BRIEFING

An exposition of development failures in Mozambique

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Introduction

It should not be a surprise that poverty reduction is the main development goal in Mozambique. For almost three decades (and counting), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank have consistently ranked Mozambique as one of the poorest countries in the world. A sharp decline in the official poverty incidence statistics, from 69% in 1996–97 to 54%, is indicative of significant development strides. Indeed, many donor agencies take Mozambique as an example to follow in sub-Saharan Africa. Mozambique is a ‘donor darling’, writes Hanlon (2009), and international aid has been on the rise. However, the food riots that erupted in 2008 and 2010, and the official poverty statistics showing an increase in the incidence, depth, and severity of poverty between 2002–03 and 2008–09 serve as a sombre reminder that many challenges remain.

The national strategy to reduce poverty, locally known as PARPA¹, governs the efforts to address development challenges such as poverty and food insecurity. PARPA hinges on the neoliberal theory, which posits that the benefits of economic growth would trickle down to the poor (Romer 1990). However, a wide range of empirical evidence suggests that this is not happening. About 55% of the population lived below the national poverty line in 2008–9 (Ministry of Planning and Development [MPD] 2010), well above the target of 45% established in PARPA II (Government of Mozambique 2006). Additionally, there has been ‘little substantive progress’ with regard to chronic child malnutrition in recent years (UNICEF 2006, p. 12). Yet, between 2002 and 2008 Mozambique had an annual economic growth rate of about 8%.

The apparent paradox of rising poverty, food insecurity, and chronic child malnutrition despite economic growth is because growth is concentrated in few industries, mainly in ‘mega projects’ in the energy and mineral sector (such as natural gas, aluminium, heavy sands, and charcoal). For example, the Mozambican Aluminium Smelter (Mozal) alone accounts for 60% of the country’s total exports. These mega projects create few local jobs, have few local linkages, benefit from huge tax exemptions and rely heavily on imported goods, and only a small fraction of their production is consumed locally. Meanwhile, both the local government and the international community have so far chosen a non-interventionist policy for the agricultural sector. Nevertheless the importance of agriculture both as a source of employment and government revenue is considerable. The underperformance of the agricultural sector is among the main reasons for persistent poverty and food

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insecurity (Ministry of Planning and Development 2010). This calls for a change in development policies, and therefore a search for an alternative development model that might be more effective in reducing poverty and food insecurity.

In medical sciences, the search for an effective antidote requires a profound knowledge of the poison. Similarly, a search for effective development policies must begin with an understanding of what successful policies require: avoiding failures. Therefore, this paper analyses some of the failures in development policies in Mozambique. The purpose of this paper is both to identify development failures and to discuss alternatives to overcome them.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. The next section discusses the failures that resulted in a decline in agricultural productivity between 1996 and 2008. This is followed by a discussion on disproportional aid for the agricultural sector, as well as the importance of ensuring timely availability of funds. Then the paper discusses the need for the use of accurate data in estimating the gross domestic profit (GDP). Next, the paper elaborates on the effect of inadequate support to farmers’ participation in the output market, and how it can foster the adoption of improved technologies. The impact of distrust between government officials is also covered. Finally, the paper concludes with some policy remarks.

**Decline in agricultural productivity**

In Africa, agriculture contributes a large percentage of total revenues. In Mozambique, about 80% of the population is employed in agriculture (including a segment of the urban population), which contributes a quarter of the GDP (Instituto Nacional de Estatı´stica 2004). Agriculture is therefore an important engine of poverty reduction. Indeed, massive poverty reduction between 1996 and 2002 was possible mainly due to growth in agricultural production (Simler et al. 2004, Fox, Bardasi and van den Broeck 2005, Arndt, James and Simler 2006). Data from the national agricultural survey (locally known as TIA²) show an increase in the use of modern technologies (Figure 1), which might have created the illusion of growth in agricultural productivity. Empirical evidence, however, points to a decline in production of many crops per hectare and per adult household.

![Figure 1. Percentage use of selected technologies by year. Source: Trabalho de Inquérito Agricola 2008.](image-url)
member during that period (Boughton et al. 2006).

The already low level of provision of extension services show a downward trend since 2005 because extension workers did not have either vehicles or fuel to reach farmers. The supply of price information to farmers also declined, despite evidence indicating its positive and significant impact on farmers’ incomes (Mather 2009). The already low use of chemical fertilisers, animal traction, and access to credit also show a decline in recent years. It is also revealing that animal traction is not even mentioned in PARPA II, and little is being done to overcome the occurrence of tsetse flies on cattle, causing endemic disease in regions of high agricultural potential in central and northern provinces. The central provinces show a dramatic increase in poverty levels, from 46% in 2002–03 to 60% in 2008–09 (Ministry of Planning and Development 2010).

Within the Ministry of Agriculture, budget cuts may have negatively affected some employees. Recently, there were cuts in fuel and telephone allowances and other subsidies. Many employees of the Ministry of Agriculture became discontented and unmotivated. In the headquarters in Maputo, the Ministry of Agriculture lost critical human resources. For instance, within the Directorate of Economics, several heads of department resigned. Furthermore, the Department of Policy Analysis, once a functional and active unit in terms of producing policy briefs and research outreach, was reduced at one point to only two employees from its previous team of more than 11 policy analysts, a decline of more than 80%.

The increase in poverty levels was caused in part by a decline in agricultural productivity. In 2008, production of food per capita and per hectare were lower than that in 2002 (Ministry of Agriculture [MINAG] 2010), suggesting that agricultural productivity shows a negative trend since 1996. Therefore, the increase in agricultural production observed between 1996 and 2002 was caused by an expansion of cropped area (Figure 2) and not by growth in agricultural productivity.

Meanwhile, poverty levels increased between 2002–03 and 2008–09 mainly due to a decline in both landholding size and agricultural productivity. Expansion of cropped area might have been possible in

![Figure 2. Poverty reduction versus total landholding size. Source: Trabalho de Inquérito Agrícola 2008. See also Inquérito aos Orçamentos Familiares, the consumption expenditure survey conducted in 2008–9 from which the official poverty estimates are derived.](image-url)
the 1990s because farmers had been cultivating significantly smaller fields (due to war), land was relatively more abundant, and it was still possible to expand land using a hand-hoe. However, at present many smallholders might have reached the threshold where further expansion of cropped area would require other tilling methods (such as animal traction) or the use of hired labour, but the poor cannot afford either.

It is hard to sufficiently emphasise the importance of growth in agricultural production to reduce poverty, whether through expansion of cropped area or growth in agricultural productivity. The third poverty assessment report on Mozambique concurs with other studies in arguing that additional success in reducing poverty depends on growth in agricultural productivity (MPD 2010). Yet the government chooses not to reward and retain qualified employees that would provide great latitude for policy change. Furthermore, the local government has not given a high priority to agriculture, and employees in the agricultural sector are apparently unable to lobby the state and donors for resources. This has resulted in a decline of resources allocated to agriculture, which in turn has resulted in lower agricultural productivity levels.

**Disproportional aid for the agricultural sector**

Mozambique has experienced one of fastest growth rates worldwide over the two decades up to 2010 (World Bank 2006). Growth in absolute terms, however, might not be as large because of the incredibly low base from which progress began. According to the World Bank, in 1992 Mozambique was ranked the poorest country in the world (Plank 2003); 17 years later Mozambique had a GDP rank of 169 out of 177 countries (UNDP 2009). In addition, about 51% of the government budget is allocated to salaries and subsidies, which represents nearly 10% of its low GDP (MediaFax 2010). It is indisputable that Mozambique needs international aid at the current stage of the development process. Indeed, foreign aid to Mozambique corresponds to 15% of GDP, compared to the African average of 4% of GDP, making it one of the top receivers of aid in the world (World Bank 2006).

Meanwhile, there is also agreement on the role of agriculture as one of the main engines of poverty reduction in Mozambique (MPD 2010). Yet, and unfortunately for the poor whose livelihoods depend markedly on crop and livestock production, only a small proportion of foreign aid is allocated to the agricultural sector (Figure 3). The neoliberal policies imposed by the international community, and pursued by Mozambique, imply less intervention in the agricultural sector. Hence, PARPA stresses Millennium Development Goal (MDG) numbers two through eight, while systematically ignoring agricultural production which arguably would halve hunger and poverty by the year 2015.

![Figure 3. Percentage of total foreign aid allocated to agriculture by year. Source: OECD Statistics Database.](image)
This is not to say that other sectors are not as important as agriculture. As a matter of fact, Mozambicans would not be able to discuss poverty reduction issues had it not been for international aid allocated to education and other social areas. However, solving the problem of hunger and poverty first might help to solve other problems more rapidly. How can children in rural areas go to school and excel if their stomachs are growling with hunger? How can gender equality be ensured when hunger threatens the whole family’s survival and relatives decide to anticipate the dowry of their 14-year-old girl?

Due to the importance of agriculture to the economy, especially in rural areas, the proportion of aid to agriculture should be increased dramatically. But most importantly, funds should be made available in accordance with the agricultural season. For instance, between mid December 2009 (the period of first weeding in agriculture) and the second quarter of 2010 (main harvests), donors were on strike over electoral reform, corruption, and the growing role of the Frelimo party inside the state apparatus (Mozambique Political Process Bulletin 2010). As much as donors’ demands were legitimate, the strike coincided with a critical period in the agricultural season. When funds are made available this late, they can only help a few poor employees through per diem payments when they visit farmers, but not help the poor farmers themselves.

**Conflicting statistics**

It has happened before. A senior government official once decided to visit a research station and assess how the Mozambican ‘green revolution’ was unfolding. But the demonstration plots had no crops standing due to lack of funds to purchase the inputs and irrigate the plots so research station employees purchased lettuce, kale, and other leafy vegetables in a fresh market and these ready-to-eat crops were ‘planted’ in the demonstration plot the day of the visit, and plots were irrigated. The senior government official was impressed by what he saw, without knowing that those vegetables were actually grown in neighbouring South Africa. Perhaps the employees were inspired by a similar episode that took place in Maputo during the African summit in 2003. Mature palm trees, about seven metres or taller, were ‘planted’ in Julius Nyerere Avenue and other places in order to create an illusion of a green city. As with the demonstration plot, this illusion makes senior government officials ‘believe’ that the ‘green revolution’ plan is bearing fruit. However, such fruits understandably never reach maturity. But what is the relation with contradicting GDP figures?

The ‘impressive’ economic growth figures might be marred by problems with the national accounts, the timing and availability of solid information, and the use of preliminary and unreliable data provided by district authorities such as the research station mentioned earlier and other secondary sources. For instance, due to a widespread drought that occurred in 2005, it is reasonable to expect a decline in crop production. Indeed, TIA data indicate that total maize production declined by 17%, relative to 2003. However, the official figure used in the computation of GDP shows an increase of 7% in the volume of the agricultural sector in 2005, relative to the previous year. Although maize production represents a small share of the total volume of the agricultural sector, it is fair to expect comparable trends.

This is critical since agriculture represents a quarter of the GDP, and therefore an overestimation of growth in agriculture has a far-reaching effect on GDP figures. The Ministry of Planning and Development attributes failure to reduce poverty in the period 2002–03 to 2008–09 in part to the underperformance of the agricultural sector. This is corroborated by data from TIA and several other studies. Yet, GDP
figures from this very ministry show growth in agricultural production. Consistent? No!

Systems for the national accounts need to be reviewed, with the possibility of *ex-post* reviews when data from the agricultural surveys and other solid non-agricultural sources become available. Otherwise, GDP figures should be used with moderation and caution. Negative results in the realm of development may be unexpected and even controversial. In fact, a negative result is undesirable in general, with few exceptions such as the HIV test where it is fair to say nobody wants to be positive. However, negative results are equally or sometimes more important than the positive outcomes. They help avoiding similar mistakes in the future, while at the same time helping the planning process. Decision makers will otherwise think that development policies in place are bearing positive results if negative results are concealed and not reported. After all, why change a winning formula?

**Inadequate support to agricultural marketing**

Only a small proportion of smallholders are able to participate in the output market, and profitable participation has been linked to participation in input markets and to the ability to store the produce. For instance, Howard *et al.* (2003) show that, in Mozambique, farmers using improved maize seeds earn 24% more than non-users if they are able to delay their maize sales until November, about five months after harvest.

Recently, the focus of the local government in boosting the agricultural sector has been the search for alternatives to increase participation in the input markets, such as the promotion of input fairs and by reducing the size of fertiliser bags so that they are more accessible to the poor. However, participation in the input market remains extremely low and shows a negative trend in the period 2005–08. Less than 3% of smallholders use fertilisers, mainly for cash crops, and about 5% use improved seeds on maize, the most important staple crop.

Low use of improved inputs is associated with the lack of output markets. Perhaps an analogy with the hypothetical fishermen paradox might be helpful in stressing the importance of output market participation. For one week, a labour economist observed a group of fishermen return home every day at 9 a.m., each carrying 0.5 kg of fish to feed their household members. The fishermen allocated the remaining time till dusk to leisure and other social activities. The economist started to wonder how much more fish could have been caught had the fishermen been persuaded to cut leisure and allocate more time for fishing. In the following week, the fishermen increased their catch by a factor of 10, but most of the fish rotted because they had no cooling system and no buyers either. Although it is risky to catch only half a kilogram each time as the weather may be hostile the next time or the fishermen may fall ill to malaria, and therefore their family members would face hunger, they decided to resume their previous practice and allocate more time to leisure.

Similarly, in 2009-10 the government provided 610 tonnes of improved wheat seed in Tsangano, Tete Province. It was sown on 7550 hectares, and 10,600 tonnes of wheat were produced. But there was no market: the Beira milling company, Mobeira, went to Tsangano and bought only 30 tonnes of wheat, but never returned. So the crop was sold over the border in Malawi, for prices regarded as derisory. Ironically, in 2010 violent riots broke out in part over the rise in the price of bread, due to the increase in the import price of wheat. Will these farmers decide to produce more wheat in the following season, or maintain their status quo of staple food production using traditional
seed varieties? Would rational farmers decide to buy chemical fertilisers using a significant share of their incomes while uncertain of the weather and without any output marketing prospect?

A recent study on the economic impact of the use of improved technologies in Mozambique shows no statistical significance on farmers’ incomes, unless farmers have access to the output market. Low use of improved technologies is a result of lack of output markets. Viewed alternatively, in order to tackle the low use of improved inputs, the local government should tackle the problem of agricultural marketing first. A guaranteed output market would induce the demand for improved inputs. In 2008–09, the state provided improved seeds of various crops on credit (including wheat) to farmers, but less than 1% of the total amount of credit was recovered because farmers were unable to sell. In the meantime, tobacco farmers who also receive inputs on credit have higher rates of return than those who received improved seeds of staple crops, also on credit. Why?

Although the state decided to close the marketing boards in the 1980s, tobacco and sugar-cane companies, which are owned by transnational firms, are allowed to have marketing boards. This ensures the access to both input and output markets, and hence smallholders are able to pay the inputs back. In contrast, marketing boards are not allowed for maize and other staples, which are crops grown by an overwhelming majority of smallholders, and therefore many farmers are unable to return the inputs received on credit. Nevertheless, only a small fraction of smallholders have such access to inputs on credit.

Rural development programmes should also include investments in road infrastructure and missing markets (output, input and financial markets). However, the relationship between market infrastructure and the use of improved technologies is barely explored in PARPA. Instead, the government expects the private sector to co-participate in the investment of market infrastructure through the development of ‘public–private partnerships’ (Government of Mozambique 2006, p. 126). But this is not happening.

As mentioned earlier in the introductory section, there have been significant improvements in road infrastructure. However, most of the improvement is concentrated in southern provinces, with the exception of a landmark bridge connecting central and northern provinces and few other roads. The decision on the location of infrastructure investments apparently does not take into account regional differences in terms of agricultural potential in Mozambique. More than half of all tractors, used by less than 3% of farmers in Mozambique, are located in the southern provinces, because road infrastructure is better. But central and northern provinces are the regions of higher crop potential. As a result, high transaction costs create an insurmountable hurdle for farmers in central and northern provinces to sell their surplus in the deficit areas in the south. Instead, the southern provinces usually import food, mainly from South Africa, while the central and northern provinces export food to neighbouring countries. This is also a result of the lack of dynamic agroprocessing and value-added industries, which, in addition to improved road infrastructure, would make it more cost-effective for the southern provinces to purchase maize and other agricultural products from the central and northern provinces.

Distrust between the government and the ordinary people

Mozambique has experienced a series of violent protests in recent years. In February 2008 violent riots broke out in several urban areas over the rise in prices of food and fuel. At least five people died, hundreds
were injured, several stores were looted, tyres were burnt in the streets, and physical infrastructure was attacked, including a secondary school in Maputo. Moreover, several businesses were paralysed for a couple of days.

A senior government official, who was later convicted in one of the country’s biggest corruption cases, had previously announced that changes in prices were irreversible. Following the riots, however, the government introduced fuel and food subsidies which potentially benefited some urban citizens. These subsidies were supposed to alleviate poverty. However, they did not prevent a repetition of the tragedy seen in 2008. In September 2010 a series of violent protests erupted in some urban centres. Again, the government spokesperson announced that changes in price were irreversible.

Protesters were obviously hopeful that the local government would find silver bullets to address food insecurity, hunger, and poverty. Yet to their surprise, live bullets were fired instead. Hélio Muianga, an 11-year-old boy, was returning from school when a bullet took his life accidentally. Another 12 people also lost their lives, and hundreds were injured. The violent reaction from the government, however, was sadly predictable since this time the protesters were labelled ‘outlaws and bandits’. Once again, the government reintroduced food and fuel subsidies in order to quell the violence. Some austerity measures were also announced.

