. At the same time, Tunisia has experienced several protests and demonstrations, particularly in Redayef and in other regions of the country. Violently repressed, these protests were not able to threaten the authoritarian system and they were even less able to cause the fall of the dictator. I will return later to this long process which started with the ‘revolts’ experienced in the mining region of Gafsa, in the south-west of the country.

However, it seems to me that among the decisive factors of the revolutionary process, two are particularly important:

- (1) Tunisia had the kind of dictatorship that probably has no equivalent – in its structuring and organisation – in the other Arab countries. An absolute dictatorship with a modernist face, built on three essential pillars: a) a real organised economic mafia that is incomparable (as regards its functioning and hierarchical organisation) to other forms of corruption and even mass corruption that many other countries have experienced, specifically Egypt and Morocco; b) a very effectively performing and a technically modern police system; and finally c) a systematic clientelistic policy of selective redistribution of resources with a particular preference for the

middle social class that could see its levels of consumption rising very quickly over the last 20 years (increase in incomes, easy access to loans and credit, etc.).

- (2) The acute and systematic marginalisation of the southern, central and western regions, as opposed to the concentration of wealth and power in the north and the east of the country.

In this article I will particularly try to explore this second point, which explains many aspects and dimensions of the Tunisian revolution. Yet we should not lose sight of the fact that the first cause of the fall of this dictatorship was in its rigid and brutal nature. It was a dictatorship that hermetically closed down all potential spaces for expression, such as the media, research centres and civil society organisations, and exercised terror as a privileged strategy of government.

On the pretext of struggling against religious fundamentalism and terrorism (particularly against Islamists) and therefore of protecting Western countries but also local secular elites from the risk of having political power seized by Islamist movements, the dictatorship progressively and methodically succeeded in crushing any political, individual or organised opposition and in reducing all the media to silence. Frequent political procedures and condemnations, usually heavily disproportionate, were the systematic response to political activity or actions considered political, including minor actions. The anti-terrorist law, rapidly drawn up after 9/11, freed security forces from any legal and 'technical'³ restrictions. Systematic torture was almost the standard welcoming ceremony for young men, even when the accused answered investigators' questions. This repressive security policy ended up creating a political vacuum and closed any space for debate, contrary to other countries, including Egypt and Morocco where, despite

everything, inhabitants do enjoy significant margins of expression, which may have limited people's desire to resist oppressive regimes.

Foreign newspapers were often banned, their websites censored, and, more widely, the homepage of the vast majority of websites that provided any information about the Tunisian political system was generally replaced by the infamous '404 not found' message. Finally, books that might have been useful to Tunisian readers rarely crossed the frontiers legally. Carrying books not specifically permitted by the authorities led the owner directly to jail. These varied prohibitions and forms of censorship inevitably resulted in a vacuum that both increased frustration and fostered a challenging spirit and the will to defy the bans. However, books circulate under people's coats, and young Tunisians have progressively become experts in banned Internet connections, circumventing and evading all the obstacles raised by the police contingents in charge of the censorship policies. These young people, passionately interested in technologies and the Internet, succeeded in gaining the sympathy of many companies, such as Microsoft. This company offered an unbreakable proxy online identity, and hackers' groups have given these young people thousands of tips and tools for gaining unmonitored access. This cyber-war was therefore won by the users who even succeeded, just two weeks before the fall of the dictator, in blocking all governmental portals, thanks to pressure from the group of hackers known as 'anonymos'. As stated by Benjamin Stora, 'the Tunisian paradox lay in the contradiction – unsustainable in the long term – between a high level of education and an authoritarian state treating its citizens as illiterate.'⁴

To this oppressive regime should be added the corruption and patronage system built by the Ben Ali-Trabelsi clan. Whether it involved a job, a bank loan, buying a car with credit facilities, importing machinery or raw materials, exporting or

even just marketing any product, getting your electricity connection, drinking water or a sewage system installed, or building a house, bribery was the rule and, in most cases, membership of the RCD (ruling party) was useful if not indispensable, especially in marginalised regions such as Sidi Bouzid. Merely having a passport was a privilege, and renewing it, particularly if lost or stolen, was a long-drawn-out matter requiring considerable patience, composure and, above all, well-placed relations. This explains the fact that in the same RCD party, there are almost 2.5 million members out of a total population of barely more than ten million inhabitants. The cost of drinking water, electricity and drainage had reached excessive levels, aggravating the dynamic of impoverishment and marginalisation of whole sections of the society. Finally, employment had gradually become a 'privileged luxury' out of the reach of low-income families even with qualifications.

