A quick fix? A retrospective analysis of the Sudan Comprehensive Peace Agreement

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Critics decry the 2005 peace agreement between the government of the Sudan and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement as incomplete, a result of the desire of external actors for a quick solution that is neither truly comprehensive nor sustainable. Through a chronological analysis of the peace process between 2000 and 2005, this article demonstrates that the scope for compromise was limited and that a significantly ‘better’ deal was unlikely. The article’s ambition is to present a concise and empirically grounded analysis of the peace process and to lay foundations for further investigation of a crucial, contested and complicated subject in Sudan’s recent history.

Keywords: South Sudan; Comprehensive Peace Agreement; peace negotiations; conflict resolution; civil war; regional mediation

Introduction

At the turn of the millennium the conflict between the government of Sudan (GoS) and Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) had reached stalemate, but both parties still sought victory on the battlefield. A broad gulf separated their positions in peace talks, and external supporters and facilitators of negotiation showed signs of fatigue and disengagement. The momentous Machakos Protocol, signed on 20 July 2002, prepared the ground for the 9 January 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Despite imperfect implementation, the CPA has proved surprisingly resilient; an uneasy peace prevailed during the six-year interim period, and in January 2011 a referendum overwhelmingly approved Southern Sudanese secession. The CPA process is not only a significant feature of Sudan’s modern history, but is also the cornerstone of the first mutually-agreed secession in Africa.¹

Attempts have been made to explain the shift from seemingly endless war to a dynamic peace process. The warring parties’ stated explanation is simply war fatigue (cf. Hiteng and Hussein in Simmons and Dixon 2006). The beginning of oil production in Sudan is another factor which is often mentioned but hardly analysed as a peacebuilding factor (Patey 2010; James 2011). Here, the most popular explanation is that the USA, after the September 2001 terrorist attack, bullied the Khartoum regime into an unfavourable agreement (Cockett 2010, Rogier 2005). A more sophisticated theory holds that the conflict could have been solved at any point; and that the agreement reached should be compared to its hypothetical

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alternatives. John Young suggests, for example, that the international community’s prioritising of a quick solution had unfortunate consequences: political opponents of the regime other than the SPLM were excluded from the negotiations, as were Sudan’s other conflicts, notably Darfur; and as elaborate as it was, the CPA provided for a ceasefire, not a permanent settlement (Young 2007, Rogier 2005). These explanations insufficiently account for the contingencies of the peace process and the difficulty of developing compromises.

The present analysis is based on both published material and extensive, heterogeneous written and oral sources hitherto largely unused or unavailable. An in-depth assessment of the negotiations and the implementation of the CPA requires answers to a number of specific questions: Which factors and circumstances generated a ‘window of opportunity’ to resolve the conflict during 2001–2002? Why did the parties reach agreement over the Machakos Protocol? What led to the direct involvement of the ‘principals’, John Garang and Ali Osman Taha, in negotiations in September 2003? What were the nature and significance of the contributions to the peace process by neighbouring countries — mainly Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda — and the wider international community led by the ‘troika’ of the USA, Britain and Norway? How was the issue of Darfur and reconstruction of Southern Sudan handled during and after the negotiation process? When answering these questions the article emphasises the impact of the Machakos Protocol on the overall process, the strong influence exerted by Sudanese parties on the content of the agreement, and the ability of external actors to facilitate the negotiations and pressure the parties to reach an agreement.

The Sudanese context: weak state, long-lasting conflict and unfocused peace efforts

Sudan is a fragile state, and modern Sudanese history is characterised by conflict between Khartoum political elites and forces at the periphery, where identity politics has fuelled opposition to the centre (Johnson 2003, Daly 2007, de Waal 2007, Sørbø 2010). These factors are also the main reasons for the prevalence of armed conflict within the country’s borders. Since independence in 1956, state capacity has been eroded through neglect and deliberate policies of shifting government power to party structures, informal networks and, in the peripheries, to militias. The central government has lacked the might to rule by force, and the post-colonial project of national integration has failed.

Since the Second World War, a Southern Sudanese political identity has emerged, concomitantly with the withering of central state legitimacy. This identity involves cultural cleavages deepened by war. The SPLM/A’s main demands during the last civil war were for a secular, pluralistic Sudan and self-determination for the South. This agenda appealed to the SPLM/A’s foreign backers, politicians and broad segments of the population in the northern peripheries and even in Khartoum. Towards the end of the war, the demand for a referendum, with the option of secession, became more pronounced in the SPLM/A’s rhetoric (Rolandsen 2005). The crumbling and delegitimising of the Sudanese state accelerated after the National Islamic Front — later renamed National Congress Party (NCP) — took control in Khartoum in 1989. This regime has pursued antagonistic Islamist policies; widened the farming out of the state monopoly of violence to local militias and strong men; and has repeatedly purged the army and state bureaucracy of persons perceived as uncommitted to the NCP (International Crisis Group 2011). During the 1990s, through its aggressive Islamism and alleged sponsorship of terrorism, the NCP made enemies of neighbouring states and became a pariah within the international community. By 2001, Sudan was a state with very limited capacity, wherein an isolated regime ruled through suppression and informal patronage networks, while being challenged politically and/or
militarily in most of its peripheries. This in turn affected the goals and strategies of the parties negotiating the peace agreement and of other actors involved.

The process overseen by the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD)\textsuperscript{4} was the most enduring and successful of the initiatives to end the second civil war (Simmons and Dixon 2006, Young 2007, Wöndu and Lesch 1999, Rogier 2005). Launched in 1993, it achieved its first breakthrough in 1994 with an agreed Declaration of Principles. The IGAD peace talks continued over several inconclusive rounds and, by 2000, international interest had waned. A joint Libyan–Egyptian initiative launched in 1999 provided the parties – particularly the GoS – an opportunity to stall by ‘forum-shopping’. Meanwhile, Southern Sudan and northern Uganda were a permanent war zone subject to general insecurity. Even as late as 2001, few, if any, anticipated a negotiated settlement in the foreseeable future (Deng and Morrison 2001, El-Affendi 2001).

\textbf{2001–2002: gaining momentum}

A new sense of optimism emerged in the period January 2001–June 2002, the result of a constellation of factors presenting a unique opportunity to end the conflict. In the late 1990s the NCP had been preoccupied with internal strife and power struggles, a deep economic crisis, an increasingly cohesive opposition, and international isolation (International Crisis Group 2002a, Carney 2007, Young 2007). A leadership struggle pitting Hassan al-Turabi against President Omar Bashir was won by the latter (International Crisis Group 2011). The result was a more pragmatic government dominated by security and military personnel and a weakened Islamist wing fronted by Vice-President Ali Osman Taha (Rogier 2005, pp. 54–55). The modest oil revenue that began to become available in 1999–2000 could only mitigate rising foreign indebtedness, sinking export revenues, and economic sanctions.

The SPLM\textsuperscript{/}A emerged stronger and more cohesive from its own factional strife, and dominated a broad coalition of northern and southern opposition parties, the National Democratic Alliance. Whereas earlier peace initiatives had been stymied by disputes among groups themselves, now the SPLM/A could more convincingly negotiate on behalf of the whole of Southern Sudan as well as the contested areas of Abyei, the Nuba Mountains and Southern Blue Nile (Rogier 2005, p. 56). The SPLM\textsuperscript{/}A had the active support of Uganda, Kenya, Eritrea and Ethiopia, Khartoum’s weak position having presented them with an opportunity for self-interested intervention. Indeed, the pursuit of Nile water rights and internal security by these upstream countries could be strengthened by increased influence in Sudan, notably in a more autonomous Southern Sudan acting as a territorial buffer with northern Sudan and, more remotely, Egypt (Høigilt et al. 2010). US influence may also have played a part in this greater involvement, though it is difficult to estimate the degree to which such influence was brought to bear when the interests of these upstream states dovetailed with those of the US (Waihenya 2006).\textsuperscript{5} The IGAD secretariat was reinvigorated under the leadership of General Lazarus Sumbeiywo, and the Kenyan government of Daniel Arap Moi actively influenced and facilitated the negotiation process. The contribution from Kenya and other countries in the region with sympathetic attitudes towards the SPLM\textsuperscript{/}A, notably Uganda, Ethiopia and Eritrea, was crucial in reaching the peace agreement. Both the domestic balance of power and pattern of regional support therefore tilted in favour of the SPLM\textsuperscript{/}A, increasing the likelihood that it could extract concessions from the NCP.

Despite these developments it is fair to assume that the parties remained willing to pursue victory on the battlefield to achieve their overarching goals. Indeed, ‘war-weariness’
was a contributing factor to, rather than an adequate and convincing explanation of a willingness to negotiate among the parties. ‘War-weariness’ was nowhere to be heard of, for example, when – concurrent with the CPA peace talks – the GoS used military means to stop the rebellion in Darfur. Throughout the process, both sides seemed constantly to consider reverting to arms, despite stalemate on the battlefield and a growing realisation that victory was unfeasible in the near future. At the same time, low morale and recurring threats of internal discord on both sides forged a double-edged sword, evincing both a need to negotiate and the possibility of the opposition’s collapse. Nor had war-weariness reached a level where the parties were ready to sign a peace agreement they could not ‘sell’ to their respective constituencies.

External developments beyond the region added the political weight and resources needed to pressure the parties into deal-making mode. Particularly important was increased US involvement as part of the troika, alongside the UK and Norway. Compared to its predecessors, the administration of George W. Bush had a more pragmatic policy towards Sudan and a determination to facilitate a settlement (Cockett 2010, pp. 156–161). This greater interest preceded 9/11 and the ‘war on terror’. The idea of a US special envoy culminated in the appointment of John Danforth on 6 September 2001. Following the attack on the World Trade Center, the Bush administration demonstrated a willingness to use decisive force in its foreign policy, which made its subsequent threats of drastic action towards Sudan more convincing. Members of the US Congress with interests in Sudanese politics pressed the Bush administration to pursue a negotiated settlement, but Congress kept the administration on a tight leash through ‘The Sudan Peace Act’ which allowed further sanctions against the regime in Khartoum if it obstructed the peace process (Rogier 2005, pp. 83–88). Apparently US also indicated a willingness to use military means against Khartoum (Cockett 2010, pp. 162–164). That these might include direct US military action against Sudan’s oil infrastructure, tougher sanctions, and greater US support to opposing forces, notably the SPLM/A, was communicated to the NCP (ibid.). In the words of a prominent NCP leader, Dr Ghazi Salahudin: ‘The United States looked like a wounded lion. It was very difficult for us to predict what kind of action they would take tomorrow. We had to wait and see, and watch what we said and what we did – and engage’ (Johnson 2011, p. 19). Engaging in talks thus became a matter of survival for NCP leaders.

The US decided to focus its efforts on the IGAD framework instead of launching a separate initiative. In late 2001–early 2002, the US, UK and Norway formalised a joint approach to the peace talks. This coordination grew closer from early 2002, when the three countries began providing technical assistance and applying joint political pressure to the parties. In November 2011 Danforth presented four tests of the parties’ willingness to negotiate a peace deal, first and foremost aimed at the GoS (Justice Africa 2001; Rogier 2005). The most important were an agreement on ending attacks on civilians, and a limited ceasefire in the Nuba Mountains, both to be internationally monitored. In April 2002 Danforth ruled that the parties had shown sufficient good faith and recommended continuing US involvement in the peace process (Danforth 2002). The Danforth process demonstrated the parties’ interest in being seen to cooperate. The parties had not been this close to agreement since early 1989. The notion of ‘a window of opportunity’ was commonly referred to (International Crisis Group 2002a).

By early 2002 a peace deal had thus begun to appear achievable. The contours of a compromise on the major issues were clear; the relative military and political strength of the two parties made it possible for the SPLM/A to win the concessions it needed; the beginning of oil production added an element of urgency and uncertainty; and a constellation of external actors, foremost Kenya and the troika led by the US, were ready to lend the necessary
political attention and technical support. In contrast to the official rhetoric, the limited goal of ending the war was more important than fundamental political change in Sudan (Deng and Morrison 2001). That this window of opportunity would stay open for only a limited period added urgency to the peace talks. The stakes were therefore high when the parties came together under IGAD auspices at the Kenyan town of Machakos on 16 June 2002.

2002–2003: from compromise at Machakos to crisis at Nakuru

The first round of talks (16 June–20 July 2002) started with little hope of significant progress (Justice Africa 2002a). It was therefore surprising when, at the eleventh hour, a momentous agreement was reached. There were two overarching issues that had to be resolved at Machakos before any other question could be addressed. First, the future of the relationship between state and religion in Sudan had to be solved. Separation of religion and state was a crucial aspect of the SPLM/A’s official reasons for starting the war in the first place and was essential to its vision of a ‘New Sudan’ (Garang and Khalid 1987). This demand was also important in winning support from Western governments and advocacy groups. In contrast, the NCP based its own legitimacy on furthering Islamic principles. For its leaders, agreeing to a secular state would risk political suicide (Rogier 2005). A compromise, which had crystallised long before the Machakos negotiations, was exemption for Southern Sudan, even as sharia remained the basis of governance in the North. Until 2002, the parties were not ready to commit to this solution.

On the question of self-determination for Southern Sudan, the parties appeared to be even further apart. Initially a champion of a united and reformed Sudan, the SPLM/A’s legitimacy among Southerners was increasingly based on its reluctant pursuit of self-determination. Two civil wars had strengthened Southern national identity. The previous peace period (1972–1983) had given autonomy to the South, further cementing the region as a political unit. A referendum as the means for exercising self-determination had been on the table since the first IGAD round in 1994, when it was immediately accepted by the SPLM/A; the GoS signed on with some reservations in 1998. In subsequent rounds of IGAD peace talks, a compromise began to take shape, but the leaders shied away from committing themselves to an agreement. The SPLM/A would settle for nothing less than a referendum with a specific date (Justice Africa 2002a), a position that foreign governments and analysts misunderstood as a bargaining ploy; they believed that the SPLM/A could be pressured into accepting some kind of regional autonomy. Maintenance of the country’s territorial integrity was an important principle for the NCP. The South is generally perceived to be rich in natural resources; most of Sudan’s known oil deposits are located there. The loss of the South implied ceding a large share of future national income. Besides, it was a truism among Khartoum elites that, over time, the South would inevitably adopt Islam and Arabic, and the Sudanese nation would become more homogenous. Southern secession or even confederation would check such a ‘natural’ process (Sharkey 2007). At the same time, however, some within the NCP appeared happy to get rid of the South, which they deemed less valuable than maintaining the purity of the Islamic state. Granting self-determination would be politically costly to the NCP, yet it seemed the only way to guarantee sharia in the North (Rolandsen 2011).

The Machakos talks started like many previous rounds of negotiations. The parties continued to diverge over religion and self-determination, and it is difficult to establish exactly how agreement was eventually reached. Sumbeywo’s biography (Waihenya 2006) focuses on skilful management of negotiations, while Hilde F. Johnson’s account (Johnson 2011, pp. 43–54) emphasises the importance of international diplomacy. In any case, by mid
July, the main remaining element of uncertainty was the length of the period between the signing of a peace agreement and the holding of a referendum. This was finally negotiated after Sumbeiywo locked two members of each delegation in a room and told them this was their last chance. Thus immured, they nonetheless had extensive telephone contact with their respective leaders, which resulted in the unexpected and groundbreaking Machakos Protocol (signed on 20 July 2002); the referendum would take place within six years of the signing of an agreement.

In August 2002 John Garang and President Bashir met – for the first time – in Kampala. Until then the SPLM/A leader had feared that such a meeting would be seen as a sign of weakness or otherwise result in unfavourable publicity. The newly positive atmosphere soon evaporated following the SPLA attack on the Southern town of Torit on 1 September 2002 (SPLM/A News Agency 2002). Although both parties had until then followed a ‘fight and talk’ strategy, by which military confrontations had occurred while negotiations continued, the attack on Torit was different, a large operation after important progress in the peace process. The motive for the attack is difficult to discern, but it was probably an attempt to strengthen the SPLM’s negotiating position (International Crisis Group 2002b, Justice Africa 2002b). The result was a crisis. The GoS walked out of the Machakos talks, demanded a ceasefire, and were not prepared to return to the talks until they had won back Torit, which they did later in the month. After some weeks of intense diplomacy, Sumbeiywo (with the assistance of neighbouring countries and the troika) managed to persuade the parties to agree to a temporary cessation of hostilities. Although this had to be renewed every three months, it was, for all practical purposes, a ceasefire agreement; and there were only a few incidents of large-scale violence in the South during 2003–2005.

By the New Year, the IGAD/Machakos talks were back on track, only for the issue of the three contested areas along the border between North and South, i.e. Abyei, the Nuba Mountains and Southern Blue Nile, to present a major hurdle (International Crisis Group 2003b). These areas were partly occupied by the SPLM/A, and there was much sympathy among the local populations for the rebels’ pro-periphery and reformist programme. The SPLM/A could not abandon them. Southerners viewed Abyei’s attachment to the North during the colonial period as an anomaly; a majority of the population belongs to the Ngok Dinka people, and the SPLM/A demanded that they be given the opportunity to join the South (Johnson 2008). The people of the two other contested areas share a strong desire for local autonomy and have common interests with the people of the South, but were on the Northern side of the border; it would be difficult to get a workable deal without compromise over these areas. The NCP insisted that the SPLM/A lacked the standing to negotiate on behalf of the people in these areas and that the Machakos Protocol applied only to the South. A separate negotiating forum outside the IGAD framework and under the aegis of the government of Kenya attempted to deal with the three areas (Johnson 2011, pp. 63–64).

Several rounds of negotiations during the spring of 2003 produced no breakthrough, but considerable progress was made in establishing the parties’ positions on the remaining issues of security arrangements, power-sharing, wealth-sharing and the three contested areas. The IGAD secretariat and the troika grew increasingly impatient, however, and intensified the diplomatic pressure to reach an agreement. The mediators decided to put aside the piecemeal approach and instead present a draft of a comprehensive solution (Rogier 2005). The Nakuru document, as it was called, foreshadowed the eventual CPA both in structure and wording (Young 2007). The GoS delegation rejected it. Seizing this opportunity to appear more reasonable, the SPLM/A negotiators approved it, only later disclosing their deep misgivings (Johnson 2011, pp. 80–84). The security arrangements were the most problematic, and these emerged as the next issue that had to be resolved if further progress was to be made.
The signing of the 20 July Machakos Protocol was, in historical perspective, the most important breakthrough of the entire peace process. Not only did this compromise end the impasse over the two major issues of previous talks – the role of religion in government and self-determination for Southern Sudan – it also established the fundamental principles of the ensuing peace process. Subsequent intensification of the war (in autumn 2002) was thus equally surprising. It is still difficult to decide whether the Protocol was a result of fortunate circumstances or whether the parties would have reached some kind of compromise during the summer of 2002 anyway. Moreover, exactly why the Machakos process made limited progress in subsequent months and was finally stranded when the NCP dismissed the Nakuru document in July 2003 is still undisclosed. Young (2007) suggests that the NCP was not ready to make a grand compromise, and it is probable that the NCP hesitated in order to get a better deal by negotiating piecemeal. Another reason may be that the NCP wanted more, i.e. a political partnership with the SPLM/A.

2003–2004: high-level haggling

After the collapse of the Nakuru process, the troika and neighbouring countries promoted a different approach to the peace negotiations. Active mediation through the IGAD secretariat was discontinued; instead, the ‘principals’, John Garang and Vice-President Ali Osman Taha, took the stage. Subsequent compromises were made in closed negotiations between them. The possibility of involving the principals had at different stages been suggested. In particular, the GoS favoured direct negotiation with John Garang. The SPLM/A had initially dismissed the idea of bringing Taha and Garang into the process, but the GoS leadership, having rejected the Nakuru document and been held responsible for halting the peace process, was eager to resume negotiations (Johnson 2011). A concentrated effort was set in motion to bring John Garang directly into the talks. Abel Alier, a Southern Sudanese elder statesman who had been working actively behind the many scenes of the IGAD process, intermediated. Ali Osman Taha also contacted the Norwegian Minister of Development, Hilde Frafjord Johnson, for help in convincing Garang to participate (ibid.). The neighbouring countries, Kenya in particular, also put pressure on Garang. Taha’s attendance at a Kenyan state funeral was used as the occasion for an unofficial meeting with Garang (Waithenya 2006). This meeting was successful, and the two leaders started direct negotiations.

The first breakthrough under the new arrangements was an agreement on security, which was reached in September 2003 (International Crisis Group 2003a). The main issues involved were the future status of the rebel army, the SPLA, and whether Northern troops should be withdrawn from the South. A default solution would have been absorption of the SPLA into the government army. The SPLM/A insisted on keeping the SPLA separate, however, and that the government army should withdraw from the South. The experience gained from the 1972–1983 period of autonomy had taught the SPLM/A that a separate army was needed to guarantee implementation of any agreement. This in turn was unacceptable to the NCP, as it would treat the national army as an occupying force and the South as de facto independent. It appeared that the problem was irresolvable.

The outcome of the first round of meetings in September 2003 was GoS acceptance of the SPLM/A’s initial position on security issues, but with modifications: the SPLA would remain a separate army, and the two parties would contribute equally to ‘joint integrated units’, totalling 39,000 soldiers, to be stationed in Southern Sudan, the three contested areas and Khartoum. This arrangement would last until a referendum decided the future status of the South. In the event the vote favoured unity, the SPLA would be integrated
into the government army (Rogier 2005). This agreement was a victory for the SPLM/A. It practically denied the GoS any military leverage over the South and set the region further on the path towards independence. Nevertheless, it is highly unlikely that SPLM/A would have settled for less, and this compromise was useful for the US and its regional allies since it gave them increased indirect control over Southern Sudan and severely reduced Khartoum’s opportunity to interact with destabilising elements in neighbouring countries. The price the SPLM/A paid for this deal was a political partnership with the NCP and (less formally) with Vice-President Taha. Like President Nimeiri before him, Taha presumably saw the political advantage in becoming a ‘peacemaker’ and harnessing the political force of the SPLM/A and the Southern Sudanese populace (International Crisis Group 2003a).

The next item on the agenda was the issue of wealth-sharing. During the last months of 2003, discussions first centred on questions related to ownership of land and natural resources, which always tend towards the technical; in the end, the parties decided to ignore some of these (notably rights to Nile waters) and postpone others (ownership of land and oil resources). Ultimately, there were two main issues: managing existing and future oil-exploitation contracts, and dividing the income from oil production (Tellnes 2006). In retrospect, it appears that the current management regime was allowed to continue, and the future government of Southern Sudan was to receive 50% of the income derived from oil production there. A third issue involved banking and currency. The parties agreed on a new common currency and a separate branch of the Bank of Sudan: the Bank of Southern Sudan (Rogier 2005). Because the most difficult issues were deferred to future negotiations, however, wealth-sharing did not make or break the peace talks. Instead, the three contested areas and power-sharing became the last major obstacles for the CPA process.

After the signing of the wealth-sharing agreement on 7 January 2004, a final agreement again seemed imminent: the peace process had gained considerable momentum, and it would have been difficult for either party to extricate itself from the process and its commitments at this stage. It was, however, imperative for each side to make a convincing display of getting the best deal possible. During the spring of 2004, much time was spent haggling over quotas in the power-sharing agreement. The result was an elaborate and fateful compromise. The SPLM/A leaders watered down their demand for a secular capital, and failed their allies in the Southern Blue Nile and Nuba Mountains (Johnson 2011, pp. 131–133). The future of those areas was relegated to undefined popular consultations, with unclear consequences. In return, the NCP had to allow a referendum to decide whether Abyei should belong to the North or the South after the end of the interim period in 2011 (Rogier 2005). The Abyei issue has continued to be a point of violent contentions between the parties (Johnson 2010, pp. 36–41).

The power-sharing protocol in fact engendered a plan for democratic transition for the whole Sudan. A national election during the interim period was included at the insistence of the international community (cf. Johnson 2011, pp. 136, 209). The reasoning was that this would give the people of Sudan their say on the peace process and thereby provide legitimacy for the CPA; the parties lacked a formal mandate to participate on behalf of their (assumed) constituencies and there were no channels for popular or civil society consultations in the negotiation framework. The end-stage of negotiations centred on an implementation schedule for the CPA and on details of a ceasefire agreement.

Following the January 2002 ceasefire agreement in the Nuba Mountains there had been a largely successful and relatively low-cost monitoring force, the Joint Military Commission, in the area. This consisted of a few foreign officers and foot soldiers from the
SPLA and the Sudan Armed Forces (Varhola 2007). The force was effective both in monitoring the ceasefire and as part of a trust-building exercise. Some saw this as a model for the whole UN peacekeeping mission in Sudan, but the UN made no attempt to deviate from its prototype. The UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) thus consisted mainly of a large number of infantry and a much smaller number of military observers, civilian staff and police (van der Lijn 2008).

Negotiations over the last details of the peace agreement dragged on during the autumn of 2004. Claims that the NCP held the process hostage while it conducted offensives in Darfur might have some merit, but are difficult to prove (Johnson 2011). But dissent within the SPLM/A over the handling of the peace negotiations in October and November 2004 certainly caused considerable anxiety and brought the process to a standstill. An extraordinary UN Security Council meeting in Nairobi in November 2004 gave the GoS and SPLM/A an ultimatum: if they did not reach agreement by 31 December, severe consequences would ensue for the international engagement with Sudan (ibid.; Rogier 2005). Negotiations continued, and the CPA was signed on 9 January 2005.

Bringing in the principals ensured that an agreement was reached. It shaped the contents of the CPA, and affected the way the agreement was implemented (Young 2007). But it was a risky strategy because there was no higher authority to fall back on if the talks failed, in which case a resumption of the war would be the likely outcome. Moreover, the members of the delegations now had a more subordinate and facilitative role in buttressing the talks between the two leaders, and the IGAD and the chief negotiator had been reduced to ceremonial hosts (Rogier 2005). The eventual political partnership of the NCP and SPLM/A was also a result of the Garang-Taha meetings – a power-sharing agreement that excluded others. These risks and consequences must be balanced against the fact that after the failure of the Nakuru document the peace talks had been deadlocked, and that the alternative to direct high-level talks might well have been a prolongation of the war.

**Implementing the CPA**

When the euphoria triggered by the signing of the CPA subsided, it was time to focus on transition from war to peace and on implementing the ambitious political and social programme embedded in the agreement. The main events and trends of this period can be briefly presented. Mistrust between the parties remained; for the peace agreement to survive, cooperation was required. Some feared that the NCP had acceded to the CPA in order to buy time and that, as soon as international attention moved elsewhere, they would evade implementation, particularly of the referendum (International Crisis Group 2005). Another element of uncertainty involved government-supported militias in the South, which constituted a significant threat to the consolidation of peace (Arnold 2007, Young 2007). Moreover, the war in Darfur continued to rage.

A significant weakness of the CPA was its dependence on the personal relations between Ali Osman Taha and John Garang (Young 2007). Their leadership was crucial for the implementation of the agreement, and for the pursuit of a reform agenda in Khartoum (Johnson 2011). When Garang returned to Khartoum for the first time since the start of the war, he was received by a crowd numbering in the millions. But only three weeks after he had been installed as First Vice-President of Sudan, he died in a helicopter accident (30 July 2005). The SPLM/A itself had always been a coalition, and a power struggle began soon after Garang’s death. Garang’s successor, Salva Kiir Mayardit, lacked the former’s political charisma and convincing commitment to Sudanese unity. Several key figures in the peace negotiations were sidelined. The SPLM/A was thus weakened on
the national scene, and failed to assume a strong position in the coalition Government of National Unity (GoNU). SPLM/A representatives sent to Khartoum as ministers made little impact. The position of Taha, whose influence within the government was partly dependent on personal relations with Garang and the role of the SPLM in national politics, was concomitantly weakened. Implementation of the CPA was hampered by the absence of its two chief architects. The process lost momentum, and execution of key provisions – elections, a census – was disputed and delayed.

Darfur cast a long shadow over the implementation of the peace agreement (Rogier 2005). It had been expected that the SPLM/A’s joining the government in Khartoum would lead to a negotiated settlement in Darfur. In the event, the SPLM/A played only a marginal role in the vexatious Darfur peace process which, although modelled on that of IGAD, differed from it in several ways. First, there were several groups on the rebel side of the table, and they disagreed with each other (Flint 2010). Because of the CPA compromise, moreover, the GoNU had less to offer in terms of power- and wealth-sharing. Finally, the Darfur peace process was, to a larger degree than the CPA negotiations, driven by external actors, who were pushing hard for a quick solution (Nathan 2007). The Darfur Peace Agreement, a compromise spearheaded by the US, was presented in April 2006. The GoNU accepted immediately, since this was close to its position, but while one rebel faction signed, two others rejected it. Since then, the violence in Darfur has been less intense, rebel groups have broken up, but insecurity is still rife in many areas. At the time of writing (July 2011), and despite some progress in negotiations conducted in Doha, a comprehensive peace agreement seems unlikely any time soon.

In 2006 Salva Kiir reached an agreement with the most important Southern militia leaders to absorb them and their soldiers into the SPLM/A (Arnold and LeRiche 2008). Skirmishes in Malakal and Abyei between military units associated with the two former enemies were kept from escalating into a resumption of general warfare (McEvoy and LeBrun 2010). Such local violence, and the general lack of policing capacity, has been the main reason for continuing insecurity in the South (Rolandsen 2009; Schomerus and Allen 2010). Although protection of civilians was part of the mandate for the large and well-funded UN mission, UNMIS has barely been able to monitor the ceasefire arrangements, and it has failed significantly in terms of peacebuilding and the protection of civilians against local violence (UN OCHA 2008; IRIN 2011). The joint integrated units have also proved to be a failure, and have indeed been more of a liability than an enforcer of peace.

Considerable attention and money was devoted to planning post-conflict international assistance to Sudan. Whether, as the UN, World Bank and the troika countries claimed, the government of Sudan and SPLM/A had a definite influence over the design of international assistance, these foreign and multinational entities certainly governed the process and laid down the overall parameters for the post-conflict assistance. The unwieldy World Bank-managed Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) was born of these efforts, accompanied by the ill-considered Joint Donor Office in Juba. This office was tasked with overseeing and coordinating aid to Southern Sudan, but it was not delegated the necessary resources or authority to fulfil these tasks. Despite extensive planning, results have been disappointing (Mailer and Poole 2010; Bennett et al. 2010). One important reason is that assistance has been based on a one-size-fits-all peacebuilding approach. International assistance, particularly the MDTF, was founded on a bureaucratic reporting regime combined with a neo-liberal tender system for contracting non-existent private entrepreneurs. A practical problem was the difficulty in finding senior World Bank officials to live and work in Juba. Funds remained unspent, and the disproportionately poor results can partly be traced to the belated disbursement of the MDTF budgets.
It is difficult to predict the extent to which empirically informed, custom-made solutions would have succeeded, but undeniable that the results of the design chosen have been disappointing (Bennett et al. 2010). The blame for lack of development in the South has often been placed at the door of the government of Southern Sudan’s incapacity and corruption (allAfrica.com 2011). But that problem had been generally anticipated, and addressing it had been a reason for international assistance in the first place. To be sure, high-level political engagement in the peace process declined significantly after the signing of the CPA. And while regional actors continued to be engaged, there was dwindling political interest in implementation from the Western countries. War in Darfur diverted both funds and attention. The International Criminal Court’s indictment of President Bashir further alienated the NCP leaders and hindered constructive engagement with Khartoum. In the autumn of 2010, as the referendum over Southern Sudan’s future status drew nearer, the US in particular stepped up high-level political involvement in the peace process.

More general points related to international intervention presented by Christopher Cramer (2006) and Mats Berdal (2009) are highly relevant for the CPA implementation. Firstly, too often a society entering a post-war phase is seen as a tabula rasa and external planners fail to pay sufficient attention to the fact that international interventions are political and solutions depend on whoever is involved in the efforts to end the war. Secondly, the extent to which peace settlements result in development depends on ‘whether economic policy is a product of ideological fantasy or of a realistic acknowledgment of particular economies and historical experience’ (Cramer 2006, p. 245). Thirdly, these plans have a tendency to ignore the slow transition from war to peace. Violence and insecurity tends to continue during post-conflict phases and preclude reconstruction and democratisation.

The standard liberal peacebuilding measures proved to be largely ineffective and perhaps even counterproductive in the Sudanese context. The stipulation of a national election during the CPA interim period was unhelpful. Although unintentionally useful as a technical dry run for the referendum, the CPA process itself did not allow a real election. The electoral defeat of either of the two parties that signed the CPA and were responsible for implementing it would have threatened the peace agreement. Moreover, the highly complex electoral process drew scarce resources and attention from the planning of the referendum and paralysed the CPA implementation process for months. Meanwhile, a confidence-building ‘peace dividend’ (based on social and economic development) also disappointed, in large part because of impractical approaches to post-war reconstruction and a failure to appreciate the specific challenges presented by local contexts (Bennett et al. 2010). The tasks of restoring security and protecting civilians are, after all, closely linked to social and economic change.

**Conclusion**

Despite its shortcomings, the peace agreement has brought a halt to the conflict between the government of Sudan and SPLM/A. Yet, the Machakos Protocol, even more so than the CPA itself, was the historic breakthrough of the peace process. That agreement accurately reflected the priorities of the two parties: when pressured by external actors to reach a compromise, maintaining a firm political and ideological grip in the North was more important to the NCP than securing the South. For the SPLM, self-determination for the South was favoured over a reformed New Sudan. The Machakos compromise thus prepared the ground for a final resolution of the conflict; it provided the opportunity to negotiate the other contentious issues of security arrangements, the three contested areas, and
wealth- and power-sharing. The Machakos Protocol also established the overall architecture of the CPA.

The CPA did not include other political parties, solve conflicts elsewhere in Sudan, or provide a blueprint for democratisation and economic development. But, expansion of the peace process to address any of these presumed shortcomings would have derailed the peace talks and most likely resulted in a renewal of the war. In terms of general theorising about peacemaking and external intervention, lessons from the implementation of the CPA indicate that attempts at including ambitious peacebuilding agendas might doom the immediate effort at hand, to end war. Moreover, in line with Cramer’s (2006) reasoning, we may ask similar questions of the literature on external intervention in peace negotiations. Are external actors neutral? Are their interests ever entirely benevolent? How do we strike a balance between a need for pragmatic engagement to end a war, and the long-term goal of lasting peace and prosperity?

That Southerners would opt for independence became increasingly probable during the CPA interim period. However, the very fact that the CPA committed both sides to making continued unity ‘attractive’ hindered constructive debate about making separation bearable to the NCP and the North as such (Rolandsen 2011). Division of the country will solve, at least temporarily, the North–South conflict, but will not eliminate the possibility of future war between the resulting two countries; nor does it ensure security, development or political empowerment of the Sudanese. The temporary framework imbued in the Protocol signed in Nairobi on 9 January 2005 facilitated a relatively quick end to the war by allowing some issues to be deferred. This also ensured, however, that an ensuing round of negotiation over the South’s terms of secession became elaborate and difficult. These negotiations were not finalised at the time of South Sudan’s secession and will require considerable statesmanship from Sudanese leaders and engagement from neighbouring countries and the wider international community to be satisfactorily concluded. The CPA process laid the foundation for change and development, but other processes are needed to realise these aspirations.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. Eritrea’s secession took place after separatist rebels had defeated and replaced an Ethiopian regime resisting the formation of an independent Eritrea.

2. Sources include, first and foremost, documentation in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs archives and interviews with Sudanese and others involved in the peace process, but also International Crisis Group reports; Justice Africa’s monthly reviews of the peace process; news
reports (e.g. *Africa Confidential* and the websites of *Sudan Tribune* and Sudan.net); and written accounts by people involved in the peace process.

3. During the late 1990s Italy had a prominent role during the early phases of the peace process but ended up in the background during the negotiations of 2002–2004.

4. The organisation was initially named the Inter-Governmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD).

5. As Wikileaks documents related to US diplomatic activities in the region gradually become available, deeper insight into US relations with the countries involved in the CPA process is likely.

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Our struggle and its goals: a controversial Eritrean manifesto

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Written in 1971 in one of Eritrea’s languages, Our struggle and its goals is a controversial manifesto in Eritrea’s political history. For some Eritreans, it is a malevolent document that has produced an unexpected sectarian project with disastrous consequences. For others, it is one of the best political documents ever written in the history of the Eritrean struggle. In any case, it is significant to scholarship especially to those who care about nation-building in ethnically and politically diverse societies. To make it easily available to researchers, an English translation is provided, following a short explanatory note.

Keywords: Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF); Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF); Jebha; manifesto; \textit{NHnan Elamanan}

Explanatory note

An English translation of a controversial manifesto in Eritrea’s political history is provided following this short note. Its publication is driven by the need to help young Eritreans and researchers understand the political dynamics of Eritrea, not only by making the manifesto available in English, but also by making it more accessible. The manifesto is of some significance to scholarship. The aim of this note is to introduce it, touching on its contentious side, with the hope that further studies will be devoted to it.

Issued in 1971, Our struggle and its goals is commonly known as \textit{NHnan Elamanan}\textsuperscript{1} – its title in Tigrinya, one of the nine languages in Eritrea, in which it was originally written. First-time readers of a piece on Eritrea may not find it easy to understand, though the document contains some introduction to parts of Eritrea’s history written from the perspective of its author/s.

In brief, Ethiopia’s unilateral annexation of Eritrea took place in the second half of the 1950s in breach of the latter’s status as ‘an autonomous unit federated with Ethiopia under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian Crown’ (UNGA Resolution 390A[V]). Most commentators argue that this move was not welcomed by the majority of Eritreans, though Negash (1997) holds a contrary view. The first to rise militarily were Muslims of the western low-lands of Eritrea who, in 1961, launched the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), referred to as \textit{Jebha} in the manifesto (Selassie 1989, p. 48; Kibreab 2008, p. 152; Pool 1998, p. 23). By resorting to extreme force and repression, however, the Ethiopians lost the support of the other segment of the Eritrean population – highland-dwelling Coptic peasants, the majority

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of whom were at one point in favour of unity with Ethiopia – and which motivated many to join the ELF (Erlich 1980, p. 178; Giorgis 1989). There, the newcomers, especially those seeking broader social and political change (Muslims and Christians alike), were not accommodated to their satisfaction (Kibreab 2008, pp. 152–153).

For this reason, a few years later, the ELF ruptured into many factions, one of which was led by the author of the manifesto, and which later became the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) (Kibreab 2008, p. 169). In the 1940s, Eritrea was marked by cries for unity across ethnic and religious lines. The background to the manifesto was Britain’s proposal to divide Eritrea, and Ethiopia’s moves to claim it. Against this backdrop, those who broke with the ELF to form a new organisation felt compelled to write the manifesto to communicate to the rest of the world essentially why they had walked away, who they were and what their goals were. At the time it was written, the breakaway groups were already in a civil war with ELF. Twenty years later, after a second eruption of civil war in 1980–81, the ELF was driven out of Eritrea by the EPLF and its allies in the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). Factions of the ELF now make up a considerable part of the opposition organisations in exile. Meanwhile, the EPLF amassed military power and liberated Eritrea in 1991. Since then, the EPLF alone has remained in power in the de facto single party state of Eritrea.

Some level of dubiousness marks the manifesto. For example, although existing views on its authorship are not necessarily contradictory, the author is not clearly known. Zere (2004) argues that Isaias Afwerki, the only and unelected president of Eritrea for the last 20 years and all-time key figure in the EPLF, ‘alone wrote the declaration’, but that the then 24-year-old Isaias was ‘savvy enough to delude the audience (readers) by giving “collective” sense to his message’. Connell (1997, p. 83) wrote that the manifesto was ‘drafted and laboriously typed in early 1971 by Isaias – it was his first experience with a typewriter – before being produced on a primitive duplicating machine smuggled out of Asmara for the purpose’. Pool (1998, p. 24) attributes authorship to Isaias Afwerki in all probability, while Tesfai (2010) holds that the manifesto was authored by ‘a team of young Christian warriors’. It is also unclear whether the manifesto was intended for wide distribution, although it appears at times to be addressed to potential foreign supporters. At one point it indicates that the authors were standing before, and addressing, what was presumably a crowd. This seems to indicate that the document was conceived as a speech to those splinters it could reach in person.

At least on two fronts – Eritrea’s entitlement to statehood and accusations against the ELF – the document is interesting. On the first issue, it tries to rebut proposals on the disposal of Eritrea in the 1940s devised by Stephen Longrigg (1945a, 1945b, 1946), the then British military administrator of Eritrea who wanted to partition Eritrea along racial lines which then would join Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and Ethiopia. Viability as a state, a claim by Haile Selassie at the United Nations during the deliberations over the future of Eritrea, is another argument the manifesto tries to rebut. To start with, Eritrea had a strong case in law to be an independent state (Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal 1980; Selassie 1988).2 The claim that it could not administer itself was strongly opposed at UN forums on legal grounds by implicated small states such as Haiti; and international lawyers argued that Eritrea’s autonomous status under the federal arrangement was unamendable, even by unanimous agreement between Eritreans and Ethiopians (Meron and Pappas 1980, p. 211).3 It is against this backdrop that the manifesto argued for Eritrea’s right to self-determination.

When it comes to accusations against the ELF, many Eritreans question whether they were accurate and, even if so, whether they justified a split in the liberation movement. Ammar (2004), a well-placed ELF veteran, casts doubt on the truthfulness of its
accusations. Kibreab (2008, p. 162) backs the accusations of the manifesto, though relying on authorities whom ELF veterans call biased towards the EPLF. Nevertheless, he questions the ‘lack of alternative’ the manifesto claims as the rationale for the split from ELF as well as the ‘non-sectarian democratic’ alternative the new front claims to have offered (2008, pp. 189–221). One young and unaffiliated online commentator (Kidane 2009) attributes the manifesto’s lasting impact to the fact ‘that there was no one feisty enough to rebut it’.

As Connell (1997, p. 83) observed, the ‘embryo of the EPLF’s vision was expressed in Our Struggle and Its Goals’. This document and the 1977 programme and 1994 charter of the EPLF are important to understand the ideological content (at least the ones preached) of the government in power today. Have Eritrean realities matched the vision? The most significant issue is national unity vis-à-vis national diversity. Pool (1997) argues that ‘unity and discipline, core values of the EPLF and of the independent government after liberation, can be linked to two experiences: the loose controls and internal struggles of the ELF, and an internal crisis’. Determined to avoid splits and a replication of the early history of the ELF, the EPLF ‘established strict democratic centralism as its core organising principle’.

Tesfai (1999), an EPLF veteran and a former member of the government, states that ‘national unity has been identified as an overriding principle that touches on practically every government policy’ (p. 276). Indeed, says Hedru (2003), the focus on national unity has become an obsession and a tool of repression to the extent that “sub-nationalism”, that is, ethnicity/tribalism, is a political crime in Eritrea’ (p. 436). Thus, even though the end of the Cold War forced the EPLF to superficially embrace some democratic principles, its core values have remained essentially the same, particularly with reference to civil and political liberties, economic policies, social diversity and foreign policy. Were popular expectations of the former EPLF leaders, now top officials of the government of Eritrea, misplaced? Because the manifesto was used to justify the rupturing (disunity) of the ELF, the manifesto is blamed by some commentators for the current state of Eritrea’s fractured politics. Zere (2004) holds that it is an ‘evil document’ which ‘had produced an unexpected result with a disastrous consequence’. Salman (2009) calls it an ‘infamous manifesto’ and a hatchet of Christian chauvinists. Ammar (2004) says it contained a ‘venomous message’ which had a ‘negative effect in modern Eritrean politics’ and it ‘must be understood as [a] negative influence’. Musallem (2010) takes the document as a ‘sectarian project’ – the very accusation the document makes against others. A 2010 manifesto, The Eritrean Covenant: Towards Sustainable Justice and Peace condemns Our Struggle and its Goals as ‘aimed to serve as a clarion call for uprising and a blueprint for ethnic domination’ that ‘became the rallying cry for all sorts of enmity and prejudice against Eritrean Muslims’ (Mukhtar 2010). The Eritrean Covenant is intended to counter NHnan Elamanan while mimicking the latter’s structure. Yet even some of the EPLF’s fiercest critics acknowledge the document’s power. Omer-Ali (2010), an ELF veteran, grudgingly salutes Isaias Afwerki for his ‘will-power and cleverness’ in using ‘a small ragtag army’ and the NHnan Elamanan to build something akin to an ‘empire’.