Food riots have had severe social and economic consequences. There have been other, apparently non-food related, riots too. In the northern provinces some people believe that health workers are responsible for the spread of cholera. In 2009, health workers were treating water with bleach (chlorine) when locals attacked them. A health centre that served about 24,000 people was destroyed and dozens of people died, including 12 arrested protesters who died of suffocation in a crowded cell in the police station and at least two Red Cross volunteers. Protesters also destroyed at least 13 houses of Red Cross volunteers.

But why would ‘bums and vandals’, as they were labelled, attack a school? And why would protesters destroy a health centre? Arguably, it is related to the atmosphere of distrust among the poor in Mozambique. The school that was attacked bore the name of the current President Armando Guebuza, suggesting that the protesters did not believe in the economic policies in place because of the soaring cost of living. In addition, it might be hard for the poor to trust the government since its senior officials call them ‘bandits and outlaws’, or ‘bums and vandals’. Moreover, as Hanlon (2009, p. 129) notes:

If a nurse or health worker normally demands a bribe to provide proper treatment, why should they be trusted when they say they are treating the water for free? If government actions have only led to increasing poverty and loss of jobs, why trust the government? The poor have every reason to ask if the sincere health workers sent into rural areas are not just an attempt to build up trust so that the poor can be better exploited. And they have every reason to distrust the local leaders who ally themselves with the new outside exploiters.

The Mozambican government needs to crack down on corruption so that trust can be rebuilt again. Government officials should also be more responsible when referring to the poor, no matter how stressed they might be. Apparently small things can in fact reduce poverty, or at least help by not increasing it. The school would have been spared by protesters had they trusted the name behind it. The health centre would also have been spared if the government first provided subsidies that would allow them to increase their incomes (such as fertiliser subsidies) and treat their water themselves rather than providing free chlorine. Distrust impairs development.
Concluding remarks

Mozambique is not on track to halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty and/or suffering from hunger. Several factors have a bearing on the current poverty levels. This paper has discussed some of these factors with the purpose of identifying a few of the ingredients for a more effective poverty antidote.

First, the local government should reward and retain qualified employees that can provide timely policy briefs. In addition, there is a need for a change in agricultural policy, demanding a rather interventionist government strategy in the agricultural sector. Second, donors should increase the share of agricultural aid, as well as ensure that availability of such funds is synchronised with the agricultural seasons. Third, some caution is needed when using the ‘impressive’ GDP figures, while at the same time there is a need to review the national accounts with the possibility of ex-post reviews when data from the agricultural surveys and other solid non-agricultural sources become available.

Fourth, marketing boards should be created for staple crops, as already exist for cash crops such as sugar cane and tobacco. This would in turn foster the demand for improved inputs. Finally, the government needs to rebuild the trust of the poor. This would involve, for instance, cracking down on corruption and an increased commitment to enhancing household incomes.

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Notes

1. PARPA is the Portuguese acronym for Plano de Acção para a Redução da Pobreza Absoluta, which is the poverty reduction strategy paper.

2. TIA is the Portuguese acronym for Trabalho de Inquérito Agrícola, which is the national agricultural survey.

References


DEBATE/ROAPE FORUM

Brand Africa: multiple transitions in global capitalism – a preface

Gary Littlejohn*

Briefings and Debates Editor, Review of African Political Economy

The following set of papers on an emerging discursive trend on linking commerce with do-gooding for ‘Africa’ seems to me to be of striking originality. The commerce/aid discourse involves a new take on ‘corporate social responsibility’ among other aspects of corporate self-presentation. The authors discuss different features and implications of this trend and so overall they establish a new area of debate for African scholars.

To mention just some of the implications, Fantu Cheru’s piece argues inter alia that development aid funded by taxpayers may soon become a thing of the past. Readers may wish to engage with such lines of reasoning by, for example, claiming that the well-known ‘securitisation of development’ funded by governments is still alive and well in places like Afghanistan and Libya. It could be argued that such militarisation of Africa is a response by Europe and the USA to a declining relative importance in their economic power. Alternatively, the emphasis in various papers on consumerism may be seen by some as being under possible threat as aggregate demand in developed countries declines sharply in the face of austerity measures imposed under the hegemony of neoliberal policies. Yet I am not trying to pick holes in the arguments presented: quite the contrary. I am merely attempting to indicate that new types of analyses, with a new research agenda suggested at the end, could easily provoke a response that simply reasserts existing ways of thinking.

Rather than that, I would hope that this Debate stimulates further contributions, although of course criticism is never ruled out as one form of improving the quality of analysis. Consequently, this preface is an invitation to make further contributions on the same broad topic. New horizons are opening as Africa and the global economy continue to change rapidly.

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DEBATE/ROAPE FORUM

Brand Africa: multiple transitions in global capitalism

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Introduction

Lisa Ann Richey and Stefano Ponte (Forum Guest Editors)

Africa is often left out of mainstream discussions of emerging trends in the global economy and the business of ‘development’. Whether on the basis of misplaced romanticism, stale Afro-scepticism, or a presumed ‘lack of data’, disengagement with Africa has significantly limited the debates on political economy in a global context. Yet, scholarly interaction on how Africa is understood within the constellation of new forms of engagement, termed ‘brand aid’, suggests that Africa is central to understanding the multiple transitions that are taking place within global capitalism. Helping distant others, typically Africans, has become a way of constructing a postcolonial Western identity, producing a responsible form of corporate engagement in the market, and selling products at the same time. The proposed interventions by Africanist scholars promise to spark a lively debate that crosses ideological boundaries about how we can raise questions that effectively critique the manufacture of Africa that is both material and symbolic as a way of selling the inequalities of global capitalism. This debate/forum arises from selections from panel discussions at the European Centres for African Studies (ECAS 4) Conference in June 2011 and the Association of American Geographers’ Annual Meeting in April 2011.

The first intervention by Richey and Ponte outlines the concept of ‘Brand Aid’ as a new way of linking commerce with global do-gooding that has Africa at its centre. What such shifting notions of aid and globalisation can mean for understanding Africa in the changing landscape of global capitalism is taken on in Cheru’s intervention. The next piece, by Abrahamson, analyses the symbolic meanings of what ‘Brand Africa’ might actually mean for Africans and for scholars. Harrison’s intervention grounds the current trend of ‘what can Africa do for you’ in its symbolic history of interconnected images. Then, Mercer points the critique toward experts themselves: how the performance of public and private aid rests on particular and new forms of expertise. Among the most attention-grabbing and surprising of the new Africa ‘experts’ and brand managers, the phenomenon of celebrities and their do-gooding is analysed in the next intervention by Brockington. Finally, the forum editors conclude with some reflections on the contemporary traders in the buying and selling of Africa as a commodity.

(1) Lisa Ann Richey, Roskilde University and Stefano Ponte, Danish Institute for International Studies – Brand Aid and Africa
Brand Aid and Africa
Lisa Ann Richey and Stefano Ponte

Brand Aid is a new modality of ‘helping Africa’ that has emerged in the past five years. We have examined the experience of Bono’s Product RED as the quintessential example of what Brand Aid is and what it does to representations of Africa (Richey and Ponte 2011). Launched at Davos in 2006, Product RED is an umbrella brand under which iconic brands such as Apple, Armani, Hallmark, Nike, Starbucks and others sell special product lines. A percentage of profits from Product RED sales goes directly to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. These funds are then used to provide AIDS treatment for Africans living in Ghana, Lesotho, Rwanda, South Africa, Swaziland and Zambia. While in ethical consumption of fair trade or ‘sustainable’ products the consumer aims at (re)shaping production and exchange systems related to the product itself, in RED there is a disconnect between the products on sale and the cause (saving AIDS victims in Africa). With Bono at the helm mediating between helpers (corporations and consumers) and the helped (distant Africans), consumers can save HIV/AIDS patients in Africa ‘simply’ by shopping. Other Brand Aid initiatives have also surfaced over the past few years: from Benetton’s ‘Africa works’ campaign, involving Youssou N’Dour1 to the SEIMEI drinks line promoted by former supermodel Helena Christensen2, and to Vivienne Westwood’s ‘Africa shoppers’ handbags that embody luxury fashion’s engagement with the continent.3

Brand Aid reflects the combined meaning of ‘aid to brands’ and ‘brands that provide aid’. It is ‘aid to brands’ because it helps sell branded products and improve a brand’s ethical profile and value. It is ‘brands that provide aid’ because, like other cause-related marketing initiatives, a proportion of the profit or sales is devoted to helping others. As a response to the crisis of legitimacy in international aid to Africa, Brand Aid also helps to rebrand aid itself and aid to Africa in particular.

Brand Aid is based on three pillars: a brand, a cause, and one or more celebrities. As brands become very valuable assets for corporations, they can also turn into liabilities. They are vulnerable to negative media exposure, which in turn can affect consumers’ brand perception and shopping choices. Managing the ethical profile of a brand is therefore a key issue for corporations. Brand Aid can be an attractive vector for building the ethical component of brand reputation because it does not question the fundamentals of ‘hard commerce’ and at the same time can help increase sales, visibility and brand equity. Brand Aid is also based on the existence

Acknowledgements
We thank all of the presenters and participants in the panels at these two conferences for helping this debate to take shape through their engagement.
of a ‘cause’, on how ‘we’ (in the West) mobilise resources to solve the manifestation of a problem instead of asking questions about how the problem came to exist in the first place.

By dedicating Brand Aid funds to causes that are removed from the everyday workings of branded corporations and their consumers, Brand Aid can capitalise on mediatised images of highly normative ideas of ‘helping’ Africa. The daily complexity of how development aid works or the lived experiences of its various proponents and recipients are far too complex for the communication strategy necessary to sell products on the basis of good feelings. The management of this affective need to ‘help’ others relies on the intervention of celebrities. Famous people – whether they are economists, rock stars or billionaires – connect products and Africans. These are not Africans who make the products, or grow the commodities, but are those who are ‘helped’ by every purchase made by a Western consumer. The consumer can identify with the celebrity subject whose ability and commitment to help Africa is both selfless, and perhaps self-serving. Brand Aid makes it possible to be, in the words of Bono, ‘a good-looking Samaritan’: nothing must be sacrificed to achieve a good conscience by extending the hand of global help to others. Thus, Brand Aid enacts the myth of ‘just capitalism’ to reconcile the contradictions of global wealth and poverty. It does so by portraying the idea that capitalism can be fixed to rein in its excesses and target its creativity and resources to help groups of ‘deserving others’ (in the case of Product RED, Africans suffering from AIDS). Africans themselves are marketed as effectively as the luxurious commodities they help to sell.

Notes

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Stefano Ponte is Senior Researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) and Professor of International Political Economy at the Copenhagen Business School. His areas of interest and publication include the changing role of Africa in the global economy and the role of celebrities, brands and consumption in development finance and intervention. His recent books include Brand Aid: shopping well to save the world (Minnesota University Press, 2011, with Lisa Ann Richey), and Governing through standards: origins, drivers and limitations (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, co-editor with Peter Gibbon and Jakob Vestergaard).

References

The right to consume: compassion and the intricate new phase of capitalism and Africa
Fantu Cheru

Our debate could not come at a better time since a particular kind of wind has been blowing across the development community in recent years that celebrates public–private partnership as the best way to deliver aid to needy countries. The Global Alliance for Vaccines Initiative (GAVI) and the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) are two recent
innovations that have opened the door for greater corporate involvement in global problem solving. In so doing, corporations have been able to use their ‘corporate social responsibility’ credentials to further promote their business interests. This new financing modality, part and parcel of the grand neoliberal project, has been in practice for more than a decade now. It does not question power imbalances, nor does it question the theology of neoliberal market fundamentalism. At the same time, it preaches the responsibility of the rich towards their less fortunate cousins in distant lands, what George W. Bush called ‘compassionate conservatism’.

I do not believe that we should be opposed to the idea of harnessing the resources and knowledge of the private sector altogether. However, we should never forget the structural power of capital, how it shapes our world view, and how we go about solving critical global issues. As Barnet and Cavanaugh’s work has argued persuasively, the new global order is spearheaded by a few hundred industrial and financial corporations with the technological means and strategic vision on a global scale to burst old limits of time, space and national boundaries and ideology. By developing the art of planning, producing and marketing on a planetary scale, the global corporation is rushing into the vacuum left by the increasing inability of national governments to govern or provide an alternative vision.

The corporate vision is more powerful than the actual money or hard infrastructure they provide. We must be aware however, that corporations engage in social causes, not because they believe that they can end suffering; but rather, they consider engagement in ‘low-cost heroism’ (Richey and Ponte 2011) as profitable business strategy. ‘What have we got to lose?’ is the question most asked in corporate board rooms. They call this ‘social entrepreneurship’.

We must analyse the inroad made by Brand Aid against the background of the failure of the conventional aid system to transform people’s lives and the political and economic structures in poor countries: while development aid has done many good things in general, transforming power relations has not been one of them. It is no wonder that we are in a stalemate right now: one side wants to see aid die a peaceful death while the other wants to keep the aid system going in the face of mounting evidence that aid has failed to ‘transform systems’. Outside of these opposing northern constituencies stand the citizens in the recipient countries who are wary of Western paternalism: their rallying cry has become ‘please don’t develop us! We don’t want your charity; we only want to do business with you!’

There is a great deal of frustration out there that many compelling reports and innovative proposals have been produced that promote global security and development in ways that address root causes of poverty, violence and despair. However, these reports, although produced by eminent panels and commissions, have not been able to generate the political momentum required to move from recommendations to implementation. These disappointments gave way to a new method of kick-starting political momentum for mobilising ‘political will’. Now, a global multi-stakeholder dialogue, involving governments, civil society, businesses, faith communities, international organisations, academia and the media were all intended to work together to accelerate thinking on global problem solving and implementing these global commitments.

We all know that aid has been an instrument of state craft. Helping the poor has been largely a pretext for the precedence of commercial, geopolitical and cultural objectives. In the early days of aid, the system generated a constant stream of ideas, incentives and directives on how non-Western peoples should develop. As a vehicle for ideas, aid has often promoted universal templates of de-publicised
development, led by experts and technocrats. However, in all fairness, the first 40 years or so of aid resembled to some degree a competitive market of ideas. Since the 1980s, the aid regime has grown increasingly monolithic and centralised. Non-conformist thinking, such as the Scandinavian or Dutch promotion of social democratic norms in the 1970s, has been discouraged. By the late 1980s, most bilateral aid policies had been brought into alignment with a cluster of neoliberal precepts and macroeconomic approaches orchestrated by Washington institutions. As of the early twenty-first century, these bodies form the commanding heights of the world’s unitary aid system.

A second characteristic of the new aid system is the public–private–philanthropic partnership in the delivery of aid. These are called multi-sectoral global initiatives, and many of them are focused on access to essential medicines or health care. Some of the initial examples are the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, the Onchocerciasis Control Programme, and the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation. These multi-sectoral initiatives put business in the centre of global aid in new and important ways, and paved the way for Brand Aid initiatives like Product RED. The RED model presents the possibility of doing business and giving at the same time. What is obviously clear is how these narratives ignore the underlying structures of production, distribution and ownership, i.e. the structure of power that drives global and national imbalances.

Now, with Bill and Melinda Gates, Warren Buffet and others directing their private earnings toward global causes, it appears that we are entering a new era of ‘giving to good causes’ that goes beyond older forms of philanthropy. Brand Aid, or as the subtitle refers, ‘shopping well to save the world’ is a completely new model that could have come right out of Harvard or Wharton Business School. Brand Aid, which sells products, is itself a new product line in the form of ideas. Rest assured that different varieties of this model will be rolled out in the coming years. For now, consider this the highest state of neoliberal globalisation.

Therefore, development aid funded by taxpayers may soon become a thing of the past. Aid financing for what are considered to be ‘sexy and tantalising African problems’ is to be done through a strategy of ‘shop till you drop’. This campaign is for branded products to help those in distant lands afflicted with miseries that can be alleviated by consumers. What a fantastic excuse to indulge even more in consuming tantalising products without having to feel guilty. This is supposed to be a win–win solution: (1) there are no more taxpayer-financed aid programmes needed; (2) you can help the needy without having to give up your own lifestyle and without having to come face-to-face with them; and (3) you can do this without having to renounce the new religion of ‘globalisation as the right to consume’. In this way, Africa’s misery is being used as a billboard to advertise brand products.

Thus, while the Brand Aid critique is another instalment in the growing critical literature on aid, it is also more than that. This is another way of looking at the intricate and ever-changing face of global capitalism with consumers who increasingly view globalisation as ‘expanding the right to consume’ and the new face of ‘corporate social responsibility’ as capital enters the aid business in new ways. This gives credence to the notion of ‘globalisation with a human face’. The solutions provided by Product RED affirm people’s right to consume without feeling guilty. This relies on the narrative of solutions that suggest: (1) complex crises cannot be understood in ‘real time’; (2) the response to such complexity requires a simplified account as the basis for action; and (3) we do not need to bother questioning whether this is a crisis ‘in the system’ or a crisis ‘of the system’; thus no debate is needed on the fundamental questions that would require drastic change.
What does this all mean to the future of ‘engaging Africa’ and on whose terms?