Corruption can of course occur in many countries of the world including 'democratic' countries. But when corruption becomes systematic and coded, it starts to look more like a structured and hierarchical organisation than a mere abuse of personal power.

The revolution of margins against the centre?

Tunisians tell a very political anecdote, the truth of which is difficult to confirm. It concerns the first Tunisian president Habib Bourguiba (1956–1987), but it is still very topical. During a public meeting in the oasis town of Tozeur, situated in the west of the country, Bourguiba, who particularly liked this kind of meeting with 'his' people (and considered the 're-education' of the people his main mission), was interrupted by a peasant from the oasis who asked him to create a sardine factory in Tozeur. Surprised, Bourguiba

asked why a sardine factory should be built in a town more than 250 km from the sea. The answer was: 'Si l'Hbib (Mister Habib), but the distance between Tozeur and the sea did not prevent the construction of a date factory in Monastir' (the city of the president, situated on the east coast of the country). The story does not tell what happened to this unfortunate peasant. However, the anecdote does show that there are two Tunisiyas: one, the Tunisia of power, money, comfort and 'development', which covers the coastal areas, particularly the capital city and its upper-class suburbs and the Sahel (including the Gulf of Nabeul, Sousse and Monastir) and, second, the marginalised, poor, submissive and dependent Tunisia (of the south, the centre and the west).

As mentioned above, and representing these two Tunisiyas, I use the the rich region of Sidi Boussaid in the north of the country, and the marginalised region of Sidi Bouzid in the south of the country, to illustrate the differing experiences of the different parts of the country. Sidi Boussaid in the north boasts jasmine, while Sidi Bouzid, in the south, is better represented by alfa, or esparto, grass.⁵ These two regions clearly experienced the revolution in very different ways.

When we look at the chronology of events, and especially some key moments in the revolution, it is tempting to assume that it was a revolution of the south against the north of the country, and of the margin against the centre.

The spark that lit the fuse of the revolution was Mohamed Bouazizi's decision to set himself on fire in order to reclaim his dignity, consequently liberating the Tunisian people from fear and the dictatorship. He could have come from any other region but perhaps the series of events leading up to his action would not have been the same, or have had the same consequences. Other young people had taken their own lives before this in protest at their own situation, but without setting in

motion the political processes that were unleashed in Bouazizi's case.

It is clear that all the regions and marginalised social groups (and later on, the middle class from the interior or the coastal parts of the country) have identified with this young unemployed graduate seeking dignity, recognition and social and economic 'security'. Numerous objective reasons relating to solidarity and identification have been advanced, but the most important, for me, is the total economic dependence of the south on the north, although the south doesn't lack 'natural' resources such as water, agricultural lands, oases, ores, gas and oil.

Marginalised areas and the areas of revolt

Since independence and even before it, the south, centre and west of the country have suffered from the economic and social consequences of the unbalanced and unequal developmental policies that were particularly concentrated on the capital Tunis, the Sahel, some big coastal cities, such as Bizerte and Sfax, and tourist zones, including Djerba and Hammamet-Nabel. All the major economic and social indicators show a dividing line between the developed north and the Sahel, on the one hand, and the underdeveloped west and south on the other. In the first bloc, the map shows a large concentration of infrastructure, investment and resulting positive economic and social indicators. In the second, there is an area with an extractive economy, where the rather negative socio-economic indicators show a large zone of poverty that is unrivalled in the other parts of the country, covering all the landlocked governorates of Sidi Bouzid and Seliana, that have no direct access to the sea or to a border zone or even to an important road axis. Being marginalised, these regions have also experienced a process of human desertification because they are necessarily zones of emigration towards wealthy parts

of the country and, to a lesser degree, abroad.

More precisely, this is a large part of the country that observes its resources being transferred to the other part without any real compensation or benefits in exchange. Oil and gas are transferred to the north to be processed and refined, or otherwise are exported: only a small amount of these is used locally, in particular by chemical industries in Gabes or for producing electricity. Ores, particularly phosphate (but also iron and other mineral resources extracted from the south-western regions of the country in Gafsa, Tala and Kasserine) are also sent by trains towards processing factories in the Sahel and the north of the country or abroad. Public or private investments come essentially from the north or the Sahel that, directly or indirectly, benefit significantly from the spin-offs of these extractive activities. The local population is generally employed as labourers who thus benefit in a very small way from these essentially extractive activities.