Selassie (2010), who once represented the EPLF at the United Nations and headed the post-independence Constitution Commission, asked 25 Eritreans, including both Christians and Muslims, about the role of the manifesto in the politics of Eritrea’s armed struggle, and saw a trend:

EPLF supporters consider [it] a historic document that was billed as justification for the split [but for mostly ELF-oriented commentators] was a fraud perpetrated by Isaias Afwerki in order to assure himself the support of Christians. And in doing so, he committed a crime against the Eritrean nation by causing a dangerous religiously-based division.
Some of his interviewees, presumably neutrals, seem to hold that the manifesto itself is not a problem:

In fact, they both contend that it is one of the best political documents ever written in the history of the Eritrean struggle, articulating as it does the mission and vision and core values of the EPLF and the people who made it.

However, he says that they ‘point to the fact that the document made the cultural, religious and geographic divide a permanent fixture in Eritrean politics’. Supporters of the EPLF’s government, such as Kiflu (2010), regard it as ‘a document that declared [the] freedom of Eritrea’. Haile (2001) expresses admiration for the man who ‘wrote what his goal was in that fateful document and has achieved 90% of what he set-out to do’.

Yet, the lasting influence of the document is contested, too. Zere (2004) holds that it did not, despite its mystical status, play a crucial role and ‘it is more likely that the majority of Eritreans never read it or were never influenced by it’. ‘Aside from its lyrical and aesthetic format’, he argues, ‘the document was not distributed widely as [was] the intention’. Pool (1998, p. 24) takes the opposite position, arguing that the manifesto was ‘distributed widely amongst Eritreans’. Ammar (2004) concedes that ‘the majority of Eritrean highlanders whom the document wanted to address and appeal to’ may not have been reached, but a segment of the Eritrean people ‘came across the message and then got infected by it’.

Despite the limited channels of communication and dissemination of information in those days, Ammar argues that ‘hand-written and typed versions of NHnan Elamanan were copied and recopied in many forms and in many places in the neighbouring countries, in Europe and the USA’. Kidane (2009) notes further that the document has current impact and still casts its shadow over the whole of Eritrea’s political history.

Determining its value and its impact has, however, been difficult, as the document has not until now been readily available, except to scholars expending many hours on research and extensive correspondence. Almost all Eritreans below the age of 40 have not read it, and the current government has not reissued it. In addition, the opposition tends to cite the document in a negative light but does not bring it to the young generation as it is. As Zere (2004) wrote, if a Christian opposition political junkie at the level of university student never had the opportunity to read the document before 2000, ‘then it is more likely that the majority of Eritreans never read it’. A translation of the text has also not been available.4

The document is originally written in Tigrinya, an Eritrean language lacking consistency and standardisation in spelling and grammar at that time. Furthermore, in the style of many such political diatribes, the document is replete with verbosity, rhetoric and extremely long sentences. These factors make translation difficult and non-standard.5 For example, the very title itself is translated differently. ‘Our struggle and its goals’ seems dominant probably because the other version had this title (Mehreteab 2004, p. 71; Connell 2001, p. 24; Leonard 1988, p. 134; Gebre-Medhin 1989, p. 202; Abbay 1998, p. 234; Iyob 1997b, p. 126). ‘We and our objectives’ or ‘We and our aims’ were used elsewhere (Ammar 2004; Markakis 1988, p. 60; Iyob 1997a, p. 659). For these reasons, the following is a close approximation but not an exact replica of the original.

Our struggle and its goals

Eritrean People’s Liberation Forces (EPLF) November 1971

For long, from time to time, we have been distributing written materials that explain who we are and our standing in some political affairs of our country. However, owing to financial
and material limitations, we know and understand that our brochures have not reached the places we desired to reach.

Now, availing ourselves of this great opportunity and favourable time, we present an historic document under the title ‘Our Struggle and its Goals’. Cognisant of its importance to the affairs of our country, to our people, to our supporters in particular and to the international community in general, we remind and advise that the document should not be taken lightly. The document contains answers not only to those who ask who we are but also to those who want to know our country, the people and its revolution.

We, Eritrean fighters standing before you and addressing you at this moment, are the ones who in March 1969 split from the administration of ‘Qyada al Ama’. It is true that almost all of us or most of us are Christians by birth, tradition and history. For this reason, a distant observer may take us as ‘religionists’. However, we do not want to negligently ignore this branding saying that one who does not know our goals can be excused in holding that opinion. Rather, we plead to everyone who cares to know our identity and our goals to read our document from beginning to end. In addition to providing written and verbal explanations, we are ready to meet in person anyone who has questions about us.

We understand in depth the main reason why we have split from, and why we are finding ourselves in this kind of situation. However, we also understand that observers and sympathisers are being bothered for want of satisfactory answers for why ‘Christians’ split from; how they split from; when did they come apart; what are their goals; what are their aspirations; are they nationalists or religionists, fighters or religious people, reactionaries or revolutionaries ... how and why. Beyond this, we do not miss that there are those who gossip and hate us based on information from third parties. It is not that only questions are being asked about our affairs; opinions too are given. Disguised as our sympathisers, many welcome that we walked away. Others support our decision to walk away understanding that staying together is too much to tolerate. Some say that we are ‘religionists’. There are those, being on a bed of dreams, who say this and that. In short, the opinions given to cheat, commend, intimidate, correct or lure us or to use us to achieve plans with different goals are, perhaps, more numerous than their authors.

We do realise that it is not somebody’s but our responsibility to provide those inquisitives with a satisfactory answer; to tell those who try to cheat us to stop wasting their energy; to convey words of gratitude to those who appreciate us; to stress to those who try to lure us that we do not get tempted to change our appearance; to welcome those who would want to correct us and to clarify to those who would want to purchase us that we are not for sale like firewood or animals. Given that we know well our goals better than those asking questions or simply chattering, realising that explaining our identity and clarifying our goals is not somebody else’s responsibility but ours, we hope this document will be a notable clarification.

A short note on our country, Eritrea, and its population

Nobody misses the fact that we, Eritreans, belong to a country with a clearly delimited national boundary, a separate history, separate culture and tradition. The international community is a witness to the fact that we have been struggling for many years because we were held back by African oppressive colonisers who have become puppets of imperialism; because our history is distorted, our languages outlawed, our cultures and traditions dominated and our dignity and human rights violated. The struggle we are conducting now against Ethiopian oppression is a continuation, albeit in a military form, of Eritrean resistance against colonial oppression. Our sacrifices are aimed at freeing ourselves from the
oppressions of Haile Selassie and his bosses because we want the Eritrean people to progress to being the master of their destiny. However, what we need to realise is that oppression is not linked to colonisers only; a coloniser is not always and not the only oppressor. There is repression and resistance in one community, too. There are those economic and political oppressions which the rich impose on the poor, the master on the slave, the powerful on the weak, the village chief on the villagers, the modernists over the traditionalists ... etc. Nevertheless, given that oppression cannot indefinitely remain unopposed, history has confirmed that sooner or later the poor and the workers in union rise against the rich, slaves against the masters; villagers arm against their chief, and the weak come together against the powerful. When different types of oppression ferment and explode, it is not beyond human imagination that the might of the oppressed rises and wipes them away.

As long as freedom based on equality of every citizen of a nation is not realised, oppression and resistance do not stop. Even though we Eritreans generally have a unifying history, economic resources, political development and related or affiliated languages and traditions, as any other community, the Eritrean population also exhibits many conflicting features. One example that is the main drive for this document is the tendency of presenting Eritrea in terms of a Muslim/Christian divide instead of as a unified nation. For this reason, let us examine and know Eritrea and its population.

A. Geographic location

Eritrea is a neighbour to Ethiopia, the Sudan and the Red Sea. In terms of topography, generally it is divided into highland and lowland. All the coastal area and the area bordering the Sudan is hot lowland called Quola while the remaining areas bordering Ethiopia is an elevated highland called Kebesa. In terms of religious affiliation, in Eritrea the division of the population more or less matches the topographic categorisation. Most of those who live in the highlands are Christians while those who live in the lowlands are Muslims. According to the districting system introduced by Italian colonisers, Eritrea is divided into eight provinces. The highland encompasses Hamassien, Serae and Akele-Guzai; the coastal lowland encompasses Semhar, Sahel and Denkel while the western lowland encompasses Senhit and Barka. The lowlands constitute three-fourths of the area of Eritrea; the highlands make up the other one-fourth. The geographic position of Eritrea is of great strategic significance. For this reason, it is clear for the whole world that alien oppressors look at it with greedy eyes.

B. Economic resources

Eritrea is endowed with natural resources such as land, vegetation, animals, minerals ... etc. that can sustain itself. However, the majority of its population subsists on farming and pastoralism and it is at the beginning of development. Colonisers have exploited and shipped away the extracted resources of the country. As a result, the Eritrean people, deprived of economic development, have been living in poverty. The people in the highland depend on relatively improved farming practices while the rest of the people in the coastal and western lowland are nomads who survive moving from one place to another. Given that our people’s oppression is mainly economic, history has witnessed that colonial oppressors have, with the aim of exploiting Eritrea’s resources unhindered, ridiculed and continue to ridicule the Eritrean people by dividing it along religious, ethnic and other factional lines.
C. Population size

The more than three million population of Eritrea is not evenly distributed on the surface of Eritrea. The people on the highland, unlike the smallness of the area, could as well be more than half of the total population. Large parts of the coastal and western lowland are arid and thus few people live there. There is no recent census of the population of Eritrea. The one conducted in 1957 indicated the percentage of the population of Eritrea, divided by provinces, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hamassien</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serae</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akel-Guzai</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barka</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senhit</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sahel</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denkel</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semhar</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D. Political awareness

When we carefully look at political awareness in our country, we find that colonisers and their puppets that were desirous to and did endeavour to run their interests smoothly, found religion as the main instrument in the realisation of their objectives. For this reason, when the Eritrean revolution against colonial oppression which, as other centuries old revolutions elsewhere in the world, started, it has since 1940 been divided into two camps. In the 1940s, most Christians opted for ‘union’ with Ethiopia while most Muslims opted for ‘union’ with the Sudan. For this reason, our political history makes it clear that the Eritrean people, who had become a victim of a United Nations’ verdict, has fallen into agony and is suffering.

E. Language

Even though more than nine languages are used in Eritrea, the two languages most widely used by the Eritrean population are Tigrinya and Tigre. Derived from Geez, these two are Semitic languages. The other languages not derived from Geez are Bilien, Beja, Baza, Baria, Saho and Denkel. More details on these languages are given below. However, on a general note, the Eritrean population is linguistically divided into two. The language of most of our people in the highland is Tigrinya while the language of most of our people in the coastal and western lowland is Tigre.

Tigrinya: Native speakers of this language are those Christians in the highland but few amongst them, such as the Jeberti, are Muslims. Tigrinya is spoken not only in Eritrea but also by those in a northern province of Ethiopia called Tigray.

Saho: Native speakers of this language are called Saho. They live in eastern Akele-Guzai and northern Semhar. While most of them are Muslims, some are Christians. As other languages, Saho is not confined to Eritrea but also used by some tribes in northern Ethiopia.

- Tigre: Native speakers of this language live in the eastern coastal lowland and western lowland. While most of them are Muslims, there are some Christians such as the Mensa-e in eastern Senhit. Tigre is also used by many Sudanese in east Sudan.
- Afar: Native speakers of this language are Muslims who live in eastern Eritrea in Denkel province. The Afar have their kinsmen in the adjacent areas of Ethiopia and Djibouti.
- Blien: Native speakers of this language are half Christians and half Muslims who have been called the Bogos. They live in Senhit. Given that the origin of this language is Agew, speakers of a language similar to Agew are also present in Ethiopia.
Beja: Native speakers of this language are those few Muslims who live in northern Sahel and western lowland. Most speakers of this language are Sudanese who live in the eastern side of Sudan.

Baza: Native speakers of this language are those called Baza. They live in the western lowland near river Gash and Setit. Though they have few Christians most of them are traditional believers.

Baria: Native speakers of this language live in the western lowland at the northern part of Gash. Like the Baza they are few in number. Though they have few Christians most of them are traditional believers.

In addition to these languages and those who speak them which we just mentioned, few unmixed Arabic-speaking race called ‘Rashaida’ live in the coastal areas of Sahel. In general, given the many languages used in Eritrea and that the Eritrean people are very much interconnected, in different parts of the many provinces, many ethnic groups are bi- or multi-lingual who can converse and communicate in more than one language. Out of these Eritrean languages, Tigrinya and Tigre have their own alphabets. For the reason that these two languages are derived from Geez, they use Geez alphabets. Geez is a language that was spoken and written hundreds of years ago. After evolving into Tigrinya and Tigre, Geez is now rendered obsolete; its limited use is confined to monasteries and holy books. Except monasteries and churches that still use it, no one uses Geez in daily life. However, as a language linked to faith and as an historical language, Geez commands considerable value. When the United Nations took responsibility of the disposal of Eritrea, with the aim of minimizing problems linked to the multiplicity of languages, it opted to link language with religion. Thus, hoping that Arabic will bring the Muslims together and likewise Tigrinya will bring Christians together, it enacted Arabic and Tigrinya to be the official languages of Eritrea and on this basis Arabic and Tigrinya became official languages of Eritrea.

F. Culture and tradition

When we come to culture and tradition of the Eritrean population, they vary across ethnic groups, provinces and dialects. These cultural and traditional variations are generally linked to livelihoods, political awareness, history, topography and beliefs. The people in the highland have similar culture and tradition. The people in the lowland are, though not as uniform as the people in the highland, unified by a common faith.

As explained above, the Eritrean people, as peoples of other countries, are diverse. However, because for centuries they have together endured colonial oppression, intermarried, shared a common history, related livelihoods, political development, language, culture and tradition; they cannot be divided and factionalised for any reason.

The people in the highland may have religious affinities with those Christians in Ethiopia. They may as well be especially related to those provinces of Ethiopia bordering Eritrea such as Tigray by a common language (Tigrinya) and traditional and cultural features. As history has it, this people may have history linked to the ancient Kingdom of Axum.

In addition, the Eritrean people in the areas bordering the Sudan may relate to the tribes in eastern Sudan in terms of old history, common religion, language, and some traditional and cultural attributes. The Eritrean people in the costal lowland, considering that it is proximate to overseas culture and tradition, may have a closer link to and understanding of overseas tribes in the Arab countries than the tribes in other parts of Eritrea.

Generally, throughout the world, peoples on border areas have stronger links and closer relations with those across the boundary than with those in their country’s mainland. This is
not peculiar to Eritrea. However, transboundary demographic similarities are not sufficient causes for dismembering a country. Our country will thus remain as one country. It will not be partitioned to parts that would merge with the Sudan or Ethiopia. When we compare the Eritrean people close to the Sudanese border with the Sudanese all over the Sudan, they are very different people. In addition, if we compare the Eritreans closer to the border with Ethiopia with the entire Ethiopians, it is a very different people. The variations in livelihood, ethnicity, language, geography and culture prevalent in Eritrea, are present in Ethiopia and the Sudan. In fact, the diversity is bigger and more extreme in the other two countries. If we revert to old history, it cannot link to the century we are living in. If we try to map the world based on centuries-old history, we would find an entirely new world rather than a few new states.

In Africa in particular, if we attempt to draw states based on the history of the last few centuries, let alone the distant history, we would find Africa divided into thousands of tribes and races. In short, the demographic diversity in Eritrea is present in other countries as a normal given. For this reason, it is not shameful nor something that threatens a unified Eritrea. The main point we tried to clarify is that religion is used as an instrument for oppression and exploitation but it cannot in itself stand as a cause for a struggle. In other words, can we say that the diversity we explained above is rooted in religion? If we have truly examined matters, religion is one of the more than ten elements of diversity within the Eritrean people. To say that every divide or oppression or cause for struggle is religiously motivated is to pass a blind judgment. Considering the fact that many of the elements of diversity more or less match the Muslim/Christian divide, it is true that the prevalent differences appear as anchored on Muslim/Christian dichotomy. We should understand and realise that this Muslim/Christian divide appears sharper than it is because colonial chiefs and opportunistic citizens exaggerated it for the sake of their private gains.

The main aim of the explanation given above is to explain Eritrea’s unity and that the basis for differences within the Eritrean people is not religion. Any citizen or foreigner who denies these facts we have just presented is either ignorant, at fault or simply hegemonic. Now, we shall revert back to our main message. If these are the facts, then, what should be the reason that forced us to split? The reason for our split is a long history that starts from the birth of Jebha [ELF] and the Eritrean Freedom Party [Selfi Netsanet Ertra]. For this reason, we shall explain in brief starting from 1961.

A. [Haphazard revolution]

Revolutions around the world have confirmed that a struggle that is not based on revolutionary principles and which lacks specific plans cannot succeed. The Eritrean experience is a big lesson that firing and wandering around with guns on your back without specific purpose is a futile effort.

Many Eritreans have spoken about our struggle that started randomly in 1961 without a clear political programme. Those who established or started Jebha in 1961 simply rang the bell of struggle without sufficiently studying the affairs of their country and their people in advance; without revolutionary plans and principles and without specific task-plans and political leadership.

B. Islamisation

No one misses the fact that the absence of sound revolutionary plans and principles are caused by lack of qualified revolutionary leadership. The founders of the struggle felt
shame to convey to their fighters a nationalist message. They thought that preaching Islam in Eritrea and in the Arab countries is the better way of strengthening the struggle. For this reason, they presented us as Muslim both here and outside. The chiefs of Jebha who assumed the highest authority and [controlled] external relations frequented Islamic countries and institutions presenting themselves as ‘Muslim brothers’ who are fighting oppression from Haile Selassie, King of Christian Habesha, on Eritrean Muslims who they claimed constitute 80% (eighty per cent) of the total population. In this mission of containing Christian hegemony, they asked for assistance and sympathy from brotherly Muslims. By welcoming assistance obtained on the basis of Muslim brotherhood, they gave their front a shocking image. Their followers who have been carrying guns and doing the actual fighting in Eritrean fields started asking the gullible public if they liked the Christian king, Emperor Yohannes, whom they presented as the one who destroyed Islam and expanded Christianity. They preached that the present king is the grandson of Emperor Yohannes and, as his grandfather did, he is an infidel (ṣīt) resolved to destroy the peoples’ Islamic faith while they claimed to be Jihadists and an Islamic messiah who are resolved to resist the king. Their struggle is thus a holy war. Preaching along these lines, they made our [Muslim] people indiscriminately hate any Christian regardless of where one lives. An Eritrean Christian was called atheist, cruel and a traitor. The Muslim part of Eritrean people started to consider their problems as religion-induced oppression and started chanting jihad fi lebis Allah to rally behind the holy war.

However, the public, who were not aware of the preaching of Jebha and who now felt the conspiracy of the colonisers in using religion as a dividing card while the pre-federation divide was still there, innocently continued to be inspired by [ELF guerrilla leader Hamid] Awate and remained tuned day and night to the struggle launched in 1961. What turned the public to the armed struggle was the experience of the political movement from 1950–60. It is to be recalled that this political movement, that appeared free from religious divide and that brought Muslims and Christians and highlanders and lowlanders to a common fold, had enlightened and unified the Eritrean public. Inspired by this era, every Eritrean was ready to join the struggle. Even though Eritreans in all parts of Eritrea were morally and materially supporting Awate’s revolution, the whole or most of the fighting force in Barka along with Awate was Muslim. Why at that time Eritrean highlanders did not join the struggle could only be because of a geographic factor. Otherwise, the claim that highlanders did not join because they did not want a revolution launched by Muslims is far from the truth.

Participation in the armed struggle continued with increasing momentum up to 1965 without changing much of its composition. However, inside ‘Jebha’ preaching of Islam did not stop.

C. Ethnic tension

Given that most of the fighting forces in the field were Muslims, did the preaching and guidance of Islam unite and solidify them as it was intended? If we ask this question, we will get an astonishing answer. In any community, the unjustified gains of one or few cannot settle well with the interests of the masses. The first leaders had no disciplined national programme. In addition, as their number grew, they immersed in a competition of running the show and towering higher in the leadership ladder than the other. To use the forces under their command in the realisation of their ambitions, they started to be creative. Having realised that ethnic tension is the card that meets their ambitions, they ignited a serious tension by splitting the forces along ethnic and regional lines.
The chiefs residing outside Eritrea did not make their ambitions explicit. However, they had to pretend that they were seeking solution for the tension in the field. Thus, at the end of 1965, they left their offices to the field to split the army into many divisions. They divided the army into four divisions. The main reason for splitting the army was to appease those who were seeking to ignite ethnic tension and thus win one or the other of them as a support base. Of course, the official explanation they gave was that it is effective to disperse the army and thus expand operational areas. Expansion with the aim of assisting and mobilising the public is good. However, this should have been done under a favourable time and circumstances, in an organised manner, after conducting an in-depth study of the Eritrean people and working out specific political and military strategies. This can only be done step by step and not like a slicing of a cake where one force is randomly assigned to Barka, the other to Senhit, the other to Hamassien, Seraye, Akele-Guzai, Semhar or Denkel. In short, we understand that the dispersal of the army conducted in 1965 was an anti-popular military strategy implemented to serve the interests of one or two individuals.

D. [Participation in the fighting force]

Generally speaking, the participation of Christians or highlanders in the armed forces increased as time passed even though it may not have been in par with the number of Muslims. Highlanders were dispersed in the four divisions. When, as one segment of the Eritrean population, highlanders started to realise their role in ‘Jebha,’ one question frequented their mind. The four divisions were based on the premise that only a leadership and rank that belongs to a specific ethnic group and locality can mobilise that group. For this reason, the leader of the Barka Division was from Barka and together with the rank from Barka operates in Barka. It was the same with the other divisions. However, the highland provinces (Hamassien, Seraye and Akele-Guzai) were under a Muslim leader. For this reason, highlanders started complaining that an exception had been made in their case.

In resolving any crisis, leaders of Jebha consider first their self-interest. If any action fits their interests, they take it regardless of consequences. Thinking that allowing the Christians to have their own military division would permit the latter to grow in number, they collected fighters from the four divisions and sliced parts of the territorial zone of the third division in Hamassien. Putting their man at the top, they thus formed a fifth division in 1996. Instead of fixing the mistake they made a year ago, they added to it.

E. Religious tension

Adding a fifth division on top of the four was akin to teaching ethnic tension and it did not solve the prevalent crisis. As we mentioned before, the actions the leaders of Jebha were taking were based on religious, ethnic, regional and other related backward principles which were bereft of revolutionary clues and thus they were anti-popular war strategies. For this reason, the five divisions they created together with their leaders started to drift away from the nationalist path.

The leaders of the divisions were not enlightened, and from the very beginning they were not driven by a national mission. Competing against each other, they created five empires and fronts just in one nation and in one front. In order to acquire a huge force and obtain capital that supports their dictatorship, they started to take actions not permitted by any imagination of human morality. To realise their individual ambitions in a short span,
and because they could not put a limit to their religious fanaticism, citing one or two old tensions and feuds between some ethnic groups as evidence, they revealed their thinking and they resolved to ignite religious crisis by presenting Christians and highlanders as their enemies and Christians and highlanders as siding with Ethiopia.

After this, they created smaller military units and instructed them to raid the wealth and cattle of the Christian population. The number of cattle raided and taken to the environs of Kassala (Sudan) at different times from the lowland, Serae and banks of Hamassien were estimated to be ten thousand. The raids were conducted by those military units of the Third and First Division that were in the lowland, Serae and banks of the Anseba River in Hamassien. In addition, houses of innocent civilians were put on fire and monies and property of the public was robbed. Those citizens who opposed the theft of their cattle and destruction of their property were brutally killed. This shameful inhuman action was tasting sweet to Jebha leaders. Intoxicated with blood, while calling every peasant an infidel, they killed 50 peasants in a cruel manner at a place called Senber. It did not stop here; killing and raiding innocent citizens was gaining momentum. From the property they seized, leaders of Jebha gathered a huge capital. In Sudan, they built villas, bought trucks, and got married while the already married ones added two or three more women. They spent the money they brutally took from the Eritrean people acquiring wealth in Arab countries, buying property and drinking and womanising.

When these evil deeds intensified, the covert colour of leaders of Jebha became overt. The top chiefs and divisional leaders of Jebha made an oppressive class in Eritrea at the expense of the Eritrean public whom they oppressed politically, economically and by use of sheer force. The fighters under their command turned into hired mercenaries at the service of leaders of Jebha. In general, Jebha became a new oppressive class in Eritrea. The Eritrean people, who were fighting for liberty from the oppressive Haile Selassie, found itself under the unexpected oppression of Jebha. When this happened, the highlanders who were specifically at the receiving end of the oppression, having found the front they supported in realisation of independence turned into an oppressor, started to not only distance the front but also to protest. Haile Selassie found this crisis as a great opportune moment. Having got evidence for his long-lasting campaign that Eritrea is deeply divided along religious lines, he soon supplied arms and turned the betrayed public against Jebha and the latter was forced by circumstance to fire against Jebha. Leaders of Jebha took the situation recklessly. In addition, instead of seeking revolutionary solutions, on the pretext that now the public is armed against them, they aggravated the tension and conflict by intensifying their campaign of raiding and killing. When the matter drifted far away from a national cause to assume religious tension, the ordinary fighters in Jebha did not register their objection. For this reason, availing Jebha’s principle that harm on your people hurts more, those mostly Christian fighters who were in the Fifth Division started to care and worry more about the situation.

These Christian fighters protested against these evil deeds not only in the field but also in Kassala [Sudan] before Jebha’s office. As they presented their grievances to the office, they were instructed to return to the field under the ploy that the discord prevailing in the Sudan did not permit their presence there for long. When, in defiance, the petitioners stayed in Kassala, they were detained by Sudanese authorities. As a result, they were very demoralised to the extent that they defected to Haile Selassie’s consulate in Kassala. Having got another excuse, leaders of Jebha dispatched a message to the field to kill Christians. More than one hundred Christians were forced to the edges of hills and shot to death there. As a consequence of this disgraceful administration, the oppression which first targeted civilians started to face the military unit too. Religious conflicts
mounted inside Jebha. After those who were killed and defected, the number of Christian fighters who remained in Jebha was reduced to the number of fingers. When the propaganda machinery of Ethiopia presented the situation in an exaggerated version, the desire of the highland people to join the struggle dwindled and they started to look at Jebha through resentful eyes.

It may seem that all these evil deeds took ages. It is indeed surprising to note that they happened from the end of 1966 to the end of 1967. At the beginning of 1967, the killings, abuses and raids leaders of Jebha perpetuated against the public was escalating. Given that at this time top leaders of Jebha needed more time to count the money they get from the sale of raided cattle, they started to run the divisions from Kassala. The fighters were engaged in raiding cattle and shuttling them to Kassala and then back to the field for another raid. Even though the leaders and their fighters thought that they were prospering, the public was distancing them and intensifying its protests.

F. From the bath to the sludge

The fighters disheartened by the situation never stopped from contemplating and inventing ways to end the ongoing abuses. Realising that the force that was fanning the religious tension was that of the enemy, they understood that it was their revolutionary duty to resist this force. Given their big number, they resolved to radically reform the construction of Jebha.

The dispersal of the army into five divisions that took place in 1965 was not revolutionary. Thus, challenging the five leaders of the divisions and persuading and bringing the army which has been instrumentality of the dictatorship into a single force under a unified command was identified as the main solution. To this end, many well-intentioned fighters exerted intensive efforts. This measure was against the interests of the top and division leaders of Jebha. The nine-month-long effort at unifying all the divisions was not entirely successful. While the Third, Fourth and Fifth divisions eventually unified together with their training centre and relief supplies, the First and Second divisions remained as they were.

As one step towards the correctional measures, the three divisions were united under one name and one political and military measure in September 1968. While advancing well in this relationship, it is to be recalled that one or two puppet chiefs of Jebha used the other two divisions to launch strong opposition to the united divisions. In addition, many wolves in a sheep’s skin infiltrated the three unified divisions. In any case, after the inception of the unification measures, the distancing public, particularly the disheartened highland Christians, again reverted from where it were to participate in the front.

The progressiveness of the unified force worried not only adherents of Jebha but also the government of Haile Selassie which was met by a heavy blow and left with unfading mark from regular fighters and spying forces. This unified force was set to reform the abusive actions, but it did not have political plans and principles based on a revolutionary foundation. Those who infiltrated the unified force in disguise issued a proclamation prohibiting new recruitments. The proclamation was passed on the pretext of intelligence measures. In reality, they were driven by backward religionist mentality to block Christians from raising more military.

While the prohibition of recruitment was a simple act of provocation, poisonous situations spread within the administration of the unified force. There were those wolves who being in the non-united second force were vying for an opportune moment of confusion. Availing of the discord in the united force and with a conviction that they will
score victory over the unified force, they started moving here and there pretending that they are resolved for a bigger unity of all the forces. Those forces in Jebha who initially were keen to see unity of all forces believed the pretensions and met with the two forces in a place called Adobha for unity which materialised and at which a leadership called ‘Qyada al Ama’ was elected. They resolved to meet again in a national congress to be held in less than a year before September 1970.

G. Second chapter of abuses

There is a saying in Tigrinya: that a kitten does not depart from its mother’s manners. Those religious fanatics who lost the opportunity for religious war for a moment, regained an opportune moment when command of Jebha’s administration fell onto their hands once again. To butcher those whom they identified as undesirables from their religious perspective, they started to sharpen their swords and flex their muscle. To do this they thought eliminating their adversaries in leadership position is the first measure to be taken. Thus, they arrested six of the members of Qyada al Ama and made them suffer under cruel conditions of imprisonment. In continuation, they killed Kidane Kfle and Welday Gdey – two who have been tirelessly working for years to reform the revolution – at the centre of Kassala. Their ploy was that once they have killed the two strong and wise men, the rest can do nothing. They put the dead bodies in sacks and loaded them on a taxi bound to a place called Hafira where the bodies were supposed to be dumped. En route, because the road was very rough, the dead bodies were tossed over on the road and left there.

After the death of the two brave martyrs, similar to what they did in 1967, instructions for indiscriminate killing of Christian fighters were dispatched. More than 200 innocent fighters were butchered and dumped. More than 200 fled in earnest and defected to the enemy [Ethiopia]. As reinforcement to the ‘kill the Christian peasant’ order already issued, Jebha leaders armed ordinary people and intoxicated them with old feuds between Christians and Muslims. They dispatched the ordinary people to kill militia but they did not make them understand what militia is. The ordinary folks were dispatched to the highland to throw bombs and metryes at assembled people they come across and snatch jewellery from Christian women. Massive abuses were done and they are still being done. Because of such abuses, some even worse, Christian fighters in Jebha were more or less liquidated as some of them were also killed and the rest of them defected.

H. What should be done?

In this situation, which alternative is better: to submit yourself to the sword of the evildoers merely because you are a Christian or to surrender to the enemy? Dying in the hands of religious fanatics or surrendering to the enemy is equivalent to death. Both alternatives are abominable. Both options are bitter. Not picking either of the options is the same as sitting on the edge of a blade. Nonetheless, it is better to sit on the edge of a blade than to opt for either one of the two alternatives. For this reason, dear readers, we are the ones who have decided to sit on the edge of a razor blade. Instead of dying in the hands of puppets of Jebha or run to Ethiopia, we are the ones who decided to sit on the edge of a blade. As one Eritrean saying goes, he who did not partake in combat appears more brilliant than the actual combatants. Those who did not partake in what we were engaged in; those who did not witness or have a test of the bodily and psychological
pain we endured may talk and gossip about us a lot. They are right. We walked away from the fascist administration of Jebha; we did not split from the ordinary fighters. In an Eritrean party, we thought it is disgraceful to see segments based on religious, ethnic, regional and other similar considerations. We, as fighters, in particular should eradicate these poisonous divides within the Eritrean people. We must not be champions of factionalism.

However, what can you do if you are chased away while working for a national cause? How do you react if you are oppressed while you are struggling for liberty? For the fighters, the answers are simple. Perhaps the way we have been gathered gives a religionist look to our situation. But, what else could have we done? We do not regret our current situation because we understand that the nation and the people give priority to religion. What we deeply regret is the reason that forced us to split from and assemble separately. We are fighters, not missionaries. What drove us to split is a revolutionary conviction as opposed to a religious fervour. And, we consider our action as honesty, determination and love of the country.

We are liberation fighters, not missionaries of Christianity

We do not want to contest the fact that with the exception of few traditional believers, half of the population of Eritrea is Christian while the other half is Muslim. Yet, instead of teaching our national goals, leaders of Jebha preach and write that 80% of Eritrea’s population is Muslim and 20% is Christian. We know quite well that advocacies are made on behalf of Muslims instead of the people of Eritrea as a whole.

We believe that the Eritrean people, as the rest of the people of the world, were and are being oppressed. In this context, what we aspire for is liberty for our people and the oppressed people of the entire world. We do not care about counting the number of Muslims or Christians in Eritrea. Let this bother those who distribute the Bible and the Qur’an. When a Muslim in Eritrea is oppressed, that is oppression of an Eritrean. Likewise, oppression of a Christian is oppression of an Eritrean. We do not think that oppression discriminates based on religion.

If there is a revolution aiming at liberating Muslims only, we will oppose it. We also oppose endeavours within Jebha aimed at oppressing and dominating Christians. We stand against any kind of oppression.

We will not keep our eyes closed while Christians are being oppressed fearing that some may call us Christian defenders of Christians. We will oppose that. We oppose it not because we are advocates of Christianity but because it is oppression. At this juncture, what we would like to clarify to those peoples or nations who care about religion is the fact that Eritrea’s population is composed of equal number of Muslims and Christians. We affirm that Muslims in their Mosque and Christians in their Church will have the freedom of faith. For anyone interested to get evidence that Jebha’s presentation of 80% Eritreans as Muslims is false, we invite him to visit Eritrea or read Eritrea’s history.

A revolution is a national mission. It is neither a jihadist’s nor a crusader’s mission. If there are individuals who believe otherwise, we want them to stand corrected; if there are individuals who work on that premise, we remind them to stop. We would like to affirm to them that assistance earmarked for the advocacy of Christianity or Islam is valueless to us and a waste for those who donate it. In addition, to those Eritreans who want to use religion for unjustified enrichment, we want to remind them that doing so is not only forbidden but also they are registering a black history in the records of their people and the people of the world. We also remind our liberation fighters and the fighters in the world that we are fighting to eliminate oppression based on the indivisibility of Eritrea and
unity of its people without caring about a religious divide, and we call them to join us in
condemning those opportunists who profit by employing and bringing religion into the
mix.

We are Eritreans, not Arabs

Leaders of Jebha use Arabism in the same manner they used Islam for profiting and as a
game of identity politics. They say that except the less 20% Habesha, 80% of our people
is Arab; our country is Arab and our language is Arabic. Given that Eritrea is located in
north-eastern Africa, geographically it is true that Eritrea is close to the Arab world. As a
result of the geographic proximity, it is clear that our revolution has joined the interna-
tional revolution in the struggle against Zionism and has become part of the revolutions
in the Middle East not only because of revolutionary duties but because of strategic
imperatives. Our participation in this front together with our Muslim brothers is
because of our revolutionary mission, responsibility, and strategic interests and because
the situation of our revolution permitted. It is not because we are Muslims or Arabs. Par-
ticipating in revolutions in the Arab world does not mean we have forgotten our
revolution.

No matter whether the people of Eritrea are Muslims or Christians, nobody misses the
fact that from the perspective of genealogy they have Arab blood. However, we need to
realise that above anything else the people of Eritrea are Eritreans, not Arabs. Yet, we
will fight together with those peoples who are close to us in terms of race and colour of
skin. If we come across a revolution based on race and colour of skin, we will oppose it
for the reason that we are race- and colour-blind fighters. If the revolution in the Arab
world discriminates based on religion, colour of skin and race, we would like to make it
clear that we are Eritreans who do not discriminate based on these factors.

In addition to Islam and Arabism, leaders of Jebha preached on the false premise that the
language of the people of Eritrea is Arabic, while other languages such as Tigrinya and
Tigre are belittled to a mere usage. Many who do not know the languages of the people
of Eritrea could be misled. In the preceding sections, we have said something about
languages in Eritrea. Even though leaders of Jebha could not deny the position of languages
under the federal arrangement, they have endeavoured and they continue to work to realise
their ambition of eliminating all other languages of Eritrea and crown Arabic alone as the
official language. Except for the insiders, others may not know well that inside ‘Jebha’,
Tigrinya and the other languages are marginalised. Fanatics in Jebha get a headache
when they hear Tigrigna being spoken. At the extreme, it cannot be missed that there are
some foolish individuals who forget and erase their language and dream of becoming
Arabs.

What we want to make clear to the Arab peoples and Arab countries is that we do not
hold grudges against Arabs and Arabic. We realise that we have not only historical ties but
we also have, and we want, strategic relations in the present century. However, we are not
going to erase our languages and buy others for want of assistance from Arab peoples and
government or to please their leaders. Nor do we want to cheat them thinking that they
would not know us. It is true that the reactionaries who want to obtain help by distorting
the truth are many. For this reason, based on the information supplied to them by leaders
of Jebha, many Arabs and their governments speak and write that the language of Eritrea
is Arabic and the Eritrean people are Arab and they, accordingly, draw the map of Arab.
Had we been Arabs or had our language been Arabic, we would not have shied away
from presenting ourselves as Arabs and speaking Arabic. However, we cannot and do
not want to betray our Eritrean identity nor erase our language from our tongue. In addition, there is no shame in telling the truth.

At present, there are many international languages. When we need to communicate at the international level, we need to master many international or widely used languages. However, the way to introduce our people and our country to the international community is to develop our people’s languages and educate the public using its own languages. When we work to educate and mobilise the public using alien languages, and when we try to elevate ourselves by selecting one language as better than the other, we become merchants of languages. As a consequence, instead of advancing one step ahead, we will be held back one thousand steps. We had better refrain from this dangerous path.

Italian colonisers tried to erase our languages and teach theirs. The British also spread their language. Even in the current new era of oppression, the Haile Selassie regime that has erased our languages and burned our books is trying to expand the Amharic language. However, the brave Eritrean public has strongly opposed and continues to oppose such expansionism. Many Eritreans have been dispersed in many Arab countries and throughout the world either as students or refugees. If they want us to speak, work with, and teach using the languages they have come to master in their adopted places, they are asking us to cease being liberation fighters and to erase our Eritrean identity for which reason we will reject them. We want to reiterate repeatedly that those peoples or governments who would want to help us should help us in the realisation of our just cause. Or else, we will not accept assistance from all those who resolve to help us to carry different goals because such goals are not ours. To those who do not know the Eritrean people’s culture, tradition and languages and who would want to help us, we invite them to tour our country.

If not, we urge those governments which are guided by the information from deceitful merchants to refrain from violating the dignity and rights of the Eritrean people. If there are governments out there which, disregarding our Eritrean identity, want to expand their sole interests, we would like to affirm that in defence of our identity, we are unflinching heroes.

We want to make the Eritrean people realise that it is its responsibility to affirm its identity to those who are profiting by saying that we are Muslims, we are Arabs, we are white, we are light-skinned. In addition, we want the public to tell those who are misleading our sympathetic governments that any assistance obtained by changing our identity does not benefit but harm our goals and for this reason they should refrain from lying.

**We are neither ethnocrats nor regionalists**

Opportunistic leaders of Jebha have divided our people into numberless factions in order to serve their personal gains. This diffusion has affected our front too. This segmentation is continuing. As factions multiply and become narrow-focused, there are fears that factionalism may eventually descend to the level of villages and clans. It is not the segmented public that is benefiting from this sectarian project of leaders of Jebha who are rushing to claim this and that as belonging to them. Nobody is benefiting from this sectarianism except those few opportunists.

Our conscience does not permit us to oppress our people for the sake of the interests of a few. We do not want to immerse ourselves in ethnic tension and consequently depart from our just goals. We, however, oppose those who work based on this divisive premise and profit from it. Given that we see inside our front competition in clientelism based on ethnic favouritism and aimed at enlarging one’s force which is being done by pronouncing one individual as being on this side and the other on that side, we want to make it clear that we do not like ethnic favouritism. We also want to remind those who, engaged in ethnic favouritism, would want us to serve them as an eyelash decoration not to fool themselves,
asking who this individual is or where he came from. We just want to tell them that we appreciate the support of innocent fighters.

**Our goals**

We will discuss with Eritrean liberation fighters the plans we have for the realisation of our goals. Pending the issuance of a second part of our document which will contain a detailed explanation of our goals, now we explain them briefly. Our goal is to create a society free from political and economic oppression of some over others; to build an advanced and prosperous nation based on agriculture and education – a nation which will have a united Eritrean front that does not discriminate based on religion, ethnicity, regionalism and gender and that in cooperation with the people of the world in general and with those progressive peoples and governments in Africa, Asia and Latin America in particular, fight American-led global imperialism and destroy Israel. Our first goal is to engage in armed struggle with the aim of freeing ourselves from Ethiopian oppression.

Victory to the people of Eritrea!
Victory to the revolutionaries of the world!
Long life to the Eritrean fighters!
Ethiopian oppression shall fail!
Imperialists, Zionists and reactionaries shall fail!

**Notes on contributors**

Simon Weldehaimanot’s formal training covers international human rights law and democratisation, with a specific focus on the African human rights system and, thematically, on the right to democratic governance, the right to self-determination, rights of minorities and indigenous peoples, and the effect of these rights on forms of government and the constitutional frame of multi-national states. This article emanates from Mr Weldehaimanot’s ongoing research aimed at identifying ideological diversity within the Eritrean political spectrum.

With a political science background, Emily Taylor holds an MA in the theory and practice of human rights from the University of Essex. Ms Taylor’s commitment to human rights has brought her into contact with the human and political situation in Eritrea and with many Eritrean human rights activists, one of whom is her co-author, Mr. Weldehaimanot. Active with the daily needs of Eritrean refugees in Phoenix, Arizona, this work shows Ms Taylor’s increasing familiarity with Eritrea in the past many years.

**Notes**

1. Variations in spelling in the Tigrinya title are common, as words are written in the same way they are pronounced which slightly varies from one individual to the other. ‘Nhnan Elamanan’ could thus be ‘Nihnan Elamanan’, ‘Nehnan Elamanan’ ‘Nhnan Alamanan’ ‘Nhnan Ilamanan’, and the numerous possibilities one can generate by combining the different forms of the two words. This version is copied and distributed by ‘Eritreans for Independence in Europe’. The front cover and pictures inside the text are omitted. At the end of the document, a glossary of words that the author/s of the manifesto considered new to the reader was provided. This glossary is omitted here.

2. The Eritrean people do not constitute a national minority within a state. They have the characteristics of a people according to the law of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Peoples. In their quality as a people they have the right to live freely, and without prejudice to its national identity and culture, within the boundaries of their own territory as delimited during the colonial period up to 1950. The identity of the Eritrean people, determined, in particular, by its resistance to Italian colonialism was recognised by Resolution 390(V) of the General Assembly of the United Nations. . . The right of the Eritrean people to self-determination does not therefore constitute a form of secession, and can today only be exercised by achieving
independence; the will of the Eritrean people having been clearly demonstrated in this regard by the armed struggle which has been carried on by the liberation fronts for nearly 20 years. (Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal 1980, extract reprinted in Review of African Political Economy, issue 25, p. 51).