- Brand Aid is in fact reinforcing stereotypes of Africa to make money: Africa is the recipient, not the producer of brand products and this ‘Africa’ sells!
- It is giving a new lease in life to ‘aid’ at a time when the number of countries needing aid might actually diminish as the growth prospects for Africa improve.
- The old donor–recipient model dominated by the OECD countries is increasingly becoming passé. There are many players now: new powerful countries, hedge funds, sovereign wealth funds, and other new sources of capital for poor countries.
- Product RED is just the tip of the Brand Aid iceberg: just like the phenomenon of the growth in derivatives, junk bonds, swaps, global securities, etc. that became the fuel for the birth of a global ‘casino economy’ – get ready to witness an ever more innovative array of instruments to promote ‘compassion buying’ in the coming decades.

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Africa in a global political economy of symbolic goods
Rita Abrahamsen

Discourses about Africa are always also discourses about the West, and historically Africa and other non-Western areas have often appeared as ‘the other’ through which the West constructs its own civilisation, enlightenment and progress (see e.g. Mudimbe 1988). With the emergence of brand aid and a globalised consumer culture, Africa’s role in constructing that self-image appears to be changing in subtle, yet important ways. Put simply, private giving and charity to Africa is no longer primarily a religious obligation or a political conviction, but instead being concerned about Africa has become part of the relentless self-invention of a particular kind of modern consumer. This of course is not entirely new, but the growing popularity of brand aid (and similar consumer-based activities) suggests that we need to expand our investigations of the role that Africa and Africans play in today’s globalised consumer culture. Is it possible to speak of the production and circulation of Africa (and the idea of Africa) as a cultural commodity within a global economy of symbolic goods? And if so, what is the relationship between such a global economy of symbolic goods and the material economy of production and consumption? What are the possible political effects for Africa and for reforming the global economy? To unravel these issues, students of Africa need to engage not only with the complexities of the political economy of consumption, but also with an area of politics more commonly left to cultural theorists, namely the politics of affect and emotions. Here I offer a few initial observations on where such inquiries might lead.

In order to understand Africa’s role in a globalised consumer culture, we need first to appreciate that consumption is not only an act, but also a statement: in this
context, the material act of buying a RED-branded product is simultaneously an emotional cultural performance. As Pierre Bourdieu (1984) reminds us, commodities are a means of expressing identity and signify one’s place within social hierarchies. They are not simply goods sought for their ‘use value’, but stakes in social contests that help acquire social positions and maintain differences between them. Commodities, in other words, are part of daily efforts to secure, advance and reproduce class cohesion and hierarchies. They facilitate movement within and between class positions and have the ability to make and remake the line of distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

It is in this sense that with the advent of brand aid, the idea of Africa appears as a commodity, its poverty and illness symbolic goods in a global economy of signification that allows (predominantly) Western consumers not only to express their identity, but also to reproduce social hierarchies and class differences. Yet, the rebranding of Africa as cool might simultaneously change the ability of Africans (even if economically dominated) to acquire and wield symbolic capital. Thus the picture is one of dynamic tensions rather than stasis and social fixity. To date, we know little about the implications of this for Africa and Africans, although the analysis in Brand Aid indicates that attention might be diverted away from the structural causes of poverty towards more easily measurable ‘results’ so as to make the consumer ‘feel good’.

‘Feeling good’ is arguably the driving force of a consumer society where desire is infinite and insatiable. Emotions play a central role, and shopping is said to stimulate both pleasure and autonomy as well as anxiety in the face overwhelming consumer choice (Bauman 1990, Campbell 2004). This means that if we are to understand the position of Africa within a globalised political economy of symbolic goods we have to engage with the politics of affect. This entails taking emotions – both at the individual and the collective level – more seriously than is common in academic disciplines still operating in the shadows of a Cartesian dualism where affect and emotions are feared for their irrationality and populism, the opposite of the reasoned and rational citizen needed for democratic politics to prevail (Thrift 2004).

Within a globalised consumer culture, affect takes on renewed importance, and raises important challenges at numerous levels. For one, it alters the role of experts (and also the academic expert) within discussions of Africa. In the past, discourses of development and aid have constituted the economist, the statistician, the doctor, the social scientists, etc. as those authorised to speak authoritatively about the ‘problems’ of Africa. Within a culture of consumption, the power of this kind of expert knowledge recedes in the face of appeals to emotions, often by pop stars and other celebrities. The celebrity is a different kind of expert, whose knowledge is not derived from numbers, deduction, or semi-structured interviews, but from ‘feeling the pain’ of the poor and from offering an emotional connection to the subjects of development. One need not go so far as many recent theorists of affect (for whom affect is an autonomic and unconscious process) to appreciate that this might have implications for the possibility of progressive politics, as it is not clear how political activists might intervene strategically in situations where affect plays important roles (see for example, Connolly 2002, Massumi 2002, Thrift 2004 and for critique, Leys 2011). As Jean Bethke Elshtain (1992) has observed, we fear the politics of affect because it seemingly banishes the reasoned politics of rational beings to the sidelines, and encourages an ontology that replaces the Cartesian maxim ‘I think therefore I am’ with the emotive ‘I feel, therefore I am’ (see also Campbell 2004). If such an emotive self-understanding comes to shape how individuals participate in social and political life, the citizen is perceived...
to give way to a therapeutic self (Elsthain 1992).

Faced with the emergence of a new modality of aid where Africa is part of a global political economy of symbolic goods allowing sections of contemporary consumer society to produce and maintain their identity and class positions, there is a need for African studies to interrogate these (and other related) issues further. Is it really the case that as the consumer is born, the citizen dies, or do people act and engage at multiple levels as both reasoned citizens and emotive consumers? And is such action just facile ‘consumerism’, or is there something that – without being naïve about the symbolic politics and inequalities involved – needs to be understood without dismissing it as superficiality? Is it possible to think of affect as a different kind of knowledge, containing its own insights as to how to behave ethically in the world? And is the scholar’s standard reaction to and dismissal of the politics of affect a performance to validate our own knowledge of Africa and to defend our position as ‘experts’ with the right to speak authoritatively about the continent? If Bono and George Clooney, Annie Lennox and Angelina Jolie with all their glamour and sex appeal are more successful in drawing public attention to African issues and more able to bend the ears of policy-makers, then at the very least the scholarly community needs to engage reflexively with our own limitations in this regard. In doing so, African studies has the opportunity to make potentially important contributions to contemporary social theory and political debates.

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Images and representations of Africa: old, new and beyond

Graham Harrison

Jane Guyer speaks of the ‘co-production of Africa and Europe over centuries of economic and political engagement’. This co-production has, of course, been highly unequal, embedded in structures of empire, of European intervention in Africa, of exploitation and violence. But it is co-production nevertheless. Not to recognise this is to efface African agency (even in within the most extreme constraints and
between the most austere of choices) and it is to reduce the social complexity of Africa to something akin to a single entity.

Part of this co-production involves the ways in which British nationalism has relied on imagery from Africa. Duly 'domesticated', Africa’s representation within Britain has been a vital facet of what passes for British political modernity. Abolitionism relied on a small number of simple and caricatured images of Africa, but the emotional vectors generated from these produced new forms of political campaign, electoral politics, the involvement of (largely middle class) women in broader public issues, consumer politics (the boycott), and ultimately, after abolition, a great efflorescence of a sentiment of narcissistic national self-esteem. Abolitionism left a legacy of Christian liberal humanitarianism, as well as a normative prop for the free market and a drive to ‘civilise’ Africa through colonial endeavours. When we think about Brand Aid, and its connections between the virtuous consumer and the fate of distant others, we would do well to remember how deeply embedded in (post-) imperial public norms this subjectivity is: the British middle classes might avoid ‘blood sugar’ (grown on Caribbean plantations) and they might also purchase a brooch confessing one’s sympathy for the prostrate African slave – a boycott and a buycott. The marriage between a vigorous entrepreneurial branding (Wedgwood potteries) and an emerging British ‘consumer republic’ was the progenitor of the hyper-mobile and ceaseless consumerism that pervades Britain today.

Following abolitionist politics, Africa served as the source of a sequence of variegated images, each bundle of which fed into Britain’s sense of nationalism and imperial grandeur. The slave image remained as a foil for Christian mission; it was replaced as the ‘savage’ Africa image became the template for a colonialism in which colonial ‘heroes’ such as Cecil Rhodes and Lord Lugard spoke of Africans as violent and childlike – the racialised selves that supposedly required beneficent British discipline. And, once again, African imagery served to generate a sumptuary sensibility: of patriotic purchase, mainly promoted through the Empire Marketing Board with its advertisements of dour tobacco farmers and poorly figured African workers. Oddly, the ‘buy British’ consumer message relayed in many other forms subsequently was articulated through the commodities of Africa and India.

The rise of African nationalisms after the Second World War (in which Europeans amply demonstrated their ability to act as savagely as any region) generated new images of rival modernity and a politics of racial affirmation that spanned the Atlantic and generated a vibrant ideological voice of negritude and Afro-centrism. Images here were often iconic: Kwame Nkrumah, Agostinho Neto, Nelson Mandela, Samora Machel, Julius Nyerere, Patrice Lumumba. One might think these images entirely disconnected from British national self-affirmation and the production of the consumer: these ‘solidarity’ images demanded something altogether more radical and explicitly political. But, movements to support African nationalism – the Movement for Colonial Freedom being the best example – fed into the liberation politics of the Anti Apartheid Movement (AAM). Perhaps the AAM’s main form of activism was also the boycott: of South African produce, tourism, banking, and then a broader sanctioning of cultural and sporting links. In a nutshell, the solidarity politics of the AAM worked through a consumer politics which was only rivalled by the slave sugar boycott as an exemplar of what is now called ethical consumption.

Throughout the entire post-colonial period, the most powerful and pervasive image bundle to derive from Africa was the famine image. There is a great deal one might say about this imagery, but here it is worth noting some key linkages to our theme. Firstly, famine appeals were
the original means through which celebrity cause-making occurred. As is well known, Band Aid was – whatever the motivations of those involved – a conduit through which artists became celebrities with a cause. Secondly, appeals for donations have become increasingly articulated as a marketing device: pitched as a ‘hard sell’ through highly distressing images, and sometimes phrased as value for money: ‘give ten pounds, save a life’, a pernicious calculus which both encourages donations and degrades African lives.

And now, the present: the neoliberal consumer culture of the West, steeped in unsustainable credit structures, a vulgar and universal praise of wealth as a good in itself, and a historically unprecedented level of social inequality. Brand Aid nestles within this broader neoliberal consumer culture that has profoundly affected the way Africa is represented. The key coordinates are:

1. A focus on the consumer as a social identity.
2. An ‘aspirational’ aesthetic in which purchasing is associated with feeling good and/or feeling better.
3. An infantilised sensibility in which a purchase will please the consumer a great deal in a short amount of time.
4. A ceaseless imagery of attention-grabbing in which highly worked imagery, wordplay, and tie-ins to websites, celebrities, films, and ersatz activism are the main currencies.

How does this affect the way Africa is represented in Britain and other Western countries? If the Christian liberal humanitarian tradition was based in the question ‘what can you do for Africa?’, then the commoditised sumptuary ethos asks: ‘what can Africa do for you?’ This is not to say that money does not get raised or that people do not sign e-petitions. But, we need to be clear on the normative ‘logarithm’ here. It is:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Purchase a commodity/brand} & > \text{enjoy the imagery of the commodity/brand} > \text{feel better about oneself} > \text{have an immediate impact on the lives of distant poor people.}
\end{align*}
\]

And, what of Africa’s representation within the signs and wonders of the neoliberal marketplace? We are facing an inchoate bundle of representations, some old and some new. The famine image remains a mainstay, and the tribal/savage trope is still cleaved to by many journalists in their disaster reportage. Within the RED–celebrity–NGO marketing nexus, images of Africa have become increasingly reified and stylised, so intense is the pitch to the consumer–citizen. And, in the midst of all of this, something of the solidarity narrative remains – not through the radical nationalisms of the 1960s and 1970s, but rather through the impact of the emergence of a global social justice movement and the creation of new information technologies. Here we find a more populist and ‘human face’ solidarity: with the slum dweller residents’ group, the agricultural union, the HIV/AIDS support group and others. Groups like these can be seen on the websites of the War on Want or World Development Movement or its curated YouTube pages.

It would be a stretch to announce a new politics of representation emerging out of the increasingly dense and rapid flow of text and image between African organisations and the West (often aimed at African diaspora communities), but we can at least see possible ways to think beyond the methodological nationalism that has been the legacy of empire in Britain; and we can at least start to have a conversation about representation in which we can think about Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie’s challenging rhetorical question: Can you think of even one African voice or face that has communicated the aspirations,
passions, concerns, and expectations of her or his fellow Africans over the last year?

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The privatisation of aid?
Claire Mercer

We are told that traditional methods of delivering aid to Africa are ineffective, and that they are now being superseded by privatised delivery mechanisms. Roberto Calderisi (2006), William Easterly (2006) and Dambisa Moyo (2009) for example have led the charge against multilateral and bilateral aid models that are bound to fail because donor governments do not know what works, and African governments are too weak and corrupt to implement plans effectively. As Easterly (2006) puts it, development aid must shed its reliance on top-down ‘Planners’ who lack the incentives to respond to consumer demands in Africa, and aid modalities must instead use more ‘Searchers’ who constantly seek out new and innovative solutions to local development problems, scaling up those that work. What this means in practice is that governments are the problem. Instead, new actors such as businesses, philanthropists, non-state actors and diasporas should take on a greater role in the financing and delivering of development aid.

Richey and Ponte’s Brand Aid (2011) makes an important contribution to this debate. Their focus on Product RED provides a detailed examination of how such new aid modalities are emerging in practice. Every RED purchase generates a contribution to the Global Fund that is spent on AIDS interventions in designated African countries. RED and the Global Fund are therefore good examples of the kind of ‘opportunistic innovation’ (Hudson Institute 2008) so urgently required in development aid. RED offers a new model of development financing by connecting the consumption of currently desirable products in the Global North to measurable development interventions in Africa, while the Global Fund generates development financing through a hybrid model of raising public, private and philanthropic monies. RED and the Global Fund provide early examples of the privatisation of aid. Or do they? One of the most important contributions of Brand Aid is the insight that arguments about the privatisation of aid seem to owe more to ideology than to the actual sources of financial flows into Africa. Richey and Ponte demonstrate that at the present time there is little evidence to suggest that aid finance is becoming increasingly privatised. To date RED itself has provided approximately 1% of total Global Fund disbursements. When 95% of the funds contributed to the Global Fund still come from traditional aid sources, this seems to be less about the privatisation of aid and more about the role of changing narratives of aid. As Richey and Ponte point out:

Beyond what the ‘real’ picture of private aid (and RED’s contribution) may be, what is relevant here is that the supporters of private giving . . . want to promote the idea that ‘traditional’ public aid is in crisis and that private forms of engagement, especially from business, provide the way out of the impasse. (2011, pp. 99–100)

Brand Aid raises the question of the role of ideology in the context of development financing, but it also rings true in the African context with which I am most familiar, that of aid delivery in rural Tanzania. I am neither convinced that the traditional (government) model is an outmoded mechanism for aid delivery, nor that it is being
superseded by various private actors. Rather the model of aid delivery is being reconfigured. It relies on patching together old and new actors in new contracting relations. Old actors include government – still the most important provider of services in rural Tanzania, NGOs (who do not count as ‘new’ actors in development anymore), and community groups in villages. New actors include those currently disbursing large amounts of money to government, NGOs and community groups – notably in Tanzania, the Global Fund and the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Money is disbursed from Global Fund and PEPFAR to local communities to be spent – not on social services but on sensitisation and education – via complex contracting chains that include bits of the state. The upshot has been the proliferation of small civil society organisations that compete against each other to win small amounts of money to conduct one-off sensitisation meetings around HIV/AIDS or vulnerable children in villages. Innovative, opportunistic and responsive to market signals this activity may be, but the overall contribution to poverty reduction, or development, is intangible. Meanwhile, government continues to be the most important provider of education and health services in rural Tanzania, although here too the effects of the new development financiers such as Global Fund, PEPFAR and others are clearly visible in the relatively over funded enclaves of AIDS clinics within government hospitals (Ferguson 2006, Sullivan 2011).

The continued importance of governments in aid delivery is also apparent in the provision of expertise. Brand Aid draws attention to the changing nature of expertise in development aid. Brand Aid’s focus is on the celebrity development experts on whom RED depends for raising awareness and funds, where expert status rests on who you are rather than what you know. In rural Tanzania something very similar is happening, where NGOs’ assumed expertise in local development is the basis for channelling money to them. Yet, it is important to distinguish between operational and technical expertise here. NGOs may demonstrate their operational expertise to win Global Fund and PEPFAR money but they have to subcontract the delivery of technical expertise (for example, in HIV seminars) to individuals in local government. It would seem that governments, for all their problems, still have comparative advantage in their capacity to train, employ and post to rural areas the expertise on which development relies. And yet the mantra that government is a poor development actor compared to NGOs and the new financiers is widely rehearsed in Tanzania, as elsewhere. Recognition of the continued importance of governments has become unthinkable in practice in the same way that is has become unthinkable in current debates about development aid.

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Celebrity interventions
Dan Brockington

Brand Aid is a most appropriate term when discussing the work of celebrity in African development issues because brand considerations, by NGOs, corporations and celebrities are central to the negotiation of celebrity development activity. Celebrity is governed by commercial considerations. The celebrity tariat as we now know it was created in order to sell products (films, music, newspapers). Managing celebrity is all about managing limited media exposure to the best possible advantage. The brand that celebrities cultivate is an essential element of that attention management. In this short section I report early findings from a research project that has been looking at the work of celebrity in the development sector.4

Charitable activity, including African development issues, can be an important element of celebrities’ images. In a survey of 147 randomly selected celebrities and the 100 top celebrities listed by Forbes in 2006, Thrall and colleagues (Thrall et al. 2008) report that at least 50% of celebrities of any level of prominence are engaged in some form of advocacy. The more prominent a person, the more likely they are to be involved in more causes. Advocacy is not a universal trait, but it is a common one in the public lives celebrities live.