The water resources in the south of the country and particularly in Sidi Bouzid (where the rainfall averages less than 200 mm each year) are no exception to the rule of intensive extraction from which the north and the east of the country are the first to benefit. In the oases, except those of Gabes where the immediate proximity with the sea prevents the production of non-local varieties of date palm, water is first mobilised for the intensive production of '*Deglet Nour*' dates, mainly for export. In Sidi Bouzid, underground water serves to irrigate numerous large irrigated investment farms and large modern olive plantations created with private investment funds from the country's second city, Sfax, and the Sahel. Olives produced there are sent to the oil mills in Sfax to be pressed. The olive oil is therefore marketed in Tunisia and overseas under the Sfax trademark name, *Chaaln*. Far in the south-east, in the Djeffara, huge amounts of underground water are used in the investors' new irrigated

lands and especially in the tourist zones of Djerba and Zarzis. More generally, in all the south and south-east, irrigated lands are generally created by northern investments. At the beginning of the 1990s, the first irrigated farm in all the southern parts of Tunisia used to pump water at an average depth of almost 70 to 80 metres. Nowadays, the average depth is between 150 and 200 metres.

In rural areas, the aggressive competition over the natural agricultural resources, such as water and land, is shown not only through the geographical transfer of wealth, but also through a rapid marginalisation of the peasant subsistence agriculture. In the region of Gabes, for example, while the total agricultural irrigated surface has more than doubled since 1990, moving from 6000 to more than 15,000 hectares, the total traditionally irrigated surface (inside oases) has halved falling during the same period from 1200 to almost 600 hectares. To different and varying extents, the process is similar in all the oasis zones and is more serious in Sidi Bouzid, Gafsa and Kasserine. The fundamental difference between the new irrigated lands and the old peasant farms is that in the first case we are in an agribusiness context, where the choice of crop is governed by profit, and in the second, the choice of what is produced is what ensures families' food security.

Because of the unequal competition between investors (agribusiness, tourism, industry, etc.) and local populations, including peasant farmers, access to employment has progressively decreased and has been reduced to low-paid casual day labour. The daily wage in the new irrigated lands is some 5 to 6 euros for men (equivalent to 1 kg of meat), around 3 to 4 euros for women, and less for children. Incomes are low and inadequate, but, worse than this, are seasonal only. For young people, who typically are educated and usually graduates, the chance to find a job, particularly in Sidi Bouzid, is

practically non-existent. In general they emigrate to tourist resorts and/or to the large cities where, even if they do not find fixed employment, they may at least find small jobs and informal activities to cover their immediate needs. The anonymity that the host zones offer liberates those young people from the feeling of being 'useless', and permits them to look after themselves first, while waiting for a better alternative. Meanwhile, their families do not need to look after them. This is called a strategy of surviving the problems of access to resources. But the exacerbation of the process of marginalisation of whole regions, of the continuous impoverishment of a large part of the population, and of the dispossession of people's vital resources, including water and land, have created the conviction that the economic development was not for these marginalised populations, and even less for children. It is a feeling of exclusion clearly linked to the uprising of December 2010 and the extraordinary acceleration of the revolutionary process that followed.

Humiliating and provocative behaviour by local authorities (more concerned about their status and privilege than about improving the situation of the people they should be looking after) aggravated the social and economic atmosphere. Mohamed Bouazizi, like other thousands of people, managed to ensure an income that would cover his basic needs by becoming an itinerant fruit seller. When he was prevented from doing this, by having the crucial tool of his scales confiscated, he protested and insisted that they give them back to him and let him work and live honestly. But when he received a slap in response, he set himself on fire. Through his desperate gesture, he showed everyone that his dignity was for him a line that should not be crossed by others. This explains why his gesture was immediately taken up in the streets by hundreds of thousands of people, particularly young people, everywhere in the south and other parts of the country, to claim the end

of humiliation and marginalisation by shouting: *khoubz ou maa we Ben Ali laa* (we may live by only eating bread and drinking water, but never more with Ben Ali). We know what followed.