3. Questions of encroachment upon Eritrea’s autonomy would appear, under the circumstances, to have been outside the domestic domain. Even assuming that Eritrea and Ethiopia had the option to reject the federation scheme — a debatable proposition — the federation plan did not purport to become legally operative solely though the consent of its participants. The approval of the United Nations General Assembly was a sine qua non to its genesis. Furthermore, since the Federal Act did not contain a revision clause, it would be argued that the federation plan could not be altered in any way short of action by the General Assembly.

4. When the translation was done, one version of the English translation was discovered in Liberation, monthly magazine by Eritreans for Liberation in North America (Volume II, no. 3, 3 March 1973). A copy of the magazine appears to be available at the Nordic African Library, Uppsala, Sweden. However, this discovery does not render this translation less significant. Compare, for example, the following part quoted by Pool (1980, p. 44) and followed by the text in italic which is part of this translation:

Conditions being such, should one opt to face butchery in the hands of the ‘Jebha’ simply because one was born a Christian or should one surrender to the enemy, the Haile Selassie government? Which option is better? Dying at the hands of religious fanatics or giving one’s hand to the enemy? Both are abominable; both are poisonous pills to swallow; both mean death. Moreover, to make neither choice is tantamount to sitting on the edge of a sharp blade. But rather than choose either of the two alternatives, it is better to sit on the edge of a sharp blade.

In this situation, which alternative is better: to submit yourself to the sword of the evil-doers merely because you are a Christian or to surrender to the enemy? Dying in the hands of religious fanatics or surrendering to the enemy is equivalent to death. Both alternatives are abominable. Both options are bitter. Not picking either of the options is the same as sitting on the edge of a blade. Nonetheless, it is better to sit on the edge of a blade than to opt for either one of the two alternatives.

5. Some kind of explosive or gun.

6. The name given to the Semitic peoples in the highlands of Eritrea and Ethiopia mainly the Tigri-nya/Tigrawot and the Amhara.

References


Abductions, kidnappings and killings in the Sahel and Sahara

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Hostage-takings in North and West Africa are nothing new. What is new is the assigning of blame to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the level of resources Western powers commit to fighting AQIM and other extremists in the region. History shows that the simplified ill-defined fear of a united Islamic front against the West was unfounded. Today, however, Westerners continue to view the motivations behind such actions without considering three fundamental issues. First, who should, or can, effectively ‘govern’ the Sahara and its fringes. Second, by defining the problems as a rising pan-Islamic front, the implementation of hard-power tactics is not questioned. Finally, any consideration of the long-term disparities in the region is postponed in lieu of dealing with hostage-takings or attacks on Western targets. In reality the Sahara and Sahel are contested territories. Ideological and personal divisions are numerous. AQIM and other Jihadi Salafist movements are not popular with the regions’ inhabitants. Most practice Sufi forms of Islam which are distant from such extremism. There is little attention to identifying the problems of poverty, creating state integration, and solving the problems that arise from foreign intervention. With the agenda of national leaders and/or international actors focusing on fighting terrorism or mineral resource extraction, a few inhabitants in the region kidnap foreign nationals for ideological reasons, quick money or both. The potential for hostage-taking for money is, at best, a tenuous strategy for the few.

Keywords: al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM); Global War on Terror (GWOT); hard power; terrorism

It is understandable that since 2001 the media and Western policymakers have focused on the capture of tourists, aid workers and foreign dignitaries in the Sahel and Sahara. Yet, kidnappings and hostage-takings make for headlines that obscure the more fundamental, endemic issues of pervasive, persistent poverty and the United Nations’ millennium goals and development. Their headlines and official reports depict terrorists as profiting from the regions ‘ungoverned spaces’ and ‘invisible desert borders.’ This is, after all, a region that is ‘sparsely populated and [with] loosely patrolled borders’ (Glickman 2003, p. 167; Brulliard 2009; CSIS 2010, p. 3). The most recent incidents include the kidnapping of seven people affiliated with the energy company, Areva, in northern Niger on 16 September 2010 (Toronto Star 2010). Such incidents highlight the exponential rise in kidnappings in the Maghreb and Sahelian states since 2001 (Alexander 2010). Experts believe that the most recent rise in kidnappings took shape in 2003 with the abduction of 32 foreigners, mostly German. El Para, a former member from Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et

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le Combat and 50 followers abducted this large group of tourists in the Algerian Sahara. They succeeded in procuring a ransom of €5 million before releasing the hostages. Upon the release, this band of kidnappers was pursued by African and Western special forces through the northern regions of Mali, Niger, and Chad. In the end, most of the kidnappers, El Para excluded, surrendered to local Toubou people who in turn sold them to Chadian authorities working in collaboration with US special forces (Africa Confidential 2006, Sahara Focus 2009a). Thus, the scene was set for the current preoccupation of attention regarding kidnapping and hostage-taking, rather than the long-term underlying realities that foster such behaviours.

Most kidnappings are smaller in scale and end without incident. The taking of two United Nations envoys in Niger in December 2008, Robert Fowler and Louis Guay, concluded when al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) released them (in addition to three other hostages) for a ransom the Swiss government paid (Thorne 2009). In November 2009, Pierre Camatte, a botanist conducting research on traditional cures for malaria around Ménaka, Mali, was abducted (Sahara Focus 2009b, Thorne 2009). He was released three months later when France negotiated a prisoner release in Mali of three suspects wanted for seditious acts in Algeria and Mauritania (Gearon 2010). There are examples of other hostage-takings, however, that have ended in disaster. Edwin Dyer, an English chef kidnapped while on vacation in Mali in January 2009, was executed by AQIM four months later (Keenan 2009, Walther and Retaillé 2010). Michel Germanau, a French aid worker with previous ties to the Algerian petrol industry, was allegedly killed in retaliation for a failed rescue attempt by a joint Mauritanian–French military operation in northern Mali during July 2010 (Barchfield 2010). Christopher Leggett, an American aid worker suspected by AQIM of proselytising, was killed during an attempted kidnapping in July 2009 at Nouakchott, Mauritania (Mohamed 2009, Thurston 2010). From Mauritania to Chad, foreigners have become targets for ideological, political or economic gain. Given the success rate, abductions are likely to continue and the media will remain focused on them, not the issues of poverty, famine, and the political marginalising of the inhabitants in the Sahara and remote parts of the Sahel.

To combat attacks on Western interests, the United States and European powers implemented the Global War on Terror (GWOT), a set of programmes designed to assist Maghreb and Sahel governments fight terrorism and govern remote areas in the Sahara and Sahel effectively (Antil 2006; Berschinski 2007). These programmes however have the consequence of locking down space – in other words, diminishing local peoples’ capacity to pursue their livelihoods. The regions’ activities: pastoralism, commerce and tourism, have increased in risk, depreciated in profits or dropped off altogether. Poverty and political marginalisation are nothing new (Jackson and Rosberg 1986, Moreira and Bayraktar 2008), yet the GWOT has placed the regions’ inhabitants in a state of further impoverishment and greater alienation from governments whose representatives live considerable distances away.

AQIM takes responsibility for abducting foreigners, and the media is quick to highlight such claims. The facts on the ground are quite different. Criminal gangs and people seeking quick profit as a temporary alternative to their persistent poverty have been the real actors in most kidnappings and hostage-takings. Based on qualitative interviews and observations conducted in southern Algeria, northern Niger, northern Mali, eastern Mauritania and southern Morocco between 2006 and 2008 (see Figure 1), it is shown that terrorists have an uneasy form of collaboration with such criminal gangs and individual actors. Outsiders, for their part, tend to misinterpret these various actors as all being terrorists. This misinterpretation is based on three false conceptions. In the first instance (as is argued
below) the myth of the Sahara and Sahel as ‘ungoverned’ and ‘lawless’ is perpetuated. Western powers justify military involvement in the area precisely because they view the region as a no-man’s-land. On paper GWOT programmes are designed to improve law enforcement by Sahelian and Saharan governments (Roberts 2003, Antil 2006, Berschinski 2007, Jourde 2007). In practice the policing inadvertently curtails major livelihood practices of local communities. The second major misconception is that Islam currently unites a diverse assemblage of distinct cultural and ethnic peoples into one pan-Islamic whole (see the section on co-equating Islam with terrorism below). The United States and Western European foreign policy experts – perhaps out of expediency – hold fast to the overarching paradigm that Muslim society as a whole is monolithic, violent, a threat to Western interests, and rapidly spreading (Glickman 2003, CSIS 2010, Filiu 2010).

Also, AQIM portrays a simplified picture of GWOT allies as neocolonials, even though such a ploy has little success with recruitment. AQIM’s success with local populations is limited and largely confined to cash exchanges for foreign hostages. The Sahara and Sahel have their share of rebels. Insurgent ideologies are largely designed to resist deteriorating socio-economic conditions, the imposition of central authority, the status quo of little to no political representation, and the exploitation of local resources by foreign companies and rentier states (Bonte 2001, Demante 2005, Zoubir and Benabdallah-Gambier 2005, Obi 2008, Cristiani and Fabiani 2010). They are not designed as a war against Western powers. Such insurgent interests have little affinity to the aims of terrorists, while at the same promoting poor-to-antagonistic relations with GWOT allies. Finally, in a concluding section of

Figure 1. Map of Saharan and Sahelian towns where interviews took place in 2006–2008. Countries in dark grey are the national authorities where interviews were conducted. Local transport involved various types of vehicles, mostly Mercedes lorries, Peugeot station wagons and delivery vans, and Toyota Land Cruisers. All transport was collective allowing several hours, in some cases a few days, to interview African subjects. Derived from ESRI Data and Maps, version 9.3 © 2008.
this paper, the misconceptions generated through the day-to-day interactions between foreigners and Africans is examined. The seemingly endless showcases of material wealth, medical supplies, and food aid create an image in kidnappers’ minds (as well as most Africans) of the West as endowed with limitless capital, an image constantly reinforced by outside assistance and foreigners’ lifestyles in Africa (Samoff 2004, Miles 2008). Given these three factors, the act of abducting foreigners, as a means to easy money, can be understood. The kidnapper/hostage-taker has long witnessed outsiders (both terrorists and GWOT agents) as a threat to their political, social and economic order. If the GWOT is serious about ending violence in the Sahara and Sahel an overhaul of the policies is needed, beginning with reductions in military and economic coercion and a plan for addressing the regions’ chronic problems.

Governed spaces: the Sahel and Sahara

Many desert countries rank among the lowest in population density. Mauritania and Libya, for instance, contain large swaths of the Sahara desert, and as such are among the 10 least densely populated countries in the world. The Sahara also occupies large parts of Algeria, Mali, Niger, and Chad. Even on its borderlands settlements are scattered and infrequent. Within the Sahel proper, Claude Raynaut et al., in their macro-scale study of the region, observed there are more animals than people in the northern Sahel (1997). Thus experts are accurate to characterise both the Sahara and sub-region of the northern Sahel as regions that are ‘vast’ and ‘sparsely populated’. Beyond this demographic dimension, however, fact quickly shifts to interpretation.

For the Sahara and its fringes there is no effective central authority. Historically, the Sahara and northern Sahel are home to Arab, Tuareg and Toubou people who primarily engage in pastoralism (Bonte 1998, Demangeot and Bernus 2001), in addition to other socio-economic activities for survival (Bernus 1981, Retaillé 1993 and 1998). These groups also provided a mixed lot of caravan traders, herders, warriors and bandits who conducted a lucrative trans-Saharan trade until the end of nineteenth century (Conte 1991, Traud 1993). Maritime trade slowly eroded the trans-Saharan routes but not before pastoral groups installed slaves, captives and artisans in Saharan oases and Sahelian villages that served as ports of call and centres of agricultural production (Brusberg 1985, Zeltner 1989, Gremont 2010). Such demographic complexity grew apace with European intrusions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Further disruptions were the result of the imposition of arbitrary colonial administrative boundaries and customs, the promotion of private property and agriculture, and the shrinking of the pastoral commons. Nomadic groups, such as Fulani cattle herders, who once inhabited the agricultural zones, migrated north, further constricting the pastoral commons (Claudot-Hawad 1993, Park 1993). The Fulani were not the only newcomers. Colonial administrations went about converting desert oases into military posts and provincial towns. Large numbers of Wolof, Halpulaar, Bambara, Songhai, Djerma, Hausa, and Sara attached to the European administration moved with their families to the colonial enclaves carved into the Sahara and northern Sahel.

In spite of these many changes wrought by colonial jurisdiction, control of the Sahara was feeble at best. The colonial enclaves were understaffed. Planning was minuscule and development underfunded. The collection of taxes and customs duties was lax, difficult to enforce, and occasionally wrought with graft (Bernus et al. 1993). Although the new settlements, a growing population rate, and arbitrary borders reduced pastoral commons, the pastoralists nonetheless gained a new opportunity from the opening up of competitive
European markets to the north and south of them. There were expanded opportunities to engage in clandestine trade in cattle, sheep, cloth, and comestible goods, particularly in the anglophone colonies (Raynaud 1948). Even as the African independence movements replaced their colonial superiors in the 1950s and 1960s, promising an end to this illicit trade (Bernus 1981), such idealism proved hollow in practice. The new African regimes had inherited a weak state structure and even weaker economies (Gammer 2000, Hastings 2009). Locally, officials contributed indirectly to the continuance of smuggling through their acceptance of bribes or directly through the brokerage and transport of goods. African states’ lacklustre performance in paying their employees, and the unforeseen consequences of trade liberalisation from World Bank programmes in the 1980s and 1990s, assured their continuance (Meagher 2003, Samoff 2004).

Fundamentally, revenues from animals and comestible goods are far too small to provide the money and materials needed to support twenty-first-century terrorism. However, such practices put in place the structures that allow the flow of contraband that does. Even before decolonisation, officials admitted their inability to control smuggling (Arditi 2003, Thompson 2009). After independence, when rebellions, civil wars and insurgencies created new demands, insurgents took an active hand in the illicit trade, both as the suppliers and buyers of weapons, ammunition, vehicles and other supplies (Pierre and Quandt 1995, Lecocq and Schrijver 2007, Guichaoua 2009). Today the commodities found in these markets include cigarettes, narcotics, and illegal immigrants shipped northwards (Brachet 2005, Walther 2009). Moving south are gasoline and electronics from Europe and North Africa (Author Interviews October 2006a and December 2007, Collyer 2007). Arabs monopolise the trade (Gutelius 2007), though it is common to find Tuaregs and Toubous employed as drivers, navigators, and security for these operations. This is especially the case after drought and civil war destroyed flocks, and since tourism’s decline since the 1990s (Author Interviews October 2006b, Walther and Retaillé 2010). Additionally, civil servants in practice facilitate the movement of goods. The Niger government recognises the benefit of transporting illegal aliens. It generates badly needed revenue and authorities do little to curtail the practice beyond the posting billboards (see Figure 2) that are meant to discourage such migrations (Brachet 2005, Walther 2009, Thurston 2010). As for the smuggling of goods, it is more than a market for arms to terrorists, it is also a part of peoples’ livelihoods.

In the Sahara and remote parts of the Sahel, both trade and authority are decentralised and highly competitive. Rivalries and intrigues do at times lead to violence. What is difficult for Western policymakers and the media to differentiate are incidents that are acts of terrorism versus ones which are not. For example, when four French tourists were killed in Mauritania during Christmas 2007, the experts and media attributed the shootings to AQIM (Petrou 2009, Thorne 2009). Mauritanians, however, held a different view. They saw similarities between the incident and previous robberies involving foreigners. In their judgement, the French tourists were simply victims of a robbery that went wrong (Author Interviews February 2008a and 2008b). Another example, the abduction of Robert Fowler and Louis Guay, highlights the complexity in distinguishing a desperate act from terrorism. There was a delay of three months between the capture of these two United Nations envoys and the ransom paid to AQIM for their release, along with that of three additional hostages (Thorne 2009). A question arises: why such a delay? One explanation is that AQIM did not kidnap the envoys. It is reasonable to posit that a group familiar with their mission kidnapped the envoys and then sold them to AQIM, or transferred them to another group in contact with AQIM for a quick return (Keenan 2009, Sahara Focus 2009a). Since Nouakchott, Bamako, Niamey and N’Djamena have weak holds on their
In such murky circumstances, there is every possibility for such incidents involving foreigners to occur without terrorism being the motivation. Nonetheless, the Western powers are quick to assume that any violence directed at Western interests is a terrorist act and thus invoke the two-edged sword of the GWOT: the use of hard power (both military and economic) and selected humanitarian programmes that purport to help end terrorism (Sheehan 2005, Huysmans et al. 2006, Mitchell 2010). Explicit examples of this strategy are in Afghanistan and Iraq. In other parts of Central Asia and Africa, covert operations are conducted in the name of the GWOT (Hafez 2008, Hastings 2009, Kurečić 2010, Sørbø 2010). For the Sahara and Sahel, there is a pattern of military build-up, masked with charity, to deflate pre-existing tensions between local populations and their national governments. The restricting of space (of the commons) as part of the strategy only serves to generate more conflict between interest groups. Add to this state of tensions, the decline in legal commerce in markets far from international borders, and the GWOT’s attempts to clamp down on smuggling and other forms of illegal trade. Licensed merchants in the interior towns of Agadez, Niger and Kiffa, Mauritania complain of drops in sales and deliveries with increased regulations on transport or the threat of hijackings in route (Author Interviews December 2007 and February 2008b). Pastoralists experience infringements on their movements. Both terrorist and soldier patrols block routes, confiscate property and in extreme cases shoot animals, people, or both (Author Interviews October 2007b). Pronouncements from GWOT officials and the negative press coverage regarding the threat of terrorism serve to further stifle tourism (Walther and Retaillé 2010). Taxi drivers who would normally earn a living driving tourists to heritage sites find themselves competing with others to transport illegal immigrants to state borders (Author Interviews October 2007a and February 2008d). Humanitarian assistance, such as vaccinations, the

Figure 2. Panel deterring illegal migration in Niamey, Niger during November 2007. Roughly translated from French the sign reads, ‘Illegal Migration ... Do not place yourselves in such danger!’ The billboard’s sponsorship comes from (on the left) the European Union, (at the centre) the United States Association for International Migration, and finally (on the right) the Niger Government. Source: Author.
construction of wells, and the donation of motor pumps fail to compensate the affected local populations for the damage caused by the presence of both terrorists and soldiers. With each cycle of increased tensions, initiated by governmental actions to implement GWOT tactics, the tension level only increases instability and alienation among the affected inhabitants of the Sahara and Sahel.

The GWOT also undermines regional long-term security by training and supporting, both financially and materially, militaries utilised by the national political elite to suppress political dissent. There are a number of examples of this practice. The Nigerien government, for example, initially blamed the Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice (MNJ), a politico-military organisation fighting for greater autonomy in northern Niger, for the Fowler–Guay abduction (BBC News Africa 2008, Graham IV 2010). Morocco persists in labelling the Polisario, Western Sahara’s independence movement, as a gang of criminals, smugglers and cohorts with terrorist organisations (Ousman 2004, Zoubir and Benabdallah-Gambier 2005). Even Amadou Tomani Touré, the president of Mali who most view as more tolerant of the Tuareg than other Sahelian politicians, scrapped diplomacy for force in dealing with Ibrahim Bahanga’s insurgency at Tin Zaouâtene in 2008 with GWOT assistance (Sahara Focus 2009a). If these groups, and others like them, have any ties to terrorists it is out of expediency more than choice. They share the same battlegrounds, after all, and have the same adversaries (i.e. national governments). Their goals, however, differ from those of jihadis. Ultimately, the suppression of dissent, or even the voluntary disbandment of these groups without resolution, provides the foundation for violence to resurface. Collectively or individually, dissent fosters closer alliances with extremists. Hard power does achieve one thing, an atmosphere of uncertainty and intermittent violence, pushing ideologues whom are not terrorists closer to extremes.

Co-equating Islam with terrorism

The perception of a pan-Islamic movement pitted against the West has deeper roots than the current war on terror. Colonial administrations in the late 1800s and early 1900s, much like contemporary independent governments, had their own cadre of experts. Such experts consistently interpreted and conflated tensions by lumping together diverse groups that in fact had little or no ties with each other. It is worth noting, however, that when colonial administration was weak, Western weaponry and military action became the primary tactical advantages against Africans. Some Muslim societies organised and resisted the approaching ‘infidels’. The Toucouleur and Sokoto empires and the Mahdist movement in Sudan, though short-lived, were large enough in scale to alarm the most confident of colonial regimes. Such organised resistance to European encroachments were the exception. Most annexations of territories and peoples occurred without incident (Kolapo 2007). Even in the Sahara, where Arab, Tuareg and Toubou groups who are commonly perceived as xenophobic and war-like, organised resistance to European colonialist rule was isolated, small in scale and contained by military forces (Le Rouvreur 1962, Bernus et al. 1993, Triaud 1996).

Isolated attacks did occur over time, but rarely in the name of Muslim versus Christian. Caravans, colonial agents and small-scale military patrols were attacked for various reasons including material gain, animosities over colonial practices, competition over resources, or personal grievances (Chapelle 1957, Frémeaux 1993). Acts of banditry had long been an acceptable practice in pastoral societies. Before European colonial domination, the competition within and between pastoral groups to meet immediate needs and expand control of land and resources were accepted practices (Claudot-Hawad 1993, Gremont 2010). During the colonial period, the targets, not the goals of the attacks, changed. The targets were no
longer exclusively families, clans or confederations. Central authority became another adversary. Nevertheless, the response by colonial officials was, for the most part, limited. The colonial bureaus paid greater attention to the policing and development of agricultural zones, not pastoral ones (Frémeaux 1993, Triaud 1993). On site, local populations did little to help in the apprehension of suspects, either out of ignorance or, in certain cases, through non-compliance. Custom also played a part as it was, and is, common for pastoralists to aid individuals whether they are victims or perpetrators (Bernus 1981). In Toubou society, for instance, it is acceptable for families to aid bandits and murderers (Zeltner 1989). Incidents involving the disappearance or death of colonial officials in the Tibesti Region of Chad were common until the 1950s (Chapelle 1957, Le Rouvreur 1962, Beltrami and Proto 2005). It stood to reason that pastoralists, regardless of their individual clan or familial affiliations, would sooner help other pastoralists than the colonials.

In terms of collective threats, European powers in the Sahara (French, English and Italian) recognised one by the early 1900s, a movement whose ideology traced back to the Mahdist uprising in the Sudan (Thompson 2009). The Sanusiyya, a subgroup of Salafists, preached a pan-Islamic doctrine and advocated the use of violence against foreigners. This tactic bears some resemblance to AQIM’s current methods. Organised in Cyrenaica with support in Fezzan to the west, this movement attacked colonial outposts far-removed from Tripoli, Cairo and Fort Lamy prior and during the First World War (Triaud 1996). French officials erroneously linked the violence in the eastern Sahara with that of the Tuareg revolts in north-eastern Mali and northern Niger that occurred during the same period (Clozel 1916, Simon 1919). Hindsight after the First World War revealed that the Tuareg rebels had no affiliation with the insurgents to the east. Their grievance was with the dramatic socio-economic changes that took place in the short tenure of French administration (Bernus 1981). Despite differing ideologies and conditions among the varied Saharan peoples, the response to dissent and resistance by every European colonial power was military force and occupation. French and Italian forces killed the Sanusiyya leadership and disbanded its followers. Such resistance persisted in Italian territory until 1931 (Rainero 1980). Liquidating the movement did not extinguish the message, however. Sanusiyya resistance again flared up during the intrigues of the Second World War, with the Allies managing to play upon divisions to suppress those sympathetic to the Axis powers (Thompson 2009).

With decolonisation, naturally, changes came in the administering of the Sahara and Sahel, but what did not change was the lack of state integration. With the exception of Mauritania, Arabs, Tuaregs and Toubous living far from Bamako, Niamey and N’Djamena had little sense of national identity. Furthermore, the established inequalities between them and national elites that existed before decolonisation continued. The disaffected, especially the young, sought alternatives to post-colonial systems that catered to the educated, urban elites from the South. Droughts, the destruction of flocks and the disbanding of family members during times of famine in the 1970s and 1980s brought many young men from the Sahel to Algeria and Libya. There, they gained work opportunities and in some cases exposure to radical politics (Boucek 2004, Zoubir Benabdallah-Gambier 2005, Boubekeur 2008). For a short time Qaddafi in Libya supported extremists as part of his anti-Western campaign. Through state backing, trained ‘jihadis’ were sent to conflicts in Lebanon and Afghanistan in the 1980s. By the 1990s, however, Qaddafi changed his policies both at home and abroad. Estranged Libyans returning from abroad organised the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group to replace what they perceived as a false Islamic theocracy (Boucek 2004, Pargeter 2005). For their part, Arab and Tuareg combatants, those from Mali and Niger particularly, returned to participate in the 1990s rebellions (Gutelius 2007,
Lecocq and Schrijver 2007). Algeria also faced the threat posed by radicalism shifting to violence. By the 1990s Algiers could not prevent civil war. The long-term one-party rule of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) was notorious for corruption, mismanagement and human rights’ violations (Pierre and Quandt 1995). Guerrilla warfare in the countryside was common and terrorist attacks occurred in the major cities.

In all these conflicts, violence directly affected the security of foreigners living and working in the Sahara and Sahel. The Polisario, fighting for the independence of the Western Sahara, killed French and Africans in a night raid at the mining town of Zouérat in 1977 (Bonte 2001). Rebels abducted bystanders both foreign and domestic in the 1990s Malian and Nigérien rebellions to obtain political leverage, material gain, or money (Grégoire, 1999, Demante, 2005). They also carjacked NGO vehicles, dropping off the workers outside towns, and selling the vehicles for cash or exchanging them for weapons and supplies at markets hundreds of kilometres away (Author Interviews January 2008). Militants in the Algerian civil war did not discriminate between Algerian and foreigner (Pierre and Quandt 1995). During the Nigérien rebellion of 2007–2009, the MNJ abducted Chinese workers, later releasing them unharmed (Guichaoua 2009). These actions were not a pan-Islamic front against foreigners. The goals within this varied landscape of actors typically involve both the need for development and political representation. Conversely, the co-optation, dispersion and/or repression of these various actors create a vacuum for extremist elements to fill. As they champion the call for a holy war against ‘despotic’ African regimes friendly to Western powers, AQIM seeks to fill this vacuum (Antil 2006, Berschinski 2007).

The growth of radicalism is for some a nuisance and for a few an opportunity. As mentioned above, the deployment of national forces and sorties by AQIM greatly reduce commerce, animal husbandry and tourism. Despite these dislocations and disruptions, most in the Sahara and Sahel avoid both terrorists and military patrols (Author Interviews October 2007b and February 2008a, Brulliard 2009). For those in contact with Salafi clerics, whose financing comes from Wahhabi donors, there are options. First, not all Salafis preach violence. Most are Salafiyya Ilmiyya or Da’wa Salafis who practise non-violence and abstention from politics. Beyond their doctrinal concerns, they offer immediate assistance of food and cash to the needy (Ousman 2004, Gutelius 2007, Boubekere 2008). Migrating Africans passing through Saharan posts (those who are delayed en route) frequently need money since bribes and expenses quickly deplete their purses and wallets (Brachet 2005, Collyer 2007). Some seek Salafi charity to return home or continue on to North Africa or Europe (Author Interviews May 2007 and October 2007c). Jihadi Salafism differs from the Ilmiyya branch by advocating violence and the potential for greater material rewards to those who join their ranks. Those recruited are likely to ship off to other battlefronts in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. Significant numbers of North Africans fight, or have fought, on the side of the Taliban forces and the Iraqi insurgency (Boubekere 2008, Alexander 2010). By contrast, the commitment of Western aid in the region is irregular, in part due to poor logistics and lack of security (Zoubir and Benabdallah-Gambier 2005, Solé-Arqué’s 2009).

In Mali, Niger and Chad, the representation of Arab, Tuareg and Toubou groups in the military and police materialised after the 1990s (Lecocq and Schrijver 2007), but most serve in the more populous parts of these countries, not their local communities. This effort of national integration serves the state (Moreira and Bayraktar 2008, Ilkjaer and Boureima 2010), but fails to address problems that occur between local communities and state services in the North (Author Interviews October 2006b and January 2008). These circumstances are glossed over by many proponents of the GWOT because terrorism is
understood more in terms of cultural conflict between Western powers and Muslims. Socio-
-economic disparities that push individuals and whole groups to the margins are not given
priority, even if they are recognised as factors that lead to alienation and resistance.

The lines between agency, insurgent, and terrorist are not always clearly defined. The
chronic, endemic problems affecting minorities – especially those of corruption, poverty,
and state repression – overlap and blur into the West’s preoccupation with the conflict ident-
ified with (often ill-defined) terrorist organisations. Some call the Sahara and Sahel ‘breeding
grounds of terrorism’ (Bruguierè 2010, Filiu 2010). The continued military involvement in the
area may help to ensure that this characterisation becomes irrefutable. At present, however,
most of the population have no desire to join jihadis and related causes. The deaths of Chris-
topher Legget and Michel Germaneau were unfortunate, but their deaths were more likely
mishaps than the executive orders of AQIM leadership (Petrou 2009). Edwin Dyer’s execution
was also tragic, yet merited greater press coverage for AQIM. In claiming to have murdered all
three men, the terror group raises the ante in future hostage-takings. AQIM also hopes to
increase the recruitment of fervent individuals who adopt the mythology of an anti-Western
pan-Islamism (Ousman 2004). Given the current socio-economic climate of the Sahara and
Sahel, however, it is more likely that profiteers and out-of-work insurgents will initiate
further foreigner abductions for the purpose of selling them to AQIM or AQIM contacts.
These people are not per se terrorists, as their primary motivation is taking advantage of a
lucrative opportunity. This activity has remarkable similarities with the Somali pirates and
the Ogoni activists in the Niger Delta (Obi 2008, Hastings 2009), insofar as a political or ideo-
logical motive is not at the heart of the action.

Foreigner–African encounters

The richest businessman in any of these countries [Mali, Mauritania, Morocco or Senegal]
could move to Europe and there he would take orders from the poorest European. (Author
Interviews February 2008c)

Africans and Europeans interacted with each other for millennia but inequalities between
the two only deepened during colonial rule. The technologies, lifestyles, colonial practices,
and infrastructures Europeans brought to their colonies increased disparities between
foreigner and African (Kapoor 2008). In the Sahara and its fringes Africans watched
warily as Europeans arrived with motorised transport, advanced weaponry, and troops
from far-off lands. Even the benign introduction of animal vaccinations and cement
wells (to name but a few innovations) served to maintain order and justify foreign dominion
(Bermus 1981, Rainero 1980, Thompson 2009). Upon independence the coloniser left and
was replaced with other foreign actors. Under the various banners of national development,
humanitarian assistance, adventure, and, in the past 10 years, the promise to remove the
threat of terrorism, these actors perpetuate the established foreign domination over local
populations. Multinational corporations (MNCs) introduce heavy machines, materials, pol-
lution in the desert, as well as increased demands on what little water is available. All this is
for one purpose: the extraction of oil, natural gas, uranium, iron ore, and the search for other
mineral resources (Bonte 2001, Chamaret et al. 2007, Guichaoua 2009). In their impressive
4 × 4 vehicles, international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) occasionally visit to
distribute medicines, food, and other implements for development projects (Sørbo et al.
1998, Sørbo 2010). Foreign military advisers enter the region embedded with national
forces. Together they arrive with helicopters and armoured personnel carriers equipped
with advanced weaponry and supported by unmanned drones and GeoEye satellite
imagery (Sahara Focus 2009a). One unanticipated consequence of such practices, without
the participation of local Africans, is to undermine the security of foreigners and place them
at risk of violence, whether instigated by criminals, local insurgents or terrorists.

Local populations have no stake or role in the presence of foreign firms or the national
militaries posted in the Sahara. They are at best a disproportionate minority of short-term
labourers and low-ranking civil servants. During the colonial era, Africans were employed
in private firms and the administration, but with the exception of a few individuals, indigen-
ous jobs were limited to clerks, foot soldiers and colonial works labour (Kolapo 2007).
Recruitment was, for the most part, limited to Africans residing in the South. Decolonisa-
tion broke the ‘thatched roof’ ceiling in the civil service but not the barrier between the
African elite and marginalised groups. In fact, African independence parties expanded
the public sector not to create jobs for a multi-ethnic society but to absorb newer generations
of their urbanised constituents (Jackson and Rosberg 1986, Sørbo et al. 1998). Within
MNCs and NGOs, foreigners retained the key-level positions until the 1980s (Gammer
2000, Bonte 2001). Change has come in the last two decades, however. The companies
and NGOs made the transition from hiring only foreigners for engineering and upper-
level administration, to training and hiring Africans (Wermus 1995, Dillard 2003, Chamaret
et al. 2007). While profiled for its positive qualities in creating local stakeholders and lea-
dership roles in Africa, little attention was paid to the demographics of who precisely
entered these highly sought-after positions. Currently, high-status positions are filled,
almost exclusively, by ethnic groups that have monopolised political, economic, and edu-
cational advantages since colonial times. This practice of exclusion extends to the Sahara
and Sahel for Arab, Tuareg and Toubou peoples. As such, they have no choice but to ident-
ify with their neighbours: the smugglers, drug traffickers, criminals, kidnappers, and terror-
ists that the current GWOT is determined to suppress.

The ‘Africanisation’ policy MNCs and NGOs apply to their management creates or
exacerbates existing ethnic divisions. The socio-economic disparities that flow from such
practices are counterproductive to both regional stability and state integration. An
example is the seven Areva employees abducted in northern Niger in September 2010.
None were native to the area. Five are French, one Togolese and the other Malagasy
(Toronto Star 2010). Even among the Nigériens employed by Areva and its affiliates,
locals, with the exception of temporary manual labourers, are not included (Author Inter-
views October 2006b). In northern Niger, local Tuareg, Arab and Fulani communities
have no attachment to AQIM, but neither do they have any affiliation with the laws a
Zarma–Hausa ruling elite in Niamey imposes on them (see Figure 3). Nor do they have
any real stake in MNCs extracting uranium from their commons (Guichaoua 2009).
Thus, for a few, kidnapping is more than an economic act of necessity. It is an act of defi-
ance, one that extremists seek to interpret as a campaign to regain direct control over land
and resources. Since pastoral commons have already been drastically reduced, tourism has
decreased, and work opportunities for wage work have dwindled since the recession of 2008,
the criminals and ideologues mingling with local people offer more than national and inter-
national agents who are but passing strangers in the region.

For training and surveillance purposes, African governments deploy soldiers in the
Sahara and remote parts of the Sahel. Their presence is, above all, to disrupt, detain, and
disband terrorists and insurgents, anyone or any group identified as ‘enemies of the
state’. They, in addition to the foreign advisers that accompany them, are but temporary
visitors. The armed forces of Mali, Niger, Chad and Algeria are made up of soldiers not
from the desert. They come from the more humid Sahel and the Mediterranean. They
have little or no stake in the welfare of this region, unlike the pastoralists, merchants,
and holy men (both reformist and radical) who live here. The hard-power tactics these militaries practise, backed by the military assets of the United States, France, and the United Kingdom are double-edged. On the one hand, if history repeats itself, GWOT allies are likely to suppress AQIM and other extremists much like the colonial regimes that liquidated the Sanusiyya. In doing this, jihadism may resurface with each new generation, particularly if their success includes the deaths of innocent bystanders. So too will the unresolved insurgent movements in Algeria, Libya, Mali, Niger and Chad, since the level of integration into their respective state-level systems is poor for Saharan populations (Claudot-Hawad 1993, Boubekeur 2008, Solé-Arqués 2009). With the exception of the joint Mauritanian–French raid in northern Mali during July 2010, the Western powers have largely kept secret their direct involvement in the covert training, equipping, and funding of African militaries, and satellite surveillance of the region (Jourde 2007, Alexander 2010, Bruguie`re 2010). Even so, this masks nothing. The local people are aware of Western involvement in their localities and AQIM is quick to label these manoeuvres as a new imperialism in their broadcasts (Author Interviews October 2007b, Jourde 2007, Keenan 2009).

This trend of involvement is exacerbated by the infrastructure, material supports, and volume of goods brought in by MNCs, NGOs and militaries. Vehicles, laptops, solar panels, cellphones, weapons, in addition to food and medicines, become commodities that thieves, smugglers, and ideologues vie for (Obi 2008, Guichaoua 2009, Solé-Arqués 2009). The GWOT material assistance upgrades African nations’ militaries considerably but also creates opportunities for bribing officials and the stealing or raiding warehouses for supplies (Berschinski 2007, Jourde 2007). Food and medical aid appear benign enough. Still, in the hands of terrorists they are tools to encourage, persuade, or extort compliance from an abstinent population (Ousman 2004, Boubekeur 2008). The same is true when political regimes control such assets (Benini 1993, Claudot-Hawad 1993). The levels of humanitarian and military assistance flowing into the region are not only

Figure 3. Panel in proximity to most national bureaus in Niamey, Niger in December 2007. The green panel translates as, ‘All Nigériens under the same law’. Signs like this were erected during the political instability in the late 1980s and the Tuareg rebellion of the 1990s.
Source: Author.
inducements for corruption and theft, such availability also reinforces the economic incentive to kidnap foreigners. Many Africans perceive no end to the wealth that MNCs, NGOs and Western powers possess (Author Interviews February 2008b and February 2008d). A company that raises the capital needed to extract minerals from the desert or a government that donates thousands of tonnes of food aid or medical supplies has the ability to raise millions of euros to free their nationals from a terrorist group. And, as such, this widens the potential for the abduction of foreigners by either unscrupulous individuals or groups in order to profit from the presence of such alien elements in their commons.

Finally, the very lifestyle that foreigners bring with them to Africa is alien to Africans. It is also idealised by many Africans (Andreotti 2007, Kapoor 2004, 2008). For those who exalt Western lifestyles, the luxurious hotels in the capital, the gated houses with servants, the supermarkets stocked with imported, processed foods, even the trivial act of drinking bottled water, is all mistakenly perceived as easily obtainable. Even tourist packages that depict African journeys as local experiences still cater to Western comfort and tastes (Donaldson and Tyner 1999, Forbes 2005, Odularu 2008). Compared to living in huts, tents or shanty towns, working in sectors of the economy that net little advancement and having to draw water from wells or dilapidated tap systems, large numbers of Africans strive for foreign tastes. African elites mimic Western behaviours that they once enjoyed at universities in France, England, the United States, and Russia. Those who crave such lifestyle opportunities have little choice but to remain impoverished or may turn to migration, informal trade, and/or crime (Andreasson 2005, Brachet 2005, Author Interviews October 2006a and October 2007c). In terms of abduction as a means to such ends, an individual or group must devote much time and effort to planning and execution of the act. Abduction is, however, neither new nor exclusive to the taking of foreign nationals (Amnesty International 2007, Bengali 2008). Abduction is an old and tested stratagem. Ransoming foreign nationals brings with it the potential of large returns (Bengali 2008, Cristiani and Fabiani 2010). It is therefore, nothing extraordinary to expect that the exclusionary practices of foreigners and elites within Africa, with their displays of material wealth, produce conditions for incidents of kidnapping and robbery that are not limited to terrorists. Both criminal elements and opportunists disaffected by such levels of disparity are also players. It is an old story cloaked by the fear of a ‘global jihad’.

Conclusion
The Sahara and its fringes are governed by a complex growing number of actors who have witnessed foreign agents, both non-African and African, destabilising their political order and socio-economic activities for over a century. Colonial regimes, national elites, MNCs and NGOs changed the pastoral commons by reducing its territory greatly through the seizure of land by eminent domain and settlement. The influxes of people from colonial times to the present clandestine migrations have further complicated the demography. Arab, Tuareg and Toubou see themselves as the proper stewards of the Sahara and northern Sahel, though their numbers, poverty and political marginalisation exclude them from political participation. The emergence of extremism is not because these territories are vast and Arab, although the Tuareg and Toubou are Muslim. Instead, jihadists have found a social environment where local populations have antagonistic relations with their respective governments. Life in the Sahara was difficult before El Para and his followers abducted tourists in Algeria. AQIM’s growth and the GWOT’s build-up, however, have escalated the insecurity and violence. Most local people cope with these difficulties through their herds, trade, and philanthropy within their communities.
or through outside assistance. The terrorist and counterterrorist activity in the region, however, jeopardises the security of pastoralists and their animals, reduces licensed commerce in specific areas, increases rivalry in smuggling operations, and leads to international NGOs withdrawing their personnel and assistance. The negative press generated from the violence ruins what little tourism still exists and provides weak states the needed military assistance to suppress political rivals. Clandestine trade continues but the current benefits may not be universally distributed and likely to diminish given the commitment of GWOT backers to suppress it.

Criminals, ideologues and other people pushed by poverty or political motivation are the culprits abducting foreigners and attacking Western targets in the Sahara and Sahel. The question that remains is whether these actors believe their cause is Muslim versus Western or if personal experience, economic difficulties, antagonisms over central authority, or grievances regarding foreigners profiting from natural resource extraction motivates their actions. Despite what these various actors think of AQIM, the terrorist organisation has a purpose for them. To put it in crude terms AQIM is a ‘clearing house’. By selling their prisoner to AQIM they reduce their risk of capture and earn quick money. AQIM can demand top ransoms thanks to both the Western media which links all violence occurring in the region to AQIM and the support of Wahhabi donors and al-Qaeda (Berschinski 2007, Gutelius 2007). Even if AQIM does not have a foreigner or group of foreigners detained, the hostage(s) will, in all likelihood, filter into their camp. AQIM bears the greater risk, but then this helped them grow from an unknown in 2003 to an organisation capable of extorting millions of euros from national governments.

Despite the proliferation of violence, however, Western powers and their counterparts in Algiers, Nouakchott, Bamako, Niamey, and N’Djamena have not lost local populations to violent extremists. Most Saharans and Sahelians shun violence. At the same time, local populations in the Sahara and its fringes do not acquiesce to their governments and outside actors exploiting their commons and constricting their socio-economic networks without participation and/or some form of compensation paid to them. Because of this, many Arab, Tuareg and Toubou are non-aligned in the war on terror. The situation where Toubou groups sold El Para’s group to Chadian authorities is a good example of this. Had the tables been turned, the Toubou (if the risk was minimal and benefits worth it) might have sold captured authorities to the terrorists. Expectations run high among policymakers that local people will collaborate with GWOT allies given Western humanitarian efforts, but this is far from the reality. Westerners and their recent enemies are both seen as opportunities in rare situations, and as nuisances and threats in most others. To maintain a status quo of backing up military and economic coercion through covert means against al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb may succeed in stamping them out, but the long-term foreign presence will only be interpreted by zealots as a new neocolonialism and will become a recruitment tool to indoctrinate newer generations who believe such rhetoric in the Sahara and Sahel, or in other regions. The failure of state integration and the lack of local participation with the MNCs and NGOs that work in the Sahara and northern Sahel have manifested into an environment where abductions and killings are lucrative, profitable and, now by default of other declining activities, a tenuous livelihood strategy for a minority of local actors.

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**Notes**
1. Morocco includes the Western Sahara territory.
2. Fort Lamy is the former name of N’Djamena, the present capital of Chad.

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Author Interviews, October 2007a. Licensed chauffeur, collective transport garage, Tamanrasset, Algeria.
Author Interviews, October 2007b. Three Tuareg family members (father and two adult sons), frontier, in Guezzam, Algeria.
Author Interviews, October 2007c. Two clandestine returnees, collective transport garage, Assamakka, Niger.
Author Interviews, February 2008a. Two Moor herders, frontier, Gogui, Mali.
Author Interviews, February 2008b. Three Moor merchants, market, Kiffa, Mauritania.
Author Interviews, February 2008c. Malian national athlete and fiancée on vacation, bus station, Dakhla, Western Sahara territory, Morocco.
Author Interviews, February 2008d. Licensed chauffeur, collective transport garage, Layounne, Western Sahara territory, Morocco.