The current prominence of celebrity in development affairs is the recent result of three decades of change within the music industry and NGO world. The 1980s were marked by a crescendo of musical albums and concerts for development causes. The 1990s was marked by two trends: a rise in number, and professionalisation of, development NGOs, and indeed NGOs more generally, and the rise in the number of media outlets which feature celebrity. But it is only since 2000 that there has been a thorough professionalisation and systematisation of relations between the charity sector generally and the celebrity industry (Brockington 2011). NGOs are now thoroughly integrated into the celebrity news industry and celebrity orientated magazines find them a useful source.5

A continual theme of interviews I have conducted with celebrity liaison officers is that many people within the charitable sector do not yet ‘get’ what working with the celebrity industry requires. They do not appreciate the flexibility required (many media opportunities arise at the last minute). They do not appreciate the media constraints (of managing exposure effectively). They do not appreciate the creativity required to come up with endorsement and advocacy that appeal to public figures and which fit their brand:

What works well ... works ... because it works with everyone’s schedule and it works with our branding and their personal branding, it stays in their voice and therefore is more authentic and therefore resonates more with the audiences who we are trying to reach and influence.6

The importance of brand considerations in celebrities’ development interventions does not render them merely superficial. Yes, they are produced to be seen, but that is not their sole rationale. Rather, the outcomes of celebrity interventions are a negotiation between three sets of interests: (1) the celebrity’s own personal desires, (2) the commercial considerations of their brand, and (3) the NGOs’ needs. Their appearance in the public domain is then further altered by the media logics and requirements. Celebrity advocacy is managed within a portfolio of public appearances in which every single appearance will affect directly or indirectly the commercial value of the celebrity.
The rise of celebrity in the charitable sector more generally is strongly influenced by their courting of corporate partners, who in turn are seeking charities to support as part of their commitments to corporate social responsibility. Charities frequently advertise access to celebrity patrons as a means of attracting corporate support on their website. For their part ‘a lot of the corporates obviously see it as a way to get free talent’\(^7\), they are ‘star-struck’\(^8\) and ‘really liked having celebrities involved’.\(^9\) Sometimes corporate interests can determine the presence, and level, of celebrity involvement in NGO campaigns:

\[\text{[We asked]} \text{ do we in fact even involve celebrities or is it that we have real women \ldots in the ads? We came to the conclusion that actually the corporates like to be associated with the campaign because of the kudos it holds and because of the level of celebrities it has supporting it. Because the majority of the income is raised through corporate partners \ldots we do actually need to have celebrity support to keep them engaged.}\(^10\)

But it is not just about dismal economics. One of the reasons why corporates are star-struck is because being part of a corporate elite gives you the possibility of personal access to publicly desirable figures:

\[\text{[Company G]} \text{ absolutely loved [public figure H] \ldots she’s very special to a group of men of a certain age \ldots She’s \ldots lovely and charming and articulate \ldots she delivers both emotionally and rationally and \ldots appeals to the softer side of them.}\(^11\)

And where does this leave Brand Aid, Product RED and celebrity interventions in Africa? I suspect that many Africanists would recognise that Africa’s brand (if you will excuse this language just for a moment) has needed an overhaul for a while. The intriguing possibility that celebrity interventions raise is that they could focus considerable creative energy on the brand images that are associated with African development causes. Thus far, however, things have not been that encouraging. The sight of Gwynneth Paltrow in ‘ethnic’ gear and proclaiming ‘I am African’ on billboards, or Kate Moss blacked up on the front of the *Independent* is, at best, gauche. However these are as yet only the early stages of serious professional attention to the brands and values celebrity interventions invoke. As NGOs rethink how they are to work with celebrity (Darnton & Kirk 2011), I am looking forward to what they, and their celebrity partners, come up with.

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**Notes**

4. The research is sponsored by an ESRC fellowship (RES-070-27-0035). More details about this research are available at www.celebrityanddevelopment.wordpress.com.

5. Source 90 (a celebrity magazine editor).


7. Source 63. Others (sources 51, 55, 63 and 76) made exactly the same point. Indeed the possibilities of corporates getting free access to talent poses significant risks to the commercial interests (agents and managers) looking after their time, and could jeopardise the good relations celebrity liaison officers work so hard to build with the celebrity sector. At least two large NGOs have drawn up written guidelines as to how to avoid that state of affairs (sources 61, 71).

8. Source 35.


10. Source 63.


**References**

Conclusions and a research agenda
Lisa Ann Richey and Stefano Ponte

A new brand, ‘Maiyet’, was launched in the autumn of 2011 at Paris Fashion Week. The brand is the latest engagement of Paul van Zyl, whose former responsibilities include those as the founder for the International Centre for Transitional Justice, and previously the executive secretary of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. Maiyet’s goals are met by ‘forging partnerships with artisans to promote self-sufficiency and entrepreneurship in developing economies’.12 Not just a commodity, Africa has become a luxury good. However, the product itself, according to van Zyl, must be put first, and ‘while most of the hardware for Maiyet’s handbags is made in Africa, the bags themselves are made in Italy’.13 An article on the engagement of luxury fashion and ‘helping’ explains: ‘We could have had an auction and dinner – but who wants another dinner? This is more direct and sustainable’.14 Direct partnership? Sustainability? The old goals of international development cooperation have become buzzwords for what is being termed a potentially ‘systemic change to the definition of “value”’. The potential revitalisation and depoliticisation of engagement between producers, traders and consumers of Africa requires engagement by progressive scholars of African political economy. It is from grounded research, intellectual debate and advocacy that we are able to answer what was clearly intended to be asked as a merely rhetorical question – who wants another dinner?

Thus, as contributors to a debate, not authorities whose cumulative knowledge has ‘solved’ it, we suggest the following questions to initiate a research agenda on Brand Africa:

- In co-branded products where ‘Africa’ is part of the brand value through production of products by Africans or on the continent, how do the production ‘challenges’ (such as unreliable transportation, ill health, or inconsistent electricity supply, for example) that may affect the quality or timing of the supply chain come to be used in authenticating the ‘Africa’ brand? Do inconsistencies become a sign of ‘individuality’ and thus ‘quality’ in claiming to meet the needs of the ethical consumption market? Do companies simply locate in the most reliable and stable environment, while maintaining a superficial link to African producers?
- How do the new opportunities for providing capital in Africa (new aid countries, investors from emerging economies, sovereign wealth funds, hedge funds, etc.) interface with African states in the diverse political/economic settings on the continent? Will there be alliances or particular groups that emerge as winners or losers in the competition for these new spoils and why?
- What effect does branding Africa as a symbolic commodity have on the ability of Africans to acquire, wield and perhaps even trade their symbolic cultural capital? How might this repositioning of affect in intellectual and political debate shape relationships between Africans and ‘Africa’ in regional, diasporic, local or networked political struggles?
• How can we begin to understand the complex interweaving of affective politics and Africa? How do Africa’s politics, cultures, traditions and modernities play into this and on what terms?

• What is the political economy of representation of ‘Africa’? Which images sell? What do they sell and to whom? These questions call for critical marketing studies and for progressive scholars to take business seriously from a deeply materialist perspective.

• Where do we look for competing brands of ‘Africa’? Who are Africa’s celebrities? What do they brand? How do they interact with global celebrities who are speaking on behalf of ‘Africa’?

All of the contributors in this debate/forum are scholars with extensive fieldwork experience on the continent, and ongoing engagement with Africa, Africans and research. We are also all linked to various and diverse scholarly, activist and practitioner communities, which themselves produce and consume ideas of ‘Africa’. Not so incidentally, scholars are also consumers of products made in Africa, by Africans, and with component parts grown, mined or sourced from the continent. Yet when it comes to understanding the multiple transitions in global capitalism that hover over, exploit, emancipate or somehow link to Brand Africa, simple ideologies do not serve us sufficiently. What might begin to ground the necessary multi-faceted critique of how Africa and Africans are faring in the face of a changing global economy and the business of ‘development’ is serious research consideration of some of the questions raised by the previous essays.

Notes
13. Ibid.
Tracks of the third wave: democracy theory, democratisation and the dilemma of political succession in Africa

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The sweep of the third-wave moment of democratic impulses through Africa saw mass movements against authoritarian rule and the demand for liberalisation of political spaces. Ruling-group compromises and promises of democratisation diluted the fervour of this demand. Conservative interests captured the process by creating formal institutions of political competition but without corresponding necessary conditions for democracy. They set up regimes of political succession that rendered the political field a closed space. National trends in succession are linked to the discursive paradigm that underpins third-wave democratisation. Selected studies of succession in African states indicate trends towards illegitimate and unpopular self-succession, hereditary trends, the appointment of proxies and only a few instances of emerging liberal democratic regimes. The dominance of perverse third-wave trajectories in Africa points to the inadequacy of the minimalist epistemology upon which the idea of the third wave is based.

Keywords: third wave; democratisation; procedural; substantive; succession; election

Introduction

Huntington’s *Third wave and democratisation in the twentieth century* (1991b) is a milestone in democracy theory. In line with the general democratic trends Huntington...
(1991a) designated as third wave, Jaggers and Gurr (1995) carried out a tracking of the third-wave polities using the Polity III data set to analyse the paths of third-wave states. Findings of the study relating to African states reveal uninspiring promises of democracy. But the analytical tools of the study are rooted in the procedural third-wave discourse on democracy. Such tools cannot explain why most of the third-wave states in Africa are generating defective versions of democratisation. I argue that the third-wave procedural discourse is not only an inadequate formulation but is also one of the sources of the perverse forms which democratic transitions are taking in several African states.

A wave of democratisation, according to Huntington (1991b, p. 15), ‘is a group of transitions from non democratic to democratic regimes that occur within a specified period of time and that significantly outnumber transitions in the opposite direction during that period of time’. He identifies three such historic waves of democratisation, with the third wave commencing in 1974 with the military coup in Portugal that ended decades of dictatorship. This touched off demands for democracy across authoritarian states. Factors associated with the spread of the third wave are: deepening legitimacy crises of authoritarian systems; economic growth and the expansion of the urban middle class in many countries; transformation of churches from being defenders of the status quo to being opponents of authoritarianism; changes in the policies of external actors, including the European Community and the United States, and their posture towards the promotion of democracy and human rights in other countries and ‘snowballing’ or demonstration effects enhanced by new means of international communication (Huntington 1991b, pp. 45–46).

Mass demands for the opening up of the political space have been an expression of more fundamental demands for material improvement in living standards. Thus within political demands are embedded socio-economic demands. Huntington sees these demands only from a procedural minimalist epistemology. This variant of democracy discourse that predominantly frames political practice emphasises procedure to the exclusion of the substance of democracy. It thus offers scope for dictatorships to mimic the formal requirements of the minimalist discourse to reproduce authoritarian rule and other aspects of misrule that are not accounted for in the dominant perspective on democracy. But ‘democracy . . . involves ideals and principles as well as procedures and institutions’ as Riley (1992, p. 549) puts it. Similarly, Simon (1995), and Gandhi and Lust-Okar (2009) have drawn attention to the inadequacies of the limited focus on elections in thinking about democracy.

Building on the procedural idea of democracy, Huntington understands twentieth-century political systems as being democratic ‘to the extent that its most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all adult population is eligible to vote’ (1991b, p. 10). This construct, which is built on Joseph Schumpeter’s earlier work, diminishes the worth of normative traditions of democratic theory and their emphasis on the substantive component of political rule. It idealises the empirical, institutional and procedural definition which is said to be the only approach with empirical referents that render the concept of democracy measurable and useful. However, if liberal democracy is reducible to elections as Huntington (1991b), Schumpeter (1976) and other liberal democracy discourses lead us to understand, the social contract element and the basis of citizen claims on the state are lost. This analytical thrust abandons the idea of people (demos) and privileges system reproduction. But de-emphasising people in favour of system or procedure theoretically reinforces political alienation.

Mid-range liberal democracy theorists recognise the importance of some aspects of normative thesis on democracy. They emphasise the importance of participation. If participation is understood in the light of deliberative democracy of the kind in which
democratic control is substantive rather than symbolic (see Dryzek 2000), then it would be touching on the heart of democracy. Unfortunately, in the procedural discourse participation tends to be conflated with voting.

Political elites’ preoccupation with the retention of power is central for explaining crises of political succession. Four broad patterns of political succession can be identified in the third-wave countries in Africa. These patterns include: illegitimate and unpopular self-succession, hereditary trends, the appointment of proxies, and rare instances of free and fair political succession. This paper contests that the trends in Africa’s political succession are connected with limitations of its minimalist basis.

Third wave, liberal democracy and political succession: contending perspectives

A central distinction in democratic theory is between the minimalist and maximalist views. At the core of the minimalist view is the electoral regime that represents the defining framework for democracy. Schumpeter popularised this approach by summing up the democratic method as ‘that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of competitive struggle for the peoples vote’ (Schumpeter 1976, p. 269). The role of the people in the Schumpeterian thesis is in the production of government or an intermediate body which produces a national executive. His main critique of the classical emphasis on people as the core of democracy is that ‘the will of the majority is the will of the majority and not the will of the people’ (Schumpeter 1976, p. 269). This critique is founded on pragmatic minimalist grounds. Thus, ‘if results that prove in the long run satisfactory to the people at large are made the test of government for the people, then government by the people as conceived by the classical doctrine of democracy would often fail to meet it’ (Schumpeter 2003, p. 8). Also, managing the affairs of society requires career politicians. As he argues

democracy is the rule of the politician... If we wish to face facts squarely, we must recognise that in modern democracies of any type other than Swiss, politics will unavoidably be a career. This in turn spells recognition of a distinct professional interest in the individual politician and of a distinct group interest in the political profession as such. (Schumpeter cited in O’Toole 1977, p. 457)

To further emphasise the importance of politicians in modern democracies, Schumpeter cited a successful politician who notes that ‘what businessmen do not understand is that exactly as they are dealing in oil so I am dealing in votes’ (O’Toole 1977). This portrays democracy as a business of vote hunting by political elites and vote casting by the rest. Contributions by Dahl (2003), Przeworski (2003), Huntington (1991b), Diamond (1996), and Joseph (1997) all share the minimalist viewpoint which forms the theoretical platform of the third-wave discourse.

Huntington finds two things crucial in this genre of democracy, namely, contestation and participation. He notes that

in democracies, legitimacy of the rules usually depends on the extent to which they meet expectations of key groups of voters, that is, on their performance; the legitimacy of the system however depends on procedures, on the ability of the voters to choose their rulers through elections. (Huntington 1991b, p. 50)

This underlines the importance of the procedures of democracy. But it fails to note that how governance affects the lives of citizens is key to fulfilling the broad elements of the social
contract. In effect, Huntington underplays the substance of political rule. His obsession with so-called democracy referents suggests that the need for empirical measurement of democracy is the alibi for justifying the procedural thesis. Thus the meaning of democracy is being adjusted to meet the technocratic requirements of theoreticians to measure it.

Despite the importance of empirical measures in social sciences, it is difficult to deny that ‘not everything about democracy can be an empirically discovered fact, at some point; philosophical assumptions have to be made and argued’ (Graham 1986, pp. 7–8). Indeed if democracy is about procedure, method and arrangement for taking decisions, ‘why does it exercise such a strong hold over us and why are we prepared to die for it?’ (Graham 1986, p. 19). For instance, the spark of the Arab Spring was death by self-immolation of a Tunisian vegetable vendor for being denied his very little space of economic existence. This singular event was the tinder box that lit the fire of mass political revolts. The underlying factors behind these are ‘polarization of incomes, rising food prices, lack of dwellings, massive unemployment of educated and uneducated...’ (Anderson 2011, p. 10). A democracy theory that ignores these material dimensions of citizens’ lives fundamentally disengages state and society.

Taking on the proceduralists, Macpherson (1977) declared the death of liberal democracy because it has come to mean the democracy of the capitalist market. He thinks that this is a deviation from the liberal democracy of J.S. Mill and other ethical liberal democrats. The ethical liberal democrats emphasised a society striving to ensure that all its members are equally free to realise their capabilities. But proceduralists pose the indicators of democracy as free and fair elections, political equality, freedom and protection from infringement and institutionalised constraints on the exercise of power (Diamond 2002, Jaggers and Gurr 1995, Buhlmann et al. 2008). Macpherson’s counter point is based on critique of the line of thought that seeks to adapt democracy to suit the market society. He draws attention to the fact that liberal democracy (not democracy) started in capitalist market society and its meaning has been under the influence of the market. Indeed the earliest theoretical formulations by the utilitarian school on the subject drew from classical political economy. In this vein, the need for government was deduced, with desirable functions for it as a political apparatus for administering the market while democracy is reduced to a desirable system of choosing and authorising government (Macpherson 1977).