A revolutionary process in two periods, at two speeds, but with one victory

While Bouazizi's suicide gave a boost to events that accelerated and made possible the rapid end of the dictatorship less than a month later, it would be quite wrong to suggest that the whole process started with this dramatic episode, and thus deny a build-up of a long series of political actions and workers' demands for rights, for example in the workplace and to health services. We can differentiate relatively long periods of time (months and years) and short ones (days), and may consider that the overall process that led to the end of dictatorship of Ben Ali took place in two distinct periods, with relatively different dynamics and rhythms. The first period that started, say, in 2008 and lasted till December 2010 is that of the growing effect of strikes, demonstrations and resistance. The second period, which started on 17 December 2010 with the suicide of Bouazizi, is obviously that of acceleration of the revolutionary process, that surprised all observers, forcing the dictator – said to be invincible – to escape overseas. The following chronology⁶ shows the whole process:

- 5 January 2008: a recruitment procedure organised by the CPG (Phosphate Company of Gafsa) offers jobs to candidates from outside the region. Local people consider the process to have been rigged, and young people occupy the UGTT (General Tunisian Labour Union) office with their families and set up tents for a sit-in. This movement reaches Erredeief, Oum Lares, Metlaoui and Feriana. It results in three people being killed and around 100 arrested and charged. In December 2008, 38 union members go on trial: five are released but the others are sentenced to prison (ranging from a suspended sentence of two years to 10 years). Six leaders of the resistance movement receive the maximum sentence, as they were accused in court 'of leading demonstrations that undermine the public order by throwing stones and Molotov cocktails against the police'. This is denounced by their defence as a 'parody of justice'.
- A strong international movement leads to the sentence being revised. In February 2009, the court in Gafsa very slightly changes the first court decision on the 30 accused, and condemns them to long sentences. As a result, Adnane Hajji, spokesman of the movement, and Bechir Laabidi find their sentences changed to eight years' imprisonment. However this trial is exploited by the accused leaders to show the extent of systematic torture, maltreatment and corruption.
- August 2010: As a result of the frontier being closed between Tunisia and Libya, riots break out in Ben Guerane. The official version explains this decision to close the frontiers by the need to control the very active informal trade between the two countries that feeds hundreds and even thousands of families, either by creating informal jobs, usually precarious and on the margins of legality, or by offering the local population expensive products cheaper than through formal channels. However in fact it was due to the Trabelsi mafia realising that it had been missing its cut from this lucrative activity and now wanting to control it. Their plan

was to transfer these informal activities from the frontier to the region of Sahel (coast) by opening a direct maritime line between Tripoli, the Libyan capital, and the Tunisian port of Sfax. As a result, tens of people are arrested, tortured, dragged before tribunals and given heavy sentences.

- 17 December 2010: Mohamed Bouazizi sets fire to himself in Sidi Bouzid⁷ after being slapped by a policewoman (which of course made the perceived humiliation much greater) who stopped him from working as an itinerant fruit seller, under the pretext of not having the required permits.
- 18 December 2010: the beginning of the movement. There are slogans about high prices and unemployment, with a marked political content; ‘work is a right, you band of thieves’, in a clear allusion to Ben Ali and his wife’s family. There is violent repression, but also, in a completely new occurrence, demonstrations organised at night to harass the security forces.
- 24 December 2010: the movements spread to Menzel Bouzaienne, a small town of 5000 inhabitants. The police violence leads to the murder of two young people and to tens of people being injured.
- From 3 to 7 January 2011: continuing in Sidi Bouzid and Menzel Bouzaienne (under blockade), the movement spreads to Saida (a village of 3000 inhabitants) and then beyond Tala (in Kasserine) on the Algerian frontier.
- 4 January 2011: The national leadership of the UGTT union declares its support for the demonstrations that are spreading over the whole country. It should be added that although the national leadership of the UGTT took time to reach this decision, local leaderships had

supported the demonstrations since the beginning and had provided the young demonstrators with practical skills and knowledge, networks and material support, such as rooms for meetings, speakers, etc.