DEBATE

Questioning resistance in post-apartheid South Africa: a response to Luke Sinwell

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Luke Sinwell’s article ‘Is “Another World” Really Possible? Re-examining Counter-Hegemonic Forces in Post-Apartheid South Africa’, published in March 2011 in the Review of African Political Economy (ROAPE) (No. 127), makes a useful and timely intervention into the body of scholarly literature about the country’s so-called new social movements. In summary, Sinwell astutely argues that ‘there is a sharp disjuncture between ideologies manufactured by intellectuals and the world views that the working class and poor possess’ (2011, p. 62). He argues that analysts have produced romanticised accounts of these movement organisations which do not make a sustained engagement with the everyday politics that occur in these spaces. Through examining the politics of two grass-roots community organisations in Alexandra Township, Sinwell calls into question the perceived counter-hegemonic potential of such organisations and offers an insight into both the possibilities and limitations of South Africa’s new social movements. Having conducted ethnographic fieldwork with one of the organisations that Sinwell makes direct reference to, the Anti Privatisation Forum (APF), I share many of his concerns and observations over the representation and analysis of such organisations, and support his call for a greater critical engagement with the internal dynamics of social movement organisations (SMOs). However, the analysis he offers does not go far enough into the internal dynamics he urges us to explore. In this response, I shall argue that, particularly with movements which draw their base from localised community-based organisations, analysts should pay greater attention to the role organisational forms have in shaping movement politics and identity. I shall also argue that our conceptualisation and understanding of resistance is often isolated from the understanding and interpretations which activists themselves hold, and the study of social movements would be strengthened if analysts paid greater attention to the messy and often contradictory realities of social movement activism. Finally, I shall argue that this will require a methodological approach that synthesises the coherent narratives of movement leaders or movement documents with other research techniques such as ethnography. The response that is offered here draws upon ethnographic fieldwork conducted with the APF between August 2009 and June 2010.

Sinwell’s article suggests that much is already known about the organisation of the APF and he discusses the organisation without any analysis or description of how the APF is structured or organised. This lack of attention to the organisational

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features of social movements is prevalent within the literature as they are generally taken as descriptive rather than analytic features of movements. Social movement theory, derived mainly from North America and Western Europe, has generally conceived of social movement organisations as single and unitary structures. However, organisations, such as the APF with its diffuse and federated structures and based in localised community-based movements, pose particular challenges to how we analyse and understand mobilisation and movement identity. An examination of these organisational features provides an important lens though which to analyse both the ‘front stage’ of the APF and the messy and often contradictory realities of the ‘back stage’ of movement politics (Goffman 1990).

The APF can be best understood as providing a central node in an inter- and intra-movement network which weaves together a web of activists and community-based organisations. This web constructs an organisation which is divided into a core of activists who occupy positions within some aspect of the formal structures of the APF (generally local affiliate leaders) and a larger periphery group of activists who remain mainly outside the formal organisation (generally the grass-roots membership of APF’s affiliates). In drawing together various community struggles, the APF aims to pose a critical anti-capitalist, anti-privatisation and anti-neoliberal challenge to the current development framework of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) by collectivising ‘organisational/political resources … knowledge and experiences … [to] develop common positions and campaigns/struggles’ (APF undated). Organisations which affiliate to the APF are expected to participate and adhere to the collective decisions of the APF but retain a significant degree of organisational and political autonomy from the APF. Important organisational decisions are generally made in a consensus-driven manner within quarterly meetings attended by representatives from all affiliates. Day-to-day decisions are taken by the APF’s elected leadership which are elected on a biannual basis at the annual general meeting. Affiliates to the APF vary in strength, size, political orientation and organisation, and represent a range of communities from the poorest of shack dwellers to low-income bond house residents.

As one would expect, the main impetus for community-based organisations to form arises from the immediate needs and challenges of individual communities, what Raymond Williams (1989) has described as ‘militant particularisms’. As Williams argues, movements emerge when ‘people recognize some condition and problem they have in common, and make effort to work together to change or solve it’ (1989, p. 249). There is, as Williams argues, nothing necessarily extraordinary about this unless people attempt to connect their particular struggle to a broader struggle: ‘It has set out, as a movement to make real what is at first sight the extraordinary claim that the defence and advancement of certain particular interests … are in fact in the general interest’ (ibid.). This involves a process of translating the concrete immediate needs into more general political claims. In affiliating to the APF, the opportunity emerges for grass-roots activists and community-based affiliates to begin this process of translation, and the core group of APF activists is crucial to achieving this as they provide an important link between the grass-roots base of the organisation and the formal structures of the APF and its elected leadership. These ‘bridge leaders’ play a key role in politicising the seemingly private issues of the community and linking ‘the formal movement organisation’s message and the day-to-day realities of potential constituents’ (Robnett 1997, p. 92).

Although the struggles of community-based affiliates and the APF are linked, analysts of the APF and its affiliates often
merge the identities of the APF and its many different affiliates without reference to the political independence and autonomy of affiliates. Sinwell makes this slippage when he criticises the ‘APF critique in Alexandra’ (2011, p. 71), when the material he presents is from the local leadership of the affiliates. Whilst there is certainly a close relationship between the activists of the community affiliates and the APF, it is also important to retain a sense of political scale when discussing the organisation. The APF has a presence on the national and transnational stage which individual affiliates are unlikely to be able to achieve. As a national and transnational actor the APF has been able to represent some of the poorest communities and advance some important critiques and arguments on their behalf. However, as Wolford (2010) argues, this claim of representation depends on ‘strategic essentialism’, so that differences between subaltern groups are temporarily put aside, creating collective identities and positions which simplify the complexity of debates but allow a far more strategic position from which to mobilise. However, as Sinwell’s article argues, it is important not to take such statements at face value and uncritically present these as representative of the movement as a whole. This therefore reinforces the need to have a more nuanced understanding of the APF as a movement organisation which considers the importance of political scale.

Stoecker’s (1995) concept of the social movement community introduces an understanding of scale to the traditional concept of a social movement. He suggests that SMOs which have their base within community organisations are inherently shaped by the geographical specificity, localised membership, resources and issue potential of this base and that these particular dynamics must inform our analysis of such organisations. Through his work with neighbourhood associations in Minneapolis, Stoecker develops the concept of a social movement community to provide a useful analytical lens through which to view such movements. Stoecker argues that these four spheres in which activism occurs which are analytically distinct but related to one another: the social movement community, the social movement, the social movement organisation, and the individual.

For an organisation like the APF, the direction and content of its mobilisation is structured by its relation to the communities in which the APF affiliates have their base. The wider community provides a backstage area in which social interactions and personal bonds that are forged in the course of daily life often become essential to successful mobilisation. Activists are then able to draw upon and establish cultural rituals, personal commitments and collective memories to mobilise the community. However, as Stoecker highlights, ‘the community is a place people have not usually chosen for political reasons, and it contains both activists and non-activists networked to each other, thus making political unity problematic’ (Stoecker 1995, p. 112).

For Stoecker, the lack of political unity distinguishes the social movement community from the social movement. A social movement consists of people who broadly orientate themselves toward the movement aims and participate in its demonstrations. However, as Stoecker highlights, those who identify themselves as part of a movement and participate within its demonstrations are often not involved with the organisation which is coordinating or leading an action. This, he argues, is because they identify themselves ‘with the goals and strategies of the action, not necessarily with the organisation’ (ibid.). The implications of this are that movement membership is often unstable as people drift in and out of the movement.

SMOs are distinguished from the other levels of the social movement community by their formal organisation, stable membership and sense of collective identity. Stoecker notes that SMOs are likely to
consist of a much smaller number than the movement itself due to the requirement for ‘greater commitment of time, risk and energy’ (ibid., p. 113). SMOs unite activists, other SMOs and leaders from community-based organisations and therefore play a crucial role in linking the wider network of the social movement community together. The value of Stoecker’s conceptualisation is that it breaks down the problematic assumption prevalent in social movement theory that movements are unified actors, and provides a dynamic way through which to view the relationship between communities, community-based organisations, movements and SMOs.

My own research with the APF has revealed that the APF means different things to different people and that community organisations are drawn to the APF for a variety of reasons:

There was no other organisation which was available for a lot of people. SANCO was pretty much out of the picture but by this stage I think people had realised clearly the ANC itself was not the place, in fact they were the ones that were doing this. They looked and they approached, they’d heard about the APF ... often times if there’s a struggle in a particular community, often times they almost immediately after a particular point look for others who are doing the same thing or who can provide some resources or support or who can bring together in some solidarity and the very fact that the APF is the only ... in Gauteng, the only social movement of its kind. There are other smaller ones ... [and it] draws people to it, inevitably. Even if they might not know much about the APF or they might not know its politics or its history it’s the fact that it’s there and it represents a potential home or a potential place where they can join with others. (Dale McKinley, interview, February 2010)

As Wolford (2010) suggests, most analyses of social movement participation stress the intentionality and rationality of social movement participation, that people join movements because it is in their best interests to do so. This assumes, she argues, ‘a market-place of ideas and decision-making that invokes Liberal economic theory: believing in agency has come to mean believing in intentionality ... someone is making decisions with access to perfect information and in a competitive political market’ (p. 17–18). As McKinley highlights above, the APF has attracted organisations and activists to it which may not necessarily be drawn to the organisation because of the politics it advances but because it provides an avenue of much-needed support to struggling communities who have few alternative outlets for expression. Therefore, as McKinley notes, affiliates were not necessarily drawn to the APF solely or primarily because of its political orientation but because it was one of the few organisations that was visible and accessible to struggling communities as well as independent of local politics dominated by the ANC.

The APF is described by many activists as a ‘political home’ which is able to accommodate a broad range of activists. The APF thus consists of a broad continuum of participants from the highly politically motivated ‘model’ members to the ambivalent. The membership of the APF is therefore not a solid or coherent category or group of people but rather a dynamic continuum of participants who come to the movement for different reasons. Creating any sense of unity is therefore, as Melucci argues, ‘the result rather than a point of departure’ (1985, p. 793) and has implications for the kinds of resistance any movement is able to pose.

Sinwell’s analysis is centred on questioning the nature of resistance within the APF’s Alexandra-based affiliates. His contention is that the resistance offered by these organisations is far more limited than either scholars or movement leaders have cared to admit, and is concerned primarily with ‘imminent’ (2011, p. 71) processes of development. Sinwell’s analysis
highlights some important weaknesses within the resistance forged by the APF. However, the conceptualisation of resistance is limited by its isolation from the way in which activists themselves interpret their own resistance and activism.

James Scott’s influential work on peasant movements questions the way in which resistance is recognised and understood by analysts arguing that much resistance, particularly by disenfranchised groups, takes place in the realm of the everyday in ways which often go unnoticed. (cited in Amoore 2005, p. 7)

Scott argues that scholarship of poor people’s movements often generates a false dichotomy between what is understood as ‘real . . . organised . . . [and] systemic’ resistance and ‘token . . . unorganised, unsystematic’ resistance with ‘no revolutionary consequences’ (1985, p. 292) which ‘imply, in their intention or meaning, an accommodation with the system of domination’ (ibid.). Sinwell’s analysis of the resistance posed by APF affiliates to the Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP) suggests it is inherently flawed because it did not ‘fundamentally challenge the premise of the ARP . . . but rather, claimed a piece of the housing pie offered by the ANC through the ARP’ (2011, p. 71). The suggestion here is that the resistance posed by the Alexandra Vukuzenzele Crisis Committee and Wynberg Concerned Residents is tokenistic due to its inability to construct concrete alternatives to the neoliberal development agenda and its acceptance of elements of that framework. As Scott has argued, the creation of a dichotomy between what is considered real resistance and what is not, ‘fundamentally misconstrues the very basis of the economic and political struggle conducted daily by subordinate classes’ (1985, p. 292).

I contend that in order to understand the internal dynamics of movement politics, it is vital that scholars engage with the meanings which activists themselves bring to their activism, and by doing so the scope of what resistance means to activists is widened to include a consideration of the ways in which various knowledge-practices (Casas-Cortes et al. 2008) play a central role in its political praxis. Polletta argues that ‘counterhegemonic challenge comes not from some disembodied oppositional consciousness but from long-standing community institutions where people are able to penetrate the common sense that keeps most passive in the face of injustice’ (1997, p. 435).

In his article, Sinwell utilises Gramsci’s theory of hegemony and analyses the role of organic intellectuals in forging counter-hegemonic resistance. However, he neglects to develop this analysis to provide an understanding of how forms of counter-hegemonic consciousness may develop. For Gramsci, embryonic forms of counter-hegemonic consciousness emerge from the contradictions of the lived experiences of the subaltern under hegemonic relations of domination (Crehan, 2002). The forms of counter-hegemonic consciousness which may emerge are therefore entangled within these contradictions which may entrench forces of hegemony whilst challenging others, leading to fragmented forms of resistance across a diffuse range of identities and interests. In order to consolidate and build upon these embryonic forms of consciousness, organic intellectuals, Gramsci argues, must work to synthesise the diverse interests of challenging groups to build ideologies which will cement and lend coherence to political action. Such challenges, Gramsci argues, are built from critiquing existing social, political and economic arrangements. How such critiques are constructed will be dependent upon the various social forces...
that are brought together in counter-hegemonic struggles which may or not be class-based in nature. Therefore the ideologies formed from counter-hegemonic challenges are not necessarily logical and linear in their progression but bound to the contested social forces of society. The task for Marxist theory is therefore to be able to provide critiques of the common-sense view of the world in order to allow people to begin to build what Gramsci called ‘good sense’, that is a more coherent understanding of their position within capitalist social relations (Simon 1982).

Much of the activism of the APF can be analysed as an attempt to build ‘good sense’ within the wider movement. A key organisational goal of the APF has been to propagate political responses to the private troubles of ordinary people and to build a movement and cadreship ‘that could go beyond just issue-based opposition to a particular privatisation’ (Dale McKinley, interview, February 2010). Political education has therefore formed a key part of the APF’s political praxis.

In the community we are dealing with specific community issues but in the APF a whole load of issues they are now broader. They will tell you about the GEAR, they will tell you about AGISA and that’s where I was growing. Because if APF was not formed I was not sure if I was going to be very clear in terms of politics... So automatically whatever we were learning from them we were able to translate it in the community to show them in the community how are we trusting GEAR, how does GEAR affect us because people were not even understanding GEAR or AGISA they are just interested in seeing the issue of service delivery happen but we managed to consciotise [sic] them and give them direction. (Male APF activist, Interview, November 2009)

As this activist explains, the process of translation structures the relationship between the APF and its affiliates as the core group of activists translate (quite literally) the political messages of the APF into day-to-day concerns of the community. Workshops and other forums within the APF perform an important function in educating a group of core activists or bridge leaders who then undertake to ‘translate’ that learning back into their communities in order to build a critical political consciousness within the wider social movement community.

Although the affiliates that make up the APF may be engaged in material struggles to access the basic needs for life, there is also a need to recognise that this is accompanied by a broader struggle about the content and quality of post-apartheid democracy. Many of the activists and communities which come to the APF do so because they find other institutional channels of expression closed to them as people who are not ‘card-carrying ANC members’. Whilst Sinwell justifiably critiques the resistance of the APF and questions what, if any, alternatives to the neoliberal development framework they pose, he neglects to consider how the limited resources and organisational capacity of a movement, largely made up of the poor and unemployed, constrains the development of such alternatives. Within such a context the APF identifies political education as one of its largest needs:

One of the most crucial and ongoing developmental needs of a growing APF, particularly given its base constituency of the poorest of the poor... is political education... the rapid pace of political and organisational challenges deriving from the intensified shifts/changes in the capitalist system, means that the APF will not be able to further develop its cadre base or its overall political/organisational effectiveness without forging a renewed and expanded political education project. (APF, undated)

As Paulo Freire argues, education can open the possibility of the ‘practice of freedom’ through which ‘men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the
transformation of their world’ (2006, p. 34). Such education provides the tools from which alternatives can be constructed. Whilst Sinwell is justified in highlighting the limitations of the resistance posed by the APF, recognition must also be given to the fact that even though it is politically uneven the APF has been able to develop political responses which go beyond defending the militant particularisms of individual communities. Constructing alternative and independent outlets of political expression in communities ‘where open opposition to the ANC puts one at risk of expulsion from the community and there are communities where taking a position against the ANC puts one at real risk of violence’ (Pithouse 2010) is an undervalued and significant development on the post-apartheid political landscape.

Throughout his article Sinwell criticises other scholars for unproblematically appropriating the opinions of the APF leadership as directly representative of the organisation as a whole. As Sinwell suggests, and as I have argued throughout this response, our understanding of movements needs to be more nuanced in approach and to take into greater consideration the opinions and understandings of grass-roots activists. However, at times Sinwell slips into the same mistakes he critiques others for. He writes that the ‘APF are adamant that the test of an authentic movement . . . is whether it holds a vision for a socialist alternative or at least opposes the state’s neoliberal growth’ (2011, p. 69). However, what Sinwell is reporting here is the analysis of Ballard and his colleagues (2006) based upon a statement made by former APF organiser Trevor Ngwane in 2003. The degree to which we can take this analysis to be a representative statement of the APF either at that time or in the current context when the APF has undergone a number of significant political and organisational changes is, I would argue, highly problematic. Sinwell’s analysis of the APF would have been strengthened had he worked towards a greater synthesis between secondary commentary and statements contained within APF documents and his own ethnographic research. Documents and other written texts are rich sources of data for understanding the politics of a movement. However, the narratives they present necessarily conceal the processes of construction and contestation in which they are formed. In such circumstances the value of ethnographic data to the study of social movement organisations becomes clear as participant observation is able to provide insight not only into how activism occurs ‘as it is happening in everyday life’ (Lichterman 1998, p. 410; original emphasis) but also to reveal the nature of debates and areas of tension or conflict within social movements which activists may seek to downplay or conceal in an interview setting.

Sinwell’s article presents a demanding analytical and methodological challenge to analysts of any social movement but particularly the one under examination here. As I have argued, the study of social movements would be strengthened if analysts paid greater attention to the messy and often contradictory realities of social movement activism and the meanings which activists themselves bring to their activism. Furthermore, greater insight into the internal dynamics of social movement organisations can be generated from a greater critical and analytical reflection regarding how organisational forms may shape, develop, as well as constrain mobilisation. However, to meet the challenge set by Sinwell, analysts will be required to take more methodologically innovative approaches which can synthesise the coherent narratives of movement leaders or movement documents with other research techniques such as ethnography.

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DEBATE

Differing voices

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We are hoping to encourage debate on a wide range of issues affecting Africa. This could be debate of an ‘adversarial’ kind, with sharply different viewpoints, or debate in the form of differing perspectives as contributions to ongoing analysis. An example of the latter might be the two contributions on the Nile Water Treaty in Nos. 128 and 129. In No. 130, we carry a response to an earlier article on South Africa, which begs to differ on some aspects of the original article.

This can only be good for fostering critical analysis. It may be that contributors might feel that an issue has been neglected and that they would like to initiate a debate as a way of clarifying analysis and soliciting further evidence from other researchers and practitioners.

Whatever the reason, we hope that readers will feel that they can also participate. We welcome contributions that may well stir up controversy. Open debate remains one of the most productive ways of advancing our common understanding of the complexities and rapid change taking place in Africa, and of bringing insights from various disciplines to others across the continent.
BOOK REVIEW

Governing sustainable development: partnerships, protests and power at the World Summit, by Carl Death, Abingdon, Routledge, 2010, 197 pp., £80.00 (hardback), ISBN 9780415569262

There is a lot to like about this book. Carl Death has done a great job turning his PhD thesis into an insightful, concise, well-written and well-structured book that provides a good balance of theoretical and empirical material. The book examines the 2002 UN World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg. It asks questions about the legacy of the summit for global attempts to achieve sustainable development, about the role that summits of this kind play in contemporary international politics, and how various kinds of arguments were deployed within and outside the summit. The particular answers the book gives to these questions derive from a Foucauldian theoretical perspective.

Death does a good job in demonstrating the strengths of this kind of analysis. He draws in particular on Foucault’s understandings of power and discourse, governmentality, and resistance. For Death, Foucault’s analysis of power suggests that we should not see it as something that forbids, denies or oppresses, but as something that produces and shapes, and which is ‘everywhere’ in all social relations (p. 15). This is an important step as it opens the line of investigation, pursued in Chapter 3, into how the summit itself is a place of power – not just in the traditional sense of ‘powerful actors’ imposing themselves upon others, but in terms of how the processes of summity work to shape regimes of knowledge, and alongside this, to shape and reshape legitimate forms of agency, and to legitimise and delegitimise certain kinds of practices. The concern with governmentality allows Death to analyse the kinds of practices for governing that are produced and reproduced with the summit. This is put to particular use in Chapter 4, which examines the tensions between a disciplinary and bio-political rationality of government and a liberal rationality of government, with the latter eventually triumphing within the summit in the form of a stress on voluntary partnerships (governing through freedom). Foucault’s understanding of resistance has been much examined, and here it is used in Chapter 6 to explore the actions of groups ‘outside’ the summit and their relationship to the official summit proceedings. In particular, Death follows Foucault in abandoning the idea of ‘pure resistance’ and instead sees these groups as engaged in ‘counter-conducts’ – struggles against the processes implemented for conducting others – and, importantly, sees these struggles as themselves implicated in the kinds of discourses and practices they profess to oppose. In addition to these Foucauldian elements, Death employs the work of Clifford Geertz to explore in Chapter 5 the WSSD as a form of political theatre involving processes, rituals, symbols and choreography that are political, particularly in the sense of establishing the summit as what Death calls an ‘exemplary centre’ – as itself an enactment of the kinds of governing practices that emerged from the summit. And it is here that the focus on
resistance to the summit becomes important, as does its location in South Africa.

The application of these theoretical insights to the empirical material is impressive and persuasive. It certainly helps to get beyond the traditional approaches to international summits and environmental negotiations found in much of the literature. It also has implications beyond the particular case. The analysis of the summit as a form of political theatre resonates far beyond the issue of sustainable development, and the particular kinds of governing practices (partnerships as forms of advanced liberal rule) that emerge from the summit have clear counterparts in other fields – notably international development and global health and disease management.

The book also shows some of the problems and limitations of this kind of Foucauldian approach. Moving away from seeing sovereign power as the only or most important form of power is certainly liberating, but it also raises two issues. First, whether there are more and less important manifestations of power such that some ought to be the concern of social scientists and others not. Someone unconvinced by the utility of Foucault’s ideas might want to argue that the really important issues about sustainable development are not to be found in the pageantry of a global summit. Second, Foucault himself seemed ambiguous about whether ‘cutting off the king’s head’ meant we should not analyse forms of governing practices as emanations of particular projects – the institutionalisation of capitalism for example. The forms of liberal governmentality that emerge from the summit are related to broader political and economic projects and there might be a case for saying they should be primarily analysed as such. Finally, there is the question of where, within a Foucauldian theoretical universe, we can finally take a stand. Death seems to think that something needs to be done about looming ecological crises, and there is a sense in his discussion of those protest groups who were marginalised at the summit that there really ought to be a more radical, perhaps a more fundamental, approach to sustainability. But as he says, Foucault-inspired approaches must resist the search for a supposedly ‘purer’ form of ecological protest. Death notes one of Foucault’s glosses on this: ‘work with and be intransigent at the same time’ (p. 165), but it also reminds one of Habermas’s description of Foucault as a ‘young conservative’. Nonetheless this is an impressive book that will be of interest to scholars beyond those concerned with sustainable development.

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BOOK REVIEW


Fifteen years after it began, the Congo crisis remains under the fog of war. Its mechanisms still largely unknown, the conflict has sparked recent scholarly fixation that seeks to describe the regional dynamics of the Great Lakes. Here, rebels, rulers and refugees alike traverse leaky borders. Elites a continent apart ally, while neighbours fight over ownership of a state largely foreign to everyone involved. Among the many contributions to decoding this tumult, Gérard Prunier’s Africa’s World War stands out as a towering achievement.

Meticulously researched, Prunier’s account catalogues the incremental machinations that saw actors enter, engage with, and eventually abandon this conflict. Prunier breaks the conflagration into four levels based on the centrality of actors’ interests in the Congo, which span two wars across the decade from 1996 to 2006. At the core is the joint Rwandan and Ugandan invasion of Zaire/Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 1996 and reinvasion in 1998, which the author describes as ‘the first known instance of post-colonial imperial conquest in Africa by an African country’ (p. 333). The second level brings the 1998 Angolan and Zimbabwean intervention to aid DRC President Laurent Désiré Kabila against his Rwando–Ugandan sponsors-turned-enemies. Prunier argues that whereas the fighting in the Congo was never much more than peripheral to Eduardo dos Santos’s campaign to eliminate the longtime challenger to the Angolan state, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA); Robert Mugabe primarily sought to advance Zimbabwean economic interests. On the third level is a nexus of diplomatic wrangling in North Africa, with Libyan logistics transporting Chadian troops paid for by the Sudanese regime, all to bolster Kabila’s incipient government. Prunier’s fourth level consists of those states that (somewhat unsuccessfully) struggled to avoid involvement altogether, including Burundi and the Central African Republic. Finally, standing outside this schema is South Africa and its quest to use diplomatic and economic clout to remain above the mêlée. Filling out this structure is a wealth of historical context and enough detail to satisfy all but the most particular of analysts. Prunier thereby deftly cuts through the knotted strands of Congo’s conflict and clarifies its course. Although the sourcing at times relies solely on confidential informants, the reader is left with what is probably the most vivid and comprehensive study possible.

However, where Africa’s World War delivers in descriptive wealth, it falters in theoretical depth. Prunier maps the state and the individual at its helm as essentially coterminous (p. 362). From this contentious position he then struggles to coherently integrate agency into the functioning of political power: ‘the state is weak, whereas identities are strong but multiple and overlapping. And behind all these we increasingly find individuals... Individuals did play a
tremendous role in the conflicts. But not independently. Individuals belong to a state’ (p. 361). Here the reader is forced to corral Prunier’s point into cogency. One interpretation of this ‘attempt at a philosophical conclusion’ (p. 358) is that agency at the level of the individual, the group, and the state is constrained both vertically and horizontally, by actors as well as structures. Understandably for what is intended as primarily an historical study, the author struggles to convey the point.

Such complication also surrounds his treatment of legitimacy. In the introduction Prunier refers to ‘a de facto legitimacy vacuum’ emerging from the end of the Cold War and the failure of democratisation (p. xxxiii). He implies here that such legitimacy was to be commonly found in the Africa of past decades as the necessary product of juridical sovereignty. Yet accepting that heads of state in previous decades were legitimate by dint of enjoying support among Western diplomatic circles, as the author appears to, pushes the concept to its limit by suggesting that long-reigning Omar Bongo or Mobutu Sese Seko were ‘legitimate’ rather than simply ‘useful’ under the anti-communism problematic. The issue resurfaces in the book’s final chapter, where Prunier moves the foundations of legitimacy away from international recognition and into the realm of coercive control. This results in confused statements such as the following: ‘states were universally weak because they lacked both legitimacy and money. Legitimacy was the biggest problem because even those states that did or could have money, such as the mining states, were also weak’ (p. 360; emphasis added). Though this second position is much more tenable, it is a hard-sell to suggest leaders such as Nelson Mandela (and later, Thabo Mbeki), Paul Kagame, and Yoweri Museveni were illegitimate as they all enjoyed near-complete domestic control. However, most troubling is not the author’s nebulous conception of legitimacy but rather the overwhelmingly negligible attention he gives to it throughout the book, despite plentiful opportunity to investigate the matter. After briefly raising the issue, Prunier only mentions legitimacy again after a 300-page absence. Here it enjoys no further exploration; the book ends three pages later.

Yet these shortcomings should not deter scholars from examining Africa’s World War with great interest. Despite its uneven theoretical grounding, Prunier’s work grants the literature a swath of microdata that reopens the debate surrounding informal politics and statehood in Africa. This book presents itself as an extended case study in which international relations is personalistic, regional, and entirely shorn from the constraints of state-centricity. Its lessons need be investigated further.

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BOOK REVIEW


Where is South Africa heading? ‘Black Economic Empowerment’, corruption in high quarters, world-market adjustment, and neo-liberal economic policies have reduced the international appeal of the African National Congress (ANC-)led regime in the post-apartheid period. Some of those who have remained committed to the South African experience have pointed to the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the trade union allies of the ANC, as a redeeming feature. Did they not play an historical role, for instance, in offering leadership to the anti-Mbeki forces at Polokwane, the ANC national conference in 2006? (See, for instance, Southall and Webster 2010.) Does not COSATU’s presence suggest that the direction of South Africa’s politics continues to be contested?

By focusing on the erosion of the democratic traditions within the unions after apartheid the author of this important book raises serious questions about such a reading of the South African experience. It is a major contribution. While concluding that COSATU remains ‘extremely powerful and influential’ (p. 177) it points to the significant organisational weaknesses that afflict the federation and its affiliates, and in particular, the lack of workers’ control. Parts of the critique have been voiced by others, for instance, by scholars associated with the Centre for Civil Society in Durban (See Ballard et al. 2006). Buhlungu’s book, however, carries special authority because it speaks not only from a massive amount of research, primarily within SWOP, the Sociology of Works Programme at Witwatersrand University, but also from a history of trade union activism, including with the Paper Printing Wood and Allied Workers Union (PPWAWU), a COSATU affiliate.

The study underscores the decisive contribution of COSATU and the unions in general to liberation, elaborating for instance the non-hierarchical egalitarianism that characterised the fight against apartheid. The problem begins in the 1990s with the coming to power of the ANC. At one level COSATU continues to be spectacularly successful, ensuring the introduction of advanced labour legislation and social policies that seek to rectify the extreme racial injustices of the apartheid era. It establishes institutions which are supposed to ensure trade union influence on the exercise of government power, including NEDLAC, the National Development and Labour Council. Above all, COSATU is assured high-level influence through the ‘Tripartite Alliance’ with the ANC and the SACP, the South African Communist Party, and an active part in ANC election campaigns, for instance, the 2011 local government elections.

Yet, while gaining in political influence COSATU is simultaneously losing ‘organisational power’. This is the ‘paradox’ which is highlighted in the title of the book. Why is this so? During the struggle against apartheid, the author
suggests that ‘activism was driven by notions of solidarity, altruism and sacrifice’ while in the post-apartheid period ‘activism is shaped by individualism and a quest for upward social mobility’ (p. 18). In particular, and paradoxically, COSATU’s phenomenal increase in size is partly explaining the decay. Unlike unions elsewhere, not least in the USA and Europe which have suffered a sharp decline, COSATU grew rapidly in the 1990s. Pre-existing restrictions were removed on general organising and more specifically on the unionisation of public sector workers. The peak seems to have been reached in the early 2000s (see Table 8.1, p. 172). The expansion, however, meant the collapse of the careful union education and training that, according to the author, had characterised unions in an earlier period. A decline in workers’ control went hand in hand with the rapid centralisation of power in a few powerful leaders who were ‘increasingly alienated from the rank and file’ (p. 168). Earlier attempts to organise those who were unemployed or engaged as domestic and agricultural workers were abandoned. A new focus on workplace-specific demands replaced a broader orientation. The new leaders had access to power and privileges with opportunities not just for specific benefits in their capacity as leading unionists but for upward mobility in both business and politics. An earlier ‘alignment’ that had existed, according to Buhlungu, between ‘rhetoric and practice’ was eroded; radicalism was replaced by demobilisation and cynicism (p. 170).

My problem with this otherwise excellent and well-documented book is its failure to discuss the responses, demands and divisions within the union movement and within the ANC leadership over the direction of development in the post-apartheid period. My own experience is mostly with the Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers Union (SACTWU). The author correctly sees the loss of organisational power as closely related to South Africa’s entry into the global economy and its effects on the restructuring of the local labour market, including job insecurity, labour force segmentation, and the failure of unions to reach out to the growing population with precarious forms of employment in the ‘informal economy’. Increasingly, COSATU is reduced to an organisation of those with permanent jobs, and is ‘patently inadequate’ in meeting the crisis of the old, ‘industrial union model’ (p. 173). He also argues that South Africa’s adjustment to globalisation goes hand in hand with the rapid diffusion of new managerial ideologies. This may all be true. But how did the unions react? There is no account of COSATU’s efforts to influence the choice of policy and the dramatic differences between affiliates. In the introduction the author says that he wants to explain why unions maintain ‘a keen interest in politics, specifically the politics of liberation and development’ (p. 1). Do we really get an answer? There is no discussion of divisions over policy, beyond the questions of rhetoric or careerism.

Workers’ capacity to exercise power democratically has to be related to the substantive issues that are being contested, both within the unions and within the Tripartite Alliance. The author shows convincingly how the balance of forces, globally, has tilted in favour of capital, favouring the ‘deregulation’ of labour markets, informalisation and flexibility. But he takes little interest in the divisions over policy that this shift generated in the ANC camp, including in COSATU and its affiliates. Does he take the shift as given? Does he see no alternative?

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BOOK REVIEW


Debates on the European Union’s (EU) trade relations with African countries of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group (ACP) have been marked by the patent predominance of the voices of Western intellectuals. This may be immaterial. However it is comforting to welcome a compendium of contributions led by African scholars on the nature and future of such ties. The volume, edited by legal and economic scholars Yenkong Ngangjoh-Hodu and Francis Matambalya, is engulfed by a sense of emotive resonance.

The editors make a number of recommendations. First, they observe that while external reforms are needed, internal reforms are more important (p. 266). Second, they suggest that Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) should have some practical funding mechanisms for ACP countries (ibid.). Third, they submit that the EU should exercise restraint in its mercantilist approach. Fourth, they recommend that duty-free and quota-free access could be useful for the poor countries. Finally they conclude that ‘aid for trade’ is needed to address supply-side problems (p. 267). In arriving at these conclusions they draw from the trends articulated in the contributions.

A common trend is the asymmetrical understanding of the concept of development and use of EPAs as poverty eradication tools. The interpretation of what development is, by the EU on the one hand and by African countries on the other, seems to run at cross purposes. The gap in the meaning of development and modalities for its attainment exists not only between the African and EU partners, but also within EU institutions. Stocchetti rightly underscores how the understanding of development by the Department of Trade in the EU Commission can be at variance with that of other departments (p. 52). She suggests that the EU is using EPAs as a tool to pursue pure commercial interests. This negative assessment of the relations is taken up by other contributors such as Ramessur-Seenarain, who argues that EPAs will have a terrible impact on Africa’s employment opportunities, intra-regional trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) flows (pp. 64–65). The sophisticated nature of rules of origin used in EPAs, noted by Herran (p. 109), further darkens prospects for African countries.

The shared sense of responsibility between the African and external actors is another theme that runs through the text. The contributions of some of the authors, especially the input by Streatfield and Watson on geographical indications, advocate for poorer countries to place more emphasis on how intellectual property rights can be productively used. Finally all the chapters articulate a sense of measured expectations and an attempt to be balanced. For instance, and in fairness to the EU, Alavi recognises that there were few options that the EU could use to legally phase out the preferential system.
that had been sanctioned under the Lomé Conventions (p. 195).

But what kind of development does Africa desire and under what context? The reader could be hopeful that this will receive attention as suggested by the editors (p. 4). However the articles fall short of providing a political and economic context at the global level for EU–Africa relations. It is true that the current financial crisis has had an impact on developing countries, including those in Africa. But it is equally true that there is a new dynamic in many African economies. Reports from the Boston Consulting Group (2010) and McKinsey (Leke et al. 2010) are bullish about Africa’s economic prospects. One of the reasons for this optimism, as noted by Joseph Stiglitz (Yaiche 2010), is the renewed interest that countries such as Brazil, India, China, Russia and Turkey have in Africa. The book does not reflect this context as a potential reason for the difficult nature of the EPA negotiations. Also, important milestones such as the EU’s Lisbon Treaty and the pre-2010 negotiation that led up to the revised Cotonou Agreement are absent.

In addition, one of the empirical chapters (Matambalya’s) provides a strong counterclaim for scaremongers who regard EPAs as catalysts for trade doom for ACP countries. This contribution is vital in showing that in cases such as Tanzania’s agricultural and livestock sectors, product densities are so shallow as to defeat recourse to defensive measures in response to the effects of EPAs (pp. 224–225). In spite of the usefulness of the contribution it reads like an independently commissioned report with mind-boggling equations. This could have been mitigated with information on the chapter’s relevance for other sectors and for other poor countries with conditions similar to Tanzania’s. That said, the book stamps an important mark on the understanding of EU–Africa trade relations, the more so as it shed light on an area that has become a moving target rather than a static edifice.

References


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BOOK REVIEW


It has been a long time since a book like this has been written. Sarah Bracking’s Money and power can be seen as continuing the tradition of critical analyses of foreign ‘aid’ started decades ago with Teresa Hayter’s Aid as imperialism (1971) and Cheryl Payer’s The World Bank: a critical analysis (1982), continuing with Susan George’s A fate worse than debt (1988) and Catherine Caufield’s Masters of illusion: the World Bank and the poverty of nations (1996), not to mention those from the right such as Lord Peter Bauer (1971) – who many of my students confuse with Paul Baran. Money and power is a welcome and youthful addition to this aging repertoire of critical political economy, more so because it adds real rigour to the crusading artefacts from the past – something much needed these days, when our expectations of radical change are less, and for solid empiricism, more. If there is anything to the hopes that more of the latter will lead to more of the former, books such as Bracking’s are very, very necessary.

Perhaps the prime merit of Money and power rests in its critical focus on aid for the private sector. The book opens with a stab at crucial definitional issues and the big debate about whether or not global capitalism can advance the forces of production in its peripheral parts: the line is ‘probably not’. The close analysis of aiding the private sector begins with a study of Britain’s Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC), which traces its changing emphasis from a statist to a more nakedly profit-making approach to development. Then, however, the book’s purview widens to examine a range of other predators. This includes various bilateral ‘development’ institutions which actually distort the discourse of free markets to support their own: the various export credit agencies around the world specialising in ‘private’ assistance, as well as the legions of consultants assessing the prospects and results of such ‘assistance’. The analysis of such predatory ‘development’ assistance includes the mirage of ‘debt relief’, and does not forget the potential impact of aid rivals from the new capitalist powers of the world such as China. Bracking blends masterful statistical analysis to challenge any economist, with deconstruction of discourse taking on any postmodernist.

Money and power is an excellent example of research going from the local (the British efforts to subsidise private development – which has commendable historical reach) to the global (other OECD private-sector developers) and back to the local (sites in Africa where these investments have taken place). At the end of it all readers are presented with an incisive survey of the inconclusive mainstream ‘what is wrong with aid’ discussions ranging from Burnside and Dollar (2004) to Easterly (2006) and Collier (2007). This leads up to a Habermasian and Foucauldian analysis which proposes a solution that would turn the Great Predators into Great Providers for ‘small, worker- and
community-run projects in the public, community and mutual sector . . . [and] the mass of small traders and entrepreneurs’ in whom Raul Prebisch had so much faith (p. 212). Unfortunately but unsurprisingly, given what Bracking teaches us, there are no examples of this although we are warned about the perils of the ever more fashionable and ubiquitous microcredit panacea.

Money and power combines clear theoretical starting points, straightforward ideological principles, and careful, incontrovertible calibrations of the money flows that mean power. In doing so, the book sets a new standard in the literature, deserving a place on senior undergraduate or postgraduate course curricula on the aid industry, not to mention on the desks of its captains and spin doctors.

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BOOK REVIEW


Sub-Saharan Africa has been affected significantly more than any other region of the world in terms of HIV prevalence and deaths from AIDS-related illnesses. Although estimating the numbers is notoriously difficult, the figures in sub-Saharan Africa are likely to be in the tens of millions. The impact of the disease however is not simply in terms of lives lost, nor its effect on the lifestyles and life chances of an additional tens of millions of Africans. Rather, as Flint correctly states, diseases historically have shaped societies more than almost any other factor, and HIV in Africa already appears to be fitting this pattern.

Why sub-Saharan Africa has suffered disproportionately provides the focus for this generally excellent book. Underpinning Adrian Flint’s analysis is that this is a tragedy: that is, an avoidable catastrophe. Ascribing the prevalence of the disease to widespread poverty is for Flint overly simplistic as other impoverished areas of the world do not possess anything like the same prevalence rates. Nor can it be explained by the ‘otherness’ of Africa, including different sexual mores and the prevalence of traditional medicine. Like most catastrophes – avoidable or otherwise, its causes are complex and multifaceted, but for Flint the key issue is politics. HIV/AIDS is presented here as being more than a development problem or a public health problem; rather the causes of the pandemic and the means of controlling it are political and ultimately bound up with issues of governance. Put simply, Flint’s thesis is that HIV/AIDS is worse in Africa because its leaders chose to do nothing about it until it was generally too late.

Flint presents his case well. It is clear, coherent and well put together. It is an argument many political scientists have been sympathetic to for some time, and Flint presents one of the best and most accessible accounts of this argument that there is. This is not to say the book is without its faults: data tend to be piled on data somewhat unproblematically; the chapters feel like a series of discrete but related seminar topics rather than a tightly controlled argument. Perhaps the two greatest problems however concern the core of the book. The first, Flint is open about: he treats sub-Saharan Africa as a single coherent region rather than one which is culturally, politically and epidemiologically diverse. He does this to provide a macro-level analysis, but in so doing risks losing much of the complexity of the situation he attempts to explain. For over a decade UNAIDS has argued that we face not a pandemic, but a series of epidemics with different political and social causes and consequences in sub-Saharan Africa. I strongly suspect Flint understands and sympathises with this. What he is trying to do is to provide a grand view and the sort of ‘big argument’ which many political scientists understand and approve of; but in so doing he risks losing some essential parts of the picture he is trying to explain. This is an argument which cannot be won:
if he focused on a series of case studies he
could equally be criticised for not attempt-
ing the big picture. I would have preferred
he spent more time discussing the limits
of the big picture approach, but to his
credit he is open about this as a problem
for his analysis. Second, it is increasingly
difficult to argue that poor governance is
either a necessary or sufficient condition
for the spread of HIV. Some states with
good governance and political leadership
have nevertheless experienced high preva-
lence, while others with poor governance/
leadership have not. Governance increas-
ingly looks like one of a number of factors in the spread of the disease,
perhaps the most important one, rather
than the determining factor. These reser-
vations aside, I would strongly recommend
this as one of the best books to be published
recently on the disease.

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Corrigendum


The opening sentence of the review should read:

Sidney 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).

The corresponding reference for this citation is:

The effects of government policies on cereal consumption pattern change in the Gambia

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This paper examines the effects of agricultural policies in the Gambia since independence from Great Britain in 1965. Under the two governments that have ruled the country since then, the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) led by Dawda Jawara (1965–1994) and the Alliance for Patriotic Re-orientation and Construction (APRC) led by Yahya Jammeh, the country has shown little to no growth in agricultural productivity. Moreover, recent policy changes, beginning in the 1980s, resulted in marked shifts in cereal consumption patterns. Rice, which has been the staple food for the past century, but is mainly imported, has been surpassed by locally grown millet as the most heavily consumed cereal in the country as a whole. However, this change is unlikely to lead to future food security as long as the failure to implement long-term agricultural development strategies by the current APRC regime continues.

Keywords: Gambia; agriculture; policy; cereal consumption

Introduction

Market liberalisation has been the preferred route of major development agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for increasing agricultural productivity in sub-Saharan Africa over the past couple of decades. The liberalisation usually includes the break-up of government monopolies (through parastatals) in agricultural marketing. The concern about government involvement in agricultural marketing centres around the possibility that price guarantees to farmers could lead to excessive draining of treasuries (because of subsidies), discourage private-sector investment in the agricultural sectors and therefore inhibit higher agricultural productivity. It was therefore believed that with government withdrawal and the resultant participation of many competing agro-dealers in the markets, farmers would respond to this competition by increasing output. Many of these policies were strongly pushed when the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) were implemented in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1980s. As a consequence of this policy view, the sub-Saharan Africa region has witnessed the privatisation of many government agencies and the concomitant reduction or removal of agricultural subsidies beginning in the 1980s (Gibbon \textit{et al.} 1993).