Despite tracing the provenance of liberal democracy to market society, Macpherson does not see that the framework offered from market-oriented discourses captures the true essence of liberal democracy. The procedural model treats democracy as a market mechanism in which voters are consumers while politicians are entrepreneurs. As an adaptation of the market model,

politicians and voters are assumed to be rational maximizers and to be operating in conditions of free competition with the result that the market-like political system produced optimum distribution of political energies and political goods. The democratic political market produced optimum equilibrium of inputs and outputs – of the energies and resources people would put into it and the rewards they would get out of it. (Macpherson 1977, p. 79)

With focus on mechanistic equilibrium generated by the process, the approach plays down the role of political rule in creating conditions of equal opportunity for the development of citizens’ capacities. Consequently, the formal equality it professes at the political level of structure is empty because it is a carry-over of the principle of competitive equality in unequal market conditions. Protection of rights therefore means protection of the market ethos of competition and contract regime. In the political context it is the right of free
competition for votes. Thus for Schumpeter, political party is ‘a group whose members propose to act in concert in competitive struggle for power. Party and machine politicians ... constitute an attempt to regulate political competition exactly similar to the corresponding practices of trade association’ (O’Toole 1977, pp. 456–457). Pluralism ensures wider political spaces for the elites to enter political competition, while rationalism is left for the voter who uses his vote as political money to buy what he considers the best plan for society. It is Schumpeter’s position that

The voters outside of the parliament must respect the division of labour between themselves and the politicians they elect. They must not withdraw confidence too easily between elections and they must understand that, once they have elected an individual, political action is his business, not theirs. This means that they must refrain from instructing him about what to do. (Schumpeter cited in O’Toole 1977, p. 458)

This translates into another dimension of the unseen hand in the political realm in which citizens are agents with politicians playing an entrepreneurial role while other citizens sustain the process with the marginal role of voting. But in true democracy, political rule must issue neither as a blind necessity of nature nor as some technicist design like market logic that diminishes the importance of people regarding the socio-economic and political conditions necessary for their development.

Socio-economic rights as part of democracy discourse are rightly emphasised by some writers. Zuern (2009) argues that popular perceptions about democracy and the assessment of regimes in some third-wave states in Africa rest largely on the substantive criteria despite contrary claims of Lewis and Bratton (2000). Similarly, Doorenspleet (2010) refers to studies that show support for democracy but not satisfaction. But the absence of satisfaction undermines support and ultimately the political system. Support itself draws from ability of an elected government to address citizens’ socio-economic needs. Thus, Huntington (1991b) sets his minimalist thesis up for challenge by noting that authoritarian regimes are inescapably driven to look for performance as a source of legitimacy. He held that the beginning of authoritarian regimes may be received with mass support. This ‘negative legitimacy’ derives from the failures of the ‘democratic’ regime. This suggests that socio-economic outcomes are the main popular concern. Therefore, discussing democracy in the light of procedure and ignoring the substantive content of governance presents a hollow picture of form without content.

Privileging of form over content or procedure over substance is the reason the third-wave democracies that emerged in Africa pander towards the dominant epistemology rather than the creation of public good which is really why governments are constituted. Ake’s reflection on democratisation and the slant of liberal democracy in Africa draws attention to the danger of excluding the substance of democracy which would create a democracy that fails to address the gaps in governance. As he puts it:

The process towards democracy must be shaped by the singular reality that those whose democratic participation is at issue are the ordinary people of Africa. ... So long as this fact is kept steadily in focus, democracy will evolve in ways that will enhance its meaning. ... But it will be quite different from the contemporary version of liberal democracy, indeed, different enough to elicit suspicion and even hostility from the international community that currently support African democratization. If, however, African democracy follows the line of least resistance to Western liberalism, it will achieve only the democracy of alienation. (Ake cited in Zuern 2009, p. 1)

Apparently concerned about the conceptual divides on democracy, Buhlmann et al. (2008) advanced an approach for classifying the conceptions. Using the framework of the classic
definition of democracy by Abraham Lincoln they classified the pluralist-elitist type based on a minimalist conception as government of the people which emphasises the method of the emergence of government and the guarantee of rights. The participatory type was classified as government of and by the people involving intense and qualitative participation and representation. The social type of democracy based on the maximalist notion was classified as government of, by and for the people. It is the last classification that really captures the meaning of democracy because it embodies the idea of best representation, participation and social justice.

As elections matter more than the substantive content of governance in the dominant conception, dictatorships in Africa have been able to make ‘political adjustment into despotic adjustment’ (Ndjio 2008, p. 120). Despotic adjustment leads authoritarian regimes to conduct elections but violate liberal democratic principles of freedom and fairness, thereby rendering elections the instrument of authoritarian rule rather than instruments of democracy. States with these characteristics have also been qualified as ‘defective democracies, hybrid regimes or new forms of authoritarianism’ (Schedler n.d., p. 4). Competitive authoritarianisms (Levitsky and Way 2002, Bunce and Wolchik 2010) and ‘illiberal’ democracies (Diamond 2002) are similar qualifications associated with the mutations of democracy in third-wave states. This development is related to the epistemological basis of the third-wave conception of democracy.

Huntington (1997) reckons with critiques of electoralism and accepts this as detraction from the proper democratic form. He tried to defend his view of democracy by pointing at Diamond’s distinction between liberal democracy and electoral democracy. Nonetheless, his model of liberal democracy does not go any further than the procedural economistic rational choice view of society in which choices are expressed in votes and goods delivered in governance in terms of certain guarantees of rights for social equilibrium similar to that of the market. On the contrary, the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa (EISA) (2010) rightly sees little use for electoral democracy if not accompanied by reforms that improve people’s lives.

Proceduralism evades the issue of the epistemological roots of the dysfunction in Africa’s democratisation. This is because elections cannot in themselves be an end. Instead, they are necessary conditions for fulfilment of the main reason for the existence of government. Popular liberation struggles in Africa and other parts of the world were based on aspirations for political rule that addresses the socio-economic needs of citizens. Nzongola-Ntalaja (1997, p. 4) comments in this vein that ‘struggle for national liberation meant not only freedom from colonial rule, but also and more importantly a better standard of living and more secure future for their children’. Ake (2003), and Onyeonoru and Aborisade (2001) also connect democratic struggles to socio-economic aspirations of the citizens. Thus Macpherson’s (1977) reflections on ethical liberal democracy are relevant in the African context. While conceding that liberal democracy developed in Western capitalist society, he refuses to conflate liberal democracy with Western capitalism. Understanding the concept of liberalism from the ethical perspective he sees that ethical position with respect to liberal democracy implies a commitment to free equal development of all individuals. However, he believes that achieving this requires a non-market, classless society whose political practice contains non-historically limited insights of liberalism including:

1. representative government, (2) an understanding of the state that includes its ‘performance of common activities arising from the nature of all communities’ and (3) the preservation of civil liberties so central to liberal theory – freedom of speech, freedom of association,
freedom from arbitrary arrest – in order to guarantee the individual what Macpherson called ‘protection against invasion by others (including the state)’ (Panitch 2008, p. 92)

Freedom emphasised above consists in ‘converting the state from an organ super imposed upon society into one completely subordinate to it…’ (Panitch 2008, p. 92). The end state of democracy for Macpherson is the one provided by Marx which is the vision of an ultimately free classless society that offers the greatest conceivable opportunity for each individual to use and develop his or her human attributes. Implied in Macpherson’s thesis is the notion that democracy is an ideal to be pursued with an end-state in view. But it must be noted that if this end-state is a possibility, it must be allowed to evolve without any attempt to create it by coercion. The image created here is an encompassing perspective that accounts for democracy as government of, for and by the people. In effect, an acceptable democracy theory must blend substantive and procedural components.

In searching for how procedural democracy is linked to the succession dilemma in Africa, different positions emerge in the literature. Thus it becomes interesting to explore how the components of democracy materialise in the entire processes related to succession. Govea and Holm (1998) linked political crises to unregulated succession rather than to economic and social crises. This follows the dominant knowledge on democracy which fails to reflect on the class basis of political power and the purpose of democracy beyond a mere actualisation of stability in society. Connectedness of social structures links crisis in each sphere to overall system crisis and it could be argued that the interests of the ruling elite which straddle the socio-economic and political spheres of society is what create succession crises in third-wave democracies. The dominant discourse ignores structural linkages of society and presents multipartyism as the solution to African politics. Therefore democratisation means, for the elite, a process of competing for power. The consequence of concentrating on the political structure is that politics further excludes the already disaffected masses (cf. Nyamnjoh 2005).

Focusing on East Africa, Warioba (2006), Musambayi (2006), Tusasirwe (2006), Matua (2006) and Othman (2006) show political succession as being at the heart of political tensions in that area. Agyeman-Duah (2003) uses a more general analysis to show that interests of the ruling group or individual are the main basis of succession crises in the continent. Political succession is therefore generating tensions among political elites such that elections are said to represent a fading shadow of democracy (Adejumobi 2000, Diamond 2002). The electoral focus of the third-wave discourse seeks to reproduce procedural democracy in Africa without regard to Africa’s cultural specificities that are not underpinned by a market ethos. Minimalist democracy fails to reproduce the African community that cares. This creates the structural alienation of the majority and at the same time obsessive need by politicians to control state structures for personal interests. Consequently, the inadequacies of the hegemonic democracy framework manifests in struggles for political succession in Africa thereby setting the theory up for contestation.

**Explaining the crisis of democratic theory and perverse manifestations of the third wave in Africa**

Theory building is akin to developing a template within which practice is fitted or measured. There operates a dialectical process in which epistemologies undergo crises. Thomas Kuhn (1970) had put forward a discourse in his classic, *Structure of scientific revolutions*. He showed that normal science or the dominant paradigm undergoes crisis through the rise of counter-instances and alternative viewpoints. Where the counter-instance is
found more appropriate in explaining issues related to the puzzle, it becomes the new normal science. Thus we have:

\[
\text{Science} \rightarrow \text{Crisis of normal science} \rightarrow \text{New normal science}
\]

Figure 1

This framework could be used to view the knowledge continuum in which democratic theory has been developing. Beginning from the classical meaning of the concept as people’s government, the theory has other major moments of robust theoretical interest in the ideas of Locke, the Encyclopedists, Jeremy Bentham, James Mill, John Stuart Mill, Thomas Jefferson and Joseph Schumpeter, among others. In the progression of the theory, it has gone through several mutations. Each mutation tends to be a reconstruction of knowledge to either reflect an ideal to be pursued or an effort to fit knowledge into the realities of social structures ranging from demographic expansion to the character of the economic base. Mindful of the impossibility of direct democracy amidst population growth beyond city states and of course the rise of capitalism, Lockean theory of representative government is posed as a contract in which citizens obey government in return for the protection of their natural rights of life, liberty and property.

Contributions of utilitarian theorists recognised evolving market conditions in the Western world and viewed democracy from the point of view of man as utility maximiser living in a condition of conflicting interests. The governing few in society would therefore be committed to their interests without regard to others. The way to prevent government from despoiling the rest of the people is to render it frequently removable by the majority. A guarantee of the greatest happiness for the greatest number can only come from this practice. J.S. Mill’s contribution in this school has a maximalist inclination. He suggested that apart from voting and participation, democracy should make people ‘more active, more energetic; it would advance them in intellect, in virtue and in practical activity and efficiency’ (Macpherson 1977, p. 51). Jefferson’s contribution to the theory was a case for creating conditions that ensure absence of fundamental class divisions. He saw the presence of opportunity for freedom and independent enterprise to all citizens as necessary for democracy.

In line with Thomas Kuhn’s logic of growth and crisis of paradigms, the journey of recorded democracy discourse goes back to the classical tradition through the Enlightenment to contemporary times. Closely observing this process reveals the emergence in each particular age of sets of ideas that reflect the level of historical development of material forces. The dominant theory of governance in each epoch can therefore be seen as an aspect of the hegemonic project of that period. Little wonder Greek classical thought, especially the Platonic school, was critical of democracy (Popper 1962, Macpherson 1977). Theories of government that found reason in the assent of the mass of the citizens as the basis of political power actually arose with increasing disenchantment against feudal monarchies and the growth of a new socio-economic class that also needed a political voice and power in an emerging capitalist order. To command appeal, the masses were included in the notion of people. It became necessary, as Locke did, to formulate governance ideas in which sovereignty drew from the governed. Ideas of the rights of man and equality arose as a corresponding slogan. The entry of Schumpeter into the discourse reflects the changing character of the market and its increasing requirement to roll back the people and more effectively dominate them through the seemingly neutral political mechanism of elections.
In search of a system of government and procedure that best guarantees this order Schumpeter thought of a democratic method that reflects the market ethos. He was writing in a full-blown market order in which system equilibrium was necessary. His emphasis on how the system is reproduced rather than its content regarding citizens’ lives leads Macpherson to qualify the Schumpeterian thesis as the equilibrium model of democracy (Macpherson 1977).

The Great Depression prompted the rise of Keynesian economics in which regulation created a compromise which led to an inclusive economic order that characterised the Fordist era. The pattern continued until the rise of neoliberalism which corresponds at the political level with the Schumpeterian perspective on democracy. In that connection, democratisation in every part of the world is taken to mean the diffusion of the minimalist thesis which represents the political variant of capitalist modernisation necessary for legitimating the dominant architecture of global power. Hence, Mamdani (2002, p. 289) sees that the wave of African democratisation articulated as the ‘second independence movement’ suffers from the inability to grasp the mode of rule that needs to be democratised. He was referring to democratic activism in Africa that focuses on form rather than substance. Similarly, Young (2004) sees this as ‘virtual democracy’.

Discourses that universalise the minimalist model not only ignore Western democratic theories of substantive slant, but also the substantive participatory ideals of African village communities (Zuern 2009). In all, what takes place are mutations of the democracy epistemology driven by the dominant regime of each epoch. This is to say that the crises of democracy theory like Kuhn’s normal science is connected to changing socio-economic patterns while the dominant one in each epoch reflects the dominant mode of production. Accordingly, the minimalist thesis fails to capture the substantive sense of, but satisfies the hegemonic project of the dominant socio-economic system. The result is contradictions in democracy theory which manifest in restored elective rules in Africa. With emphasis on the formalistic components of democracy, most former dictatorships in Africa have adjusted it to their convenience leading to certain broad patterns in political succession that fall short of the substantive elements.

Illegitimate/unpopular self-succession

This relates to the manipulation of the extant laws and institutions on political succession especially those dealing with term limits to enable the incumbent to continue in power. Beginning with Cameroon, the ruling People’s Democratic Movement (RDPC) has been under Paul Biya’s dictatorship since 1982 (Ngoh 2004). His present term in office was achieved by manipulating the legislature to remove term limits to enable him to run for the presidency in the last election. Through a series of fraudulent elections, Biya has consistently succeeded despite doubts about the popularity of his leadership. Similarly, Congo-Brazzaville has been ruled since 1979 by Denis Sassou Nguesso. Following an election held in 1992, he lost to Pascal Lissouba. Political disagreements with the new leader led him to mobilise a militia and start a war against the elected government of Pascal Lissouba in 1997. His forces overwhelmed the government forces and overthrew the Lissouba government leading to Nguesso’s return to power. He quickly conducted an election to give formal effect to his rule. The election would have been calculated to serve the purpose of staving off international pressure on him to democratise. He therefore played along the line of the dominant democracy template that emphasises elections. This justifies Daremas (2009) who sees that in the contested terrain of democracy theory, certain notions of it could create a window for authoritarian politics to mask itself as democratic.
Another instance is Egypt which was ruled by Mubarak from 1981 to February 2011. His mandate was renewed four times through a series of referendums. While activists had been demanding political reforms, it was not just demands for these reforms that occasioned the revolt which ended Mubarak’s regime. The events which were identified as forming the background of the crisis are:

Dissolution of the social contract governing state–society relations since Nasser’s coup in the fifties. The contract involved a tacit exchange: the regime offered free education, employment in an expanding public sector, affordable healthcare, cheap housing and other forms of social protection, in return for obedience. You could have... these benefits so long as domestic or foreign policies were not questioned and political power was not contested. (Kandil 2011, p. 17)

This contract was abrogated through neoliberal reforms combined with looting by insider capitalists who are mostly connected to the ruling clique. To ensure stability in the face of social stress occasioned by exploitation there was an increase in repression by agents of the state. Consequently, the life of ordinary Egyptians who had nothing to do with politics was made unbearable (Kandil 2011). When an Internet-based opposition group identified as ‘We are all Khaled Said’ called for a protest on 25 January 2011, there was a massive turnout, of about 20,000 people. The response to the demonstration and the fall of Tunisian dictatorship encouraged the group, with support of other activists, to demand political reform and the end of Mubarak’s rule. These demands are symptomatic of the need for a government that will not renege on a social contract which addresses the substantive aspects of democracy.

Uganda is another typical self-succession instance. President Yoweri Museveni has been ruling the country since 1986 after winning the guerrilla war against the regime of Milton Obote. The National Resistance Movement (NRM) which he led to victory in that war has since been the ruling political platform. Internal cracks within the movement which were occasioned by the demand for democracy, and pressures from international development partners, compelled the regime to adopt a multi-party system in 2003. However, Museveni has retained an unremitting hold on power even after the so-called opening up. In a meeting of the ruling party’s National Executive Committee in March 2002, the president and his supporters, amidst opposition within the ruling party, removed Article 105(2) of the constitution, which placed term limits on the presidency. Thereafter, the Legal and Parliamentary Affairs Committee passed a bill in May 2005 which amended the clause relating to term limits for the presidency. Evidently, this was to pave the way for Museveni’s continued qualification for contesting the presidency. The incumbent is practically in control of the entire electoral process as well as all relevant institutions including the media, the judiciary, police and military, all of whom are usually deployed in favour of the sitting government during elections (Makara, Rakner and Svansand 2009).

Other cases that typify self-succession in Africa are Sudan, the Gambia (where President Jammeh is described as an ‘elected’ autocrat) (Saine 2008) and Zimbabwe, in which the 2008 elections created major tensions. Amidst the massive economic destitution of recent years (Mills 2011) the personalist regime of Robert Mugabe finds it expedient to satisfy the procedural conditions of democracy by staging elections.