- From 8 to 10 January: The city of Kasserine becomes the main theatre of confrontation, along with Regueb and Ben Aoune (30 km from Sidi Bouzid) where tens of people are killed. After the closure of schools and universities (a decision taken by the authorities in an attempt to crush the widespread events), the movement starts to take a clear national dimension. The movement propagation is made towards two directions: from the centre of the country to the south (Kebili, Tozeur, Douz, Ben Guerdane, Mednine) and to the north (Beja, Jendouba, Kef) and in the small towns which are peripheral to the coastal metropolis (Jebeniana near the city of Sfax).
- 8 January 2011: A big massacre in Tala and Kasserine reinforces national solidarity and the radicalisation of the movement – the slogans of which have become overtly political and directed against the government and the regime.
- 9 January 2011: Ben Ali, still authoritarian and intransigent, delivers his second speech (his first speech had been just a few days after the first troubles following Mohamed Bouazizi’s action). He insists on an immediate end to the troubles that are affecting public order, by whatever means necessary.
- 10 January 2011: demonstrations reach the city of greater Tunis through neighbourhoods such as Ettadhamoun, Intilaka and Ibn Khaldoun, where most of the inhabitants, generally of modest means, come from poor or marginalised regions.

- 11 January 2011: other neighbourhoods in Tunis, such as Zahrouni and Sidi Hssein, join the movement.
- 12 January 2011: it is the turn of Kram, a poor suburb of Tunis situated in the middle of the richest ones. According to a young man in Kram who took part in the movement from the very beginning, young people from upper-class parts of the northern suburb of Tunis (Marsa, Carthage and Sidi Boussaid) used to come to demonstrate in Kram. As it has more working-class residents, Kram becomes the demonstration space for the richest demonstrators.
- 12 January 2011: a big demonstration of tens of thousands of people is organised in Sfax, the country's second city. Slogans are openly political (for freedom, democracy etc.).
- 13 January 2011: a demonstration is organised in Mohamed Ali Square, in front of the national UGTT union office. It is harshly suppressed and broken up by the police. That night, Ben Ali delivers his third speech, where he seems totally unsettled, almost trembling, and fails to convince. This the first time in his rule that he has spoken using Tunisian dialect, and he announces the total opening up of Internet connections and the ending of all restrictions. He feels and has understood the level of urgency, but it is evidently too late to save his power.
- 14 January 2011: huge demonstrations take place in Bourguiba Avenue, the main avenue in Tunis, in front of the Ministry of the Interior. The main slogan is: '*Ben Ali: dégage!*' (Ben Ali, get out!). That night, Ben Ali has already left the country seeking his first refuge. The revolutionary process has just recorded its first victory over the dictatorship system of Ben Ali-Trabelsi. However, this extraordinary victory is more the first step of a process which did not start on 17 December, and which has not yet finished.
- 17 January 2011: only three days after the departure of Ben Ali, a new government is announced. It is almost a copy of the last government of Ben Ali, and is led by Ghannouchi, Ben Ali's prime minister since 1999, with the main leaders of the former dictator's Constitutional Democratic Party in all the key ministerial positions.
- 21 January 2011: a 'freedom caravan' comes from Sidi Bouzid and several other regions of the country to put pressure on the new government. On 23 January, thousands, including members of the 'freedom caravan', organise a continuous sit-in in the Kasbah square, (situated in Tunis close to the Medina and surrounded by official buildings and ministries) only a few metres from the prime minister's offices. The sit-in is broken up by the police on Friday 27 January, but has succeeded in bringing about the resignation of all the RCD ministers, except for Ghannouchi, who resigns only from the RCD, and leads to the installation of the new government.
- 20 February 2011: a second sit-in takes place in the Kasbah to insist on the resignation of the second Gannouchi government, suspending the two legislative assemblies and electing a constituent assembly. This sit-in starts on 20 February and runs till Friday 4 March, after having its basic demands met, including a new government with a new prime minister, and with 24 July set as the date for election of a constituent assembly whose role is to write a new constitution.

We are therefore clearly in a cumulative process of learning and resistance, in

which the events from 17 December to 14 January were the most rapid, yet decisive, phase. It is only by tackling the revolutionary process in its 'thematic' (from social and economic demands to political claims), spatial (from the centre, the south and the west to the north, the capital and the Sahel) and temporal (from January 2008 onwards) entirety that we can discern this revolutionary process as clearly different from the episodic rebellions and, *a posteriori*, as a real revolution that causes deep spatial and societal structural transformations, along with effects at the level of the state.