Contrary to predictions, the reduction of the state’s role in agricultural marketing did not lead to agricultural productivity increases in most African countries. This is because the debate about the merits of agricultural market liberalisation sometimes occurs with little
reference to the specific political economy contexts of individual countries. The impediments to agricultural productivity growth in many sub-Saharan African countries are due more to structural problems (for example, high transportation and input costs) and tend to be country-specific rather than price distortions caused by government interventions (Delgado and Mellor 1984). In fact, the involvement of government agencies was most likely premised on these structural problems since their policies in agriculture were characterised mainly by the provision of credit and input subsidies and reduction of transportation costs. As a result, even after the privatisation of government parastatals, there is little evidence that any significant agricultural productivity growth resulted (Gabre-Madhin and Haggblade 2004).

The persistent lack of agricultural productivity growth in sub-Saharan Africa and frequent food crises in the region are consistent with the view that structural impediments are indeed quite important, and likely more so than any possible distortionary effects of government involvement. For example, the 1994 devaluation of the CFA franc (a currency used mostly by former French colonies in West and Central Africa) has led many to hope that the production of local cereals such as millet would increase and possibly displace (mostly imported) rice since the devaluation would lead to relative price increase of the latter (Singare et al. 1999). However, there has been no evidence of local production response to this favourable change induced by the CFA franc devaluation (Diagana 1999).

This paper provides evidence from the Gambia on the effect of government policy changes in the agricultural sector. We focus specifically on the changing cereal consumption pattern in the country and provide evidence that its cause lies in major PPP government policy changes starting in the 1980s. Instead of leading to productivity increase in the relevant crop (groundnuts) as hoped for by proponents of reforms, it actually led to a production decline in that crop and an increase in the production and consumption of millet in the country, and had no corresponding agricultural productivity effect. In actuality, what the agricultural policy changes achieved was the compounding of a problem that had its basis in the absence of sound and long-term agricultural policies since independence in 1965, and earlier during the colonial period. Our paper builds on and extends Sallah (1990), who not only noted many of the policy problems with regards to the agricultural sector in the Gambia between independence in 1965 and 1990, but was able to highlight numerous instances of misplaced priorities such as higher government expenditures for defence and external affairs over agriculture. The paper also questions implicitly the efficacy of the World Bank–IMF imposed SAP austerity measures, which provide the backdrop for policies of both the Jawara and Jammeh governments.

Like most countries in West Africa, (mostly imported) rice has been the staple food in the Gambia despite the presence of many locally grown cereals such as millet and sorghum. Beginning in the 1990s, however, the production and consumption of millet in the country increased and, by 1999, total millet consumption had overtaken rice consumption, despite the continuing importance of factors that have traditionally favoured rice consumption such as increased urbanisation and government subsidies. We provide evidence that this shift in consumption from rice to millet is caused by abrupt changes in PPP and APRC government policies, such as government withdrawal from the marketing of groundnuts and the reduction of state agricultural subsidies, which were driven by SAP conditionalities. Thus, beginning in the 1980s, the PPP government privatised parastatals that provided credit and input subsidies to groundnut producers with disastrous consequences, given that earnings from the sale of groundnuts, the major cash crop, enables farmers to purchase imported rice. Difficulties faced by farmers in producing and selling
groundnuts left them with no option but to turn to locally grown cereal to ensure food security.

In the absence of structural problems in the agricultural sector, changes in government policy, such as the privatisation of agricultural marketing and elimination of subsidies, would be welcome developments. However, in the context of the Gambian economy, such policy changes were ill-advised, and even though the adoption of reforms during structural adjustment led to macroeconomic stabilisation, governments failed to implement long-term agricultural policies. Thus, policy instruments meant to stimulate agricultural production exclusively through market liberalisation only exacerbated the hardships faced by farm households, even though the country was often touted as a model of success and vindication of SAP austerity measures.

Agricultural policy has always been a sensitive political area for Gambian governments. Since the agricultural sector is the main source of livelihood for most Gambian households, and periodic elections have been held since independence, elected governments have always found it politically expedient to respond with short-term measures rather than long-term agricultural policies. Therefore, political factors play a crucial role in explaining the failures of Gambian regimes in implementing long-term agricultural policies.

The importance of agriculture in the Gambian economy

A poor agricultural country (Sallah 1990) with a GDP per capita of US$430 in 2009, the Gambia is characterised by Low Human Development, being currently ranked 160 (out of 179 countries) in the UNDP Human Development Index (UNDP 2009).

Agriculture employs 68% of the labour force (World Bank 2010) and accounted for 33% of GDP in 2007 (IMF 2007). Beyond this, productivity growth in the sector is essential for economic growth and development (Timmer 1988). Like most economic processes, however, sectoral growth has numerous determinants, some of which depend on government policies. Understanding these determinants will help provide a context for appreciating the effects of government policy changes.

The key policy determinants of agricultural productivity include good infrastructure, access to modern inputs, agricultural research and favourable policies on trade and human capital investments (Bravo-Ortega and Lederman 2004). Good and reliable infrastructure lowers the cost of inputs by reducing transportation cost and reduces the cost of marketing for farmers, an essential requirement as farm households produce increasingly for the market. Modern agricultural inputs such as improved seeds and fertiliser which increase crop productivity (both in output per land and per worker) are essential to the growth of agriculture. Consequently, policies that do not actively facilitate farmer access to these inputs also forego considerable productivity gains in the agricultural sector. Investment in human capital such as education also facilitates agricultural growth because the cost of public awareness campaigns in agriculture (and other sectors) is reduced. For example, more educated farmers are less likely to make mistakes in the precise application of modern inputs, some of which have little margin for error. The presence of local agricultural research institutes is also vital, not only to develop new technologies, but also to ensure that modern innovations developed elsewhere are customised to local conditions. These local institutions usually work in tandem with extension agents who facilitate the transmission of information to individual farm households.

Before addressing government policies directly in what follows, we provide a brief background note on agricultural crops grown and consumed in-country, the most important
of which are groundnuts, coarse cereals (millet and, to a much smaller extent, sorghum) and rice.

**Major Gambian crops**

Groundnuts, grown by at least 80% of all agricultural households, are the main cash crop in the country, contributing approximately 6% of the country’s GDP (Ministry of Agriculture 2002). About 45% of cultivated land has been devoted to this crop, on average, since independence; approximately 60% of the crop is exported (as both raw or shelled nuts and groundnut oil), with the rest being marketed locally. Although 34,000 metric tonnes (MT) of groundnut (shelled) were exported in 1965, exports were down to 16,000 MT by 2006 (FAOSTAT 2009).

Although Figure 1 shows national groundnut production was roughly the same in 2007 (100,000 MT with shell) as in 1965 (128,000 MT with shell),\(^2\) annual production fluctuated widely over this period, with the great Sahelian drought of the 1970s, for example, alongside low fertiliser use during these and other years, impacting negatively on production totals, which come in their entirety from rain-fed farms (Ministry of Agriculture 2002; FAOSTAT 2009). Farmers preserve a portion of their harvests for use as seed the following rainy season which results in the use of low quality seeds since groundnut traders insist on the highest quality seeds right after harvest. And, while the National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI) has been promoting the use of new and improved groundnut varieties, the take-up rate among farmers has been low, with the result that little growth in productivity or yield has been recorded (Figure 2).

Rice has been the staple food in the Gambia for over a century, although more so in urban than in rural areas. At independence in 1965, rice (milled) consumption was 28,400 MT, since when the average annual rate of growth in consumption has been almost identical to the rate of population growth, at some 3% per annum. However, beginning in the mid 1990s, the level of consumption of rice started to fall, and by 2003, total national consumption was back to late-1970s levels (FAOSTAT 2009).

Most of the rice consumed in the country is imported since local production falls far short of total demand. As a result, the level of local production in Figure 1 (37,000 MT of paddy rice in 1965 and 40,000 MT in 2007) is a poor indicator of the extent of domestic consumption. As with groundnut production, output totals and average yield are both low as virtually all the area cultivated is rain-fed, levels of fertiliser application are low and use of new seed varieties is limited. Average yield in the 1960s was 1.3 metric tonnes/hectare.

![Figure 1](image_url)

**Figure 1.** Production trends of groundnuts, millet and rice, the Gambia, 1965–2007. Source: Graphed from data in FAOSTAT (2009).
climbing to 1.9 MT/ha between 2000 and 2007. Currently, only about 2,300 ha of land planted to rice is irrigated, with all irrigated rice fields being situated in Central River Region. Although average smallholdings are as low as 0.5 ha in irrigated perimeters, for example, this is due only partly to a high national population density of 154/km², as only about 40% of the potential area that can be dedicated to rice production is being utilised (African Development Bank 2005).

Because of the higher level of consumption relative to local production, rice imports (mainly from Asia) are vital for food security, growing from 6,800 MT in 1965 to about 92,000 MT in 2006. Not all rice imports are consumed within the Gambia, however, as a significant proportion leaves the country through the re-export trade, mainly to Senegal and Guinea. Prior to market liberalisation in 1985, the government agency, the Gambia Produce and Marketing Board (GPMB), had the sole licence to import rice into what was a tightly regulated market. An average post-independence per capita rice consumption rate of 67kg is one of the highest in Africa, with only Madagascar (102kg/year), Guinea Bissau (92kg/person), Sierra Leone (89kg/person) and Liberia (86kg/person) recording higher average per capita rice consumption between 1980 and 2003 (FAOSTAT 2009).

Millet is currently the most important cereal grown locally. At independence in 1965, 35,400 MT was produced in the country, a figure which had reached 160,000 MT in 2006 (Figure 1), reflecting an average annual increase in production, between 1992 and 2007, of 7% (FAOSTAT 2009). Most of this growth was the result of an expansion in the area under cultivation rather than an increase in yield (Figure 2). For example, the land devoted to millet cultivation in 1965 (33,000 ha) was just one-third that devoted to groundnut cultivation (100,000 ha), but by 2005, the area under millet was 21% higher than that planted to groundnuts (105,000 ha versus 127,000 ha).

The flat trends in the productivity of these major crops provide strong evidence that growth in agricultural productivity has been largely absent over the past four decades. The underlying reasons for this general low productivity can be traced to policy decisions.

**Historical reasons for high rice consumption in the Gambia**

Although the key motivation of this paper is to explain the shifting consumption pattern in which millet is competing with rice as the main staple, it also raises the question of why the Gambia has rice, a cereal it is not self-sufficient in, as its staple food. But while the origins go back centuries, the reality of rice’s continued importance can be attributed to path...
dependence and the privileging of groundnuts as the colony’s cash crop to satisfy European industrial demand (Swindell and Jeng 2006).

Following the end of the transatlantic slave trade in the late 1870s, the Gambia became enmeshed in the new but growing legitimate trade in primary commodities, principally groundnuts. The consequence of the shift in trade from enslaved Africans to primary production was to irreversibly restructure both economic and social relations of the Senegambia region and, specifically, in the Gambia. This gave rise to the intensified use of the ‘strange farmer’ system in the Gambia, which not only helped to increase the production of groundnuts for export, but also effectively incorporated Gambians and Gambian farmers into a global capitalist economy. In time, export crop production undercut production of food crops, partly because of demand and, partly too, because of support it received from the British colonial administration. The result was the reliance on rice imports which, when combined with seasonal famines and droughts, deepened the dependence of farmers on imported rice and European consumer goods. In time, a complex relationship between European subsidiaries and their Gambia intermediaries, Gambian farmers and the colonial state ensued (Saine 2008).

In the end, this economic relationship was inherently exploitative, with the major beneficiaries being the foreign business sector and colonial state which, through collusion, operated a de facto monopoly at the expense of farmers. This economic relationship also had the negative effect of stimulating groundnut exports while simultaneously dampening production of food crops (Saine 2008). This pattern of dependence and privileging of groundnuts did not change after political independence, continuing under both the Jawara-led and Jammeh-led regimes. Despite the increasing importance of Asian and hybrid rice varieties, the West Africa subregion has an indigenous variety, *Oryza glaberrima*. Archaeological and linguistic evidence suggests that its domestication occurred about 3,000 years ago around the Senegambia region (Porteres 1970). The Asian variety (*Oryza sativa*) is believed to have been introduced by Portuguese traders around the sixteenth century (Linares 2002). Groundnuts were introduced to the region around the same time (Brooks 1975), with its production increasing significantly in the early nineteenth century due to demands from Europe for raw materials in the manufacturing of soap and lubricants.

Most of the Gambia’s early exports of groundnuts went to France because Britain depended more heavily on palm oil, which was exported from Ghana and Nigeria (Hughes and Perfect 2006). In response to an increase in Gambian groundnut exports from about 50 MT in 1835 to 11,000 MT in 1851 (Brooks 1975), local farmers shifted resources away from locally grown cereals such as millet and sorghum to groundnuts, generating concern over food security as local cereal production declined. Over time, this led, as in 1857, to serious periodic food shortage in the country (Carney and Watts 1991), to which the colonial administration’s solution was to increase imports of rice from Asia. We have here then the main reason behind the eventual dominance of rice as the staple food in many Sahelian countries in West Africa, especially in the Senegambia subregion (Swindell and Jeng 2006).

As testament to the importance of this arrangement in maintaining reasonable food security, both the Senegalese and Gambian governments continued to be heavily involved in the marketing of groundnuts and the importation of rice. In the Gambia, the government agency, the GPMB, had the sole licence to market groundnut and import rice in the country until 1985. Similarly, in Senegal, a government agency, the Office National de Coopération et d’Assistance Pour le Développement (ONCAD), had the sole monopoly in marketing groundnut and importing rice up to 1981 (Ross 1982).
Over time, socio-economic changes have reinforced the importance of rice as a staple. Across all countries in Africa (Gajigo and Denning 2010), rice consumption is strongly correlated with urbanisation rates. The reason behind this correlation is that the preparation of milled rice is less time-consuming than that for local cereals such as millet and sorghum. For non-agricultural households in urban areas, the high opportunity cost of time leads to a preference for rice. Taking the Gambia, while only about 15% of the population lived in urban areas at independence in 1965, that percentage had increased to 57% by 2009, the result of an average annual urbanisation rate of 7% (United Nations Populations Division 2009). But there are also political reasons that favour high rice consumption in urban areas, with many African governments providing rice subsidies to both feed and appease an increasingly restless urban population.

Although rice is mainly imported and locally produced groundnut is mostly exported, the fate of the two crops has continued to be highly intertwined, as most smallholder farmers depend on the proceeds from the sale of their groundnut harvests in order to purchase imported rice. Consequently, any serious disruption to either groundnut production or marketing is likely to have an adverse effect on farmer ability to afford imported rice, the price of which is set internationally.

Government policies and the groundnut sector

While many of the factors that underlie low agricultural productivity are long established (for example, the exclusive dependence on rainfall and poor infrastructure), a more recent phenomenon, major changes in government policies, has compounded the difficulties faced by traditional smallholder farmers. Since before the colonial period, British and French traders have purchased groundnuts directly from farmers along the banks of the River Gambia (Brooks 1975). The long navigable river was instrumental in making the interior of the country accessible to vessels and significantly reduced the transportation cost faced by farmers. Given the small average farm size, transportation cost relative to the value of crop harvests has always been high. Following independence in 1965, the Jawara government retained the system of purchasing harvests from farmers close to their farms. The Gambia Cooperative Union (GCU), which had been established by the colonial government, continued to buy groundnuts directly from farmers and provided credit and subsidies for seeds and fertilisers. In 1973 the government created the Gambia Produce Marketing Board (GPMB), which added to and modernised groundnut collection points throughout the country. This new agency continued to be the governmental arm in providing subsidies to farmers, while farmer credit was financed through the government-owned Gambia Commercial and Development Bank (GCDB).

This arrangement worked reasonably well for the first 15 post-independence years, with groundnut (with shells) production averaging some 124,000 MT annually between 1965 and 1980. The problem with the groundnut sector started in the 1980s, a period which was preceded by a decade or so of rapid expansion in government expenditure and indebtedness, some of which could not be blamed on simple profligacy. For example, drought affected crop output during the 1970s. Nonetheless, as part of a Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), known locally as the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP), government was forced to drastically reduce the size of the public sector by inter alia cutting back on subsidies for seeds and fertilisers, after the short-term Economic Stabilisation Programme (ESP) failed to stabilise the economy (Cooke and Hughes 1997; McPherson and Radelet 1996; Sallah 1990). Prior expansion in public expenditure and debt made it difficult for the government to guarantee the convertibility of the currency – the dalasi – and to...
meet its debt service obligations (Sallah 1990; Jabara 1994). The seriousness of the crisis left the government with little choice but to quickly implement IMF reforms to bring both expenditure and debt to sustainable levels. Within the agricultural sector, the most important reforms led to the privatisation of the GCDB. With much government support for the groundnut sector removed, the GPMB struggled to provide the same services that farmers had come to expect. The effect on farmers was acute enough for the Jawara government to promise more subsidies despite commitments to the contrary made under ERP (Jawara 2009), thereby highlighting the role of politics in frequent policy reversals and changes in agricultural policy.

The government tried several measures between the late 1980s and early 1990s to reform its most important parastatal in agriculture, the GPMB, without success. Finally, in 1993, the Jawara government sold it to Alimenta SA, which renamed it Gambia Groundnut Corporation (GGC). Needless to say, while this new privately owned enterprise continued to purchase groundnuts from farmers and licensed traders, it not only did so at fewer collection points but farmers no longer received seed and fertiliser subsidies. In 1994 the then government (still headed by Dawda Jawara) was overthrown in a military coup led by Yahya Jammeh (Ceesay 2006; Saine 2009). The new government faced serious funding problems since almost all development aid was suspended until after elections were held in 1996. As the difficulties faced by farmers in selling their groundnut harvest continued, the new Jammeh-led government nationalised the GGC in 1998 through a presidential decree, accusing the company of money laundering. This charge was never proven in a court of law, and the nationalisation was most likely a political response to farmer discontent about groundnut marketing. Alimenta successfully sued the government and received US$11.4 million in settlement (IMF 2001). The government is currently under pressure to privatise the GGC as it is obligated to do under the requirements of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) programme (IMF 2007).

The repossession of the GGC by the Jammeh government resulted in the restoration of some subsidies, although subsidy levels remained lower than they had been during the 1980s, before ERP. This decision provided opportunities for the Jammeh government to portray itself as responsive to the concerns of farmers, a highly important voting bloc. However, after a brief surge in production in the late 1990s and 2000, groundnut production dropped again.

In 2004, the Jammeh government gave sole authorisation to the government-owned Gambia Agricultural Marketing Corporation (GAMCO) to market groundnuts, a decision which had a disastrous impact on the following year’s harvest. In the event, the under-capitalisation of GAMCO meant that insufficient funds for the purchase of all of the 2004/05 harvest led to a significant fall in groundnut exports that year and, subsequently, untold hardship to poor farmers (IMF 2006).

As the preceding discussion suggests, government policy changes and reversals started with the abrupt privatisation of the GPMB and the GCDB by the Jawara government, with the resulting withdrawal of credit and subsidies previously provided by these agencies worsening the problem. Far more abrupt was the nationalisation of the GGC by the Jammeh government, which raised hopes that subsidies would return to their previous levels, although these were never fulfilled. The reduction of groundnut collection points further added to the cost of production for the mostly small-scale farmers. By 1998, many farmers close to the border sold their produce in Senegal (Samarasinghe and Gray 2006). Those without such an option had to pay to transport their harvest to points where it could be collected for export. Finally, the government’s creation of GAMCO and the monopsonist status it was granted raised hopes that were later dashed when it could not
purchase groundnuts due to limited funds. Taken together, these changes effectively led to the decimation of the returns to groundnut production in the country.

The World Bank–IMF SAP policies that the Gambian government was required to follow, and which led to the privatisation of the GPMB and the GCDB, and the subsequent removal of agricultural subsidies and credit, were based on the theory that the best incentive for agricultural productivity was through producer price incentives that government involvement in the sector was supposedly impeding. But as Delgado and Mellor (1984) had presciently argued, supply response to price changes was likely to be very limited as long as small-scale farmers continued to face high input prices, high transportation cost due to poor infrastructure and inadequate agricultural extension services.

Although the effects of SAP represented a proximate, rather than underlying cause of the problems faced by the Gambian agricultural sector, SAP policies made a poor economic environment all the more untenable. And, as a macroeconomic stabilisation programme, SAP in The Gambia (ERP) was successful but not successful enough to improve the lives of farmers. Specifically, not only did staff retrenchment in the public sector reduce the government budget deficit, but foreign reserves increased and debt obligations were brought to sustainable levels. Nonetheless, the price of this success included a significant cutback in government agricultural expenditure, including reduced subsidies, which exacerbated both the structural weaknesses of the agricultural sector and existing challenges to groundnut productivity. Furthermore, the austerity measures contributed directly to an increase in unemployment due to retrenchment of public employees and may have worsened income inequality among Gambians.

In hindsight, it is not difficult to understand how groundnut production in the country was adversely affected by PPP government policies, notably the removal of price guarantees by the GPMB, which saw small-scale farmers, whose small farm sizes and rural location placed them outside the reach of the few formal financial institutions that could provide services such as credit and savings instruments, facing wildly fluctuating and unpredictable prices. Predictably, average groundnut production fell by 29% from 1980s to 1990s (Figure 1). Indeed, the extent of the problem of limited access to essential modern agricultural inputs is illustrated in Figure 3, which is based on data from a representative national household survey carried out in 2003 by the Central Statistics Department of the Gambia. The vast majority of farm households do not have access to productivity-enhancing inputs such as fertilisers, seeds and extension services. Government services that provided these inputs were those that were removed as a result of policy changes that began under the Jawara government and continued under Jammeh.

Figure 3. The problem of access to inputs in the Gambia in 2003.
Significantly, political considerations played a key role in the persistence of such short-term and ineffective agricultural policies in the Gambia. The patronage system under Jawara’s rule meant that government agencies such as the GPMB and the GCDB played key roles in funneling money to politically connected individuals and groups (McPherson and Radelet 1996). Furthermore, the periodic announcements of agricultural subsidies provided opportunity for the government to present their implementation as largesse during election campaigns.

The removal of subsidised fertilisers and seeds under both Gambian governments has not been the only problem to have affected the groundnut sector. The quality of Gambian groundnuts is relatively low compared to other groundnut producing countries and this has lowered the price fetched by the country’s exports (Samarasinghe and Gray 2006). For example, after the EU imposed standards for aflatoxin contamination for edible groundnuts, Gambian groundnut exports could no longer benefit from high prices that are available in the European market (Otsuki et al. 2001; Samarasinghe and Gray 2006). As a result, Gambia’s groundnut exports target mainly the groundnut oil and European birdseed markets, and are completely absent from the lucrative edible groundnut market in Western Europe.

The link between groundnut and millet production

How did the change in policies under the PPP and APRC regimes lower rice consumption and increase millet production through their effects on groundnut production? Recall that rice consumption in the Gambia and in the subregion took off because of the rapid and sustained adoption of groundnut as a cash crop. Over most of the twentieth century, the production of local cereals such as millet and sorghum remained marginal as farmers increasingly devoted land to groundnut production in response to global demand. This arrangement, in which groundnuts were grown as the cash crop and rice was imported, worked well as long as government intervention reduced the transaction cost for farmers, and rice imports were not obstructed. However, with the disruption of groundnut production and its export in the wake of SAP, critical elements of this arrangement that had ensured reasonable food security for over a century were disrupted. Without guaranteed proceeds from groundnut exports, many farm households found it difficult to purchase imported rice. Near specialisation in groundnut production for most agricultural households became untenable in light of government policy changes with regards to the provision of credit and input subsidies. To ensure food security, farmers had little choice but to grow their own cereal.

![Figure 4. Trends in the production and consumption of the major crops in the Gambia. Source: Graphed from data in FAOSTAT (2009).](image-url)
The cereal that has benefited most directly from this is millet. The production and consumption of millet started to expand rapidly by the late 1990s (Figures 1, 4 and 5). By 2000, millet consumption had overtaken rice consumption. The average annual per capita consumption of millet went from 39 kg between 1990 and 1999 to 59 kg between 2000 and 2007, an increase of 50%. The situation for rice was almost the reverse, with average annual per capita rice consumption decreasing from 68 kg between 1990 and 1999 to 40 kg between 2000 and 2007.10 Figure 6, based on the findings of nationally representative household surveys carried out by the Gambia Central Statistics Department in 1992 and 2003, shows that household production of millet went up significantly in all regions over the period under review, thus providing corroboration of the aggregate increase in millet production mentioned above. A further way in which the disruption to groundnut production has affected rice imports is through the sharp reduction in foreign exchange reserves it has caused, given that groundnuts are the country’s biggest export and its largest foreign currency earner. With groundnuts bringing in less in the way of foreign currency than previously, the government found it increasingly difficult to meet the import bill to satisfy the demand for rice of a growing and increasingly urbanising population.11

**Consumption pattern change**

(1) **Comparing evidence from the Gambia and Senegal**

To the extent that the fall in groundnut production and the rise in the consumption and production of millet can be attributed to policy changes within the Gambia, it is important to
show that the observed production and consumption trends in these crops are specific to the Gambia and not a local manifestation of a region-wide phenomenon. We would like to stress that we are not providing a comparison between Senegal and the Gambia in terms of agricultural policies in general. Rather, the goal here is to show that the observed consumption pattern change is limited to the Gambia.

Senegal provides a useful comparison when examining whether the consumption pattern change in the Gambia can be attributed to state policies in the latter. While it is a separate country with different policies, Senegal surrounds the Gambia on all sides except for a small strip of land on the Atlantic coast, and shares similar agroecological zones with the Gambia (Figure 7). More relevantly, the historical reasons behind the high consumption of rice and heavy export dependence on groundnuts are identical in both countries.

Figure 8 shows production trends in groundnuts and millet in Senegal. Groundnut production does not show a pronounced decline in production from the late 1990s. And millet production does not show an upward trend over the same time period. In Figure 9, the levels of consumption of rice and millet show patterns significantly different from, maybe even contrasting with, those observed in the Gambia over the period under review (see Figure 5): consumption of rice increasing in Senegal but falling in the Gambia and millet consumption in Senegal falling while rising in the Gambia over the past decade and half.

Comparing consumption and production trends in millet and rice between Senegal and the Gambia helps to underscore the role of policy, notably the key similarities and differences in policy implementation and impact between the countries, both of which have experienced very little agricultural productivity growth since independence (Kelly et al. 1996). Like the Gambia, Senegal also underwent economic reforms as part of Structural Adjustment Programmes in the 1980s (Masters 2007) which, via a reduction in direct agricultural input subsidies, adversely affected agricultural productivity (Fall 2003; Kelly et al. 1996). However, there are some key policy differences that can account partly for differing patterns in rice and millet consumption. In 1994, Senegal (along with several other West

![Figure 7. The Senegambia Region.](http://www.geographicguide.net/africa/gambia.htm)
African countries that use the CFA franc underwent a 50% currency devaluation. Despite its adverse consequences (Creevey et al. 1995), the devaluation led to increased competitiveness of all export goods in the country, including groundnuts (Diagana 1995). Furthermore, Senegal has acted to subsidise the importation of rice on numerous occasions in response to economic shocks. For example, import duties on rice were reduced after the 1994 currency devaluation to offset rising import costs. Another example is the suspension of import duties on rice imports during the food crises of late 2007 and early 2008 (Gajigo and Denning 2010). Devaluation thus helped to improve groundnut production, while the import duty policies adopted prevented a significant reduction in rice imports. Consequently, Senegal did not experience the changing consumption patterns which were recorded in the Gambia.

(2) Are changes in world rice prices responsible?

Since most of the rice consumed in the Gambia is imported, it is possible that the fall in rice consumption beginning in 1997 was a response to rising world rice prices. To evaluate this possibility, we examine the movement of world rice prices in the years preceding the fall in consumption.

Table 1, which shows the price of rice exported from Thailand, an important source of Gambian rice imports, indicates little significant fluctuation during the mid and late 1990s. Table 2 shows the price indices that incorporate 16 world rice exporters. Even though the price record starts from 1997, we can see that the price index that year is significantly below the level that triggered the world food crises of 2008. So there is no evidence in either of

![Figure 8. Production of groundnuts and millet in Senegal.](image)

Source: Graphed from data in FAOSTAT (2009).

![Figure 9. Consumption of rice and millet in Senegal.](image)

Source: Graphed from data in FAOSTAT (2009).
these tables to suggest that the rapid fall in rice consumption in the Gambia, beginning in
the late 1990s, was triggered by international price surges.

(3) Cross price effects
As the production of crops is affected by both their own prices and that of relevant compe-
titors, it is worth examining whether exogenous price movements in favour of millet have
been responsible for the increase in millet production. Figure 10 shows that, overall, there
has not been an increase in the per unit price of millet relative to groundnut. It is therefore
likely that policy changes rather than increases in the relative price of millet have been
driving its increasing production.

Table 1. Price of 5% broken milled rice, free on board (FOB), Bangkok.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>US$/Metric tonnes (MT)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>287</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>313</td>
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<td>1992</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>286</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>305</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: International Rice Research Institute (IRRI 2009).

Table 2. FAO Rice Price Index based on 16 rice export quotations. Rice quality is determined by
percentage of broken kernels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total index</th>
<th>High quality</th>
<th>Low quality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>124</td>
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<td>1998</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>296</td>
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Source: International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), 2009.
Implications of consumption pattern change for food security in the Gambia

Is the growing replacement of rice with millet as the staple food a favourable development for future food security in the Gambia? The answer depends on many factors. The West African subregion is increasingly reliant on rice imports. Only a small percentage of the world rice production is exported and sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) accounts for a third of global imports (Gajigo and Denning 2010). Thus the region is highly exposed to price or production shocks on the world rice market. This precarious position was highlighted during recent food crises when food prices (especially rice) increased precipitously over the course of a few months in 2007 and 2008. For many of SSA’s poor, food security is unlikely to be achieved under the current reality. Although this situation can be ameliorated through increased local production stimulated by appropriate policies, it is unlikely that SSA can become self-sufficient in rice in the short- or medium-term if current consumption trends and government policy instruments persist. At projected levels of consumption, production growth would have to increase tremendously (and perhaps unrealistically) for local West African and SSA production to match consumption (Gajigo and Denning 2010). It is therefore possible that the Gambia could improve its food security by relying increasingly on millet, something which could also have long-term positive health implications, as it would begin to reverse consumption of highly refined (and less nutritious) rice in the diet of Gambians.

This potentially favourable effect on food security, however, is not guaranteed. As Figure 2 shows, virtually all the growth in the production of millet comes from expansion of the area cultivated rather than an increase in yield. This implies that structural problems that inhibit productivity growth, which are caused by the absence of effective long-term agricultural policies, persist. For example, the percentage of arable land in the Gambia that is equipped for irrigation has not increased since independence: 0.8% (1965–1964), 0.6% (1975–1984), 0.8% (1995–2005) and 0.8% (1995–2005) (FAOSTAT 2009).

In contrast, the situation with transportation cost has actually been getting worse. Between 1990 and 2000, the proportion of roads in the country which were paved remained constant at about a third, but has since dropped under the Jammeh-led APRC regime to just a fifth (World Bank 2010). This suggests, when taken along with the current low level of millet yield, that the overall level of millet production is far below its full potential. Figure 11 shows that the potential impact on total production of a 50% increase and doubling of the current average yield value of 1.03 metric tonnes per hectare (MT/ha) would be average annual increases in total production of, respectively, 47% and 96%. Additionally, the continuing lack of agricultural productivity under the current regime, of which low
millet yield is just one specific example, is in part attributable to the frequent changes and lack of continuity at the topmost level of policy making in the Ministry of Agriculture.\(^\text{12}\) In short, food security would be improved if farm households could achieve substantial increases in yield, but improved access to modern varieties and fertilisers and, therefore, government-funded subsidies, as well as improvements in infrastructure, would be prerequisites for such improvements in yield. Given the Gambia’s high population density, increasing crop yield from the acreage already under cultivation, rather than expanding the cultivated area, is the only feasible long-term path to food security. The gender dimension of the increasing importance of millet consumption is also important. Traditionally, cash crops such as groundnuts are cultivated by men while women cultivate mainly food crops such as millet and rice (Carney and Watts 1991). This sexual division of labour implies that a lot of the recent government interventions in terms of providing inputs have largely benefited cash crop producers who are overwhelmingly male. The increasing importance of millet provides an opportunity for gender balance in agricultural intervention, although such an outcome should not be taken for granted, given that the current division of labour is not immutable. For example, government intervention in the 1980s to help commercialise rice cultivation in Central River Region (known at the time as MacCarthy Island Division) led to an influx of men in rice production, and the subsequent crowding out of some women from this traditional women’s activity (von Braun and Webb 1989).

In addition to modern inputs, technology that prolongs the storage life of millet flour is also essential. Part of the reason why the consumption of rice increases with urbanisation is that rice is more easily processed, and milled rice can be stored for longer than millet flour without deteriorating. While non-milled millet can be stored for a long time without any damage, millet flour is susceptible to pest infestation and chemical reactions with atmospheric elements. Therefore, food processing and storage technologies that close the gap between millet and rice would also be required. Significantly, too, such technologies would have the added advantage of much-needed time- and labour-saving opportunities for women, given the prevailing intra-household gender division of labour in the Gambia.

**Conclusion**

This paper has looked at the nature, (presumed) causes and effects of frequent policy changes in relation to agricultural production and marketing, notably the provision of subsidies and credit, under the PPP and AFRC governments. Contrary to predictions, the withdrawal of government subsidies did not result in productivity increases in groundnut
production, which had benefited most directly from government intervention. Rather, groundnut production stagnated and rice imports, historically funded from the proceeds of groundnut exports, declined. At the same time, millet production and consumption have both risen.

The lack of productivity response in the case of groundnuts is explained by the presence of structural factors such as high transportation costs resulting from poor infrastructure, high input prices and inadequate extension services, rather than limited competition caused by government involvement. These structural problems remained, even after government withdrew from agricultural marketing, thereby casting doubt on the potential attractiveness of agricultural marketing for private sector investors. In turn, they reflect the failures of successive post-independence governments which failed to implement meaningful long-term strategies to promote growth and development of the agricultural sector. Both regimes have found it politically expedient to implement short-term populist measures that could be unveiled during election campaigns in a bid to win votes. And yet, these policy failures have had adverse consequences for the economic development of the country as a whole, given the livelihood significance of agriculture for individuals and households, as well as the national economy. Most telling, however, is that real per capita GDP has grown at an average annual rate of only 0.3% between independence in 1965 and 2007 (Penn World Tables 2009).

We have also argued that the shift from rice to millet consumption is a direct outcome of government policy changes, rather than a simple local Gambian manifestation of a West Africa-wide phenomenon. The neighbouring country of Senegal does not show a similar shift in cereal consumption, despite similarities in agroecological conditions and a shared history. We show, too, that the fall in rice consumption cannot be explained by sudden world price surges, since none occurred around the time rice consumption started to fall in the Gambia. Furthermore, there has been no relative price increase in favour of millet to induce more farmers to start growing it, which further strengthens the view that policy change has been the main driving factor.

Although the switch from rice to millet consumption could improve food security in the Gambia, this would depend on productivity increases in millet production, something that has not happened so far. For the past five decades, average millet yields have been stagnant. The recent increase in production has come from expansion in the area cultivated, a response which is not sustainable because of the high population density of the country. Therefore, public–private partnerships and long-term agricultural development programmes that address structural barriers such as poor infrastructure and access to modern inputs are needed to raise productivity of millet, as well as other important crops, to ensure future food security.

Given the importance of gender in Gambian agriculture, it is not surprising that the observed shift in consumption has gender implications. Groundnuts are mostly cultivated by men while women are relatively more involved in food crop growing. So the increasing importance of millet has the potential to increase the relative income of women. However, this is only a possibility. As long as existing economic and cultural norms responsible for gender inequality persist, there is a real likelihood of the gains earmarked for women being captured by men. This therefore underscores the need for gender mainstreaming in agricultural policy in The Gambia.

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Notes

1. The GDP per capita based on Purchasing Power Parity in 2009 was US$1415 (World Bank 2010). This GDP per capita figure is in current prices.
2. Conversion factor of groundnuts with shell into shelled groundnut is 0.70 (FAO 2009).
3. In the irrigated rice field in Mali under Office du Niger, average rice yield in 2008 was approximately 5 MT/ha (Gajigo and Denning 2010).
4. The Gambia has six main administrative regions (formerly known as divisions): Kombo St Mary, Western Region, North Bank Region, Lower River Region, Central River Region and Upper River Region. Banjul, the capital, is administered separately by its city council. Central River Region is located in the middle of the country.
5. ‘Strange farmers’ are seasonal agricultural migrants who travel to groundnut producing areas to practise sharecropping (Jarrett 1945, Swindell 1980).
6. GPMB, which was created in 1973, was preceded by the Gambia Oilseeds Marketing Board (GOMB).
7. Most of the fertiliser and seeds provided by the government to farmers are not purchased directly at world market prices. Japan has been a major source of subsidised fertiliser.
8. The GPMB was a continuation of both the GCU and the Gambia Oilseed Marketing Board (GOMB).
9. Some other key privatisations not directly connected with the agricultural sector were the Gambia National Insurance Corporation (GNIC) and National Trading Corporation (NTC) (Sallah 1990).
10. It is important to note that while the average national consumption of rice has fallen significantly, this fall is more pronounced for rural rather than urban households.
11. Another factor that has adversely affected the country’s foreign exchange reserve (and contributed to the difficulty in importing rice) is the shock to the tourism industry caused by the 1994 military coup. Due to travel advice from the UK and other European countries (Sharpley et al. 1996), the number of visiting tourists fell sharply. Tourism is the second largest foreign exchange earner for the Gambian economy after groundnut exports.
12. Since assuming office, President Jammeh has arbitrarily hired and fired over 10 secretaries/ministers of agriculture as well as numerous permanent secretaries. Over the past five years, the uncertainties over this important ministry have mounted as Jammeh himself has added this ministry to the State House’s portfolio (Sarr and Sillah 2006).

References


Continuous primitive accumulation in Ghana: the real-life stories of dispossessed peasants in three mining communities

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The purpose of this article is to provide an opportunity for the peasants in three mining communities in Ghana to voice their experiences of primitive accumulation under contemporary global neo-liberalism. There is a plethora of literature on the exploitation of Africa, drawing on theories of new imperialism or ‘accumulation by dispossession’. However, there is not much grassroots empirical work on how different social groups experience accumulation by dispossession. It seems that NGOs and journalists do better on this than intellectuals. I seek in this article to contribute to filling this lacuna, by focusing on the hardest hit social group, namely, the peasants. I also argue that the existence of this lacuna has major theoretical and political implications for the struggle for alternatives to capitalism and ‘development’ that is distinctly anti-imperialist. The article is based on data collected through focus group discussions and in-depth personal interviews with peasants affected by surface mining activities of transnational mining corporations in three mining communities in the resource-rich Western Region of Ghana: Prestea, Dumasi and Teberebie.

Keywords: Ghana; primitive accumulation; enclosures; dispossession; peasants; development; global capital

Introduction

We have heard about the democracy in Ghana, but we are not part of it. (Dei Nkrumah, a peasant in Dumasi, 21 November 2008)

After several years of political instability and military dictatorships, Ghana is back in the limelight as a beacon of hope for Africa because of its relative political stability and exemplary democratisation process since the 1992 elections. In the West Africa subregion, where Ghana is surrounded by countries mired in civil war (Côte d’Ivoire) and pseudo-democracies (Togo and Burkina Faso), the euphoria surrounding Ghana’s democratisation is not unfounded. However, the kernel of my argument is that Ghana practises liberal democracy, a model of democracy that serves as a thin veneer for exploitative mechanisms and power relations of the global capitalist order. ‘Continuous primitive accumulation’, an inherent feature of the capitalist mode of accumulation (De Angelis 2004, p. 60) is one of the mechanisms and power relations that liberal democracy masks in Ghana.

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Democratic doctrines such as freedom, rights, and liberties of the individual, rule of law and constitutional government, political equality, equality before the law, and representative government are all universal values that are available to all citizens, including the subaltern classes (Sen 1999). However, as we shall see, the deleterious effects of continuous primitive accumulation wrought on peasants in the mining communities by foreign mining capital – not without the complicity of the democratic neo-liberal state in Ghana – show that liberalism and democracy are not necessarily harmonious. It is a truism that classical liberalism, the thrust of which is ‘possessive individualism’ (Macpherson 1964), is in contradiction with classical democracy, the thrust of which is political accountability to citizens, as well as the promotion of their social well-being in substantive terms. It is, therefore, possible in practice to have liberalism without democracy (Bobbio 2005, p. 11).

It is in the mining communities that the violence of continuous primitive accumulation is well pronounced in Ghana. The structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) that liberalised the Ghanaian economy in the 1980s led to a stupendous increase in foreign direct investment (FDI) in the mining sector (Aryeetey et al. 2004; Hilson 2004). Surface mining, rather than underground mining, is the method mostly used by foreign mining companies in Ghana (Owusu-Koranteng 2008). Socially and environmentally, surface mining is extremely rapacious in nature (Palmer et al. 2010), and in the case of Ghana, this has had impacts on the mining communities in ways that are strikingly similar to the enclosures of eighteenth-century England in the wake of the ‘Great Transformation’ (Polanyi 2001). This article seeks to give agency to oppressed and marginalised peasants to enable them to speak about their real-life experiences with continuous primitive accumulation. One hopes that this will contribute to the literature on ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey 2003, Bond 2006) by providing empirical evidence of how real human beings experience this injustice.

While critical political economy scholars have insightfully theorised and depicted the exploitation of Africa by global capital through the mechanisms of classical imperialism and new imperialism (see ROAPE, Vol. 30, No. 95; Bracking and Harrison 2003), there is surprisingly no comparable empirical work on how different classes of people, especially the lower rungs of society, experience the effects of this exploitation. With the notable exceptions of Akabzaa (2000), Hilson (2004), Hilson et al. (2007) and Bush (2009), it looks as though journalists and NGOs do better in this than scholars.\(^1\) I seek, therefore, to press a case for more empirical work on accumulation by dispossession at the bottom level of the state, not just to demonstrate its rapacious effects, but to serve as the basis for intellectual activism. Also, to serve as a basis for musing about alternatives to the capitalist social order in the specific context of ‘underdevelopment’ in Africa and the struggle for ‘development’ that is free of imperialism.

The article is based on field observation of the living conditions of the peasants in the midst of the destructive activities of two foreign mining companies — Golden Star Resources Ltd and Iduapriem, a subsidiary of AngloGold Ashanti Limited — in Prestea, Dumasi and Teberebie, three mining communities in the Western Region of Ghana. I also conducted six focus group discussions (FGDs) with the members of these communities (women and men) — with at least five participants in each FGD — on the activities of the mining companies and the impact on their livelihoods. In-depth personal interviews (IDIs) with key political figures such as Dei Nkrumah, leader of one of the peasant groups taking court action against enclosures, Daniel Owusu Koranteng founder and head of Wassa Association of Communities Affected by Mining (WACAM), a human rights NGO for the mining communities, and Honourable Francis Adu-Blay Koffie, Member of Parliament for Prestea–Huni-Valley constituency which encompasses two of the three communities under study (Dumasi and Prestea).
Before his election, Hon. Koffie was also an activist of WACAM in these communities, and struggled with the peasants against enclosures.

Though my sample is not random, nonetheless, the voices of the peasants below illuminate broadly the violence of continuous primitive accumulation in Ghana. For the purpose of transparency, I must add that I do not intend the voices of the peasants to be understood as what they said in verbatim; as these have gone through translations from Twi to English. I had an interpreter to assist me where I could not understand certain difficult vocabularies and proverbs. I recorded their voices with a digital voice recorder and then transcribed them into English, careful to capture as much as possible of what was said. What is certain is that the essence of what my respondents said was captured in the interviews.