Proxy succession
This variety arises out of the exertion of undue influence by the past incumbent on the choice of who succeeds him/her. The mechanisms for this range from vote rigging in
general elections, to the manipulation of party selection or parliamentary processes. Usually the outgoing leader seeks to use this approach to retain influence in the government or create a regime that would lack firmness in making him accountable for past misrule. Following Malawi’s transition to multi-party rule for instance, Bakili Muluzi became the head of state in 1994. After serving two terms, which is the constitutional limit, he tried in vain to change the constitution to contest the presidency again. Muluzi selected Bingu wa Mutharika, who was an outsider to the ruling party, as his successor. To foreclose challenge to this affront on party internal democracy, he dismissed his entire cabinet after announcing that it was the cabinet and the United Democratic Front (the ruling party’s politburo) that chose Mutharika (Agyeman-Duah 2003). Mutharika eventually became his successor, though Muluzi’s intent to use him as a stooge never did materialise.

The late President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua of Nigeria became the presidential flag-bearer for the ruling party through the undisguised partisanship of his predecessor Olusegun Obasanjo (Posner and Young 2007). When Obasanjo failed in his ambition to change the constitution to allow him to run for a third term – contrary to the constitutional limit of two terms – he manipulated the emergence of Yar’Adua as the flag-bearer of the ruling party in the following presidential election. The 2007 presidential elections in which Yar’Adua was declared winner were extensively rigged (Suberu 2007). The aim of Obasanjo was to achieve proxy succession and remain politically influential.

An account of related events in Zambia goes back to the year 2000 when the late Frederick Chiluba tried to exceed his constitutionally mandated two terms as president. He actually received the nomination of his ruling party despite massive internal opposition, including his own vice-president and several of his ministers and parliamentarians. In May 2001, he decided to respect the constitution and not to seek a third term. This came only after violence and a rare and courageous threat of impeachment by the parliament. Chiluba then engineered the victory of his hand-picked successor, the late Levy Mwanawasa, in the December 2001 elections (Agyeman-Duah 2003).

**Hereditary trends**

Joseph Kabila became the twenty-first century’s precedent for hereditary succession in a republic when on 16 January 2001 his father, Laurent-Désiré Kabila was assassinated by his bodyguard. The military leadership thought it wise to replace Kabila with his son, who is to date President of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It must be noted here that the DRC was not an elective regime at the time. In a controversial election held in 2006, Joseph Kabila emerged the winner amidst allegations of electoral malpractices. Similarly President Omar Bongo has maintained personalist political rule in Gabon since 1967 when he took over power as military leader. He later transmuted into a civilian head of state and ‘won’ all presidential elections conducted during his rule. Bongo’s death in 2009 transformed Gabon’s succession pattern from self-succession to hereditary presidency. His son Ben Bongo became Omar’s successor. Omar Bongo dominated Gabonese politics for over four decades. In the process, he strategically positioned his son in politics by making him the defence minister. Besides, Bongo’s dominance of the political space did not allow the opposition to build popular support (France 24 2009). In the end, the emergence of Ben Bongo as his father’s successor, which in principle complied with the constitution, could be accounted for by long years of subtle closure of the political space by his father, Omar Bongo.

In the case of Togo, the death of President Eyadéma in February 2005 created room for the crude politics and manipulation of the constitution that characterised the process which
led to the emergence of his 39-year-old son Faure Gnassingbé as his successor (Banjo 2008). Eyadéma’s death was followed by swift action by Togo’s military high command to announce Faure as his father’s successor to the presidency. The military elite suspended the constitution and swore allegiance to Faure as president. This contravenes Article 65 of the Togolese constitution, which provided that ‘in case of vacancy in the presidency of the republic by death, the president’s function is exerted temporarily by the president of the National Assembly...’ (Banjo 2008, p. 152).

The parliament was implicated in this conspiracy against the constitutional rule of succession because they quickly met to legitimise the succession blunder. Composed of 81 members, 72 of whom belonged to Eyadéma’s political party, Parliament passed an extraordinary resolution that dismissed the Speaker on 7 February 2005 and then amended Article 65 of the constitution. This breaches a constitutional provision that ‘no revision procedure shall be initiated or continued during an interim period’ (Banjo 2008, p. 152). International pressures compelled Faure to hold presidential elections within 60 days, as stipulated by the constitution. To give a sense of transparency to the elections, he stepped aside and appointed the vice-president of the National Assembly as the interim president. The opposition contested that the return of the ex-Speaker was relevant to the process of restoration of constitutional order fearing that the refusal to reinstate him and the appointment of another person as an interim president was orchestrated to manipulate the process in favour of Eyadéma’s son (Banjo 2008). The ballot which was programmed to deliver Faure as president ultimately did so. The point of elections in the first place is because of overwhelming international pressure requiring states to identify with the formalities of liberal democracy.

**Emerging regimes of free and fair elections**

Ghana is one case which is claimed to be democratising. Whitfield (2009, p. 621) praised it as ‘the shining democratic star on the African continent’. In light of Ghana’s 2008 general elections, he argues that the country has developed stabilising characteristics typified by an independent electoral commission, transparent electoral processes, integration of the political elite, creation of norms and institutions that structure elite behaviour, and the institutionalisation of political parties. No doubt these are essential components of democracy, but are portrayed as sufficient from Whitfield’s procedural minimalist viewpoint. But even on the basis of the minimalist view Jockers, Kohnert and Nugent (2010) contest that although Ghana may be more advanced in electoral practices than most countries of sub-Saharan Africa, there are persistent concerns of inflated voters registers and electoral fraud perpetrated by the two major political parties, as well as reluctance on the part of responsible authorities to investigate what appears to be a long history of fraudulent voting. To be sure, Ghana shows some promise, but it is still racing to catch up with the requirements of procedural democracy. Most of the complimentary discourses on its success hardly refer to the substantive elements of democracy. Reports on the economic conditions in Ghana tends towards emphasising general improvement. However, an Afrobarometer (2008, p. 4) survey reveals that 31% of Ghanaians suffer food shortages, 36% are without water, 36% are without medicine, 27% are without cooking fuel, and 53% are without a source of income. The report also shows that more than 60% of the survey respondents are dissatisfied with government performance in narrowing income gaps and keeping the prices of commodities down. This is not surprising because the framework of economic reform is neoliberalism (See Republic of Ghana 2005). Given this ideological focus, the
emphasis of political rule is on how to grow capital, which hardly goes hand in hand with state responsibility towards the welfare of its citizens.

**Conclusion**

In tracing the various tracks which third-wave regimes have taken in Africa, this study reviewed the epistemology which underpins the dominant discourse. This review shows that the epistemology is part of the hegemonic project that reifies capitalist modernisation and conflates it with democracy. It has a strong effect on the democratisation discourse with confinement of the meaning of democracy to only the easily measurable procedural referents. These referents, such as elections and regime of rights, fail to integrate the substantive elements that are related to socio-economic conditions which create social citizenship. Social citizenship is created when political rule is based on practices which create democratic spaces for the development of both institutions and members of a political community. The maximalist perspective that addresses both the form and substance of democracy is subordinated to the procedural minimalist perspective. The latter perspective is the common measure of the so-called democratisation in Africa. It leads to the establishment of regimes that mimic the procedural stipulations of minimalist democracy. In the end, elite collaboration and integration increases, while the political and socio-economic alienation of the large mass of the citizens continues. Ultimately, democracy remains in abeyance.

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**References**


Beyond the fringe? South African social movements and the politics of redistribution

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Collective action in support of the redistribution of wealth and power in South Africa was initially led by the trade union movement. But, as more labour-market entrants have failed to find work in the formal economy, unions’ capacity to speak for the poor has declined. Scholars and activists have, therefore, come to see new social movements as a superior source of effective action for redistribution. Analysis reveals that the movements are not equipped to lead a redistributive coalition but that co-operation between unions and social movements, and a synergy between their approaches, is most likely to produce effective redistributive politics.

Keywords: redistribution; politics; social movements; trade unions; South Africa

Ironically, since predictions that poverty and inequality in South Africa will prompt a social convulsion are a routine feature of the national debate (Mbeki 2011), the recession which followed the global financial crisis has been remarkable more for what it did not bring than for what it did. While it was widely seen as the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, and in South Africa cost hundreds of thousands of jobs (Nxumalo 2009), it did not trigger organised mobilisation by working people and the poor for a new economic order. While grass-roots protest in the townships and shack settlements where the black poor live has been a constant during this period, it is unrelated to the economic crisis – it predates it and is directed at local governments rather than economic power-holders. Engagement between the African National Congress (ANC), which has governed since democracy’s advent in 1994, and its trade union and South African Communist Party

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alliance partners’, was a far more visible response to economic crisis than mass mobilisation behind an economic alternative.

The lack of a sustained challenge to the current distribution of economic power is not an accident but is a consequence of structural changes in the conditions under which the poor organise. While the future contours of organisation for redistribution remain unclear, it is now evident that the ‘classic’ form of organisation by the poor, the labour movement (Piven and Cloward 1979), is no longer able to play the role it once did as the leading agent of redistributive politics. The trade union movement remains the largest organised interest in South Africa, but it has little or no presence among the growing number of poor people outside the formal economy.

This limitation on the trade union movement’s reach reduces its bargaining power, and partly explains its failure to win economic policy changes from a governing party which is formally allied to the country’s largest trade union federation. This in turn begs a key question – whether, given the limits on trade union capacity to lead the poor in the quest for a more equitable social order, South African social movements, which do organise outside the formal workplace, might be able to step into the breach to play the leading role in organising campaigns for redistribution once played by unions. This article will argue that social movements are unable to play the role once played by unions and that they are not equipped to lead an effective campaign for the redistribution of power and resources. But it will argue also that the limited social power of unions means that a new synergy between trade unions and social movements is the likeliest route to sustained collective action by the poor and formal workers in support of redistributive goals.

**Limits on labour**

In South Africa, as in any other society with a significant industrial base, redistributive politics was historically led by labour (Friedman 2002). The beginning of the demise of the apartheid system can be traced back to 1973, when black workers in the port city of Durban struck for higher pay (Friedman 1985). While the 1976 rebellion in the Soweto township is often seen as the beginning of the wave of resistance which was to defeat minority rule, it was the strikes which, over the ensuing decade, triggered the growth of a trade union movement which became not only the largest and most organised vehicle for collective action by black South Africans but also became a social movement committed to a thoroughgoing redistribution of wealth and power. Attitudes among union members are, surveys show, more militant in their expectations of change than that of other citizens (Charney 1995). Currently, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), South Africa’s largest trade union movement and an ally of the governing ANC, is the most consistent voice in support of redistribution.

The influence of trade unions, in South Africa as in other industrial economies, was possible because poor people were concentrated in mass production workplaces in which collective action was much easier and workers had considerable bargaining power if they organised because they could withdraw their labour. In western Europe, this favourable environment for organisation produced labour movements and parties which formed alliances with other social strata which labour, by virtue of its numbers and capacity for organisation, invariably led (Przeworski 1985). In South Africa, the largest industrial base on the African continent ensured substantial union influence in the early years of the movement — wages increased dramatically in response to union growth (Fallon 1992, p. 18). But labour influence has declined as changes in the workplace have reduced employer reliance on it — less and less of the economically active population are absorbed into the formal labour
market (Bhorat and Oosthuizen 2006). This has potentially profound implications for redistributive politics, since it means that the unions represent a declining percentage of working people. In the Western Cape province, traditionally the home of the garment industry, women who once worked in mass-production clothing plants now work from home in cut-make-and-trim piecework operations (Rogerson 2001). When they worked in factories, they could withdraw their labour and force the employer to negotiate. Now, if they do not produce, they sacrifice income and leave the clothing companies free to purchase from another supplier. More generally, the poor are now increasingly outside the formal workplace and so beyond the reach of traditional forms of labour organisation. This may explain why the unions, while they have been able to secure a labour relations regime which does meet many union demands, have failed to secure the changes in the economic policy framework which they have demanded (COSATU 2011) – strength in the workplace does not translate into equivalent strength in the society. A more effective redistributive politics will require the emergence of a new coalition in which unions will play a role, but only in alliance with other organisations representing the poor outside the formal labour market.

Because many poor people are now beyond the reach of the trade unions, it follows that an effective redistributive politics will require the organisation of the millions of people who are excluded from the formal workplace and thus from the labour movement. It is here that social movements become crucial to the analysis, for they would seem to be the obvious modes of organisation for citizens who live in poverty but are unable to participate in the formal economy and so to join the labour movement. Are South African social movements the bearers of a new politics of redistribution? Do they provide the collective voice for poor people which the labour movement once offered? And have they a reasonable prospect of winning shifts in the redistribution of power and resources? The next two sections will attempt to address these questions. They will rely on empirical research by this author and colleagues into one such movement, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) (Friedman and Mottiar 2005, Friedman 2010) and on published research on current social movements.

**Changing the system or joining it? Social movements in a democratic society**

The emergence, some six years after the defeat of apartheid, of social movements which responded to the persistence of social and economic inequalities in a democratic South Africa, was a development of great importance to intellectuals on the left.

In 1996, the ANC-led government adopted the Growth, Employment and Redistribution strategy (GEAR), which was seen by many activists and intellectuals as a retreat from redistributive politics (Michie and Padayachee 1998, Habib and Padayachee 2000). Prior to GEAR, ANC policy had been underpinned by the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), initiated by the union movement in an attempt to hold the first universal-franchise government to a redistributive agenda. GEAR’s stress on tight fiscal policies was seen as evidence that the ANC had abandoned social justice for neoliberalism. In reality, the version of the RDP which the ANC adopted after a lengthy internal negotiation was far less redistributive, and government policy after GEAR was far less neoliberal’ than this view suggested (Masiza and Ngqungwana 2001). But the failure of the post-apartheid government to launch an effective assault on poverty was widely blamed on GEAR.

The emergence of social movements seemed to show that the government’s policy direction was being fiercely resisted by the poor and that the critics had been correct to insist, in the face of frequent government protestations, that the policy shift represented a war against poor
people, who were now fighting back. The social movements were thus the focus of much scholarship (Ballard, Habib and Valodia 2006, Desai 2002) which welcomed them as a new departure in South African politics. One scholar and activist hailed them as vehicles of ‘a socialist vision, and an independent mass-based mobilisation and struggle as an ideological and organisational alternative to the capitalist ANC’ (McKinley 2004a). Other writers make less grand claims on behalf of the movements, but still see them as motors of an attempt to change social power relations. Thus the movements have been defined as ‘politically and/or socially directed collectives . . . focused on changing one or more elements of the social, political and economic system . . . ’ (Ballard, Habib and Valodia 2006, p. 3).

There are significant differences between movements – they range from small activist groups to national organisations, from local initiatives to affiliates of international organisations (Ballard, Habib, Valodia and Zeurn 2005, p. 628). There was also initially a strategic divide between movements. Two of them – the TAC and the Homeless People’s Federation – adopted a similar strategy to the trade union movement: they sought to engage with the new government and other power-holders to win concrete gains on behalf of their constituency. TAC was unique among the movements in its leaders’ expressions of loyalty to the ANC (if not to its current leadership and practices) (Friedman and Mottiar 2005). The other movements were concerned to articulate an alternative voice rather than to win specific demands – either because they saw themselves as harbingers of a new social order (McInnes 2005) or because they found engagement with the authorities futile (Desai 2002). In some cases, they sought to subvert the system rather than engage with it – by, for example, reconnecting the electricity of people disconnected for non-payment (Egan and Wafer 2005). But what the movements have held in common is a rejection of government social and economic policy and a demand for redistribution.

Again with the exception of TAC, the new movements defined themselves in opposition to the ANC. In this, they seemed to be filling two gaps. First, while grass-roots movements which challenged the prevailing distribution of wealth had played a role in the fight against apartheid, both the movements and their leaders worked with the ANC-led government elected in 1994 and did not challenge it. The new movements revived the oppositional politics of the fight against apartheid, often using the same tactics (Ballard, Habib, Valodia and Zeurn 2005). Second, they were seen as vehicles for concerns which trade unions will not or cannot address (partly because the alliance between COSATU and the ANC initially tempered the union movement’s militancy). Thus one study asserts that the emergence of social movements filled a gap created by the failure of trade unions to ‘lead the struggle against neoliberal globalisation’ (Buhlungu 2006, p. 69). In this view, unions were ‘slow in responding to the challenge’ posed by the switch to GEAR and ‘it was in this context’ that social movements emerged. These factors ensured that the movements were seen as radical alternatives to an ANC administration which was said to have abandoned redistributive goals.

The expectation that the movements would lead a powerful successful assault on economic and social power relations has not been vindicated (Ballard, Habib and Valodia 2006, pp. 397–417). Some have won significant gains – the TAC’s success in winning a comprehensive AIDS policy is the best-known example (Friedman 2010). These have invariably been a result of using the post-apartheid democratic system rather than confronting it. And, while many of the movements initially lacked a social base – they were usually started by activists and intellectuals who found it difficult to build a grass-roots membership – grass-roots support has grown (Birkinshaw 2009). But the gains have been modest, only rarely have they stemmed from mass mobilisation and the membership remains a fraction of those eligible to join – TAC at its height boasted some 12,000 members while over 5
million people are believed to be living with AIDS (Friedman 2010, p. 46). Social movements have played at best a marginal role in protests which have, since 2004, been a constant feature of life in the areas in which the black poor live. A sign of the reduced expectations which now attach to the movements is the insistence of the academic supporters of social movements that they should now be seen not as an attempt to change the social order but as vehicles which allow the poor to cope with it.¹

This limited impact does not, however, exclude the possibility that the movements do play the roles once played by the labour movement – organising and mobilising poor people to claim a say in decisions and thus the means to alter the distribution of resources as well as power. They could be playing that role but without appreciable success thus far: the labour movement endured years of limited influence before its growth period (Friedman 1985). While trade unionists challenge the claim that they have ceded their role to social movements, it does seem fair to assume that movement activists do believe that they are rallying the unemployed poor behind demands for changes to the social and economic system (and thus are playing a role which trade unions cannot play).