The middle class role; the convergence of interests, or when dignity becomes a collective demand

(a) From convergence. . .

Despite the fact that it was above all the outcome of an uprising of marginalised regions and populations of the country against the more privileged regions, the revolution can not be considered the result of class struggles alone. Although it is difficult to ignore the social classes and their roles in the revolutionary process before and after Ben Ali, the fall of the regime on 14 January happened as a result of a general mobilisation that largely transcended social class configurations and social categories. Real fieldwork and detailed surveys and research still need to take place, but an early assessment points to a convergence of interests between marginalised classes and groups and the middle classes.

While the marginalised classes protested with demands for employment, food and an end to marginalisation and exclusion, the middle classes fought tooth and nail for individual liberties, for political rights of expression, organisation and participation, for the consolidation or affirmation of their new rights, especially for women, and for an improvement in incomes and standards of living. But there was one main demand at the centre that was common to both

groups: dignity. When Mouhamed Bouazizi did not find a job, he created one for himself (as a fruit seller). When he was prevented from carrying out this job, he tried to carry on working in any way he could. When the tools of his trade – the weighing scales – were seized, he called on his contacts to intervene with the authorities. But when he was slapped, he set fire to himself. Nothing could better express the fundamental importance of dignity in the social dynamics and in the revolutionary process in Tunisia, as indeed elsewhere.

Chronologically, the revolution essentially began in the south as a result of the actions of young graduates and unemployed, all from relatively or very poor and marginalised families and from economically and socially marginalised regions. In spite of the violent responses they received from the police, with a dramatic toll of deaths, injuries and arrests, and the first two speeches by Ben Ali, which were violent, insulting, and associated the demonstrators with terrorists, several demonstrations in support of the young people in the south were rapidly organised in the north and in some towns of the Sahel. These demonstrations turned, very quickly, into political demands including for an end to privileges for the elite and for respect for human rights. As well as young people, we saw the progressive mobilisation of the UGTT⁸ local sections, of lawyers, and of civil society in nearly all of the regions, especially in the week before the big uprising of 14 January.

In summary, we can say that: 1) the revolution clearly started in the south and was mainly for the right to dignity. This is why calling it 'the jasmine revolution' is not very consistent with events. There is more jasmine in Sidi Boussaid than in Sidi Bouzid, where alfa grass predominates. 2) The dictatorship fell due to a general movement and uprising of the whole population – of all social classes. 3) The violent actions of the police and of militia before and especially after 14

January affected all neighbourhoods, from the richest to the poorest.

(b) ... to strategic differentiations

Logically, a convergence of interests and class alliances is always temporary and lasts as long as the process. It ends when one of the allied parts achieves its own objectives. In most situations, the logic of maximising benefit and limiting risk is not completely absent. In Tunisia, this logic has been completely respected: the poor and/or marginalised classes and workers, with their demonstrations in Redayef and in the entire mining area of Gafsa, started a revolutionary process as early as 2008. The second phase of this process was very accelerated, and took place between 17 December 2010 and 14 January 2011. At the end of December, those popular classes were actively joined by the middle classes and particularly by youth, hungry for freedom. Together, they caused the fall of the monster, Ben Ali.

After the departure of the dictator and after installation of the first transitional Ghannouchi government, with the ministers of Ben Ali and the RCD holding the most important ministerial positions, there were debates: should we let the government operate the transition up till the legislative and presidential elections, or should we continue the revolutionary process in order to definitively finish off the system of Ben Ali-Trabelsi, and ensure that the situation could not be reversed or the dictatorship returned? The supporters of the first option drew attention to the risks of a serious economic crisis, particularly after the departure of investors and tourists. According to the supporters of the more radical line, the problem was not only Ben Ali as a person, but even more the economic and political systems. Since then, two socially *and* politically differentiated discourses and strategies have been going on, alternately agitated and calm, depending on events, and accompanied by political actions and specific demands.

At the beginning there was the 'freedom caravan' coming from Sidi Bouzid and other marginalised regions of the country to occupy the Kasbah in order to force the RCD ministers to resign. As we know, the sit-in was broken up by force on 28 January, but it succeeded in forcing the government to change its composition. This gave birth to the second Ghannouchi government that included only two RCD members occupying technical ministerial positions of less political importance. At the same time, people representing the middle class and urban bourgeoisie were actively campaigning to demand an end to demonstrations and strikes in order to let the transitional government do its job and to kick-start the economy which, according to them, was verging on bankruptcy. This campaign was run at the same time via the Internet (e.g. Facebook) and on the street, with a demonstration organised in support of the first Ghannouchi government, in front of the municipal theatre of Tunis, on Bourguiba Avenue, only two or three days before the great success obtained by the militants who occupied the Kasbah.