Global capital and mining in Ghana

A historical sketch of the mining context in Ghana will illustrate clearly that continuous primitive accumulation in the era of neo-liberalism is a continuation of the exploitation of Ghana by global capital since the obnoxious slave trade in the sixteenth century, classical colonialism in the nineteenth century, to present-day ‘neocolonialism’ or ‘new imperialism’ (Nkrumah 1965, Harvey 2003). Besides slave trading, the exploitation of natural resources, particularly gold, is one of the concrete manifestations of global capitalist accumulation in Ghana during the classical period of ‘primitive accumulation’ that Karl Marx theorised and documented. It is also the touchstone of the exploitative terms under which Ghana’s economy, like other African economies, has been articulated to the global economy for centuries (Amin 2002). Exploitation of Ghana’s natural resources started with the ‘free’ trade in gold between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when Portuguese, Dutch, and later, English merchants bought gold cheaply from local miners in the Akan areas of the Gold Coast, to the gold rush and colonialism in the late nineteenth century (Dumett 1998, Hilson 2002).

The atrocities of foreign mining capital against the three mining communities studied in this article thus have a long history, dating back to the ‘gold rush’, in the period 1877–1885 when mining capital entered the Wassa area of the then Gold Coast, an area that included the three mining communities under study here. As documented by Raymond Dumett, peasants and local miners were dispossessed of their lands by foreign mining capital during the Wassa ‘gold rush’ in a manner that is remarkably similar to the dispossession that happened with the rush of foreign mining companies into Ghana in the era of neo-liberalism. This happened with the collaboration of the local capitalist class, chiefs, and concession-middlemen (Dumett 1998, pp. 22–23, 178–180), just as continuous primitive accumulation in the era of neo-liberalism is happening with the complicity of the Ghanaian political/state elites and corrupt chiefs who have their selfish material interests in the activities of the foreign mining companies.

After Ghana’s independence in 1957, the mining sector came under the control of the state, following the recommendation of a commission of enquiry into the mining sector set up by Nkrumah’s socialist-oriented government. Under the auspices of the State Mining Corporation, formed in 1961, the state took control of all existing mining companies, with the exception of the Ashanti Goldfield Corporation (AGC) in Obuasi. However, in 1972 the Acheampong-led National Redemption Council (NRC) military regime nationalised AGC by decree (NRCD 132), and it was renamed Ashanti Goldfields Corporation (Ghana) Ltd (Hilson 2002, pp. 22–23). The era of global neo-liberalism arrived in the 1980s and opened the Ghanaian economy to the exigencies of global capitalism through the free-market macroeconomic reforms implemented under the economic recovery
programme (ERP), the Ghanaian version of the World Bank/IMF’s structural adjustment programmes (SAPs).

As part of the liberalisation and privatisation principles of the SAPs, state-owned mines were privatised. To prime the economic conditions for profitable accumulation by global capital, generous investment incentives were given to foreign mining companies under the guise of promoting foreign direct investment (FDIs), which is hoisted by development agencies and bourgeois scholars as the pathway for development in Africa. In line with this belief, the Rawlings military dictatorship that governed Ghana in the 1980s passed the Mining and Minerals Law (PNDCL 153) which granted the following investment incentives to mining capital: tax reductions and breaks, variable royalties between 3 and 12%, removal of restrictions on the transfer of dividends, reduction of mining tax from 45–55%, and so on (Hilson 2002, p. 24).

The neo-liberal Kufuor-led government also passed the Mining and Minerals Act, 2006 (Act 703) that made the investment incentives more generous; for example, instead of royalties of between 3% and 12%, it sliced it by half, to between 3% and 6% (Act 703, section 25). What is even worse, it legalised the dispossession of the peasants in so many ways, of which only a few can be mentioned here: it stipulated that any land with minerals can be leased by the state for mining without the consent of the traditional owners of the land, the peasants (Act 703, Sections 1–3); it sanctioned the lease of huge tracts of land for a period of 30 years, subject to renewal (Act 703, Sections 41, 44); once granted the lease, the mining company is given the right, with few limitations, to do anything necessary to exploit the minerals and dispose of them in the way they choose (Act 703, Sections 46 and 48), and the original owners of the land (the peasants) virtually lose their rights over their property, considering the lax terms of compensation and strict conditions imposed on them if they are to farm on their lands (Act 703, Sections 72–75). In Stephen Gill’s terms, both the defunct PNDCL 153 and its successor, Act 703, are quintessential cases of ‘new constitutionalism’, where constitutions are used not to guarantee the rights of ordinary citizens, but rather to ‘redistribute the terrain of normal politics so as to “lock in” the power gains of capital and to “lock out” or depoliticise forces challenging these gains’ (Gill 2002, p. 48).

The logic of capitalist accumulation and continuous primitive accumulation

To understand why primitive accumulation – a distinctly violent and undemocratic dynamic of capitalism – continues in the twenty-first century and in democratic countries like Ghana, we need to understand the underlying logic of the capitalist social order and the centrality of the role of the state in it. One important characteristic of the capitalist mode of production distinct from other modes of production is the purpose of production: it is undertaken mainly for profit or value-added and not for use or consumption. The capitalist class invests money in the production process with the ultimate goal of making more money, and not for consumption or to generate surplus value for the purpose of collective good as in, say, the communal mode of production or the moral economy of the peasants (see Scott 1976). The thrust of the capitalist mode of production, Karl Marx tells us, is its ‘boundless drive for enrichment’ and its ‘passionate chase after value’ (Marx 1976, p. 254; see also Brenner 2006, p. 80). This characteristic makes the capitalist system fiercely competitive and extremely individualistic. It also makes it inherently exploitative of, and unjust to, specific classes of people and geopolitical areas. It will suffice here to simplify by saying that the exploited classes are the working and other cognate lower classes, and the exploited geopolitical areas are the non-industrial and raw-material-producing countries or the
The exploiting classes are the capitalist/propertied classes and the exploiting geopolitical areas are the industrialised or core capitalist countries — those that Amin (2000, p. 599) conceptualised as the ‘Triad’ (the United States, Canada, Europe, and Japan).

The capitalist system accumulates on a worldwide scale and brings areas in the backwaters into a web of exploitative relations governed by institutions of the capitalist global economy (Soederberg 2006). Despite its worldwide accumulation, it does not lead to capitalist development in most of the peripheries (especially Africa), let alone give their citizens equivalent high living standards as in the core capitalist countries. Historically, not only has the working class in the core capitalist countries been exploited by the capitalist class, but even worse, the peripheral countries are exploited by the core capitalist countries through the structural mechanics of the capitalist global economy. Africa and most peripheral countries have, therefore, been plundered of their resources by the core capitalist countries through subtle strategies of neocolonialism (Nkrumah 1965, Shivji 2009).

Samir Amin has since his influential Accumulation on a world scale unceasingly theorised and systematically demonstrated how the exploitation of the peripheral countries happen and the way in which it serves as the main cause of ‘underdevelopment’ in these countries (Amin 1974; Amin 2000; Amin 2002). Amin sees the exploitation as primitive accumulation, which for him, does not ‘belong only to prehistory of capitalism’ but is ‘contemporary as well’. He argues correctly that whenever the capitalist system enters into relations with precapitalist modes of production, its sole purpose is to transfer value from the precapitalist to the capitalist formations, through the ‘mechanisms of primitive accumulation’ (Amin 1974; pp. 3, 22). Amin has in mind the classical and popular Marxian notion of primitive accumulation where the emergence and development of capitalism in the capitalist centres are said to be inextricably linked to exploitation of resources from the peripheral countries through historically specific mechanisms such as the trade in slaves, mercantilism, colonialism etc. These were the prehistory of capitalism because, as the radical structuralists have argued, it was this initial wealth looted from the peripheral countries that served as the foundation of capitalist development in the core capitalist countries on one hand, and, on the other, ‘blocked’ development in the peripheral countries (Brenner 1977, p. 67, Amin 1974, p. 22).

The extraction of natural resources from Africa by global capital, as Nkrumah documented in his book over 45 years ago, clearly demonstrates this exploitation: he argued persuasively that minerals are meant for export in their raw state to feed industries in the metropolitan capitalist state, ‘to the impoverishment of the countries of origin’ in Africa (Nkrumah 1965, p. 4). For example, despite the rush of mining capital into Ghana in the era of neo-liberalism, and despite the several billions of dollars worth of gold the foreign mining companies have exploited from Ghana, the contribution of the mining sector to the GDP of Ghana is negligible. Highlighting this, a mainstream source, The Economist, wrote: ‘Gold accounted for 40% of [Ghana’s] exports in 2008, with a value of $2.2 billion. But the government received only $116m in taxes and royalties from mining firms — less than 4% of the country’s total tax take’ (The Economist 2010). This is unsurprising because, far from being the sort of FDI that has promoted development in countries such as South Korea, China, Taiwan, and so on, the purpose of mining capital in Ghana is to ‘loot’ – in the blunt terms of Patrick Bond – and not to invest in the country as the organs of new imperialism – the World Bank and IMF – will want us to believe.

The above notion of primitive accumulation has been seriously questioned by the compelling criticisms of Marxists like Robert Brenner and Ellen Wood (Brenner 1977, Wood 2002). Drawing on Marx, these critics point out that what was crucial for the development
of capitalism was the transformation of social relations of production that are historically specific to the capitalist mode of production, not the wealth accumulated from the peripheral countries. For Marx, ‘primitive accumulation plays ... about the same part as original sin in theology’ (cited in Shivji 2009, p. 26). What is crucial in this conceptualisation of primitive accumulation is the creation of a unique social condition whereby people (the majority in society) have no other means of social and material (re)production than to sell labour power to the propertied class for wages (Shivji 2009, pp. 26–27). In Polanyian sense of the ‘double movement’, primitive accumulation was the first movement that subjected the lives of people to the atomising discipline of the self-regulated market, it was what caused ‘the catastrophic dislocation of the lives of the common people’, and it was the ‘satanic mill’ that ground people who hitherto had control over their lives into a hapless mass of labourers with only the sale of their labour as their means of livelihood (Polanyi 2001, pp. 35, 81). Through primitive accumulation, as one authoritative source points out, ‘objects rule subjects, deeds command the doing, and the doing of human activity is channelled into forms that are compatible with the priority of capital’s accumulation’ (De Angelis 2004, p. 64).

What is indisputable to Marx himself is the fact that primitive accumulation – in the crude sense of wealth accumulation from the periphery countries – did take place, that it contributed to the advancement of capitalist development at the centre, and ravaged the periphery. Furthermore, the mechanisms for primitive accumulation were violent. For example, Marx drew an explicit link between slavery and colonialism and industrial capitalism:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalized the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation. (Marx 1976 1867, p. 915)

In this light, what Amin has done, which is very insightful about the (mal-) articulation of the economies of African countries with the capitalist global economy, is to show that primitive accumulation and its ‘underdevelopment’ effects on Africa have continued into the twenty-first century, long after ‘the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production’. Recently, Issa Shivji has sought to underscore that ‘primitive accumulation is not simply historical, but continues contemporaneously with the development of capitalism, specifically in the periphery’ (Shivji 2009, p. 28; see also Bush 2009).

Amin, Shivji, De Angelis and Bush’s theory of the historical continuity of primitive accumulation is particularly useful if one focuses on the violence of primitive accumulation, not just at the country and continental level (henceforth, macro-level) analysis of the looting of the resources of Africa under new imperialism or ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Bond 2006, Shivji 2009), but on the bottom-level (henceforth, micro-level) analysis of how different social groups (in this article, the peasants) in Africa continue to suffer this violence. At this level, the ‘the continuing relevance of “enclosures” as [a] constituent element of capitalist relations and accumulation’ manifests itself concretely, even in the twenty-first century (De Angelis 2004, p. 61). Perhaps, De Angelis is one of the few scholars of recent times concerned to argue the historical continuity of primitive accumulation at the micro-level, doing so persuasively. Distinguishing between ‘historical primitive accumulation’ and ‘inherent-continuous primitive accumulation’, he illustrates theoretically that the capitalist logic of accumulation needs primitive accumulation not just as a one-time incident – say, as part of its birth pangs – but as a continuous dynamic that drives its mode
of production until such a time that it is overthrown and replaced with an alternative mode of production (De Angelis 2004).

Following De Angelis, I see the activities of foreign mining companies in the aforementioned mining communities of Ghana as enclosures of the commons, and more so, with striking similarities to the classical enclosures that Marx and Polanyi described in England in the sixteenth century in terms of the violence perpetrated against the peasants and the complicity of the state therein. In the rest of the article, I shall report on these enclosures through the voices of the peasants, showing that despite its violence and its undemocratic nature, primitive accumulation as enclosures defies temporal and political limitations, thanks to the powerful nature of capital (Nitzan and Bichler 2009). It is neither a barbaric mode of accumulation that belongs to the uncivilised past like slavery, nor an appalling social injustice that is perpetrated by an undemocratic liberal state like the one in existence in England in the sixteenth century. Though barbaric, appalling and unjust, enclosures are happening in the twenty-first century and in liberal democratic states like Ghana.

**Mining capital and enclosures in Prestea, Dumasi and Teberebie**

Prestea, Dumasi and Teberebie are mainly peasant communities, though Prestea has been a mining town from colonial times through to the era of neo-liberalism when the state-owned and underground mines were closed down and later sold to private owners. Inhabitants of these communities live off the land by a combination of hunting, gathering (snails and mushrooms) and the planting of staple such as maize, plantain, cassava, coco yam, palm nut and cash crops such as cocoa, a major export earner. The forest also provides firewood as the main source of fuel for the women for cooking and the snails serve as an important source of protein, used to prepare soup to go with *fufu*, a popular Ghanaian dish prepared from a mixture of cassava and plantain or coco yam.

Because of the important role that land plays in their livelihoods, women participants in my focus group discussions (FGD) complained bitterly about the activities of the aforementioned mining companies which have deprived them of their culture and right to gather firewood, mushrooms and snails from their farms. This is what one female participant said in my Dumasi FGD:

> At first we used to go to the forest to gather snails to prepare our soup and to sell to make extra income to buy our clothing and to cater for our other necessities. But as a result of the mining activities, we can no longer gather snails because the mines have occupied all the forests and more so, the snails have all disappeared. (FGD with women in Dumasi, 20 November 2008)

The forests also serve as home to the shrines of the people and the source of herbs for treating various illnesses. On this latter point, we should note that herbal medicine is what most rural people in Ghana rely on when they fall ill, in the absence of clinics (let alone hospitals) in rural communities. Land is, therefore, the most important factor in the social reproduction of the people of these communities, just as it is in other peasant communities in Africa. Fortunately, unlike the typical ‘dependent peasant’ of the manorial production system under European feudalism (Poly and Bournazel 1991, p. 247), the peasants in Ghana are ‘free’ peasants; in the sense that they have access to land by virtue of their membership of the lineage or clan in which they are born. This is because, in Ghana, land is a corporate property of the lineage or clan, and is traditionally not alienable.²

As Dei Nkrumah, a farmer from Dumasi told me in an interview, every clan in the area has a parcel of land that its members can use for farming. Nkrumah went on to underline the sacred significance of land in Ghana: traditionally, land does not belong to the living alone,
but to their ancestors before them and the unborn. According to him, they inherited the land from their ancestors with the undertaking that the land will pass on to their children and grandchildren (IDI with Dei Nkrumah, in Dumasi, 21 November 2008). The sacred significance of land seems to dominate the consciousness of the people in these communities with regard to property ownership, because participants in my focus group discussions passionately alluded to the fact that they inherited the land from their ancestors, and are going to bequeath it to their children, who will also bequeath it to their children; and then the linearity of land inheritance continues like that to the far, far future.

Unfortunately, similar to sixteenth-century England where the quest for wool led to the enclosure movement by the landed class in order to use the land for sheep rearing, the quest for gold has led to land seizures by foreign mining companies with the complicity of the Ghanaian state. Therefore, if ‘sheep ate men’ – in Thomas Moore’s terms, ‘sheep devouring men’ – in the sixteenth-century enclosures of England (Moore 1967, p. 12, Wood 2002, p. 109), gold is ‘eating’ or ‘devouring men and women’ in Prestea, Dumasi and Teberebie in the twenty-first century enclosures in Ghana. In view of the large tracts of land taken from the peasants in Ghana, this is not stretching the comparison too far. The fact is, unlike underground mining where arable land is not destroyed, surface mining, which is the mode of mining used by the foreign mining companies in Ghana because of its profitability, destroys a lot of arable land as it requires large tracts of land, for both the actual mining and as dumping sites for the waste produced from the mining. That is why the farmers must be expropriated of their land, regardless of the economic and social cost to them. The horrific environmental destruction caused by surface mining is almost irreversible; likewise the human health hazards from environmental pollution (Palmer et al. 2010, Conant and Fadem 2008, Ch. 21).

True, the situation in Ghana is not as brutal as the enclosures in sixteenth-century England in terms of the crudity of the violence used. However, the way land is acquired and used by these mining companies, the deadly environmental consequences that the people would have to live with for generations, and the immediate effect of the deprivation of the use of their lands make the situation in Ghana comparable with the original enclosures. On land acquisition, Hon. Koffie told this author in an interview in Accra on 15 July 2009 that the peasants literally have no say in the process; in fact, they may not even be aware that they are about to lose their main source of livelihood. The first point of contact for the mining companies when they arrive in Ghana is not the owners of the land but the Ghana Mineral Commission. These companies get maps from the Ghanaian government showing the location of the area where the minerals are found and the size of the concession. The granting of concessions is sealed in Accra with the state, regardless of whether the land earmarked for mining contains farms, hamlets or villages. The point at which the people get involved in the process of the acquisition is paradoxically the point their dispossession is executed – exactly the point their involvement is useless. That is when they have to negotiate with the mining companies – who would have acquired the concession from the state already – for compensation (see Act 703, Sections 73–75).

The peasants in the three communities complained bitterly about the devastating effects of enclosures and surface mining on their livelihoods. A female participant in my FGD in Dumasi had this to say:

There is one important thing for us as peasant women in this village that I must mention. We are not educated to get a different job so we depend solely on our land. When we go to the forest, we can fetch firewood free for our own energy needs and to sell for income. But what has the Ghanaian state done? It has given all our land to the white man to mine for gold; and not to do
underground mining but surface mining, destroying all our arable lands. In the midst of all this, I cannot say the state of Ghana is good to me or responsive to me. On top of that, the Ghanaian state has given the white man the authority to do whatever they want to us: I have my own land and I cannot have access to it; my water sources (the streams) have been polluted, etc. Up till date, the Ghanaian state has not come to our aid, either to check these mining activities or to provide us with potable water since the mines have polluted our water sources. For me, there is nothing that the Ghanaian state can do for me to view it as a responsive state; so both the past and present government have not helped us. (FGD with women in Dumasi, 20 November 2008)

The same story is echoed and re-echoed in the other two communities. This runs through all the six transcripts for the six focus group discussions that I held in the three communities, and cut across gender lines. The male peasants in Dumasi told similar stories of enclosures in their communities:

Me for example, I am a stranger in this village yet when I came into this village I was given land to farm to feed my family. But now the state has given the land to the mining companies and now I don’t have a farm to feed my family. So the state has to do something about the mines and the land issues in this village. Imagine that we live in the rural areas yet food items are very expensive. These days when you buy 10,000 cedis’ worth of cassava to prepare fufu, the food won’t even satisfy one person let alone the whole family. So the government has to stop the surface mining else in future we will all be landless. (FGD with men in Dumasi, 20 November 2008)

The enclosures have also affected commercial farming because some of the participants in my FGDs complained about the destruction of cocoa, palm nut farms and fish ponds. Two of them talk about their plight below:

**One respondent:** Now that the mines have come to this village, we don’t get jobs. And if you go to make a farm, thinking that you would invest in the farm for your own future and the future of your children, the mines will come to destroy it without compensation. You will labour on your farm up to an advance stage and the mine companies will use Caterpillar to destroy the farm.

**Another respondent:** These cocoa farms are at different stages of growth, some farms have already been destroyed and others are earmarked for destructions – no adequate compensation is paid to us. The mines too have constructed drains that drain waste water from the mines into our cocoa farms. This waste water kills our cocoa trees; it has poisoned the land so crops like cassava cannot yield again. (FGD with men in Dumasi, 20 November 2008)

Considering that it takes more than three years to nurse a cocoa plant before it begins bearing fruit, and that the cocoa plant has a lifespan of more than 30 years (both being very conservative estimates), no rational farmer will agree to his/her cocoa farm of, say, 10 years of age being destroyed even if he/she is promised the most attractive compensation. Let alone in these cases where the farmers claimed that no compensation was paid to them, and in others the compensation was ‘woefully inadequate’, as Hon. Koffie put it. According to Daniel Owusu-Koranteng, the founder and head of WACAM – an NGO that advocates the protection of the human rights of residents of the mining communities – ‘Newmont paid 69,000 cedis (about $8) for a Cocoa tree to Cocoa farmers in Kenyase when a Cocoa tree can earn a farmer about half a bag of Cocoa beans for a year (about $25 per year) and the economic life of a Cocoa tree is between 40 and 50 years’ (Owusu-Koranteng 2008, p. 469). Clearly, the paltry amount of money paid as compensation for enclosure in Ghana affirms the ruthlessness of capital in its quest for profits. In any case, even if the compensation were adequate it can never be adequate enough to mitigate the harm that these enclosures have caused to the peasants. As discussed above, the
significance of land is more than material, and so is the harm caused by enclosure: it affects the whole way of life of the peasant community.

The precarious life chances of the peasantry are captured by Tawney’s metaphorical man ‘standing permanently up to the neck in water, so that even a ripple might drown him’ (cited in Scott 1976, p. vii). Faced with this predicament, the social reproduction of peasants has always depended on the doctrines of the moral economy, of which land as the commons is a key element (Polanyi 2001, p. 171, 187–188; Scott 1976, p. 5). The moral economy of the peasant is clearly endangered by the activities of foreign mining companies in Ghana, and as the above stories indicate, the peasants are ‘drowning’ – and unsurprisingly so because the enclosures constitute a tsunami, not just a ‘ripple’. Note, for example, the high cost of food that the peasants complain about. Usually, food insecurity is not a problem to communities with such fertile arable lands, debarring natural disasters. Now it is. The motif that thus runs through the stories the peasants told me is ‘skin-tight’, as some of them put it in Twi, the local dialect in which they spoke to me. The ‘mining companies have made our skin to tighten us too much’, one of them said. This means the mining companies have made life very, very hard for them.

The complicity of the Ghanaian neo-liberal state in continuous primitive accumulation

Unfortunately, the Ghanaian state that is supposed to protect the peasants is complicit in the violence of primitive accumulation. This paradox is based on the fact that it is a neo-liberal state and like the liberal state of sixteenth-century England, it protects the interests of capital, not its citizens; certainly, not the peasants and other subaltern classes. Like the primitive accumulation in England, the coercive apparatuses that the state is privileged to control exclusively are needed to perpetrate or protect the perpetrators of the injustices of enclosures. This contradicts the grand dichotomy between the ‘political’ and the ‘economic’, one of the liberal dogmas – the mantra that liberal scholars and commentators recite in the era of neo-liberalism. Ellen Wood helps us to unravel the paradox of the acclaimed minimalist state, which is at the same time so extensive that its hand is very visible in the economies of capitalist countries. She argues powerfully that a unique characteristic of capitalism is its capacity to ‘detach economic from extra economic power’ (Wood 2003, p. 5), yet ‘capitalism, in some ways more than any social form, needs politically organized and legally defined stability, regularity, and predictability in its social arrangement’ and sometimes, even outright political coercion (Wood 2002, p. 178, Wood 2003, p. 10). This is so, because the scope and depth of the primitive accumulation that Polanyi and Marx documented in sixteenth-century England – the near-total and all-encompassing uprooting of those who lived off the soil – would have been impossible without the brutal and visible hand of the liberal (not the same as democratic) state. As documented by Marx in *Capital Vol. 1*, soldiers were deployed to root out families from the countryside and to burn down their villages. So brutal was the exercise that one old woman who refused to leave her hut was burnt to death when the soldiers set it in flames (Marx 1976 1867, p. 891).

Similar stories of state brutality were told in my focus group discussions and in-depth personal interviews. Participants told stories of how the Ghanaian military was quick to deploy and to suppress them any time they organised any resistance because the Ghanaian state has stationed military garrisons in their communities purposely to protect the mines from the angry victims of the enclosures. The following proceedings from one of my focus group discussions capture the visible hand of the Ghanaian state in modern day enclosures:
Moderator: What do you do to resist the confiscation of your lands?

The dominant respondent: We have demonstrated against the mining companies but each time that we organise one, soldiers are called to beat us. There have been instances where some of the demonstrators have been injured by the brutalities of the soldiers. Besides the brutalities of the soldiers, any time we ask for permission from the police to demonstrate, they refuse us. Also when we send petitions to the state about the activities of the mining companies we don’t get any response.

Moderator: Did these military brutalities take place during Rawlings dictatorship or in this era of democracy?

Respondent (laughing): This happened in the era of democracy. In 2006, they beat them, in 2007 they beat them, and in 2002, 2003, Yaw Mensah and others were beaten in 2000. If it were Rawlings’s time we would say it is military era so it is normal.

One respondent (speaking alone): One person was shot here. Another person was made to eat the raw meat of a rat. He was coming from the farm where he had hunted for the rat, but he was accused of walking on the road of the mine companies.

Another respondent: Now in this village, we don’t have freedom because of the mines. You can be walking to the farm and be arrested by the mine companies for trespassing on their land, just because you are walking on a road they have constructed for their activities. In this village about fifteen people have been arrested for this petty complaint and sent to jail for it. Some have even died while in jail. [One participant interjects: ‘jailed for just walking to your farm’]. Two weeks ago, I was arrested and detained for three days for going to cut wood from the bush to construct my room. Yes, I was arrested for cutting wood from my own land. At the police station, I was told I have trespassed on the land of the mine companies. I was detained for three days before I was released on bail. Master, in this village we don’t have any peace of mind. In fact, as I am sitting if I had access to a gun, I will disturb a lot; I will disturb a lot. (FGD with men in Dumasi, 20 November 2008)

For most of these peasants, the democracy that Ghana is widely known for has not reached their communities, as one of them has stated in the epigraph. They questioned, for example, why in a democracy soldiers are deployed in civilian communities; and pointed out that they did not see such military brutalities in their communities even under the widely proclaimed brutality of the military regime of Rawlings.

Conclusion

What this article has achieved is to document the concrete manifestation of the violence of continuous primitive accumulation in Ghana at this present historical conjuncture of global neo-liberalism. The orthodox approach in the critical political economy literature is to focus on macro-level analysis of the exploitation of the peripheral countries (especially Africa) by the core capitalist countries, using the lenses of new imperialism or ‘accumulation by dispossession’. This approach tends to totalise the victims of accumulation by dispossession in the peripheral countries just as it does to its beneficiaries in the core countries. This does not and cannot illuminate the huge difference in the suffering of the injustices of new imperialism by different social classes who are at different positions in the power structures of African countries. What I have done here is to illuminate the plight of one of the most marginalised social groups in Ghana, the peasants.

Disaggregating the victims of accumulation by dispossession has considerable theoretical and political implications for the struggle for alternatives to capitalist development. Often, the target of resistance is capitalism and the end of this resistance is socialism.
However, this begs the question of whether socialism necessarily ameliorates the plight of the victims of enclosures. If socialism is the non-negotiable alternative to capitalism, the question that poses itself poignantly is whether socialism is immune to the violence of primitive accumulation. Historically and economically, the answer must be no. Economically, every economy – socialist, capitalist, mixed, etc. – must necessarily involve production and distribution of surplus, or some form of accumulation. Production, whether in a capitalist or socialist system, necessarily requires labour and exploitation of nature – especially in economies of scale. If the preceding assertion is true, then it points ominously to primitive accumulation even in socialist social formations. Historically, the case of ‘really existing socialism’ in Russia illustrates that socialist social formations are not immune to primitive accumulation. Though the peasants in Russia participated in fighting to overthrow the tsars, Stalin’s collectivisation policy under his First Five-Year Plan (1928–1932) sought to ‘make them the main basis and victims of the socialist version of primary capitalist accumulation’ (Moore 1967, p. 481), conceptualised somewhere as ‘socialist primitive accumulation’ (Hobsbawm 1995, p. 382).

Analysing accumulation by dispossession at the micro-level and with attention to disaggregating its victims complicates the problematic of alternatives to capitalism and the ends of anti-imperialism struggles. It also complicates the search for a remedy for the ‘underdevelopment’ of Africa; namely, ‘development’. When Barrington Moore argued that the development of the core capitalist countries came at the cost of horrific violence and human suffering, he was referring directly to primitive accumulation (Moore 1967). Considering the positive results of primitive accumulation in the core capitalist countries – industrialisation and mass and conspicuous consumption – modernisation scholars (including Marxists) may argue that primitive accumulation is a good trade-off for the sort of human suffering happening in Africa without it. For example, Geoffrey Kay argued that it is an ‘unpalatable fact that capitalism has created underdevelopment not simply because it has exploited the underdeveloped countries, but because it has not exploited them enough’ (cited in Bernstein 1976, p. 59). This raises a question as to whether the demise of imperialism would necessarily mean the demise of continuous primitive accumulation, if Africa wants to follow the Western model of development. I will argue it would not. If so, then the relationship between primitive accumulation and imperialism is more complicated than it appears on the surface. All these are the political and theoretical issues that my study of continuous primitive accumulation in Ghana raises for scholars of both critical and mainstream political economy and urges them to reflect on in their efforts to understand the (under)development puzzle of Africa, and how to solve it. As demonstrated in the ‘Kenyan debate’ in the pages of this journal in the 1980s and in the work of Bill Warren, we should bear in mind that Marxists have grappled with the question of capitalist development as one of the solutions to this puzzle (Kaplinsky 1980, Leys 1980, Warren 1980). Finally, in light of the scramble by agricultural corporations for land in Africa as documented in the pages of this journal (see Bush et al. 2011), the theoretical and political issues raised here are germane to research into current developments in the political economy of Africa.

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Note on contributor
Jasper Ayelazuno defended his PhD dissertation in May 2011 at York University, Canada. This article is based on his PhD research in Ghana. He had worked in law enforcement in Ghana and with the UN Peacekeeping Missions in Bosnia and Kosovo before joining academia. He is presently a Postdoctoral Fellow with the Department of Anthropology and Development Studies, University of Johannesburg.

Notes
1. For example, FIAN International, a human rights NGO, has documented the atrocities that Iduapriem’s mining activities are wreaking on the people of Teberebie and has used social media to publicise them to the wider public (see FIAN 2009).
2. This is by no means to uncritically glorify this traditional landownership system as pristine and free of inequality or non-capitalist class divisions. As documented by Dumett (1998, pp. 272–273), this system was corrupted during the Wassa ‘gold rush’ when chiefs commercialised land by leasing it to foreign mining firms and the local capitalist class. This practice has continued till today, as illustrated by Kojo Amanor in his study of Southeastern Ghana (Amanor 2010). This notwithstanding, the traditional communal system has proved resilient, so the assertion that Ghanaian peasants are not landless is still valid.

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BRIEFING
Militancy in the Niger Delta and the emergent categories

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Introduction

The oil-rich Niger Delta has been engulfed in militant activities in recent years. Militancy in the Niger Delta is undeniably an issue of local resistance to repressive state institutions. The Niger Delta is the theatre where these repressive state institutions, using taxes from the multinational oil corporations, inflict their obscene brutalities on the helpless inhabitants of the oil-bearing communities (Owolabi and Okwechime 2007).

From a transnational perspective, resistance polities have become the refuge for those who are alienated by capitalist social relations and the hegemonic power of the federal government/corporate alliance over oil, and seek to oppose their exploitative agenda. Depending on the specificities of each moment, the balance of social forces and the organisational capacity of local social movements, these movements seek forcefully to rectify the inequities embedded in the imperatives of global accumulation. To be candid, the cocktail of political marginalisation, repression, conditions of poverty, abject deprivation and social exclusion in the Niger Delta represent legitimate grievances for violent group mobilisation. The reason has been that oil production in the Niger Delta has not generated wealth for the majority of the people, but simply the outflow of wealth. For instance, the centralist nation-building project of the military in post-civil war Nigeria, bankrolled by petrodollars, manifested as a virtual transfer of oil wealth from the Niger Delta to other regions of the country. It is owing to the failure to win concessions through peaceful means that the youths in the Niger Delta have been inexorably driven to militantly protest, marginalisation, unemployment, development deficit and inequality.

The origins of militancy in the Niger Delta

The origins of militancy in the Niger Delta can be divided into remote and immediate causes. The remote causes include inter alia: environmental degradation, marginalisation and underdevelopment in the region, the existence of obnoxious laws such as the Petroleum Act of 1969 and the Land Use Act of 1978, and the killing of Ken Saro-Wiwa. The immediate causes of militancy on the other hand include the militarisation of the Niger Delta by the Nigerian state, the ‘Youths Earnestly Ask for Abacha’ programme, the Kaiama Declaration, bunkering by Niger Delta youths and the mobilisation of youths as political thugs during the 1999 election. Though youth involvement in the Niger Delta struggle took a decisive turn (characterised by militancy) with the repression suffered at the hands of the Abacha regime that turned
Niger Delta communities into garrison enclaves patrolled by the Nigerian militiants, the eye opener that propelled the youths to change tactics was the Youths Earnestly Ask for Abacha programme, while the motivational force was the Kaiama Declaration.

In his bid to transform himself into a civilian president, the late military dictator General Sani Abacha invited youths from all the local government areas of the federation to participate in the Two Million Man March in Abuja, an event which resulted in a serious number of backlashes, especially in the Niger Delta. Hundreds of youths were mobilised to attend the Abuja programme from the poverty-ridden and development-elusive interior enclaves of the Niger Delta. While in Abuja, the youths from the Niger Delta saw, for the first time in their lives, express roads with four lanes, roads that were free of potholes, bridges built over dry land (flyovers) that contrasted with the absence of bridges across creeks and rivers back home, and beautiful streets and high-rise buildings. The youths at first thought that they were in a foreign land, but after several inquiries they were told that they were in Abuja, the federal capital of Nigeria, a new city built by oil revenue sourced from the Niger Delta. The perception of relative deprivation among Niger Delta youths amplified by exposure to the magnificent new Federal Capital Territory awakened the people of the region to the surreptitious and persistent transfer of wealth from the Niger Delta to other regions (Ukiwo 2009). Therefore, after seeing Abuja in its impressive splendour, the youths returned home to fight for the development of their land and to secure resource control. After the Abuja trip, protests against the activities of the oil industry increased in geometric progression and culminated in the birth of the famous Kaiama Declaration.

The Kaiama Declaration was named after the historic town of Kaiama (the home town of Isaac Adaka Boro and the revolutionary headquarters of the Ijaw nation) where the All Ijaw Youths Conference was held on the 11 December 1998. On that fateful day (the day the Niger Delta changed), over 5000 Ijaw youths, drawn from over 5000 communities of about 40 clans that make up the Ijaw nation, met in Kaiama to deliberate on ways of finding solutions to the problems associated with ‘the enslavement in the fraudulent contraption called Nigeria’ (Ikelegbe 2005). The Kaiama Declaration that was announced at the close of deliberations recognised that oil and gas are exhaustible resources and declared that the complete lack of concern for ecological rehabilitation in the light of the Oloibiri experience was a signal of impending doom for the Ijaw race (Ikelegbe 2005). The document was signed and published with the intention of changing the terms of the relationships between the oil companies and the national government.

The first four articles of the Kaiama Declaration stated that:

All lands and natural resources (including mineral resources) within Ijaw territory belong to Ijaw communities and are the basis of our survival.

We cease to recognize all undemocratic decrees that rob our people / communities of the right to ownership and control of our lives and resources, which were enacted without our participation and consent. These include the land use Decree and the Petroleum Decree etc.

We demand the immediate withdrawal from Ijaw land of all military forces of occupation and repression by the Nigeria State. Any oil company that employs the services of the Armed Forces of the Nigeria State to ‘protect’ its operations will be viewed as an enemy of the Ijaw people.

Ijaw youths in all the communities in Ijaw clan in the Niger Delta will take steps to implement these resolutions beginning from December 30th 1998 as a step towards reclaiming the control of our lives. (Ijaw Youths Council 1998)
‘Operation Climate Change’ was then launched as the preliminary step to bringing about the vision. The Kaiama Declaration also gave birth to the Ijaw Youth Council, with the motto ‘Resource control by any means possible’. Thus, the Kaiama Declaration was the harbinger of the contemporary form of violence by the militants who abandoned the non-violent stance of the Ken Saro-Wiwa era and adopted violent measures as their modus operandi. It also shaped and popularised the term ‘resource control’.

It is important to note that the repressive character of the Nigerian state, coupled with military brutalities in the Niger Delta necessitated the acquisition or possession of alternative sources of power to oppose the activities of the Nigeria military. This led to the reinvocation of the Egbesu deity (the Ijaw god of war) as a means of protection against military attacks. There is a belief in Ijawland that if you are fighting a just cause, the Egbesu will make you impervious to bullets if certain rituals are observed, and even make you invincible. To Best and Kemedi (2005, p. 31), ‘Egbesu seems to be an ancient cult that was revived in the 1990s with the aim of recruiting young Ijaw men to be inculcated with the Egbesu rites and beliefs so as to act as a cohesive group in the forceful protection of the Ijaw people.’

Inspired by the triumphant release of Timi Kaiser Ogoriba, president of the Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality in the Niger Delta (MOSIEND), from detention in Government House, Yenagoa on 29 June 1998, following the suppression of the military security apparatus at Creek Haven, the demonstrations that followed the Kaiama Declaration recorded unimaginable results. (Ogoriba was believed by his followers to be wielding Egbesu power.) The Ogoriba–Government House incident was the first public test of the Egbesu power as the protesting youths became impervious to gunshots fired at them by security operatives in broad daylight in Yenagoa. The resultant effect spread like wildfire and was accompanied by widespread Egbe-subirination (the ritual of obtaining Egbesu power) by youths in the region. The practical experience of the researcher is that the Egbesu power is a very potent force that compels its believers and devotees to be aggressive towards military personnel. Thus, the military men deployed to quell the early post-Kaiama Declaration demonstrations across the Niger Delta were boldly attacked by barehanded youths, basking in the supernatural bulletproof euphoria of the Egbesu power. A notable example is the killing of many soldiers by youths from Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area in Bayelsa State who were seeking to liberate Kaiama from military occupation following the All Ijaw Youths conference.

Moreover, it is a fact of history that the first set of militants that emerged in the Niger Delta did not consist of gun-carrying insurgents, but violent resource agitators that depended solely on the protection of the Egbesu power in their exploits. The first sets of guns used for the struggle were those captured from security operatives. However, due to the strict regulations which are prerequisites of success in the use of Egbesu for protection, and the attendant violations and deaths recorded on the part of the Niger Delta youths, the need to acquire arms and ammunition became inevitable.

I wish to emphatically argue that the deviation from anchoring the struggle in the protection of the Egbesu power which emphasised purity, equity, justice and truth, ushered in greed, self-centeredness and fractionalisation among the leadership of the struggle. With the walls of the status quo breached, every form of ‘outsider’ came streaming through the gates: cult leaders, political thugs, criminals, and self-centred individuals hiding under the cloak of resource agitators. Therefore, instead of focusing on how the needs and aspirations of the region would be actualised through
violent agitations to press home the demands of the local people, some militant agitators became preoccupied with how to satisfy their parochial interests, deviating from the tenets of the struggle.

The unholy mix of insurgency and criminality evidenced by the involvement of armed groups in hostage-taking, illegal oil bunkering, illegal oil refining and trading, as well as the proliferation of criminal groups disguised as militants, has promoted the view in some circles that militancy in the Niger Delta is driven by the greed of the *dramatis personae* (Ukiwo 2009) which necessitates critical analysis of the process by which militants were created.

Typologies of militant groups in the Niger Delta

I must emphasise the fact that the militant creation process in the Niger Delta is differentiated: there are different types of militants in the region. This is attributed to the divergent factors or reasons that motivated or compelled such youth to become militants. Members of militant groups expressed a variety of reasons for joining. This included: desire to protect their land, communities and ethnic groups; to protest against government and oil companies’ political and economic marginalisation of their communities; fear for their personal safety following threats by members of other armed groups or government security agencies; being hired by politicians to help rig elections, intimidate voters, and attack opponents; to make money through criminal activities, and so on. We shall therefore proceed to identify and discuss the typologies of militants in the Niger Delta which will help decipher the issues of criminality and fighting for justice.

**Peaceful resource-agitator militancy**

This category of militants refers to armed youths in the Niger Delta that decided to militarise the struggle due to the inability of peaceful agitations to yield the desired goals in the region. It embraces youths that are committed to the development and resource control struggle in the Niger Delta. The first set of militants that emerged in the Niger Delta after the Kaiama Declaration, especially those who depended on the Egbesu power to execute Operation Climate Change, belongs to this category. One crucial fact to note is that the pioneer resource-agitators membership was devoid of criminality. Criminality only crept in later as the struggle continued. The militants were thus sustained by goodwill donations from wealthy individuals and communities in their region. What transpired was that youths with the zeal to fight for their people were mobilised to carry out attacks on oil companies and government security forces that perpetuate exploitation and marginalisation in the region. A good example of militants that fall under this category are Government Ekpemupolo (General Tompolo), Ebikabowei Victor Ben (Boyloaf), and Alex Preye.

**Political-thug militancy**

This second category developed from political thugs to become militants in the Niger Delta. Though thuggery in the Niger Delta is as old as the Nigerian experience, it was the 1999 general elections that ushered in the political-thug militancy category. The move to return Nigeria to civilian rule raised the curtain for serious politicking by politicians struggling to be elected into various leadership positions. Considering the do-or-die character of Nigerian politics, which is premised on winning at all costs, some youths were engaged to perpetrate electoral crimes such as election rigging, snatching of ballot boxes, intimidation of voters, and kidnapping and attacks on opposition candidates. These youths were armed with dangerous weapons and financially mobilised by the politicians to carry out their parochial undemocratic plans.
Paradoxically, after they had ensured victory for their political masters, the youths were abandoned and nothing tangible was ever done to retrieve the guns and ammunitions from them. Therefore, with instruments of coercion in their possession, some of the frustrated and neglected youths decided to set up militant camps and became involved in the destruction of oil installations and the kidnapping and hostage-taking of expatriate oil workers for ransom.

Thus the political-thug militancy category was the creation of politicians. Experience has shown that the aftermath of every general election in Nigeria since 1999 has led to the emergence of new militant groups fighting for space and relevance in the Niger Delta. Youths are always contracted and armed prior to elections to perform illegal roles during elections. It was in this context that Asari Dokubo and Ateke Tom (in Rivers State) were recruited to the cause of delivering the 2003 elections for the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Specifically, they were to deliver certain local government areas that were seen as crucial to winning Rivers State. For instance, Ateke Tom (then a community vigilante leader) was contracted for the purpose of securing Okrika, Ogu/Bolo and Port Harcourt local government areas in the 2003 elections. Asari Dokubo was also contracted to perform similar functions in Akuku Toru, Degema and Asari Toru local government areas. They were both successful and the Peoples Democratic Party won the election in those areas (Coventry Cathedral 2009, p. 64; Best and Kemedi 2005, Manby 2004), Likewise, in Bayelsa State, notable militant leaders such as General Africa, Joshua Maverick, Young Shall Grow, Egberi Papa, and Daddy Ken graduated from being political thugs to become militants. Owing to the ‘abandonment-after-usage’ syndrome, both Asari and Ateke in Rivers State turned their attention to the transnational illegal oil bunkering networks, collecting tolls on the trade, providing security to bunkering crews, selling oil or operating illegal oil refineries whose products were sold below market prices. In essence, the recruitment of young men from a widening cesspool of unemployed youths by politicians anchored another dimension of militant creation.