This begs two questions. The obvious one, to which we will return, is whether social movements really do what they hope to do and whether they may be capable of doing so more effectively in future. The less obvious one, which needs to be addressed now, is whether the people who participate in them believe that the movements are mobilising to challenge prevailing power. The question is more complicated and more important than it may seem. Like unions, social movements attract the interest and sometimes the involvement of intellectuals and activists seeking a new social order – they equally invariably attract members who are simply hoping to improve their personal circumstances.² And, while movement intellectuals might see them as vehicles for wide-ranging social change, members may seem them purely as a means to bring grievances to the attention of authorities. Thus Andile Mngxitama, then of the Landless People’s Movement (LPM), argued during the period when the movements were still a new phenomenon that the belief among some activists that participants in social movements share their leftist perspectives substantially overstates their ‘revolutionary’ impulse: ‘a LPM leader explained recently to the disappointment and chagrin of the “revolutionary left”: “We want the government to listen to us”’ (Mngxitama 2004). This raises obvious questions about the role of movements: are they challenges to what one scholar calls the ‘hegemonic framework’? (Greenberg 2006, p. 145). Whatever the hopes of their architects, are they about redistributing power and privilege or simply about obtaining for participants a greater share of that which the prevailing distribution makes available? Are social movements, despite their lionisation by left intellectuals as attempts ‘to construct a future society in the decay of the old’ (Bond 2004), merely vehicles for citizens who have no quarrel with the status quo but who hope to gain access to land, housing, medication or public services?

It is important to stress what is at stake here. The problem is not the perennial concern among some on the left that ‘reformism’ – campaigns for incremental changes in policy and law – will reinforce an exploitative system by obscuring the root causes of domination. This is a profound misunderstanding of the processes by which power and wealth are redistributed. The last decades of apartheid showed how incremental reforms which entail even a seemingly small shift of decision-making power from the dominator to the dominated are important steps forward for the dominated because they create new sources of power which can be used to fight for a further redistribution of power. The key test was thus not whether a reform changed the system but whether it required, in however seemingly minor a way, a shift in power (Friedman 1985, 1986, 1987). This holds not only for overtly authoritarian systems such as apartheid but also for formal democracies (such as post-apartheid South
Africa). Thus John Hoffman has argued that emancipatory projects which assume that human progress can be achieved only by the destruction of what exists have repeatedly enslaved rather than freed humanity because they have misunderstood the way in which sustainable redistributions of power occur. Hoffman pleads for a return to the dialectical notion of transcendence in which the new both preserves and supersedes the old, preserving that which is still of value while transcending that which is not. Integral to this view is the notion that victories against domination are achieved in the present, not some mythical future, and that structural change is a result not of a violent break with the past but with the incremental shifts in power which restrict domination and open new horizons to the dominated. Hoffman thus proposes that a ban on smoking in public places is a step towards Utopia because it forces participants in the market to take into account human needs and is thus a contribution towards ‘a gradual process of making the exchange process more and more concrete so that real people replace the abstract individuals of the market’ (Hoffman 2009, p. 92).

The problem is not, therefore, that social movement members may demand changes which shore up the system. It is that they may demand no changes at all and might prefer to use the movements to extract resources from the system. It is not that they may seek only modest changes, for even those changes can shift power relations in favour of the powerless. It is that they will seek special favours for themselves rather than rights and entitlements which are available to all citizens or to all members of a class of citizens. This is not yet a real problem for social movements – their demands at present suggest that they are not simply seeking to obtain a larger slice of the cake for participants but are seeking to establish rights which are in principle available to all. And, where changes have been won – by TAC, for example – the resulting entitlements are available to all who meet explicitly stated criteria, not only to those who belong to TAC and are connected to it. But it could become a problem if movements are not alert to the need to ensure that a campaign for greater inclusion does not degenerate into a vehicle for privileged access for a relatively small group of participants.

Tensions between participants’ immediate goals and the wider proclaimed aims of movements can also entail important practical consequences: while movement activists may want the organisation to address broader campaigns for social change, participants may feel that this wastes time and resources which could be devoted to their primary concerns. To illustrate: TAC’s interest in a people’s health campaign which would have sought a public health system more accessible to the poor did not become a reality and it seems reasonable to assume that the reason was that participants’ priority was securing antiretroviral treatment, not the broader systemic issue of a better health system (Friedman and Mottiar 2005). Trade unions faced similar dilemmas during their growth phase and the result was usually that campaigns which sought to tackle broader issues were not pursued because of the pressure of addressing members’ needs for better pay and work conditions (Friedman 2010).

TAC has won changes in policy which have thus far eluded most other movements. This means that it has been forced to face choices which others can still avoid: whether it should concentrate purely on ensuring treatment for its members or insist on wider access and whether it should be content with securing treatment for people living with AIDS or should pursue wider social change. On the first, it has, as noted earlier, avoided becoming an exclusionary lobby. On the second, its successful campaign for a comprehensive treatment regime has not been a springboard to wider change – it has, rather, meant the organisation’s decline as a national actor.

The tensions discussed here pose significant challenges for movements. They warn of limits on their capacity to campaign for wider social changes and of a need to ensure that campaigns for change do not become vehicles for patronage. But, in itself, the fact that
participants join and take part in social movements because they want concrete changes in their lives rather than a new social order does not limit their potential to secure structural changes. In the main, this is why powerless people have always joined movements – the labour movement began with a successful campaign for an eight-hour day (Roediger and Foner 1989). As Hoffman points out, winning the immediate gains which participants seek can achieve momentum towards structural change. This is precisely the way in which trade unions were able to build a very distinctive social movement from seemingly mundane battles over pay and work conditions.

This initial clarification enables us to move to an assessment of the degree to which social movements are becoming a vehicle for the organisation and mobilisation which enables participants to turn 1994’s formal promise of a say in decisions into reality. Two issues are important. First, the degree to which participants are able to exercise voice within these organisations. The degree to which the poor gain a voice does not only hinge on whether the organisations to which they belong win gains; if gains are to demonstrate widening participation in public decisions and, therefore, an expansion of the right to decide, they must have been freely chosen and fought for by those who belong to the organisations which win the gains (Robinson and Friedman 2007). Clearly, however, exercising voice within a movement is of limited value unless its expression effects concrete changes. The extent to which organisations win gains – or use strategies which may reasonably be expected to win them in the future – is therefore a crucial second test of the degree to which social movements are extending citizenship and empowering participants.

Intellectual fad or structural shift? Assessing social movements

One trade union role which social movements clearly have not taken over is mass organisation and mobilisation. Membership figures of social movements are often hard to come by. Those which are available suggest that membership is counted in thousands rather than tens of thousands. The Landless People’s Movement has claimed 20,000 members. By its own estimation, there are more than 26 million landless people (Landless People’s Movement 2004). TAC’s limited membership was mentioned earlier. More recently, a study of the Western Cape women farm workers’ movement Sikhula Sonke reports that it has 5000 members (White 2010). It can, therefore, safely be assumed that membership of social movements is a fraction of the almost two million people who belong to COSATU (Naidoo 2010). This comparison is distorted to some extent by the reality that unions are able to rely on ‘closed shop’ or ‘union shop’ agreements in some workplaces which automatically make all workers union members. But this makes a relative difference only; it is safe to assume that voluntary membership of trade unions far exceeds that of social movements, making the unions rather than the movements the prime source of mass mobilisation in the society.

Social movement activists and some of their academic supporters are critical of a ‘numbers game’ in which support and strength are simply equated with membership numbers. They are right to warn against a mechanistic relationship between numbers and power in which the former is said directly to translate into the latter. If power required mass support, TAC would not have won a comprehensive government response to AIDS. It is also far easier for unions and professional associations to recruit dues-paying members and retain accurate records of how many they have than it is for social movements. But, while a more nuanced view of membership numbers is appropriate, this does not mean that these numbers are irrelevant: claims to be ‘mass-based’ require a mass membership base and the number who join is an important indicator of a movement’s ability to
speak for people. As long as social movements speak of a few thousand at most, they cannot be seen as the primary vehicles for political participation of the poor and weak.

As noted above, the limited support base of social movements is also demonstrated by the fact that they have played a minor role in six years of sustained urban protest and have failed to turn the discontent which prompts the protests into a major organising opportunity. Some analyses insist that social movements have played a key role in leading the demonstrations (Shoba 2007). However, a parliamentary investigation of the protests insisted that ‘political factionalism’ was a key cause (Parliament of South Africa Research Unit 2009), a view repeated frequently by local and provincial politicians who attribute the protests to politicians who mobilise grass-roots citizens in the hope of strengthening their position in local politics. A recent study of the protests suggested that ‘many gatherings were probably local political protests’ (Alexander 2009) – in contrast, presumably, to actions organised by movements. Available evidence suggests that social movements have led some protests (Gwala 2010) – a trend which has increased as the wave of protests has continued. But there is no evidence to suggest that movements have led much more than a fraction of this vast wave of demonstrations which, in the financial year 2004–5 alone saw, according to official figures, 5085 legal and 881 illegal actions by protestors (Masondo 2010).

While the role of movements in leading the protests is open to debate, what is far clearer is that the demonstrations have not prompted a dramatic growth in the organisation of the urban poor or a consequent shift in the distribution of power in the cities. It remains likely that participation in social movements has increased since the protests began. What the protests have not done, however, is to prompt a sustained increase in the capacity of the urban poor to gain a say in urban decisions. Some have prompted attempts to negotiate and thus to gain a say: protesters have handed in memoranda to the authorities (Alexander 2009) and have on one occasion successfully mobilised to remove a mayor from office (Grootes 2009). But there are few, if any, examples of residents achieving a share in urban decision making by negotiating on grievances with the authorities.

This point is of paramount importance, for it was by channelling collective action initiated at the grass roots into permanent transfers of power that the union movement grew. As labour militancy increased, industrial action was not organised by unions – but it was the unions who stepped in to ensure that the gains were turned into organisation (Friedman 1985). This is not only the key to organisational growth. It is also the means by which the expression of grievance turns into power to participate in decisions. Union members became more impatient for change than other citizens (Charney 1995) because they were able to exercise power and this gave them the confidence to demand more. If movements cannot build on the grass-roots expression of grievance to achieve sustained shifts in social power through organisation and negotiation, it is hard to understand how they will be able to ensure that the poor gain a significant say in decisions. This point was demonstrated in the urban context in far less favourable circumstances during the township battle against apartheid during the 1980s when, beginning in the village of Port Alfred in the Eastern Cape province, local civic activists forged negotiating relationships with the authorities or with business which gave them a share in decisions and in some cases enabled them to exercise joint decision-making power despite the fact that apartheid denied those who participated in them elementary citizenship rights (Suttner 2004). Thus far, this has been beyond the social movements – for as long as it remains so, it is difficult to see them making a sustained impact on the environments in which the South African poor live.

This raises another key observation about social movements – that they have largely failed to win concrete gains for their participants. TAC’s victories are, of course, an exception. More recently, the shack-dweller movement Abahlali baseMjondolo won, in late
2009, a constitutional court order striking down Section 16 of the Slums Act (Abahlali base-Mjondolo 2009). Abahlali baseMjondolo has also won small gains for members – taps or toilets in shack settlements (Birkinshaw 2009). This reflects a new departure in the strategies of some movements: the neat distinction between organisations which use the system and those who do not, which was largely accurate when the movements emerged, has become less tenable. Abahlali baseMjondolo combines use of the courts with an electoral boycott – it has sought to persuade shack dwellers in its Durban base not to vote in local elections – a tactic pioneered by the Landless People’s Movement in 2004. In her study of the farm workers’ movement Sikhula Sonke, White points to some concrete gains made in engagement with employers and government officials (White 2010, 682 ff.). But, in the main, social movements have not achieved concrete changes to law, policy and practice for their participants. This means that they are, in the main, not vehicles for citizens to acquire a greater voice because voice means the capacity to translate demands into concrete change.

Social movements and academic authors sympathetic to them may reply that this was not one of the goals of the movements: they were concerned not to win concrete changes but to act as ‘alternative avenues for democratic expression’ (McKinley 2004b, p. 12) outside those forms offered by the formal political system or as mobilisers of an alternative socialist vision (McKinley 2004a, Buhlungu 2006, Oldfield and Stokke 2006). On both of these grounds, most movements did not seek negotiation with the authorities – indeed, they often saw it as an unacceptable compromise. TAC was treated with suspicion partly because it did seek gains through engagement with the public authorities. Concrete changes are won in engagement with official instruments of governance (including the courts); many of the movements are suspicious of this engagement and so do not achieve the changes which go with it. To judge the movements by whether they win concrete changes, in this view, is to use a standard which cannot appropriately be applied to them.

There are two answers to this point. The first is that, as noted above, the abstentionist position described here has eroded and it is now increasingly common for social movements to seek to use negotiation with the authorities and, in some cases, court action (Abahlali base-Mjondolo 2010, Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign 2009, 2010). So it is becoming increasingly inaccurate to see the movements’ failure to achieve concrete gains as a product of principle. The second is that the history of both the trade union movement and social movements such as TAC shows convincingly that the abstentionist position is a recipe for powerlessness and that, to the extent that social movements embrace this stance, they will remain marginal to the concerns of most poor people. It was the unions which won gains which grew and became vehicles for organised militancy. The key obstacle to a fairer distribution of the right to make decisions as well as access to resources is the powerlessness, real and perceived, of the poor. By winning demands, even very immediate ones which seem not to alter the nature of the system, movements enable participants to gain a sense of their power, which enables them to expand both their demands and their willingness to fight for them. People who see themselves as powerless and who are drawn to organisation by the scale of their immediate need are very unlikely to stay long in movements which offer them the prospect of perpetual struggle but no concrete change.

Some analyses insist that social movements are deepening democracy despite their lack of gains because they give members a means of participating in their organisation (McKinley 2004b, p. 12). Internal democracy is essential if movements are to offer a vehicle for voice, a point made earlier. What is less clear is whether the movements are as democratic as some of their advocates insist. Thus, Ballard, Habib and Valodia, in their much-cited study of social movements, point out that the movements differ in their
embrace of democratic practices, implying that particular movements cannot be assumed to practise internal democracy: whether or not they do must be empirically established in each case. They note also that ‘in all cases … a vanguard cadre play a crucial role’ (Ballard, Habib and Valodia 2006, p. 407). Pithouse devotes a significant section of an analysis of social movements to repeated warnings against elite capture (Pithouse 2006), a theme which would not be necessary if this was not a concrete threat. Work on TAC suggests that while democratic structures are operating, dynamics which privilege elite voices are ever present (Friedman and Mottiar 2005). Whether movements do indeed give their grass-roots participants a voice depends, therefore, on a set of highly contingent circumstances. And even where movements are democratic, strategy may continue to be largely the work of middle-class intellectuals.

Equally importantly, the notion that participation in associations which do not achieve any concrete gains for their participants – and which therefore do not enable them to alter the power relationships to which they are subject – has automatic democratising qualities misses the point. The poor and marginalised are excluded from democratic participation by unequal power relations and they can be said to be participating – and thus to be wielding power – only if they are able to acquire a share in the decisions which have hitherto been made about them and not with them. Ironically, the implied claim that participation in ‘struggle’ can offer a viable means of democratic participation even in the absence of concrete gains which shift the distribution of power has much in common with the position of Robert Putnam, who has argued that participation in apolitical associations such as choral societies equips citizens with the experience they need to become democratic citizens (Putnam 1994). Despite their differences, both views ignore the reality that it is not participation in voluntary associations which deepens democracy – whether these are football clubs or social movements – but collective action to hold power to account. Associations which do not offer the powerless a means to begin to wield power are not instruments of deeper, more inclusive democracy because they do not address the chief constraint to democratisation – a distribution of power which reduces the poor to the objects of others’ decisions rather than the subjects of their own destiny.

It is perhaps worth noting that a more thorough democratisation of social movements might, given the points made earlier about the expectations of participants rather than leaders, ensure that the movements became more focused on immediate gains and more pragmatic in their dealings with government authorities and perhaps private power-holders too – the current trend within movements to greater engagement with official institutions may reflect the extent to which both the quantity and quality of grass-roots participation is growing. Movement intellectuals may resist the notion that democracy is about winning a say in decisions from which concrete gains can be made, but the evidence suggests that grass-roots participants are under no such illusions. If social movements do begin to develop authentic mass bases and effective internal democracy, a greater focus on using whatever levers the democratic system has to offer to win immediate gains seems the likeliest result.