This episode recurred a few weeks later in almost the same way, with a second occupation of the Kasbah (from 20 February to 4 March 2011), with militants coming from the south and the west of the country to force the resignation of the prime minister, the dissolution of both assemblies, and the election of a constituent assembly. Immediately, the opposing groups were mobilised to support the second Ghannouchi government, arguing about the risks of anarchy, of economic crisis, etc. In order to be heard, they chose to organise a sit-in in El Kobba, a sports compound situated in the wealthy quarter of El Menzah. On Facebook and in the press, there were accusations and counter-accusations.

It is again in the Kasbah that is the scene for the victory and the ensuing celebrations, with the nomination of a new prime minister, Beji Kaid Essebsi, who is

not from the circle of Ben Ali-Trabelsi, the departure of many contested ministers, shelving the two assemblies (for a long period of time) and designating a date, 24 July 2011, for the election of a constituent assembly whose role is the writing of a new *destour* (constitution). In July 2011, the date was postponed until 23 October 2011. The radicals gloated, and the 'silent majority' kept quiet, preferring the humility of appearing a good loser to humiliation. Behind all this, the classes are clearly playing for position regarding their immediate and long-term interests.

In this positioning, there are the south and the north; there are poor and marginalised classes and middle classes. There is the demand for social and economic rights. There are Sidi Bouzid and Sidi Boussaid. And there is alfa grass and jasmine. But are we facing the real opposition of one part of the country (society and space) against another? Further in-depth research is certainly needed before this question can confidently be answered.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while we are waiting for a necessary distance to enable a more profound analysis, we can provisionally advance some remarks that I consider it important to remember:

- The whole world saw that this revolution took place without leadership or dominant ideology. However, it is important to stress some points: 1) The right to dignity is now and for the first time, as far as I know, unavoidable in the analyses of the Tunisian, and more widely, sub-Mediterranean societies. This concept, however, is not new and it is well placed in social science analysis in Asia (particularly India) and in Latin America; 2) Social and economic rights become important, particularly as a response to the marginalisation of a large part

of the country and of the population. Being linked to the economic, social and political marginalisation, the competition over resources and the unequal development are again put at the centre of the debates dealing with development; 3) The interests and struggles of classes are objectively too obvious to be ignored in any attempt to explore and analyse the revolutionary process and its different steps that were characterised by successions of alliances/convergences and of differences and even very obvious oppositions.

- This does not really mean a permanent breaking off or a clear separation between social classes: the interaction of family structures, geographic origins, professional fields, social classes etc. make this separation very unlikely. Nevertheless, the different interests and strategies are expressed very differently during the moment of opposition and differentiation but also during the (rarer) moments of alliances such as those observed when the dictatorship fell.
- Another element of customary readings of the political evolution of Arab societies, focusing on the significance and strength of Islamism, is relatively marginalised and reduced to a modest level, even as a result of the total absence of Islamists in the revolutionary process. It is certain that this 'absence' is not only a result of the violent repression that Islamists have suffered from at least the 1990s (if we only consider the episode of Ben Ali, starting with his rise to the presidency in 1987). Like other political groups, political Islam has been very clearly overtaken by the process of revolution in all its phases, from 2008 up till the most recent events.
- Finally, the question of whether the events in Tunisia were a rebellion or

a revolution becomes a relatively unproductive argument that is further linked to some readings dealing with the history of revolution and particularly to the French revolution, which some people call ‘the mother of revolutions’. What is certain is that it is a continuous political process that radically modifies the way citizens in Tunisia introduce themselves and redefine their roles, their rights and their hopes. Nearly three months after the departure of the dictator and his mafia, no one has succeeded in imposing themselves as a leader, and no political tendency has been able to impose a precise political line.