Cult-group militancy

As the name implies, the cult-group militancy category embraces initial cult leaders and membership that altered their activities to militancy. This category of militants basically emerged from the Rivers State axis of the Niger Delta. There are two types of cult groups that feature most often in the media reports of conflicts in the Niger Delta. First is the campus cult groups formed by the original fraternity groups such as Supreme Vikings Confraternity, Black Axes, Buccaneers, and Mafia Fighters. Second are the urban social groupings that spun off from the university fraternities and use coercion to recruit, indoctrinate and retain their members, frequently for violent purposes. They include Dey Gbam, Dey Well, Greenlanders, and Germans. The latter groups, which are also known as street cult groups, seek to exert control over defined geographic areas that they conceive as their territory.

Most of the street cults are the creation of the university cults in the sense that the university students who founded the original fraternities recruited younger and less-educated teenagers to fight their street battles, while these youths in turn recruited still younger populations. By this process a hierarchy of armed young people was formed. Life became cheaper the lower down the pecking order one descended (Asuni 2009). From initial clashes between cult groups with sticks and broken bottles, it soon progressed to the use of machetes, locally made guns (popularly known as Akwa-Made) and later advanced to the use of sophisticated guns
and explosives such as dynamite, as the battle for supremacy and territorial control intensified. The fact remains that many of the politicians in the Niger Delta, especially in Bayelsa and River State, are known to be members of confraternities, particularly the Vikings (which dominates higher institutions in the two states). These politicians and other wealthy ex-members act as patrons to the various cult groups and also fund their activities.

The cult groups were also contracted to perform thuggery roles during elections in return for financial incentives and sophisticated guns and ammunition. One cult member described a meeting in Government House, Port Harcourt just prior to the 14 April 2007 polls during which he saw government officials hand out between N5 million and N10 million to several different cult groups in return for their assisting or simply accepting the PDP plan to rig the polls (Human Rights Watch 2007). Some of them were also contracted to protect bunkering networks with their ever-increasing armoury. Ateke Tom, Soboma George, Farah Dagogo, and Occasion Boy belong to this category. Moreover, in order to sustain their activities, confraternities frequently change their loyalty and actions in response to new sources of money. Most of the confraternities have been implicated in the hostage-taking of foreign oil workers in the Niger Delta. Again, due to the exposure of cult members to gun battles, numerous militant groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) employ confraternity members as combatants. For example, the head of the cult group the Outlaws, Soboma George, doubles as an MEND commander (Wellington, 2007). It is a common practice in the Niger Delta for cult members contracted by militant leaders as combatants in their camps to be paid between N200,000 and N300,000 every two weeks, based on the type of activities they carry out. Other notable cult leaders simply break away from their parent bodies, set up their own groups, acquire arms and ammunition and begin to operate as militants in the region.

Community/ethnic-warlord militancy

The Niger Delta has witnessed a series of intra- and inter-communal conflicts. These conflicts are attributed to the divide-and-rule politics of the Nigerian state and its alleged collaborators, the multinational oil companies. Most of the conflicts were fought over land ownership claims, payment of compensation due to spillage and exploration activities, and so on. Some notable conflicts of these nature include the Warri crisis, Olugbobiri and Peremabiri crisis, Odioma and Liama crisis, Ogbolomabiri and Bassambiri crisis in Nembe, Biseni-Agbere crisis, Ikwerre and the Okrika crises.

The zeal to protect one’s community from external aggression led to the acquisition of community armouries manned by able-bodied youths. As seen in the Warri, Nembe, Olugbobiri and Okrika crises for instance, the weapons acquired to fight communal wars were diverted to militancy when peace returned to the affected communities. Therefore the ethnic-warlord category of militants transformed from initial communal and ethnic warlords to become militants. Examples of militants that fall under this category are Government Ekpemopolo, Prince Igodo, Alex Preye, and Commander Ajugbe.

Be that as it may, the line separating the various categories of militants is very fluid. The reason has been that militants like Ateke Tom, Tompolo, Soboma George and Farah Dagogo fall into two or more categories. Moreover, militants that basically carry out criminal activities like kidnapping belong to the cult-group militancy category.

Conclusion

This paper has identified and discussed the remote and immediate factors that that led
to the advent of militancy in the Niger Delta, such as decades of marginalisation and state repression, oil-induced environmental degradation, endemic poverty, teeming unemployment and a development deficit. The success of the original militancy, derived from developmental and resource-control aspirations and from the Egbesu military ethic of purity, equity, justice and truth, stimulated the other forms of militancy. This process led to the subsequent variety of motives for and forms of militant action in the Niger Delta. The resultant diversity can be conceptualised using the above typology, but that should not obscure the nature of militancy as a dynamic set of actions. Indeed some militant groups fit into more than one category in terms of their actions. As with many struggles, the original goals of the militancy became somewhat lost in the course of the struggle because it opened a space for other forms of violent action. These new kinds of militancy and violence had objectives far removed from the original aspirations for which the Egbesu-inspired militancy had served as a mobilising cultural form.

The fact remains that militancy in the Niger Delta is as a result of the abundant oil wealth derived from the region not leading to regional prosperity. Consequently, people-oriented effective and efficient policies, geared towards addressing the development deficit and uneven wealth distribution in the region, must be implemented to nip militancy in the bud.

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References
Family and favour at the court of Jacob Zuma

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Jacob Zuma’s role as both state and party president is significantly underpinned by those who pay court to him on the basis of personal loyalty, patriarchal fealty and hope for personal gain, his formal authority buttressed by political patronage and protection which extends to those close to him. However, Zuma combines his role of tribal patriarch with that of his role at the head of a shadow state, his ‘family’ extending beyond close relatives to include business associates with shady connections. Zuma is an accidental president who ascended to the office because he was not Thabo Mbeki. He may not be any more inclined to cohabit with the morally dubious than his predecessor (who, notoriously, shielded Chief of Police Jackie Selebi from investigation for linkages to organised crime). Nonetheless, it is difficult to believe that a man deemed by a court to have been in a corrupt relationship with Shabir Shaik (eventually sentenced to 15 years imprisonment for offences committed in connection with the notorious 1998 arms deal) and who was facing some 783 criminal charges involving fraud, corruption and racketeering would have secured the presidency had he not been able to place himself at the head of a ‘coalition of the aggrieved’ who wished to bring Mbeki’s rule and influence to an abrupt end. That this coalition was broad-based is generally accepted, receiving strong backing not merely from the organised left within the Tripartite Alliance but ethnic support from within the ANC of his home province. But in addition, he received strong support from black business interests. Mbeki may have been the chief champion of BEE, but his challenger received support from a motley group of business players, some of whom switched their support from Mbeki to Zuma when they identified him as the rising man; from established business persons from KwaZulu-Natal who had long been close to him; from those who had lost out or had felt disadvantaged under Mbeki; and not least, from major figures within the Indian business community (again, significantly rooted in KwaZulu-Natal). In addition, he was backed by powerful figures within the ANC who had either been convicted of criminal offences (such as Winnie Madikizela-Mandela) or who were under investigation for criminal acts, some of these for alleged involvement in tendering scams (such as Ngoako Ramathlodi and Angie Motsheka) (Southall 2009). In Zuma, powerful elements within the party saw a man who would not be overly troubled by ethical or legal concerns when it became time to cash in their cards for supporting him in his conjoined struggle for political survival and to stay out of jail.

The evidence laid before the court in Shabir Shaik’s trial of Zuma’s heavy

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reliance upon his friend for financial support on a month-to-month basis suggests that his personal financial means were not significant before his rise to the presidency. This makes the massive improvement in his fortunes since he became ANC president all the more remarkable (and blatant). To be sure, evidence was produced by the state during Shaik’s corruption trial that alleged bribes from the French arms firm Thales were used by Zuma to expand his family homestead at Nkandla in rural KwaZulu-Natal, but after he became president the bill for new building and improvement rose to R65 million, most of it – it is alleged – being footed by the taxpayer. The expansion will turn the presidential homestead into a sprawling precinct that will include a police station, helicopter pad, military clinic, visitors’ centre, parking for 40 vehicles as well as the construction of a double-storey mansion, guesthouse and three smaller houses to serve as staff houses. The financing of the expansion has remained shady, with the Presidency simultaneously denying that public money is involved but admitting that while Zuma is funding the construction of the houses himself (R4.1 million) the state is responsible for ‘construction work in line with the security and medical requirements relating to Heads of State in the Republic’, even while it remains unclear how future heads of state will benefit from such expenditure (M&Gonline 2009).

Perhaps it is not surprising that Zuma proved reluctant to declare his assets and business interests within 60 days of his becoming president as was required by the law, only doing so after his failure to do so was exposed by the press (Sunday Times 2010).

In order to avoid conflicts of interest, the law requires that politicians serving in executive positions at any level of government withdraw from active involvement in business. Consequently, it is to those around the president that it is necessary to look to explain the improving fortunes of ‘Zuma Inc.’, which in 2010 was reported as involving Zuma himself, along with 15 adult members of his family, owning some 134 company directorships or memberships of close corporations, at least 83 of which had been registered in the period after the ANC’s 52nd National Conference at Polokwane at which Zuma won the ANC leadership, and are linked to industries in which the state plays a key role (PoliticsWeb 2011). However, it is Zuma’s ties with the two brothers, Ajay and Rajesh Gupta, along with the related activities of his son, Duduzane Zuma, and his nephew, Khulubuse Zuma, which have attracted most attention.

The Guptas

The Gupta family, which comes from Saharanpur in India, has focused on building its empire in South Africa rather than in their home country, using their connections among the Indian community in South Africa. Its business is divided into two main groups.

The first is Sahara Holdings, which houses the family’s IT interests. It was started in 1997, and by 2010 had a turnover of about R1 billion, with R500–R600 million of this coming from Sahara Computers, a subsidiary which imports components and assembles laptops and PCs, and has a share of around 30–40% of the dealer-based market and 10–12% of the retail market in South Africa, although less than 1% of the corporate and government markets. The second is Oakbay Investments, which owns a range of businesses related to mining.

Whilst the full details of the Guptas’ corporate expansion are obscure, it is clear that they have gone out of their way to cultivate strong links with prominent figures in both the ANC and the empowerment community. That they struck up links with those around former President Mbeki is indicated by Ajay Gupta’s non-executive
chairmanship of Vusizwe Media, the company through which former minister in the presidency, Essop Pahad, publishes *The Thinker*, a magazine broadly associated with the interests of Mbeki. However, although they remained out of the limelight during his campaign for the presidency, it is with Zuma and his associates that they have cultivated their strongest connections.

The Guptas, in association with Duduzane Zuma, are said to have put their influence to major effect to secure significant deals – including involvement in the Cape Town waterfront development – from government. Further, Duduzane Zuma is a director of Sahara Computers (as was for a short time, his sister Duduzile), while his own company, Mabalenga Investments, is 40% owned by Oakbay. Together with Oakbay Resources and Energy Ltd, Zim Holdings (owned by Lazarus Zim, a prominent empowerment figure) and smaller investors such as the Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) Veterans’ Association (2.5%), the MK Veterans’ Association Women’s Group (2.5%) and the Aflease Workers’ Trust (10%), Mabalenga owns Islandsite Investments 255, which in turn partners with Oakbay Resources in owning Shiva Uranium (purchased in 2010 for R38 million) (*Business Day* 2011a). Having apparently moved into close proximity with the political elite in 2006 after both Zim and Tokyo Sexwale’s Mvelaphanda had bought a large stake in Sahara computers, the Guptas sought to consolidate their influence when in 2010 they bankrolled the launch of a new newspaper, *New Age*, whose proclaimed purpose was to provide more balanced coverage to government and the ANC than was provided by the established private media.

However, not all their deals have gone smoothly. In early 2011, Afripalm Resources, co-owned (via a paper trail) by the Guptas, Duduzane Zuma and Lazarus Zim, signed a memorandum of understanding with the Steel Authority of India (SAIL), an Indian parastatal, to investigate building a R21 billion steel mill in South Africa. The outcome, it was said, would be to force down prices in a domestic steel market dominated by near-monopoly producer Arcelor Mittal (*Mail & Guardian* 2011a). But then, in August 2011, Afripalm Horizons announced the signing of a deal with the China Railway Construction Corporation whereby they would be in pole position to cash in on the government’s planned R550 billion rail infrastructure programme. This followed Lazarus Zim’s accompanying President Zuma on a state visit to China.

If the deal between Afripalm and SAIL were to go through, SAIL would need access to cheap iron ore and coking coal. However, in April 2009, the Department of Mineral Resources had awarded 21% of the rights of the Sishen mine (unbundled from Iscor in 2001) to Imperial Crown Trading (ICT). These had been previously owned by Kumba, a subsidiary of Anglo-American, which had failed to convert their mining rights in the mine into an updated format or lose them after a new mining act took effect in 2004.

ICT, had been founded by Phemelo Sehunelo (previously a leading provincial civil servant in the Northern Cape and reputedly romantically linked to a key official in the Department of Mineral Resources, Duduzile Kunene), and Prudence Gugu Mtshali, the partner of Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe, and was co-owned, *inter alia*, by Pragat Investments, which was either owned exclusively by Jagdish Parekh, a leading executive in the Gupta’s empire, or co-owned with the Guptas, along with other local black empowerment figures.1

The Sishen mine, under Kumba’s ownership, had supplied ore and coal to ArcelorMittal at cost plus 3%. However, with the loss of Sishen, Kumba now demanded that the latter pay a more economic price. This then provoked an announcement by ArcelorMittal in August 2010 that it
would buy ICT for R800 million and do a parallel transaction in which ICT’s shareholders (inclusive of the Gupta family and Duduzane Zuma) would obtain ArcelorMittal shares with a face value of more than R7 billion. In a nominally separate deal, ArcelorMittal would also take on Ayigobi Consortium, an investment vehicle led by Duduzane Zuma in association with Jagdish Parekh and Gugu Mtshali, as a BEE partner.

It was against this background that it remained unclear how any deal between Afripalm and SAIL could go ahead unless the ICT resources first offered to ArcelorMittal were now offered to SAIL (despite a denial from ICT). The uncertainty was then to be compounded by Sishen claiming in the High Court that it had been cheated out of its mining rights; ArcelorMittal squaring up to ICT for a legal battle; and by a raid by the Hawks, the major corruption-busting team housed within the South African Police Service, upon both ICT and the Department of Mineral Resources (Mail & Guardian 2011g). It was scarcely a surprise when, in late September 2011, ArcelorMittal pulled the plug on the deal with ICT and Ayigobi and announced that it would not go through (Business Day 2011e).

By this time, there was growing concern within certain quarters of the ANC and the Alliance regarding the influence of the Guptas over the Zuma family. There were allegations that they had influenced the appointment of CEOs and chairmen of major parastatals, notably of Lazarus Zim to the chair of the board of Telkom in 2010 and Brian Molefe to become CEO of Transnet in early 2011; that they wielded so much power that they summoned cabinet members and senior government officials to their house in Saxonwold, the upmarket suburb in Johannesburg; that they had pressured government officials into placing advertisements in New Age; and that they had offered to transport Zuma around in their private jet ahead of the 2009 elections. Major figures within the party, notably Mathews Phosa (treasurer-general) and Baleka Mbete, the ANC national chairman (whose Mandumo Investment Holdings had allegedly been sidelined as a potential BEE partner by ArcelorMittal’s deal in favour of Duduzane Zuma’s Ayigobi consortium) threatened a revolt against their influence. Julius Malema and the ANC Youth League likewise raged against them, and Alliance partner, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) announced that it would establish an investigation into allegations that they were plundering the country (Sunday Times 2011a). In contrast, the MK Veterans’ Association leapt to Zuma’s and the Guptas’ defence, as did the Women’s League, whose spokesperson, Edna Molewa, stated that she saw nothing wrong with the Zuma family benefiting from deals facilitated by government. The SACP (as ever protective of Zuma) said that while it opposed the use of political connections for the accumulation of private wealth, those who were attacking the Guptas were seeking to harm his image (Business Day 2011b).

Revelations that the Gupta brothers had provided the R250 million worth of shares for the MK Veterans’ Association further dented their reputation, sparking fears that they were attempting to buy support for a run by Zuma for a second term as president, the rumour fuelled by the admission by the association’s treasurer, Sparks Motseki, that he held a private stake in one of the Guptas’ subsidiaries, Dixie Investments, and that he was a close friend of Duduzane (Mail & Guardian 2011d).

The Guptas were shrewd enough to accompany Duduzane Zuma to a meeting with COSATU, at which they claimed that they had ‘never taken a cent from the government’ and would collaborate fully with the investigation into their interests. They also averred that they had taken a decision in 2007 to forgo all government tenders and contracts to put a stop to insinuations
about their relationship with Zuma. These they lay at the door of established capital, offended both by their founding of New Age and their entry into the mining sector (Mail & Guardian 2011b).

So great is their influence, it seems unlikely that the Guptas will not be able to ride this particular storm, not least because Gloria Bongi Ngema, who is due to become Zuma’s sixth wife, recently landed a plum job as head of the communications and marketing department at JIC Mining Services, which is majority owned by Oakbay Investments (Mail & Guardian 2011c).

**Dodgy deals: Aurora Empowerment Systems and Consolidated Rand Gold**

In October 2009, Aurora Empowerment Systems, led by Khulubuse Zuma, Zondwa Mandela (the great man’s grandson), and Michael Hulley (the lawyer who defended Zuma in the courts against charges of corruption) took over Pamodzi Gold, which had gone into liquidation. The takeover was controversial, for Aurora was inexperienced, but the new boys won out over experienced players, including Harmony Gold, a long-established mining company.

At the time, seven shafts at Pamodzi’s Grootvlei mines and six at Orkney were still operational, but thereafter followed a tale which unions describe as blatant asset-stripping, with Aurora selling gold, machinery and scrap for unknown millions, and misappropriating unemployment and pension funds. Within months, some 5000 mineworkers were being left unpaid, water and electricity was cut off to the hostels where many of them lived because of unpaid bills, one worker committed suicide, and water pumps, if not sold, stopped operating, threatening the mines with flooding.

Aurora continuously denied asset-stripping, blaming thefts on illegal miners, and gained successive stays of execution from government liquidators, by promising that they were bringing in major investors to reopen the mines. Amidst the controversy, Khulubuse Zuma made a donation of R1 million to the ANC, despite owing far in excess of that in wages to the unpaid miners. Subsequently, Zuma was promising that a Chinese company, Shandong Gold, would buy a 65% stake in Aurora for in excess of R800 million, winning extensions from liquidation from the High Court. However, the deal never came through, and in early 2011 Aurora was finally thrown out of its mines after Enver Motala, a government liquidator accused by the unions of protecting the company because of its political connections, was fired and new liquidators brought in, and the assets sold to China African Precious Metals for a mere R150 million. Despite Khulubuse Zuma having amassed enormous wealth (he owns a personal fleet of 19 expensive cars), it remains a moot point whether the workers will ever get paid (Sunday Times 2011d, 2011g).

Meanwhile, less attention has been paid to Zuma’s connections with ‘sushi king’ Kenny Kunene, who has moved from rags to riches in record time. In 2007, Consolidated Rand Gold (CRG), a company backed by Australian interests, in association with an empowerment partner, Puno Gold (supposedly representative of community interests), raised more than R1 billion on the London and South African stock exchanges in order to mine reefs running from Germiston to Soweto that contained gold estimated to be worth at least R200 billion. Kunene and a business partner, Gayton McKenzie, a reformed bank robber, were employed by CRG as executives with the particular role of using their political connections to secure mining rights from the Department of Mineral Resources, and did so within a short time. However, while Kunene and McKenzie earned extravagant salaries, drove flashy cars and dined with President Zuma, CRG’s operations took a sharp
dive, and in April 2011 it was forced to announce plans to retrench 212 of its 233 workers, reporting a loss of R1 billion. Puno Gold claimed foul, and declared that it had never received any dividends. Subsequently, when appealing to the Hawks to investigate the matter, Puno revealed the results of a forensic investigation it had commissioned which showed, inter alia, that CRG had planned to replace it as its empowerment partner in favour of Fine Asset 127, a company belonging to the president’s son, Edward Zuma, the top leadership of the MK Veterans’ Association, and Jerome Braun, a lawyer who had represented Jacob Zuma at his rape trial in 2008. A CRG executive pointed out that the plans were never acted upon, and that Puno’s fraud accusations were a result of its refusal to accept liabilities for debts. Kunene and McKenzie, he admitted, were indeed expensive employees, ‘but they got the mining rights in 11 months. That’s incredibly fast’ (Sunday Times 2011c).

There is no evidence that Zuma himself has had any direct involvement in either of these dubious deals. Yet those close to him have, and he appears to have no compunction in associating with business interests which trade on their political connections and sail very close to the law.

Politics, private interest and public property: friends and family as tenderpreneurs

Amongst the deals secured by Zuma’s relatives are one whereby, in 2009, a company linked to his nephew Mandla Gcaba, was awarded a contract to run Durban’s bus fleet without a tender, this after the collapse of the previous operator, Remant Alton, of which Gcaba had also been a director. In another, before Zuma had become state president but had already become president of the ANC, a R3.5 million catering contract had been awarded, again without being advertised for tender, by the KwaZulu-Natal legislature to Bucebo General Trading, a company owned by Nonkulele Mhlong, mother of two of his children (PoliticsWeb 2009). However, the most notorious case of tenderpreneurship has involved the chief of police.

In early 2011, corruption-battered South Africans were reading about a property scam involving Roux Shabangu, a BEE businessman said to be close to Jacob Zuma, and Bheki Cele, Zuma’s appointee as commissioner of police. While Zuma was to deny connection with Shabangu, it was impossible for him to deny a long involvement with Cele, with whom he had a strong connection going back to shared days in Umkhonto we Sizwe, who was known as a significant power-broker in KwaZulu-Natal, and who had strongly backed Zuma for the presidency. The exposure of apparent tenderpreneurship at the highest levels consequently had explosive political implications.

Media investigations were to uncover the leasing, from Shabangu, of one building for R500 million over 10 years as new headquarters for the South African Police Service in Pretoria, and of another, for R137 million, also in Pretoria, to be the headquarters for the police department’s Independent Complaints Directorate. The sums involved in both deals were highly inflated, and the state could have bought similar buildings for considerably less. Shabangu’s business partner, Japie van Niekerk, with whom he had fallen out, informed the media that Shabangu had bought the prior building because his political connections informed him that the Public Works Department wanted to lease it. Nonetheless, despite two legal opinions offered to her which indicated that their approval would be illegal, both deals were authorised by Public Works Minister Gwen Mahlangu-Nkabinde (Mail & Guardian 2011c).

The adverse publicity scuppered two other deals: one whereby Shabangu would have leased yet another building in
Durban for a new police headquarters for R100 million (Sunday Times 2011b), and another whereby the Billion Group, a property company with which Lonwaba Sambudla (who is married to Duduzile Zuma) is closely associated, would have won a tender under dubious circumstances for the construction of a new headquarters for the Department of Public Service (Mail & Guardian 2011i). Billion was later revealed as having already leased a building to the Department of Public Works which, even after payment of some R68 million, remained empty. This seemed a valuable return upon a donation of R1 million which Billion was said to have made to the ANC or its senior officer-bearers (Mail & Guardian 2011h).

Of more political impact was that it resulted in a formal investigation into the deals being undertaken by Thuli Madonsela, recently appointed as public protector. Despite having been subject to a raid by two police intelligence officers demanding documents related to the lease and her office having its computers hacked, she forwarded provisional findings to Zuma, Mahlangu-Nkabinde, Cele, Shabangu, Police Minister Nathi Mthetwa and Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan for comment in June 2011. This was leaked to the press, leading to dramatic headlines, for Madonsela had reported that Siviwe Dongwana (the Director-General under Mahlangu-Nkabinde at the time the leases had been signed, but who by this time had been suspended from duty) had indicated that his telephone had been tapped, that he had been pressured into approving the deals by Mahlangu-Nkabinde and that he now lived in fear for his life. Madonsela submitted that Mahlangu-Nkabinde had been guilty of improper conduct; that Cele was guilty of maladministration and unlawful conduct for driving the R1.1 billion Durban deal; that the tender for the latter had been rigged to favour Shabangu; and that the Treasury should blacklist Shabangu’s company, Roux Property Fund, for its involvement in ‘unlawful and irregular procurement’ (Sunday Times 2011e).

The political fallout was immediate. Madonsela found herself confronting reports, emanating from the Hawks, that she was to be charged for fraud and corruption for doing irregular business with the South African Law Reform Commission when she had worked there as a commissioner, and announced that she feared for her safety and would seek the protection of Parliament against police ‘intimidation and dirty tricks’. The public outrage against any idea of her being charged was such that it resulted in Justice Minister Jeff Radebe swiftly announcing that all her dealings with the Law Reform Commission had been above board, and that there was no intention to institute proceedings against her. Subsequently, in July, she submitted her updated report on the leases, this arguing that the lease agreements were invalid and calling upon President Zuma to take action against Mahlangu-Nkabinde, Cele, and senior officials in the Department of Public Works and in the South African Police (inter alia, Business Day 2011c, Mail & Guardian 2011f).

Zuma was now confronted with a major dilemma: whether to act against powerful figures within the ANC during a period when the continuation of his leadership of the ANC was under major debate within the Alliance, or to win praise for upholding the law and the constitution. Characteristically, he fudged the issue, and played for time as both Mahlangu-Nkabinde and Cele remained in office (speculation being rife that it would be senior officials under them who would, eventually, be forced to walk the plank). But Madonsela’s independence had come to represent a major threat to powerful forces within the ANC threatened not only by her but other officials within state organs deemed to be taking the pursuit of action against corruption too seriously. ANC Treasurer-General Matthews Phosa and cabinet spokesman suggested that Parliament should debate
and if necessary amend Madonsela’s report (despite such amendment being clearly unconstitutional).

Under immense pressure from the media, Mahlangu-Nkabinde subsequently did the right thing by referring the Pretoria and Durban leases to the courts to have them declared invalid, complaining that she had been handed a poisoned chalice and had been obstructed in her investigations by senior officials within her department. She also revealed that the value of leases improperly awarded by her department amounted to over R3 billion in value. However, by this time her credibility had been shredded, and she was facing calls to resign (Hoffman 2011). Meanwhile, Zuma had at last opted to call Cele to account, asking him to give good reason why he should not be suspended from office. However, well-grounded speculation was rife that the principal motivation behind Zuma’s action was an intelligence report handed to the president in October 2010 that, apart from being deeply implicated in organised crime and corruption in KwaZulu-Natal, Cele had become part of an anti-Zuma faction which included Human Settlements’ Minister Tokyo Sexwale, Sports Minister Fikile Mbalula and Arts Minister Paul Matshatile (Mail & Guardian 2011j).

In another move, the National Director of Public Prosecutions, Menzi Simelane, presiding over the laying of charges against renowned corruption-buster Willie Hofmeyr, who heads the Asset Forfeiture Unit and the Special Investigating Unit, in relation to various actions he had taken, notably in regard to the Intaka case (whereby senior ANC figures had allegedly received a donation of R1 million for the party from South American businessman Gaston Savoi, in exchange for a R45 million tender to supply water purifiers to state hospitals at inflated prices). His actions in regard to Intaka had aroused the ire of high-level politicians, including KwaZulu-Natal Premier Zweli Mkhize, whose support for Zuma in any forthcoming leadership battle within the ANC would be vital (Business Day 2011d). ‘We’re fucked, just like the Scorpions’, concluded one official (Sunday Times 2011f).

The ANC’s shadow state under Jacob Zuma

The merging of party and state under the ANC has provided for the increasing criminalisation of authority and power, a tendency which has gained serious momentum under Jacob Zuma. Formally, government operates according to the constitution, and responsibility for governance lies with the president, cabinet, civil service and the similar institutions charged with legal and political authority at provincial and local government levels. As under any system of government, decision making by such bodies is subject to political bargaining and negotiation, with policy outcomes often the result of diverse pressures, and implemented according to bureaucratic, political and legal constraints, with departures from legality investigated and prosecuted by authorities which are constitutionally independent of the political executive. Increasingly, however, the formal operations of government are being eroded by the private interests of individuals and businesses which trade on their political presence within, and connections with, the ANC and the government itself. As the ANC itself becomes increasingly factionalised, a development closely linked to the struggle for state resources, the system of governance established under the constitution becomes increasingly eroded, not least by successive political assaults on the independence of bodies responsible for investigation and prosecution of corruption. Prosecution of major cases of corruption occurs, but usually only after extensive exposure in the media, and is heavily dependent upon the prevailing balance of
power within the ANC. How many corrupt deals go through without such exposure, which in itself often results from internal clashes amongst those scrabbling for favours, obviously remains unknown, although the presumption must be that they are numerous.

Zuma ascended to the presidency at the head of a disparate coalition whose interests were in many ways incompatible. COSATU and the SACP looked to him to change the direction of government economic policy in favour of workers and the poor, whereas there were many in the party concerned only to displace Mbeki, and to gain access to public office to pursue private interest. In turn, the manner in which Zuma had gained office, as a result of bitter political struggle within the ANC and against state institutions, indicated the potential fragility of power. Any incumbent of State House was constitutionally limited to two terms of office, but the internal battles within the ANC had indicated that the prospect of a second term was insecure, and had to be struggled for. Time in office could well prove to be shorter than intended, increasing the urgency of the struggle for control of state power and public resources. Zuma, unencumbered by either ideological concerns or moral principles, combines his role as president with that of head of a shadow state, his political influence percolating downward through government structures to facilitate the allocation of tenders and contracts to his family, friends and those who can serve their financial interest. As such, he disowns responsibility for crimes seemingly committed under his protection, and there is no person or institution willing or capable to point a finger directly at his culpability. Where looting of resources by his cronies becomes so blatant that it provokes publicity and prosecution by anti-corruption agencies, legal action becomes mysteriously stalled, corruption-busters intimidated and action against looting politicians regularly postponed. It is now commonplace that as president, Zuma’s principal concern is to juggle his political debts and backers in such a manner as to ensure a second term as president. Whether he succeeds or not will depend far less on the adoption by the ANC of a coherent political programme for ensuring a ‘better life for all’ than whether he can convince key forces within the ANC that he can and will continue to promote and protect their material interests and ability to loot the state.

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Notes

1. The financial press remains confused about whether Pragat is exclusively owned by Parekh or co-owned with the Guptas.
2. The other beneficiaries were Mabelindile Luhlabo, who founded the Mineworkers’ Investment Company, but who resigned from it in 1999; Zebo Tshethlo, a municipal manager of the Kgalagadi district municipality; Mojalefa Mbete, who has extensive business interest in the Witbank area, notably in coal mining.
3. Whose residents they had outraged by landing their private helicopter on the nearby public park, Zoo Lake.
4. Kunene, closely connected to key figures within the ANC, had celebrated a major birthday by holding a lavish party at which sushi was served on the bodies of scantily dressed women. The event has been extensively parodied in a number of Madam and Eve cartoons.
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**BRIEFING**

A new growth path for South Africa?

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**Introduction**

South Africa continues to face deep problems of unemployment, inequality and poverty. The South African government recently released a new economic policy framework, the New Growth Path (NGP). This policy is intended to facilitate ‘a restructuring of the South African economy to improve its performance in terms of labour absorption as well as the composition and rate of growth’ (Economic Development Department 2011, p. 2). This is a huge challenge given the country’s extremely high unemployment rate, middling growth record, and the continuing structural economic distortions that have not been fundamentally transformed in the past 17 years of democracy.

In the NGP there is a significant shift from earlier post-apartheid economic policies. The Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy of 1996 can be characterised as broadly neo-liberal, including amongst its key tenets, tight monetary and fiscal policies, elimination of exchange controls, labour market flexibility and privatisation. In 2006 the government launched the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative – South Africa (AsgiSA) economic policy. This had as its pillars the expansion of public infrastructure investment, sectoral development strategies to promote private investment, improving education and skills, integrating marginalised parts of the population into the mainstream economy, improving macroeconomic management and enhancing public administration.

The political background to the NGP is somewhat different to these earlier policies of the African National Congress (ANC) government. The current Jacob Zuma-led administration came into office in 2009 with backing from the ANC’s trade union and Communist Party allies and with expectations of some sort of leftwards shift in economic policy. A new Economic Development Department was created, headed by Ebrahim Patel, who until then was the General Secretary of the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union. It was under this minister that the NGP was developed and championed, although it was formally launched by the cluster of economic ministries.

The NGP has received mixed reactions. The main trade union federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), which is in an alliance with the ANC, released a thorough critique of the NGP subtitled ‘One step forward, two steps backward’ (COSATU 2011) while in another statement welcoming it as ‘a giant step forward’. While recognising the NGP as a progressive shift, COSATU views the NGP as not going far enough, and is particularly concerned about the macroeconomic policies in the NGP as well as the proposed

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wage capping. Organised business, while welcoming certain elements, has been critical in particular of the increased state intervention envisaged and of the proposed capping of higher salaries. Meanwhile, Joseph Stiglitz (2011) has characterised the policies of the NGP as ‘[having] the most promise of leading the country on the path of sustainable, equitable, and democratic development’, in particular praising the NGP *inter alia* for putting employment (specifically decent work) at its centre, for building a long-term foundation for a vibrant society in contrast to the short-termism of unregulated markets, for the focus on building capabilities, and for appropriate macroeconomic policies. Overall, however, reactions to the NGP from social forces and commentators have been largely negative.

This article discusses the policy changes in the NGP, and evaluates the extent to which the NGP represents a leftwards shift in economic policy. A polemical discussion of what constitutes ‘left’ is avoided. In broad terms, this is interpreted as economic policy expected to benefit the working class in particular (in terms of the level and quality of employment, improved livelihoods, lower inequality, and so forth) as well as opening the space for more radical pro-working-class shifts in future.

**Summary of the New Growth Path**

The NGP sets an ambitious target of five million new jobs by 2020.¹ These jobs are explicitly conceptualised as arising from increases in both the rate and the employment intensity of growth. Five key ‘job drivers’ are set out in the NGP: substantial public investment in infrastructure; more labour-absorbing activities in the main economic sectors; the green economy and knowledge-intensive activities; social capital and public services; and spatial development (referring both to rural development and to the development of the southern African region). As well as prioritising employment creation, the NGP consistently emphasises the need for ‘decent work’, citing the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition of this.

The macroeconomic policies presented in the NGP are mixed. The monetary policy on the one hand commits to lower real interest rates and continued targeting of low and stable inflation. On the other hand, there is to be support for a more competitive exchange rate, primarily through more sterilisation of foreign currency inflows, with further measures to be explored (including measures to address the negative effects of short-term capital inflows). Fiscal policy is probably the most conservative aspect of macroeconomic policy in the NGP: despite a counter-cyclical fiscal stance, real growth in expenditure is to be limited to just over 2% per annum for the next few years.

What the NGP terms the ‘microeconomic package’ contains 10 programmes intended to control inflationary pressures and inefficiencies, as well as promote a more inclusive economy with social equity and regional development. These programmes are: active industrial policy; rural development; more interventionist competition policy; improved education and skills development; promotion of small enterprises; broad-based black economic empowerment; labour market policies focused on improved productivity; promotion of technological advancement; developmental trade policies; and policies to support development in the rest of Africa. Insofar as there is a change in emphasis from previous policies, this could be characterised as more active state intervention and greater focus on employment than was previously the case.

Although the NGP did not emerge through a meaningful process of consultation outside government prior to being announced, the policy itself recognises that ‘no technocratic solution . . . [can] be imposed from above’ (Economic Development Department 2011, p. 44) and heavily
emphasises social dialogue. The most prominent aspect of this is in the proposal for wage moderation, with stronger moderation at higher salary levels, coupled with moderation in price increases and the intention of ensuring that wage moderation leads to measurable increases in employment.²

There is more in the NGP than can be discussed here, such as proposals on building co-operatives, the green economy, overcoming spatial inequalities, and more integrated industrial development within the southern African region. Having summarised the main elements of the NGP, we proceed with an overall assessment of the policy followed by discussion of some specific policy areas.

**Overall characterisation of the New Growth Path**

The combination of decent work, growth in employment-creating activities, and social-democratic-style consensual wage restraint in the NGP is an unconventional package. While elements draw on models pursued in other countries, the mix of policies is unusual. There are some similarities between the industrial policies of the NGP and those followed in East Asia. However, the role of the state is not nearly as strong, and the more social democratic elements of the NGP and the emphasis on decent work were not part of the East Asian route. The NGP also has some commonalities with the Scandinavian models, especially that of Finland, but without comprehensive social security and other elements. Of course, both the domestic and international political economies are very different in South Africa in 2011 than was the case in either the East Asian or Scandinavian cases.

The NGP draws on a model of economic policymaking in which key social forces buy into a model which holds some benefits and trade-offs for different classes and which is implemented through agreement. Such a model of economic policy is essentially based on class compromise, where no class is powerful enough to drive through a clear class agenda (but this certainly does not imply that economic policy under such a model is class-neutral). That South Africa is going this route is understandable in the context of the balance of class forces, including the uneven distribution of economic and political power. Whether organised labour and business can actually reach agreement on the key tenets of the policy remains to be seen.

A significant change in the NGP from all earlier economic policy frameworks is the paradigm shift that puts employment creation and specifically decent jobs at the centre of policy. Previous policies have acknowledged the importance of job creation but have been focused primarily on growth rather than employment, despite the crisis of unemployment in South Africa.³ Job creation, especially the creation of decent jobs, is fundamental to the empowerment of the working class, both in terms of livelihoods and more broadly in terms of working-class power. The extent to which the measures put forward in the NGP are likely to successfully create jobs on the mass scale needed are debatable, but the paradigm shift to prioritise job creation is important (and overdue).

The shift in the NGP towards a central focus on job creation is linked with the emphasis on the transformation of the productive base of the economy. The NGP explicitly recognises that growth alone is insufficient for employment creation of the magnitude needed (that is, by simply scaling up the existing productive base), such that transformation of that productive base in required.

A key thrust of the NGP is the deepening of domestic demand, through increasing employment and making income distribution less unequal. This could be important not only as a base for sustainable growth but also in improving the living standards of the working class.

Perhaps the greatest threat to the success of the NGP — and specifically of
those aspects which would be most beneficial to the working class – is the dependence on decisions that will be made by the capitalist class. For instance, measures are proposed to promote employment creation, but in the main these ultimately rely on the private sector choosing to hire more people. The NGP does envisage some direct job creation by the state (for example through public works and the public service) and some which would fairly directly leveraged off public spending, such as in infrastructure. Nonetheless, it is explicit in the NGP that the overwhelming majority of jobs would be created in the private sector. This endangers successful job creation as the state can implement policies aimed at stimulating employment creation but capitalists may or may not respond accordingly.

To illustrate this by way of example: the NGP advocates ‘more constructive and collaborative relations between the state and business, where government commits to minimising unnecessary economic costs . . . and business responds by supporting critical and innovative initiatives for a more inclusive and equitable economy, especially projects that can generate employment on a much larger scale’ (Economic Development Department 2011, p. 43). The state could do its part in ‘[minimising] unnecessary economic costs’ – the NGP mentions in this respect unnecessary regulatory requirements and delays, inadequate infrastructure, and weak education and training – yet capital will decide how to respond to these changes. They could potentially respond by reaping higher profits and paying these out in higher dividends or by expanding production in a capital-intensive way.

To some extent this vulnerability is inherent in a market-based economy in which most employment is private. Even so, there could be greater compulsion on the private sector to employ more people or more direct employment creation by the state. The state might implement all the measures set out in the NGP which are under its direct control, yet the employment outcome could fall far short of the targets set out. This is a particular problem given that employment creation is the centrepiece of the NGP. Nevertheless, the private sector would be expected to at least partially respond to state interventions such as those mentioned by expanding production and raising employment, if policy is not to be dismissed a priori as ineffective.

One of the weak aspects of the NGP is that it is gender blind. Changing the patriarchal structure of an economy requires explicitly analysing the differential effects of policies on women and men and prioritising policies that especially benefit women materially as well as contributing to transforming patriarchal power relationships. For example, the prioritisation of sectors in industrial policy would need to take into account the gendered patterns of employment across sectors.

**Macroeconomic policy**

Macroeconomic policy is a crucial aspect of any economic policy framework, as it frames the fiscal parameters of what is possible in microeconomic interventions and conditions the overall state of the economy. The macroeconomic section of the NGP is notably short and thin – just one page in a 56-page document. It appears that the macroeconomic framework was crafted as a compromise between different views within government, especially between the Treasury and other economic ministries (as well as within the ANC). The lack of macroeconomic detail may well be based on the difficulty in obtaining agreement on anything more. It effectively implies a bias towards the retention of conservative macroeconomic policies. Even where there is an explicit shift in macroeconomic policies, there is limited detail in terms of how these changes are to be effected.
The NGP combines a looser monetary policy with a more restrictive fiscal policy. Even on the monetary side, the commitment to continued inflation targeting at low rates of inflation is inconsistent with a looser monetary-policy stance and is unlikely to support economic expansion and employment creation.

A positive shift is in the commitment to a more competitive exchange rate and lower interest rates, as these changes are likely to support (re)industrialisation and the expansion of employment. These aspects of looser monetary policy are by no means radical leftist policies, but could simply be regarded as long-overdue, common-sense shifts which have even been publicly called for by sections of South African industrial capital. Nonetheless, these policies represent a significant improvement on previous conservative monetary policy.

The NGP notes that, apart from increased sterilisation of capital inflows, additional tools for making the exchange rate more competitive are being explored. It is disappointing that the NGP does not make a firm commitment to strong capital controls. South Africa has experienced massive capital flight (see Ashman et al. 2011) as well as currency volatility and over-valuation arising from portfolio inflows. Particularly at a time when countries such as Brazil have acted decisively to strengthen their capital controls, and even the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has come out in cautious support of capital controls (see International Monetary Fund 2011), the South African government remains unwilling to take a stand on this. Capital controls are important not only for economic stability and growth in the short- to medium-term, but also for opening space for more radical future changes by mitigating the power of capital to influence policy with the explicit or implicit threat of capital flight. The NGP also does not consider measures such as taxes on financial transactions which have been implemented by centrist governments in other countries. The global economic crisis has opened up policy space for more progressive macroeconomic policy and the NGP could have pushed forward much more boldly on this.

Contractionary fiscal policy is one of the most conservative aspects of the NGP. The policy provides for real growth in expenditure of just over 2% a year for the next few years, and since GDP growth will almost certainly exceed 2% a year, this amounts to a reduction in the expenditure–GDP ratio. Even with the intended better use of existing resources, it is doubtful whether the austere fiscal policy of the NGP will enable the success of other components of the NGP. Significant fiscal resources will be needed for the active industrial policy measures, infrastructure rollout, and other interventions set out in the NGP, and the conservative fiscal policy threatens to hamstring or derail these. It will also constrain domestic demand, which the NGP posits as a source of sustainable growth. This highlights the weakness of the NGP as a compromise document. Aspects of the compromise package which have been included to satisfy certain government departments (or the views of certain groups in the ANC) will undermine other aspects of the same policy, thus compromising the policy’s overall coherence and feasibility.

Industrial policy

The NGP takes a relatively strong stance on industrial policy, envisaging a central role for the state. Progressive aspects of the industrial policies in the NGP include the active promotion by the state of employment-creating sectors; the promotion of forward-looking activities such as knowledge-intensive sectors and green technologies; stimulation of domestic and regional demand; strengthening of competition policy; support for fabrication; and developmental trade policies. More broadly, the NGP recognises the importance of
(re)industrialisation and supports measures to achieve this.

A concern is whether the fiscal conservatism of the NGP will undermine its active industrial policy programme. For the state to play a leading role in industrial policy, on a scale that would allow South Africa to catch up the ground lost when there was no real active industrial policy as well as move forward, will take significant resources. Adequate financing of industrial policy also relates to the prioritisation of sectors for support. Future growth would require South Africa to target sectors in which it is not highly competitive at present but which are likely to grow as a share of global demand and sectors which are technologically advanced. However, such activities are generally not very labour-intensive. The unemployment crisis in South Africa compels the targeting of highly labour-intensive activities, even where these activities do not play a leading role in competitiveness and productivity. These conditions require industrial policy to target and support a much broader range of activities than would otherwise be the case. This in turn entails substantial financing and supportive fiscal policy, and the NGP falls short in this regard.

The financial sector

Proposals on the financial sector in the NGP include: raising the level of private savings; increasing the capacity and impact of the development finance institutions for industrial financing; improving access to micro-finance for small enterprises; retirement fund reforms; disincentivisation of personal debt; incentivisation of corporate savings; mobilising resources from retirement funds; and exploring the possibility of a state-owned bank.

Overall, these proposals focus more on raising funds for the other measures in the NGP than on fundamental transformation of the financial sector. Given that the financial sector is a powerful part of the economy with implications for virtually all economic activities, and given the current highly concentrated and non-developmental character of the South African financial sector, a more comprehensive approach to the transformation of this sector would have been desirable. Even in terms of leveraging funds, the NGP could have gone further with bolder measures such as prescribed asset requirements. As well as mobilising resources, such a policy could weaken the power of financial capital and open space for more radical interventions in future.

The NGP does mention the possibility of establishing a state-owned bank. This is an interesting idea, with the potential of challenging private-sector domination of this important ‘commanding height’ of the economy. The success of such a venture in advancing working-class interests would, of course, be contingent on how it is implemented and what its role would be.

Changing the patterns of distribution

Inequality in South Africa is extremely high, and is strongly racialised. The NGP proposes to bring down inequality primarily through the labour market, in particular through large-scale creation of decent work and also through progressive wage moderation. Creation of employment, especially decent work, and the closing of wage gaps amongst the employed are absolutely central to reducing inequality. Empirical results from Tregenna (2011) suggest that the unemployment rate is a central determinant of inequality in South Africa, which would support the choice in the NGP of addressing inequality primarily through the labour market.

One implication of focusing primarily on changes in the level of employment and in the wage structure to bring down inequality – as opposed to through channels such as direct redistribution of assets – is to raise the stakes on the success of
employment creation (as well as the reduction in wage gaps amongst the employed). Should employment creation not materialise on the scale envisaged, this will be a failure not only in its own right but also for the NGP goal of reducing inequality.

A further potential vulnerability of the inequality-reduction measures of the NGP relates to the enforceability of the proposed capping of salary increases at the top. Even if agreement with organised business and labour were to be obtained on these measures, South Africa does not currently have the institutional structure for enforcing this. Individual businesses are unlikely to feel bound by any agreement made by organised business in this respect. In Scandinavian countries that followed corporatist wage-restraint, peak-level organised business had far greater power over individual businesses than is the case in South Africa. There is a danger that the sacrifices that are called for from labour will be enforceable whereas those from capital and high-income earners will not actually be implemented.

The proposed wage moderation starts from a low level of earnings at just R3,000 (about US$430) per month, which would include much of the organised working class. The proposed wage moderation at this level is quite mild – inflation plus modest real increases. Even so, it seems likely that this threshold would be negotiated upwards before any agreement on it would be obtained. The proposed minimum threshold would imply sacrifice from sections of the working class in a context of very high wage gaps and a phenomenon of the working poor; it would also undermine the bargaining power and organisational strength of trade unions.

The NGP does not mention progressive taxation as a way of reducing inequality (and simultaneously mobilising resources for development). Furthermore, income from capital contributes to inequality but it would not be affected by the proposed salary capping and the NGP does not contemplate higher taxation of dividends.

One of the ten pillars of the ‘microeconomic package’ in the NGP is Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE). This takes a progressive position with a critique of the limitations of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) thus far, notably that the model has focused excessively on the transfer of existing assets to a small number of people and that issues of ownership and the demographic transformation of senior management have been prioritised whereas employment creation has not been incentivised. Instead, the NGP calls for a welcome new emphasis on the more broad-based elements of BEE, with the promotion of employment creation, investment in new productive capacity, skills formation, collective forms of ownership, and so forth.

An interesting issue for consideration is the extent to which this broad approach to BEE suffuses the entire NGP. On the one hand, this approach takes several of the other components of the NGP (skills development, sector strategies to create jobs, etc.) and conceptualises these as part of BEE. On the other hand, it is unclear whether the NGP’s BBBEE approach will be sufficiently integrated with the policy’s industrial policy thrust, to ensure that manufacturing not only grows but that patterns of ownership and control in manufacturing are also transformed, in the process building black-owned productive enterprises (as opposed to just the transfer of stakes in existing enterprises). This could be covered in the aspect of the BBBEE approach on investment in new productive enterprises by black entrepreneurs, and it remains to be seen how integrated these components of the NGP will be in practice. In the absence of this integration, existing racial and gendered patterns of ownership and control in the manufacturing sector could just be entrenched.
Conclusion

The NGP aims to be a comprehensive and cross-cutting policy package. A shift to a new growth path goes well beyond narrow economic policies only. Changes needed for the success of the NGP would fall under the ambit of a range of government departments and institutions in addition to the core economic departments. A coherent approach and a strong sense of ownership across the state is thus a precondition for the success of the NGP, but this is not clearly evident. In particular, without real commitment to the NGP from National Treasury it is highly unlikely to succeed. Commitment to the NGP would imply inter alia significant changes in spending patterns and changes in macroeconomic policy, including the mandate given to the Reserve Bank.

As well as full commitment to the NGP at the top level of government, its success would also depend on a paradigmatic shift at all levels of the state apparatus. A new central policy focus on employment creation requires a new orientation in which the direct and indirect impact on employment is factored in as a consideration in an entire spectrum of policy choices. In practice, such a mindset shift would need strong political direction as well as capacitating bureaucrats to think and act in a different way from previously.

The NGP is not by any stretch a socialist economic policy, nor does it purport to be one. Some shift to the left from previous economic policies is evident, notably in the central focus on employment creation rather than growth, the emphasis on decent jobs in particular, the intention to transform the productive structure of the economy, some aspects of monetary policy, a more active role for the state in transforming the economy, active and developmental industrial policies, and so on. Amongst its weaknesses, perhaps the most important are the failure to fully change macroeconomic policies to ones that would really facilitate the shift to a different growth path as well as mitigating the power of capital, and the reliance on the private sector for the majority of employment creation. An explicit choice is made that it should be the private sector rather than the state that employs more people, and that this is subject to the decisions of capital. There remains an apparent lack of strong political will to really challenge the existing distribution of economic resources and power.

Relative to the conservative economic policies implemented since democracy, the NGP is certainly a significant improvement. Much of it could arguably be characterised as a ‘normalisation’ of economic policy in South Africa, in the sense of finally adopting policies which in many cases have been successfully implemented internationally, and also in selecting policies responsive to the country’s extremely high levels of unemployment and inequality. For instance, had previous economic policy been more sensible then lower interest rates and a more competitive exchange rate would not need to be hailed as the advance which, in the event, they are. To some extent the thrust of the NGP is pro-growth and pro-development in general terms, in the sense that its policies can be seen as conducive to enhancing sustainable growth and industrial development. This is likely to be materially beneficial across classes, benefiting both the established and emerging fractions of capital as well as the working class. Beyond this, some specifically pro-working-class orientation in the NGP can be discerned, in the focus on creating decent jobs and in closing wage gaps, as well as in developing poor rural areas and in the broad-based approach to black economic empowerment. Of course, as with any economic policy, its effects can only be surmised from simply reading a document and the actual effects remain to be seen. These will also depend on the relative aggressiveness with which the various components are implemented. Particularly in the context of the global
economic crisis, the case for more radical policies is easier to make than previously. While the NGP takes significant steps forward in the transformation of the South African economy, the necessity and the space exist for much stronger interventions.

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Notes
1. According to official data there are currently 13.1 million people employed and 4.4 million unemployed, with a further 2.2 million so-called discouraged unemployed (who have not actively sought employment in the four weeks preceding the survey interview). (Statistics South Africa 2011, p. vi)
2. Although not a major element in the overall NGP, it is this proposal (specifically strong wage moderation at the top) which elicited the strongest negative reactions from business when the NGP was announced.
3. The official rate of unemployment currently stands at 25% (Statistics South Africa 2011, p. 2). The expanded unemployment rate, which includes the so-called discouraged unemployed and which can be considered a better indicator of full unemployment, is 33% (derived from figures in Statistics South Africa 2011, p. 2).

References


Democracy and development in Nigeria: the missing links

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Introduction

It is the responsibility of every comrade and patriot of this country to animate the memory of Chima Ubani, a Nigerian patriot who kept hope alive and died fighting for the course of the oppressed masses of our people six years ago on 21 September 2005. We have not been consistent in marking it due to the pervasive apathy in the broad progressive movement in Nigeria. Here, I don’t intend to interrogate the underlying causes of the apathy. It suffices to say that our inability to project the noble exploits of the progressive forces in this country and the consequent dominant current of reactionary forces constitute one of the missing links in our quest for development in this country. I now turn to democracy and development, two popular post-war concepts that have captured the imagination of social scientists and the development set. I do so with a great sense of responsibility because Chima Ubani stood for the total transformation of Nigeria, in other words, the development of the country within a democratic setting.

Understanding democracy and development: a theoretical excursus

Why democracy? Karl Marx (1972) says it is the solution to the riddle of all constitutions. In our contradictory governance milieu we have also latched on to democracy as the solution to our crisis of governance. Our solace is understandable having been victims of rapid military dictatorships. I do not need to bother you with the history of the development of democracy in the Western quadrant, to borrow the phrase of Guillermo O’Donnell. But two important things need to be emphasised. One is that democracy was built on the development of certain positive and negative rights – I mean socio-economic and political rights. O’Donnell (2008, p. 21) referred to this when he observed that:

The early construction of subjective rights, especially in the law of property and of contract for the exchange of goods and services, is the legacy of capitalism and of state-making, not of liberalism or political democracy, both of which emerged after these constructions had become, in the Northwestern countries, widely diffused and highly elaborated legal doctrines.

The second is that the complexion of democracy in countries which fit into that governance mould is a function of practice, which of course explains why there are various markers for democracy, namely: liberal democracy, partial democracy, participatory democracy, and delegative democracy. Importantly, one endemic theoretical problem that political scientists have to deal with is the theoretical bifurcation of democracy, that is, the difference between a political definition of democracy and a

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socio-economic definition of democracy. In confronting this challenge in a recent work, O’Donnell (2008, p. 113) cast his lot with the former. He argued that contemporary literature has diverse definitions of democracy and if the options were limited to the two above he would opt for a political definition of democracy because ‘the definition that conflates democracy with a substantial degree of social justice or equality is not analytically useful. Furthermore, it is dangerous: it tends to depreciate whatever democracy exists; and thus plays into the hands of authoritarianism’. He, however, entered a caveat to the extent that such a definition is adequate but not sufficient. I will opt for a socio-economic definition for a different set of reasons. Firstly, historically, if we take democracy as ‘unfinished business’, there is no need to run away from its liberating content as well as its dialectical continuity. Secondly, it is only in the context of a socio-economic definition of democracy that the nexus between democracy and development can be intelligible. Finally, the dominant perception of democracy by the electorate in Nigeria today is focused on the presence or absence of ‘dividends of democracy.’ Indeed, the argument in the literature is whether development should precede democracy or whether democracy should come before development. In his *Political man, the social basis of politics*, the renowned American scholar, Seymour Martin Lipset (1983, p. 41) argued for urbanisation, industrialisation, wealth and education as essential precipitates of democratic development. Education, he wrote, ‘presumably broadens man’s outlook. Enables him to understand the need for norms of tolerance, restrains him from adhering to extremist doctrines, and increases his capacity to make rational electoral choices’ (*ibid.*, p. 39). On wealth he wrote,

The general income level of a nation also affects its receptivity to democratic norms. If there is enough wealth in the country so that it does not make too much difference whether some distribution takes place, it is easier to accept the idea that it does not matter greatly which side is in power. But if loss of office means serious losses for major power groups, they will seek to retain or secure office by any means available. (Lipset 1983, p. 51)

This is largely true with regard to the development of the West where economic development preceded development of democracy. This argument held sway for a long while and served as an ideological rationalisation of authoritarianism largely in the Third World. The question really is whether the contemporary international community will permit the developing world to engage in the plunder of alien resources and the consequent social violence which underlay the Industrial Revolution and economic growth in the West. I shall return to this in subsequent sections of this paper.

A political definition of democracy emphasises mainly negative freedoms, namely: political liberty and civil rights – the right to association, freedom of expression, freedom to choose those to govern and the right to own private property. Robert Dahl (1998, p. 90) labelled regime types with these features as polyarchy, a short hand for representative government. Given these political attributes a country can qualify as democratic and in the context of post-Cold War diplomacy be open to external aids as well as direct foreign investment. If we take democracy as the highest expression of modernity as Samir Amin (2001) has argued, the question then is whether a bifurcation of the political and economic aspects of democracy is possible. In my opinion democracy is that form of governance which provides the material conditions for individual self-actualisation in the context of the community free from oppression and alienation in a given social formation. This connotes the prevalence of social justice, equality and freedom. My definition of democracy produces a convergence of the two schools. I do not think we should wait for economic development before we
can govern ourselves according to the general will; I believe it should be both. The foundational ingredients of the general will should unleash development as well as democratic institutions of political management. This provides explanation for Nigerians’ expectations that democracy must produce dividends in ways that reinforce our belief in the system. However, the Nigerian condition is that we have no development and have no democracy. Or let me charitably say our democracy is hemmed in Carothers’s (2002) grey zone of unfreedom where elections are neither free nor fair; where vertical and horizontal accountability are absent; and the goal of governance is the aggrandisement of the base instincts of incumbent state actors. In the following section, I shall look at the reasons that, in my opinion, Nigeria is trapped in the deoxidised sphere of development and democracy.

The missing links

While Nigeria has been unable to reach the destination of democracy and development, a number of contributing factors can be identified. These include the absence of the general will, the citizenship question, the presence of two publics, the character of the post-colonial state, the global ‘jungle’, and leadership. I shall address these factors seriatim.

Absence of the general will

Thomas Hobbes (1998 [1651]) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau are prominent contractarian theorists who engaged with the notion of social contract. Hobbes espoused the general will or the social contract and then invested authoritarian attributes in the Leviathan or the Sovereign, the political expression of that social pact. Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s (1968 [1762]) treatment of the general will provides no room for its alienation. He says

and under which each individual, while uniting him with others, obeys no one but himself, and remains as free as before. This is the fundamental problem to which the social contract holds the solution. (Rousseau 1968 [1762], pp. 60–61)

The social contract thus amounts to:

‘one of us puts into the community his person and all his powers under the supreme direction of the general will; and as a body, we incorporate every member as an indivisible part of the whole’. Immediately, in place of the individual person of each contracting party, this act of association creates an artificial and corporate body composed of as many members as there are voters in the assembly, and by this same act that body acquires its unity, its common ego, its life and its will. (ibid., p. 61)

And hence the republic or body politic is then born. In Nigeria I dare say there is no general will; what exists is the ‘British will’ for the protection of primordial interest, not solely British interest as originally intended in a neocolonial sense. This is why each section to the ‘Nigerian union’ tries to lord it over the other thereby upsetting the polity. Everyone is tired of the marriage and has yet to find a perfect solution to an ongoing marital squabble. Pro-democracy forces have over the past two decades prescribed a sovereign national conference (SNC), a conversation to arrive at some common articles of faith. Unfortunately, those benefiting from the prevalent unjust social order have severally subverted the path to national dialogue. The truth is that there may be no room for a talk before the Armageddon. Truly, the realities are clearly ominous.

The citizenship question

No event accentuates the citizenship question in Nigeria more than the current ethnic carnage in Nigeria’s Plateau State, where the settler Hausa–Fulanis are ranged against indigenous Berom communities. Indeed, the citizenship problem in Nigeria
is closely related to the absence of the general will or can be located within it. The thesis here is that if we as a people had a common agenda or universal minimum and we were truly a republic; whoever espoused that minimum would become part of the association or republic. The absence of the general will hinders our ability to create a transnational identity which is why Chief Obafemi Awolowo described Nigeria as mere ‘geographical expression’. Today, the dominant reference for Nigerians is their ethnic identities as Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Fulani, Ijaw, Edo and so on, in spite of constitutional provisions which create the formal modern criteria for citizenship. Chapter 3 (Citizenship) and Chapter 4 (Fundamental Rights) of the constitution contain essential provisions on citizenship and its consolidation. Citizenship is either by birth, registration or naturalisation. Under Chapter 4, Section 42(1) (2), the constitution states that:

(1) A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person – (a) be subjected either expressly by, or in the practical application of any law in force in Nigeria or any executive or administrative action of the government, to disabilities or restrictions to which citizens of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, sex, religions or political opinions are not made subject; or (b) be accorded either expressly by, or in the practical application of any law in force in Nigeria or any such executive or administrative action, any privilege or advantage that is not accorded to citizens of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, sex, religions or political opinions.

(2) No citizen of Nigeria shall be subjected to any disability or deprivation merely by reason of circumstances of his birth.

Due to the absence of the general will, these provisions in the basic law, to paraphrase W.R. Brubaker (cited in Stewart 1995, p. 65), have not become shared rights and obligations, legally rationalised and ideologically accentuated, and, as Femi Taiwo (2000, p. 99) puts it, lack ‘moral ideological content’.

**The two publics dilemma**

Peter Ekeh (1975) interrogated the civic realm in Africa and identified the existence of two publics, namely the primordial public and the civil public. The former, a native sector of moral obligation, and the latter a Western amoral sector ‘from which one seeks to gain, if possible in order to benefit the moral primordial public’ (Ekeh 1975, p. 100). This departs greatly from the civic realm in the West where morality is bound up – citizenship and duty are coterminous. This phenomenon, traceable to colonial times and spawned by the ideologies of legitimation by the African bourgeois, produces an endemic tension that is the bane of development in Nigeria. The public realm lives with the problem in which thieving public officials, either jailed or indicted, are given a red carpet reception by their native communities for accessing the largesse of the public sector seen as no man’s land. This is the rationale for neopatrimonialism which underlies politics in Africa. Next is the character of the post-colonial state.

**The post-colonial state**

The character of the Nigerian state is, in the main, neocolonial. Like all neocolonial states, it lives to fulfil the accumulation goals of the metropoles as well as the compradorial bourgeoisies. By its nature, it is
incapable of unleashing the dynamics of development. This understanding must have also informed Claude Ake’s (2001 [1996], p. 1) observation that to assume that there had been a failure of development was misleading, because development was never on the table as the political conditions render it nugatory.

A major and contemporary defining element of the Nigerian state is oil, and the diverse ways in which oil has shaped the political economy of the Nigerian state have been described by Terisa Turner in her 1978 article, ‘Commercial capitalism and the 1975 coup’ as one involving multinationals, compradors and state elites. The Nigerian state by virtue of its sole reliance on oil is a rentier state. According to Hazem Beblawi (1990, p. 86), the latter is characterised by ‘a windfall wealth of unprecedented magnitude’. And as I have observed elsewhere, this is the sole incentive for Nigeria’s continued existence and simultaneously underlies its indefinable nature. The state collect rents from sales of oil and merely distributes these revenues through the bureaucratic system where they are appropriated, misappropriated and stolen outright. It is the struggle to access the oil wealth that has made politics akin to warfare, or, in the words of the former Nigerian president, Olusegun Obasanjo, ‘a do-or-die affair’. This type of state is roguish and is incapable of engendering development. The state acts largely to entrench the two public orders, thereby living up to its character captured by Ralph Miliband (1969, pp. 265–266) as ‘primarily and inevitably the guardian and protector of the economic interests which are dominant in society. Its “real” purpose is to ensure their continued predominance, not to prevent it.’

The global jungle
The global environment, aptly qualified by the former Peruvian diplomat Oswaldo de Rivero (2001) as a ‘global jungle’, is one that cannot be discounted in scholarly endeavours that intend to scrutinise the development problematic. I have always argued that a deep appreciation of our problems in the Third World, especially Africa and Nigeria, will always reveal the overarching nature of the external dimension. Mercantilism, slavery and colonialism created the primary uneven development and the resultant divergence inherent in the unequal relations of production in the global capitalist economy (Weeks 2001). In this context, Africa and other Third World regions play second fiddle. To sustain those unjust relations in post-colonial settings, the forceful removal of unfriendly regimes was undertaken and praetorianism was ideologically justified. The relationship was further sustained through global governance by powerful international institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) whose policies create what I have qualified elsewhere as secondary uneven development – those policies which entrench and reinforce the primary uneven development. To buttress these claims, hear what John Perkins (2004, p. ix) said:

Economic hitmen (EHMs) are highly paid professionals who cheat countries around the global out of trillions of dollars. They funnel money from the World Bank, the US Agency for International Development (USAID), huge corporations and pockets of a few wealthy families who control the planet’s natural resources. Their tools include fraudulent financial reports, rigged elections, payoffs, extortion, sex, and murder. They play a game as old as empire, but one that has taken on new and terrifying dimensions during this time of globalization. I should know; I was an EHM.

The age of globalisation has been one of anarchy of capital on a global scale; this is de Rivero’s (2001, p. 82) global jungle where ‘the undeveloped countries that
failed to modernise technologically are not only unfit species. The individuals and social groups that are less skilled in grasping and using new technologies are too’.

There was however, a paradigm shift in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War, namely the instrumentalisation of democracy to tame recalcitrant countries into the orbit of finance capital underlined by the old Wilsonian idealism that democracies do not make war on each other. And in this era the states have become ‘surrogate powers’ acting only as sentinels for transnational capital. I dare say here that the goals of development cannot be fulfilled by transitional capital, whether through corporate social responsibility or otherwise. The truth is in the nature of capital. Capital has no soul and therefore it cannot be saved. In the global jungle where it operates, ‘it is very jittery. It is apt to flee from a given country in a flash. Besides, it represents an almost virtual value, which no government can control’ (de Rivero 2001, p. 86). Largely, they deconstruct efforts of developing social formations, but the big powers are privileged to infuse a dose of financial socialism into their depressed economies in the form of bailout packages. The question is how can the developing countries achieve the goals of development in such a hostile environment? I will attempt an answer in the concluding section of this paper.

The leadership question

On 25 March 25 2010, reflecting on the new cycle of crisis which the ruling clique in Nigeria has caused the country, Dr Muazu Babangida Adamu, chairman of the Northern Governors’ Forum, said Nigeria was a failed state. In his words:

Outside there, many people see Nigeria as a failed state. The argument that came up was that if in 2010, we are still killing one another, if in 2010, we cannot guarantee electricity, if in 2010, we cannot guarantee water, if our roads are still bad, our economy virtually comatose, many people talk of these variables as the elements of a failed state. We must not allow that to happen. (Daily Sun Online 2010)

Economically, Nigeria has been labelled a fragile state. Fragile states according to the World Bank are characterised by ‘weak policies, institutions and governance’. It is simply indicative of systemic failure which can only be denied by those who profit by the Nigerian chaos.

However, most high-profile analyses of the Nigerian condition see it as a problem of leadership. Chinua Achebe (1984 [1983], p. 1) leads in the pack of analysts in this regard with his seminal pamphlet, The trouble with Nigeria. He argued that the bane of the country was its harvest of bad leaderships.

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which is the hallmarks of true leadership.

Jeff Haynes (2001) in his study of democratisation in the developing world referred to this as structural contingency. The strength of character of a leader could alter the course of a country’s history in the most productive ways. Beyond the sheer force of personal example, I shall address the leadership question under a new category of vanguardism, which allows the appreciation of leadership as a socialised phenomenon rather than as an individualised phenomenon, which is often ephemeral and ceases to exist once the leader is no more. The word vanguard refers to the leading parts of a group. Vanguardism in concrete political terms refers to a core of advanced cadres in a move-
ment, political in this regard, that shapes the philosophical content and form of the movement (Odion-Akhaine 2009, p. 431). The death of one person in the vanguard does not necessary lead to the derailment of the ideological principles that underlie the movement. This is why countries are able to preserve and energise a core of unimpeachable principles that continue to drive them through modernity. Today, rather than a leadership vanguard, Nigeria breeds ‘cliques’ or ‘cabals’ that have held the country hostage to their base and venal instincts fed by oil rents.

Conclusion: beyond the constraints

What are we to do to transform these counterproductive variables which I have talked about in the foregoing sections of this paper? Professor Kelechi Kalu (2005, p. 3) linked the absence of public leadership to the absence of the general will. To move beyond the colonial contraption he recommends a national dialogue which those of us in the pro-democracy movement call Sovereign National Conferences (SNC) and which we have agitated for since the Aka-Bashorun-led National Consultative Forum (NCF) in the late 1980s. At the risk of sounding like a broken record, we cannot move the country forward without a new social contract. The other suggestions that I will add here in the form of solutions are contingent on the social contract.

A historical fact that needs recognition is that most of the ethnic nationalities in Nigeria are geographically contiguous; a fact which reinforces the materiality of the ethnic nationalities and provides a basis for its incessant politicisation in ways that are counterproductive to common citizenship. The absence of common citizenship drives the accumulation of national resources along ethnic lines. Therefore, the construction of a common citizenship as an empirical and juridical reality to deal with the indigene/non-indigene question can be resolved within the framework of a national dialogue. So also is the structural rearrangement of the economy. Once we have a country we can call our own, we can then square up to the task of navigating the international waters or through the global jungle where only the fittest survives. As Samir Amin (2001) has rightly noted, in that global jungle ‘the objectives of dominant capital are still the same – the control of the expansion of markets, the looting of earth’s natural resources, the super-exploitation of the labour reserves in the periphery’. I have no doubt that given the abundant energy of Nigerians and the creative ingenuity of our people we can – as a people – stand tall in that jungle. To begin in earnest with the organisation of a transnational nation-building elite is desirable. The elite can construct a transnational consciousness on the basis of redemptive core values and enduring institutions. After all, the reification of nationalities as the basis for regional and individual relevance in Nigeria was first and foremost a result of the bourgeois elite’s conscious search for legitimation (Ekeh 1975, pp. 103–105), not a natural creation. This is the challenge of our time. Surmounting it is the only vehicle, I believe, that will take us away from the nightmare scenarios that stare at us.

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References

EDITORIAL

Identifying and exploiting cracks in capitalism’s edifice

While acknowledging the existence of diverse pressures which force people to reproduce capitalism daily, John Holloway argues that ‘there is no pre-existing capitalism, there is only the capitalism we make today, or do not make’ (2010, p. 254). He then challenges readers of his book, Crack capitalism, to look for and exploit weaknesses in the edifice, to create or exacerbate cracks ‘that defy the apparently unstoppable advance of capital’, and which may take any suitable and effective form of individual and group protest, opposition or rebellion (ibid., p. 8). The overall aim, he suggests, is to galvanise ordinary people to experiment with pro-active ways to stop ‘making’ or ‘creating’ capitalism instead of merely re-acting to ‘a pre-existing capitalism that dictates that we must act in certain ways’ (ibid., p. 254). Holloway himself is realistic about the limits to this vision (noting that refusing to contribute to the reproduction of capital is inherently contradictory); but is hopeful that people will take responsibility, reappropriate their lives and, in concert with a myriad others, set the agenda to break with the logic of capitalism and start creating a different world.

It is a thesis which deserves a full and fair hearing, one which is probably best reserved for a detailed book review. In the interim, and in the wake of widespread ongoing global anti-capitalist protests, there is little doubt that, in an era in which ‘capital is in its deepest crisis for many years’ (ibid., p. 250), it addresses themes which resonate in varied ways with the preoccupations of this journal, as well as of its contributors and subscribers. Indeed, the papers making up this issue can be considered as serendipitous responses to Holloway’s encouragement to document examples of both pre-emptive and reactive challenges to capitalism. In particular, the papers have the advantage of documenting case studies as a ‘practical–theoretical activity’, an iterative process, which advances an understanding of the workings of capital, on the one hand, and the manifold challenges to capitalism’s worst excesses, on the other.

The opening two papers deal, in very different ways, with the impact of state policy, specifically neoliberalism, on peasant society and livelihood. In their study of staple grain consumption patterns, Ousman Gajigo and Abdoulaye Saine remind us of the unfounded assumptions used to justify agricultural market liberalisation in the Gambia. Given a political economic context in which, as they make clear, the fortunes of rice (the national – but mostly imported – staple) and groundnuts (the main export crop) are closely intertwined, earnings from groundnut exports had historically funded rice imports and its purchase/consumption by farm families. Thus, privatising parastatals catering to the needs of groundnut producers without also addressing the structural impediments which state intervention was partly meant to address in the first place ran a very real risk of disrupting production and trade, and, consequently, reducing farmer earnings and disposable rural household income. And, since ‘any serious disruption to either groundnut production or marketing [was] likely to have an adverse effect on farmer ability to afford imported rice’, this left farmers with little option ‘but to turn to locally grown cereal to ensure food security’.

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Gajigo and Saine thus highlight how, contrary to both prediction and expectation, market liberalisation prompted unintended local production responses which, in the context of the local political economy, were far from being entirely unpredictable. That this was not foreseen is itself a reflection of the blueprint nature of much (early) structural adjustment and its associated conditionalities. More importantly, perhaps, was the complete failure on the part of legislators and policy makers to recognise the significance of this reaction to neoliberalism on the part of peasants for what it actually was – that is, evidence that ‘policy instruments meant to stimulate agricultural production exclusively through market liberalization only exacerbated the hardships faced by farm households, even though the country was often touted as a model of success and vindication of SAP austerity measures’. Farmer response is also a useful reminder of the well-founded nature of Holloway’s concern with the disciplining effects of capital on labour.

The great value of Gajigo and Saine’s narrative lies, therefore, as much in its contextualisation of the region’s incorporation into a global capitalist economy, as in its detailed demonstration of exactly how the contemporary adoption of orthodox neoliberal agrarian policy reform was ill-advised in the first place; and in its suggestion of why the long-term implications of the consumption shift from mostly imported rice to locally produced millet should raise concerns about both food security (increase in millet production not matched by increase in productivity of millet farming) and environmental sustainability (increased output due to expansion in area cultivated rather than intensification of production in area already under cultivation). The lasting impression is of a farce in which increases in productivity were not realised because pre-Adjustment structural bottlenecks had persisted into the era of a liberalised agricultural market. However, this ‘freed’ market had, in turn, failed to attract private sector investment to replace the state subsidy, service provision, etc., which had itself been initially ‘outlawed’ as anti-competitive and/or distortionary. One cannot but recall Cramer’s (2006, p. 245) insightful observation, cited with justifiable approval by Øystein Rolandsen in the context of peace implementation in Sudan in his paper (see below), that the potential of development intervention to be translated into progressive change depends on ‘whether economic policy is a product of ideological fantasy or of a realistic acknowledgement of particular economies and historical experience’.

In the second paper devoted to the impact of neoliberalism on peasant society, Jasper Ayelazuno consciously sets out to use the research process not just to bear witness to the rapacious effects of ‘accumulation by dispossession’, but also to give voice to exploited and marginalised rural Ghanaians by ‘enabling’ the peasants in his study villages to recount their experiences of ‘continuous primitive accumulation’. He also hopes ‘to press a case for ... intellectual activism’. Significantly, while Ayelazuno acknowledges the connivance of predatory political/state elites and corrupt chiefs in the processes under review, he reserves particular contempt for the legislative instruments adopted as part of market-friendly liberalisation and privatisation measures since the 1980s, which both legalise and facilitate the advance of capital. He cites Stephen Gill’s (2002, p. 48) denigration of such ‘new constitutionalism’ approvingly, particularly the latter’s capacity to disenfranchise ordinary citizens through ‘redefin[ing] the terrain of normal politics so as to “lock in” the power gains of capital and to “lock out” or depoliticise forces challenging these gains....’

Clearly, the metaphor of ‘enclosures’ in the mining areas favoured by Ayelazuno seems eminently apposite in highlighting the precariousness of peasant existence in the face of this particular neoliberal onslaught. And, in a political economic context in which individual protest is punished, group resistance subverted, and third-party representations ignored, it
is little wonder that it is an acute sense of injustice, marginalisation and abandonment in
equal measure which pervades the comments of interviewees; or, indeed, that at least
one person is driven to speculate somewhat darkly about the additional possibilities for
individual protest which the possession of a firearm might open up. Are there any realistic
prospects for progressive change, for chipping away at existing cracks in this particular
edifice of mining capital in a meaningful challenge to the status quo? The paper does not
address this directly, but its references to determined continuing local resistance, allied
with NGO advocacy, appear to offer some hope in this direction, as does the wider adoption
of intellectual activism-as-advocacy which Ayelazuno promotes by example and which
ROAPE, among others, has long championed in Ghana and the rest of the continent.

Øystein Rolandsen’s careful, chronological and empirical analysis of the negotiation
and implementation of the Sudan Comprehensive Peace Agreement (‘the cornerstone of
the first mutually agreed secession in Africa’) represents a less activist but no less valuable
kind of intellectualism. The CPA brought the long-running conflict between the government
of Sudan (GoS) and Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) to an end,
paving the way for the eventual emergence of the Republic of South Sudan, Africa’s
newest state. Rolandsen concentrates on the process of peacemaking rather than devoting
inordinate attention to personalities and their (undoubtedly complex) motivations, or,
indeed, the interests which they represented, even if these inevitably feature in the narrative.
There is thus little overt or sustained reference to the workings of capital here, although
there is little doubt that this was (in)directly implicated in the persistent disagreements
over questions of religion, self-determination and asset/wealth-sharing which ‘represented
a constant threat’ to negotiations, making compromise difficult and delaying eventual
agreement. It undoubtedly featured, too, in calculations informing the political engagement
of key external participants, the so-called troika (USA, Britain and Norway) and regional
(neighbouring) countries, in the peace process.

It is, however, in relation to the planning/delivery of post-conflict international aid,
which attracted a ‘considerable amount of attention and money’ and was largely designed
and supervised by the UN, World Bank and troika countries, as Rolandsen observes, that
capital comes to the fore. During the implementation of the CPA, an approach predicated
on the establishment of a bureaucracy for coordinating and supervising aid to Southern
Sudan was thoroughly hampered in its task by an unwieldy structure, inadequate resources
and limited authority, on the one hand, and a lack of adequate supervisory oversight on the
other. Add to this a variety of local and more international political economic factors which
distracted attention from, and/or slowed the momentum of implementation, and very
limited early progress was actually made in delivering social and economic ‘development’
to Southern Sudan via coordinated large-scale aid transfers.

Nonetheless, the conclusion that an underlying motive of the aid strategy was to
promote neoliberal globalisation is inescapable. It is reflected as much in its blueprint
(‘one-size-fits-all’) approach to peacebuilding, as in what Rolandsen describes as its
‘bureaucratic reporting regime combined with a neo-liberal tender system for contracting
non-existent private entrepreneurs’. Indeed, there are clear echoes here of earlier
Gambian experience with market liberalisation reported by Gajigo and Saine, for
example. Similarly, the insistence that there was meaningful Sudanese participation in
the design of the programme of international assistance even though the latter was, accord-
ing to Rolandsen, ‘controlled by foreign and multinational entities’, appears to have been
aimed at establishing Southern Sudanese ‘ownership’ in an approach pioneered by the
now-ubiquitous Poverty Reduction Strategy interventions. In any case, there is little or
no sign in either programme design or implementation of, for instance, the kind of anti-
imperialist development which Ayelazuno advocates; or, indeed, of the value of empirically informed development policy which Franklin Graham calls for in his paper on the impact of securitisation on Saharan and Sahelian livelihoods (see below). Either way, we can do a lot worse than recall Holloway’s lament of the pressures which force people to reproduce capitalism, particularly when, as Rolandsen acknowledges (and as the analysis of humanitarian imperialism in Issue 129 of ROAPE showed), the motivations and goals behind external intervention in peacemaking and peace implementation ought to be probed.

The Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) manifesto, Our struggle and its goals, constitutes the subject of the next paper in this issue. Judging from Simon Weldehaimanot and Emily Taylor’s English translation and contextualisation of the document, it appears to set out to detail the specifics of local contexts as a basis for the elaboration of custom-made development interventions. Here was a manifesto which, while contested from the moment it first appeared at the height of a factional struggle in 1971, had clear revolutionary purpose: liberating Eritrea from Ethiopian occupation, preventing it from being partitioned into ethnic, religious and racial enclaves, and proclaiming the ideological content of the EPLF’s transformative vision. Unfortunately, however, as Weldehaimanot and Taylor’s explanatory note also indicates, there is increasing dissatisfaction with, and open hostility to, the lack of democratic accountability associated with de facto one-party EPLF rule. There is thus a reminder here of the contradiction which Holloway argues is inherent in revolutionary experiments. In this case, and in the hands of the EPLF regime, the seemingly laudable pursuit of national unity which appears to have become somewhat obsessive and indistinguishable from the personalisation of state power, military conscription, intrusive surveillance and brutal suppression of popular discontent. Or, put differently, a regime which owes its existence to the success of a progressive liberation movement appears to systematically deprive its citizenry of basic freedoms, transforming its national territory into one big internment camp or prison in the process (see also Dan Connell in ROAPE Issue 129).

Not surprisingly, but entirely coincidentally, this issue of ROAPE also contains a separate statement, issued in solidarity with the oppressed in/of Eritrea, protesting at precisely this widespread abuse of basic rights. Such a call for the restoration of civil liberties and political freedoms is itself a challenge to the status quo, albeit of a different order to the various, often selfless, acts of direct rebellion of opponents of the regime at home and in the diaspora. It is, however, the cumulative effect of all such challenges, what Holloway refers to as their shared resonance, which should eventually initiate the transition to a different world.

If Rolandsen’s paper concentrates on the details of making and maintaining peace in a context of war, Franklin Graham focuses squarely on the wider livelihood and political economic implications of a recourse to war – the Global War on Terror (GWOT) – in the Sahel and Sahara as response to a perceived threat to Western interests from al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and other extremists. And while Rolandsen mentions the prospects for post-conflict social and economic development, Graham details the implications for regional livelihoods of ongoing securitisation of vast expanses of drylands by regional ruling classes and their Western backers, ostensibly to counter Islamist terror. He argues, very convincingly, that a political economic context dominated by a focus on fighting terrorism and protecting investments in mineral extraction disrupts traditional pastoralist, tourism-based and (clandestine or illicit) trading livelihoods, while distracting attention from underlying questions of widespread poverty, significant disparities in wealth and political marginalisation of Saharan and remote desert fringe populations. And yet, given their influence on the structural context within which livelihoods are pursued, on
the one hand, and capacity to regulate access to livelihood capitals, on the other, patterns of poverty, inequality, wealth and (in)security can and do constrain the scope for livelihood diversification and sustainability. Ultimately, too, they also influence the relative de/merits and attractiveness of the abduction and kidnapping of mostly European and North American nationals for ransom as a livelihood (or income-earning) strategy.

Graham’s contribution demonstrates above all else, perhaps, the value of a political economy approach allied with a livelihood perspective of the kind advocated in ROAPE Issue 109 in unravelling the complex and dynamic strands of long-term regional socio-environmental change. ‘Criminals, ideologues and other people pushed by poverty or political motivation are the culprits abducting foreigners and attacking Western targets in the Sahara and Sahel’, he argues, while contradicting the assumption, widely held in policy and press circles, that these are (all) anti-Western Islamist terrorists rather than diverse individuals and groups who collaborate uneasily, frequently opportunistically, with AQIM, among other insurgents. There is, in other words, and to use Holloway’s terms, a shared resonance here in challenging actual existing capitalism and, in the case of jihadis at least, offering a different anti-capitalist world. Significantly, Franklin concludes that as the main preoccupation of the vast majority of marginalised desert and desert-edge inhabitants is a desire for greater political representation and improved socio-economic conditions rather than a war against Westerners (there is minimal overlap between insurgent interests and the aim of terrorists), GWOT policies for ending violence are more likely to succeed if they address the goals of regional inhabitants for development.

To close by returning to Holloway, these papers document, to varying degrees, both contexts and processes of ‘capitalism-making’ and/or ‘capitalism breaking’, while focusing on the livelihood struggles of ordinary (and, more rarely, not-so-ordinary) people, mostly in the interstices of capitalism. And, published as part of ROAPE’s mission to encourage research on, and an understanding of African political economy, the papers resonate, too, with another of his preoccupations:

If revolution is the revolt of doing against labour, then the issue is not to bring revolutionary consciousness to the masses, but to develop the sensitivity to recognise the revolts that exist everywhere, and to find ways of touching them, resonating with them, drawing them out, ways of participating in the thawing and confluence of that which is frozen. (Holloway 2010, p. 258)

But how exactly is such sensitivity to be developed, and by whom? Arguably more importantly, how can such sensitivity be extended to recognise the inevitable attempts to co-opt and/or subvert revolts against capitalism, particularly when these are not as transparent as the reported comment, attributed to Gerald Howarth, UK Minister for International Security Strategy (presumably in the wake of the capture and killing of Libya’s Muammar Al-Gaddafi) – ‘We liberated the Iraqis from a tyrant, we liberated Libya from a tyrant, frankly I want to see UK business benefit from the liberation we’ve given to their people’ (Self 2011)? And, finally, once identified, how best can/should these be countered to maximise their potential to identify and expand cracks in capitalism’s edifice?

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References
STATEMENT

Stop the abuse in Eritrea! Respect basic rights!

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A global plea for action

Twenty years ago Eritrea became independent from Ethiopia after a 30-year struggle. At that time, Africa’s newest nation inspired great hope. Today, it arouses only fear. The enthusiasm of most Eritreans in 1991 was enormous. In a short time the country made great progress towards democratic development, ratifying a new constitution in 1997 after a three-year popular consultation process. No longer isolated, it enjoyed a high international reputation as a largely crime- and corruption-free state determined to avoid international dependency. But renewed war with Ethiopia over border issues in 1998–2000 wiped out this success.

In May 2001, leading members of the ruling party, the parliament and the army – the so-called G15 – published an ‘open letter’ to President Isaias Afwerki asking him to implement the constitution, permit other political parties, and conduct democratic elections. They also criticised his failure to resolve the conflict with Ethiopia.

The president’s response on 18–19 September was to jail those identified with the G15 for ‘crimes against the sovereignty, security and peace of the nation’ and to shut down all independent newspapers. In the days that followed, numerous senior civil servants and government employees were also arrested.

For the past 10 years these political prisoners have been locked away in unknown places without legal process or contact with the outside world. Unconfirmed reports in 2006 indicated that four members of the G15, three journalists and several highly placed functionaries had died.

Meanwhile, thousands more Eritreans have been arrested without charges or legal proceedings. According to leading human rights agencies, many have perished as a result of inadequate medical treatment and torture, without their families having been informed.

Throughout the past decade, the political, economic and human rights situation in Eritrea has steadily worsened, scarcely noticed by the world at large. The constitution has not been put into force, and there are no democratic parties or civil society organisations, as President Isaias Afwerki has ruled through the only legal party (derived from
the liberation movement he led, the secret service and the army. All Eritreans between 18 and 54 years of age are required to undertake ‘national service’, without any time restrictions, leaving tens of thousands in conditions of indefinite indentured servitude. Today, the final year of secondary school is conducted on military bases to make certain none avoid conscription.

As a consequence, more than 250,000 people (from a total population of 5 million) have fled Eritrea, according to United Nations figures. Hundreds have drowned while crossing the Mediterranean by boat in the attempt to reach Europe. Here the inhuman domestic policy of Eritrea and the anti-immigration policy of the European Union play into each other’s hands.

We are calling on the holders of power in Eritrea to respect human rights, to free political prisoners and to put the democratic constitution into force, in particular to legalise political parties, civil society organisations and independent media and to hold free and fair elections.

We call on the international community, governments, the United Nations, the African Union, the EU and other multilateral institutions, as well as on the world’s civil society organisations, to support all Eritrean institutions that speak out for these demands. We also request governments to grant asylum to Eritrean refugees and to forbid the compulsory contributions that the Eritrean government raises from migrants to other countries.

Should Eritrea allow for a democratic opening, we will do everything in our power so that the country again finds its way out of international isolation and receives all necessary political and material support.

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This ‘global plea for action’ was published in the Germany newspaper Taz.die Tageszeitung on 17/18 September 2011, with 123 signatures including those of many scholars in African studies.

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