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Note on contributor

Habib Ayeb is a Tunisian social geographer at the Social Research Centre of the American University in Cairo, Egypt. He writes and researches on rural and agrarian change, water resources, poverty and marginality, and is currently conducting research on competition over agricultural, rural and environmental resources and the marginalisation of small farmers in Egypt, Tunisia and India. His most recent publication is *La crise de la société rurale en Egypte ou la fin du fellah ?* (2010, Paris: Karthala).

Notes

1. In this essay I perhaps take some liberties with the complex concept of ‘middle class’, which should be defined at the outset. By middle class, I mean the social group composed of individuals whose functions, social status and/or incomes are different from ‘popular’ classes and from social marginalised groups, on the one hand, and of high bourgeoisie on the other hand.

2. I consider it legitimate to talk about a ‘first Arab democratic revolution’, unless the Lawrence of Arabia ‘revolution’ is considered a real revolution, which does not in my opinion correspond to the facts.
3. A young graduate and unemployed man – which is the case for hundreds of thousands of young people – who apparently does not shave and who frequents the mosque at dawn for the first prayer of the day is systematically suspected of active Islamism, and can experience the prison life sequence that starts with the torture sessions in police stations or even the cellars of the Ministry of the Interior.
4. Stora, B., 2011. Tunisia is not Algeria, neither is it Morocco, nor Iran. *Marianne*, 718. 22–28 January, p. 41.
5. Alfa, or esparto, grass, also known as ‘halfah’ (alpha/alfa) grass or ‘needle grass’, *Macrochloa tenacissima* and *Stipa tenacissima*, is a perennial grass grown in northwest Africa and the southern part of the Iberian peninsula employed for crafts (ropes, baskets, espadrilles, etc.). See: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Esparto> [Accessed 10 May 2011].
6. This chronology was reconstituted from numerous different sources. However, many elements were partially or integrally taken from those published in the very rich document ‘*une cartographie géomédiatique de la crise tunisienne*’ published by the website of CIST ; Collège International des Sciences du Territoire [The International College of Territory Science]. Available from: <http://www.gis-cist.fr/index.php/main-sections/axes-de-recherche/geomedia-mapper/dossiers-du-cist/pourquoi-sidi-bouzi/2-une-chronologie-desevenements-tunisiens/> [Accessed 28 March 2011].
7. Sidi Bouzid belongs to the central region of Tunisia. A town of 5000 inhabitants in 1973, promoted chief town, Sidi Bouzid became in a short period of time a medium-sized town of 40,000 inhabitants. In the 1970s, the region experienced an important development of irrigated crops, but some years ago, this activity quickly declined due to salinisation of agriculture lands, problems of underground water tables, etc. See: <http://www.gis-cist.fr/index.php/main-sections/axes-de-recherche/geomedia-mapper/dossiers-du-cist/pourquoi-sidi-bouzi/>.
8. The UGTT was the only labour union up till 1 February 2011, when the CGTT (Confédération Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens) was founded.

ERRATUM

The article ‘Land grabbing in Southern Africa: the many faces of the investor rush’ by Ruth Hall, published in *Review of African Political Economy* Volume 38, Number 128, June 2011, pp. 193–214, contained an incorrect version of Figure 3 on page 204. The corrected figure is printed below.

The *ROAPE* Editorial Working Group would like to apologise for this error.

<i>To food</i>	<i>To biofuels</i>	<i>To nonfood</i>
<p>Type A <i>Food to food</i></p> <p>Very little; some rice and some cultivation and livestock by SA and Zimbabwean farmers</p>	<p>Type B <i>Food to biofuels</i></p> <p>Very substantial, in Mozambique, Zambia, Angola, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Madagascar, Tanzania (but slowing down?)</p>	<p>Type E <i>Food to nonfood</i></p> <p>Displacements of people and their land uses (i.e. whole settlements) for mining and tourism deals</p>
<p>Type C <i>Nonfood to food</i></p> <p>Rice expansion in Mozambique and as above; degree of displacement of local food production difficult to ascertain</p>	<p>Type D <i>Nonfood to biofuels</i></p> <p>Widespread, especially through forest clearance for plantations, as well as through ‘in-filling’ of unused land surrounding cultivated fields</p>	<p>Type F <i>Nonfood to nonfood</i></p> <p>Widespread enclosures for forestry (including plantations), mining and tourism deals</p>

Figure 3. Main directions of land use change.

Source: Author’s own, adapted from Borras and Franco (2010a, p. 13).