None of the criticisms argued here should be interpreted to mean that social movements are little more than an irrelevance given an inflated importance by the desire of left intellectuals to find a vehicle. The movements obviously differ in a great many ways – not only in their internal organisation but also in their levels of organisation, their support base, their ability to mobilise and their tactics and strategy. But all provide a vehicle for people who, without them, would be deprived of the right to participate in democratic politics, to seek to exercise the active citizenship to which democracy entitles them. Some of the movements – TAC in its successful fight for antiretrovirals, Abahlali baseMjondolo in its challenge to the
Slums Act, and the other movements which have enabled members to challenge decisions which affect them but in which they had no part – are making South African democracy more inclusive by providing for thousands of people the means of collective action without which democratic rights remain a promise rather than a reality. Not only is South Africa more democratic than it would be if there were no social movements – given the constraints on workplace organisation in the formal economy discussed earlier, it seems probable that, if poor citizens are to claim a stake in decision making, it will be through the efforts of social movements (if not necessarily those movements which currently exist).

What the argument has sought to show is that the movements are not providing an organisational nexus which offers a realistic prospect of a shift in power and privilege. Despite changes which have weakened unions here, the South African union movement remains unusually large and influential in comparison to similar movements in most other societies. The unions thus remain a far larger and a far more influential source of mass mobilisation than any of the social movements who operate outside the workplace – and this by a considerable distance. For many years, a South African redistributive politics which does not assign a pivotal role to the trade union movement is likely to remain marginal to most of the poor, as well as to mainstream politics.

But this, of course, does not mean that unions are still the key drivers of redistributive politics. They cannot be, for the proportion of poor people who are outside the reach of the formal labour market, and thus of the unions, is high and growing. If an effective redistributive politics is to emerge, therefore, it will need to move beyond the workplace and thus beyond the labour movement. But what would be needed for social movements to play a far greater role in altering the distribution of power and resources? The concluding section will argue that an effective redistributive politics is most likely to emerge from a social movement–trade union synergy.

Movement unions and union movements: a new synergy?

Despite their shared support for a redistribution of power and privilege, COSATU and most of the social movements do not see each other as allies (Lehulere 2005) – indeed, relations are characterised by distance and mutual suspicion.

The most obvious and most oft-cited reason is COSATU’s alliance with the ANC. On the one hand, this makes it hesitant to work with movements which are hostile to the governing party – it did work with TAC but this was possible precisely because its leadership professed loyalty to the ANC. When TAC embarked on a civil disobedience campaign, COSATU withheld support because it was unwilling to confront an ANC government in this way (Friedman and Mottiar 2005). When, in late 2010, COSATU initiated a meeting with civil society organisations to discuss co-operation, it was careful only to invite those which were not hostile to the ANC – and even then, the meeting was denounced by the ANC as an initial step towards ‘regime change’ – as an attempt to displace it with an alternative government (Mantashe 2010). The movements have been more ambivalent about COSATU but a widely held position has made co-operation dependent on its abandoning its alliance with the ANC (Lehulere 2005, p. 21). The divide may go deeper and may also reflect differing tactical orientations as well as divergent views on relations with the ANC. Despite occasional suggestions that COSATU and social movements are willing to co-operate more closely, they have remained rivals rather than partners. Both, however, may face compelling pressures to explore co-operation.

The immediate reason for this may be recognition that a refusal to co-operate has reduced the influence of both. Union bargaining power is undercut by rising unemployment and the growth of informal work – organising workers outside the formal workplace is a
task which unions have been unable to address. Organisation is more difficult, bargaining power not as obvious – the styles of organisation which succeed in the formal workplace are often ineffective outside it. This explains why limited attempts by unions to assist the organisation of informal sector workers such as street traders have thus far proved unsustainable (Devenish and Skinner 2006). There are no signs yet that unions are able, on their own, to organise informal workers. Social movement growth has been limited by organisational constraints but movements have acquired constituencies which are beyond the reach of unions, giving the latter an incentive to enhance their bargaining power by co-operating with the movements. An alliance would also substantially increase the influence of social movements. Alliances were always a key feature of union strategy just as they have been integral to TAC’s approach (Friedman and Mottiar 2005); some social movements have begun to see the value in alliances (Saunders 2009) and co-operation with unions would enhance this trend.

But more is at stake here than the need for an alliance between organised workers and organisations which recruit members outside the formal labour market. A synergy between organising styles and strategies may strengthen both parties. Unions which work with social movements would become more aware of the importance of organising outside the workplace, the difficulties which this presents and the approaches necessary to build strength in the society beyond the formal labour market. Movements may follow the lead of TAC and the Homeless People’s Federation by recognising the power of the unions’ stress on winning the gains which participants seek when they join movements. As noted above, there is already movement in this direction among social movements which would be enhanced if movements begin to absorb union approaches and unions begin to acknowledge the constraints of organising the formally unemployed. Movements may also begin to adopt the internal practices, processes and structures which make the unions relatively democratic. Trade union democracy was not a choice – it was an imperative which flowed from the logic of the situation in which unions found themselves: it would not have been possible to persuade workers to remain united during long and punishing recognition disputes without a high degree of internal democracy (Friedman 1985). But it was precisely because democracy was an organisational imperative that it became so crucial an element in the unions’ way of operating. Unions were also compelled to develop processes and structures to sustain democratic practice. While the logic of social movements’ situation differs, internal democracy is likely to ensure that movements are better placed to grow and exert enhanced influence. Those movements which have demonstrated significant degrees of internal democracy, such as TAC and Sikhula Sonke, have relied on clear rules and procedures to preserve it (White 2010). It is probable that the high job losses of the past two years have removed from the formal workplace union activists who have a knowledge of organisation and a motive to use it outside the formal economy – it may be no accident that retrenched union shop stewards have appeared as organisers of collective action in some townships and shack areas over the past decade. A synergy between union and social movement approaches may be as crucial to enhancing the effectiveness of both as the added numbers which an alliance would bring.

However compelling the strategic arguments for union–social-movement co-operation which might be a catalyst to this synergy, greater union organisational strength means that it is unlikely to occur unless COSATU in particular sees a compelling strategic reason to seek alliances with social movements. While some unionists insist that this co-operation is already occurring, the evidence does suggest that this shift in union strategy has not fully occurred. But developments within the ANC alliance could impel COSATU to make campaigning in partnership with social movements a key feature of
its strategy. It has, over the past four years, based its attempts to seek greater influence on public policy on a continuing attempt to influence ANC politics: the election of Jacob Zuma as ANC president and then state president was meant to open opportunities for unprecedented union influence. Over the four years since he was elected, COSATU has pinned its hopes of enhanced influence on insider ANC politics. This strategy has yielded very limited results – although the signs that the strategy has been ineffective have been visible for some time, this was brought home to COSATU forcibly during a public sector strike in 2010 during which the attitude of the Zuma government was almost identical to that of its immediate predecessor when faced with a very similar dispute. The result has been COSATU disillusion with an ANC leadership which it has worked hard to elect and to cultivate (Steenkamp 2010).

COSATU could respond to the disillusion by continuing to rely on ANC politicking to meet the concerns of its constituency. But it could also conclude that it will be unable to enhance its influence unless it seeks to build social power rather than relying on insider influence. This would prompt recognition of the earliest lesson of the union movement’s history – that power is a product of organisation, not of links to political leadership. One consequence could be a renewed emphasis on workplace organisation in an attempt to build power in the formal economy; another could be an increased attempt to build power in the society which would require organisation outside the workplace – and could prompt it to seek alliances with social movements and to seek ways to strengthen grass-roots organisation outside the workplace. It was precisely this strategic perspective which prompted the 2010 meeting between COSATU and civil society organisations which sought to build an alliance to ‘tackle corruption, poverty and unemployment’ (Phakathi 2010).

The union federation is clearly finding it difficult to make this shift. There is broad consensus within COSATU that its alliance with the ANC must survive – balancing an alliance with the governing party with a partnership with social movements is difficult, particularly given the degree to which the ANC feels threatened by these alliances. Internal differences between unionists who emphasise a continued alliance with the current ANC leadership and those who want to challenge it (Mkokeli 2011) also make it difficult for COSATU to chart a new strategic course, a problem compounded by the fact that some COSATU leaders hope to win election to leadership positions in the ANC. Even if these obstacles are overcome, a synergy between unions and social movements may require COSATU to make strategic changes which it is unwilling to entertain.

If, however, COSATU finds the shift too great, and the union–social movement synergy proves elusive, it is unlikely that an effective movement for redistribution will emerge. Neither unions nor social movements can, on their own and using the strategic approaches of the past decade, build an effective challenge to the prevailing distribution of power and wealth. Only enhanced co-operation between them and a synergy between their methods and approaches can make a movement for greater social equality emerge with the capacity to become as effective as the campaign against apartheid was.

**Note on contributor**

Steven Friedman is Director of the Centre for the Study of Democracy at Rhodes University and the University of Johannesburg. He is the author of Building Tomorrow Today, a study of the origins of the South African trade union movement. He is currently studying the relationship between democracy, poverty and inequality.
Notes
1. This was the tenor of discussion at ‘A decade of dissent’, a conference held at the University of Johannesburg in November 2010 to review the decade since the movements emerged. The proceedings have not yet been published but are forthcoming.
2. For a discussion of this reality in the context of the trade union movement, see Friedman (1985). For a discussion in relation to a social movement, see Friedman and Mottiar (2005).

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References


Neo-patrimonialism and the discourse of state failure in Africa
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This paper is a critical interrogation of the dominant Africanist discourse on African state forms and its relationship with what is seen as pervasive state failure on the continent. Through an examination of the neo-patrimonialist literature on African states, this paper argues that what informs such problematic scholarship, inscribed on the conceptual and analytical landscape of the Weberian ideal-typical conception of state rationality is a vulgar universalism that tends to disregard specific historical experiences while subsuming them under the totalitarian grip of a Eurocentric unilinear evolutionist logic. The narrative that such scholarship produces not only constructs a mechanistic conception of state rationality based on the experience of the Western liberal state as the expression of the universal, but also denies the specificity of the continent’s historical experience, by either denying its independent conceptual existence or vulgarising its social and political formations and realities, dismissing them as aberrant, deviant, deformed and of lesser quality. Immanent in this move is the ideological effacement and the rendering invisible, hence the normalisation of the relational and structural logic, of past histories of colonial domination and contemporary imperial power relations within which the states in Africa have been historically constituted and continue to be reconstituted and reimagined. When exactly does a state fail, the paper asks. Could what is defined as state failure actually be part of the processes of state formation or reconfiguration, which are misrecognised or misinterpreted because of the poverty of Africanist social science and ethnocentric biases of the particular lenses used to understand them?

Keywords: Africa; failed states; ideal types; neo-patrimonialism; state formation; state failure; universalism

[Le néo-patrimonialisme et le discours de la défaillance de l’état en Afrique]. Cet article est une interrogation critique du discours africaniste dominant sur les formes d’état africain et sa relation avec ce qui est considéré comme une défaillance persistante de l’état sur le continent. A travers un examen de la littérature néo-patrimonialiste sur les états africains, cet article soutient que ce qui est à la base de ces savoirs problématiques, inscrit dans le paysage conceptuel et analytique de la conception idéal-typique wéberienne de la rationalité étatique, est un universalisme vulgaire qui tend à ignorer les expériences historiques spécifiques tout en les subsumant sous l’emprise totalitaire d’une logique évolutionniste unilinéaire euro-centrique. Le récit que ces études permet de produire non seulement construit une conception mécaniste de la rationalité étatique basée sur l’expérience de l’état libéral occidental comme l’expression de l’universel, mais aussi nie la spécificité de l’expérience historique du continent soit en niant son existence indépendante conceptuelle, ou en vulgarisant ses formations et ses réalités sociales et politiques, les rejetant comme aberrantes, déviantes, difformes et de moindre qualité. Immanent dans ce mouvement sont

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Questions about African state forms and political realities have over the past two decades been dominated, in mainstream Africanist political science discourses, by two ubiquitous concepts: neo-patrimonialism and, more recently, state failure. While multiple tendencies exist within these two broad conceptual approaches, they have, in their variations, held a totalitarian grip on the interpretation of the continent’s postcolonial sociopolitical realities, as well as cast a grim shadow over political possibilities, especially in terms of transformative politics, on the continent. Although these concepts have spurred debates and many critiques have developed targeted at their modalities, most studies, even those critical of them, end up reproducing their problematics in reading Africa’s political realities. Instead of approaching Africa’s postcolonial political conditions in terms of these concepts as is common in conventional Africanist studies purporting to explain them, let us take a different route and set our critical sights on the very modalities and epistemological structures of these concepts and interrogate their violent and objectifying discourses on the continent. First, let us proceed by presenting the core features of the state failure and neo-patrimonial literature, then work our way through a critical discussion of their intellectual foundations and core assumptions, as part of a broader critique of the epistemological structures and conditions of possibility of Africanist scholarship, before finally considering their practical power political implications for the continent and its people.

II

In a study published by the Netherlands Institute of International Relations in which he seeks to explain what caused the Sierra Leone civil war, the British Africanist political scientist Christopher Clapham (2003) makes the interesting claim that ‘Sierra Leone was by no means an obvious candidate for state collapse’ (p. 9). (David Keen, another British political scientist, makes a similar claim in his 2005 volume Conflict and collusion in Sierra Leone that ‘Sierra Leone was not a particularly likely candidate for civil war’ [Keen 2005, p. 8] – which begs the question, what state is a particularly likely candidate for civil war, or what makes a state a likely candidate for state collapse and what does not?) Clapham’s reason for this somewhat bizarre assertion is based on certain pre-given criteria which he believes ordinarily allow for successful statehood: Sierra Leone has a favourable political geography in terms of its small size, manageable population, abundant natural resources and good communication networks which largely frees it from some of ‘the inherent problems that bedevil massive territories with very poor communication such as Angola, Congo or Sudan’ (Clapham 2003, p. 9). But more importantly, it ‘experienced an exceptionally long period of colonial administration’, which gives it ‘a favourable
social endowment’ in terms of a long-standing commitment to Western education, and a substantial cadre of indigenous lawyers, academics, administrators and other professionals. Because of these factors, ‘if you were looking for an African state with the physical, social and economic infrastructure appropriate to success as an independent state, you would have had difficulty finding a better candidate than Sierra Leone’ (Clapham 2003, pp. 9–10).

Implicit in Clapham’s claims are extremely problematic assumptions, which though stupendous, are not immediately discernible. First, is the claim to a purported knowledge of what makes a state an ‘obvious’ candidate for ‘state collapse’, ‘state failure’ or ‘civil war’, and what does not. In Clapham’s imagination, (a) the size of a state matters: the bigger it is – e.g. massive states like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Sudan – the more likely it is to fail; (b) the duration of colonial rule matters: the longer the colonial experience, the more likelihood of successful statehood; and (c) the level of exposure to Western civilisation, education and lifestyles matters: it helps in bequeathing a favourable political culture and social endowments which contribute to a successful statehood. Irrespective of what his political intentions are, Clapham’s notion of statehood is already constructed on the normative orthodoxy of a Eurocentric metaphor that privileges Western historicity, cultural achievements, political organisations and systems of governance over others. Admittedly, exposure to Western civilisation is the key to successful statehood, as if Western states themselves are not sites of violence, woes, distress, domination and disciplinary power and authority.

Second and more important, and this is not unconnected with the first, is the problematic liberal understanding of the political, which holds or pretends that it is possible (and in fact incessantly tries) to separate violence from politics – a move that has allowed for the interpretation of political violence and armed conflicts as a social pathology that develops when politics or the state fails or collapses. This idea, which has in scholarly reflections, policy debates and media representations become the dominant way of understanding southern (especially African) state forms thought to be beset by economic distress, civil strife and political unrest, relies on a particular problematic reading and interpretation of political reality in the south. Armed conflicts are said to be symptomatic of a larger phenomenon of what has now come to be known as ‘state failure’ or ‘state collapse’; a phenomenon that its proponents claim can be understood by focusing on a state’s degree of statehood, determined by its nature and capacity to achieve certain pre-given tasks (Gros 1996, Midgal 1998, Rotberg 2004, Zartman 1995).

Since the 1990s, (and especially after 9/11), the phenomenon of ‘state failure’ has taken centre stage in global politics and international development discourse, and has become, in the dominant academic and policy reflections and debates, the outcome of nearly every form of socio-economic distress, civil strife and political conflict in the south. There is a widespread belief among northern policymakers, strategic actors and academics that state failure poses a security threat for not only the inhabitants of the failed states, but also for international peace and security, and especially northern states – failed states are believed to create ‘zones of lawlessness open to exploitation by criminals and terrorists’ (Department for International Development 2004, p. iii). The concerns of northern states with understanding, explaining, predicting, preventing or reversing state failure have thus become a major policy concern for northern policymakers, strategic actors and academics seeking to manage globalisation. This linking of state failure in the south to the security of the north has been instrumental in the merging of security and development discourse (Duffield 2001, Wai 2011).

Africa, which since the 1990s has been the theatre of a number of armed conflicts, or ‘state failure’ as the ‘experts’ and strategic actors are quick to point out, has become a conceptual and theoretical staple and the ‘guinea pig’ for testing the various international
policy prescriptions that have developed in response to the phenomenon. Depending on the specific political interests and ideological commitments of the scholars involved in relation to what they define or see as a state’s claim to, or exercise of authority over, its territory and its citizenry, as well as its capacity to achieve certain specific economic, social and political outcomes, a semantic field of concepts (all of which are inscribed on a pejorative landscape) has emerged to describe and portray these state forms: failed/failing state; collapsed/collapsing state; fragile/weak state; quasi-state; shadow state; felonious state; captured state; warlord state and so on (Bayart, Ellis and Hibou 1999; Boas 2001; Carment 2003; Chege 2002; Clapham 1998, 2003; Goldsmith 2000; Gros 1996; Helman and Ratner 1993; Hopkins 2000; Jackson 1987, 1990, 1992, 2000; Keen 2005; Mazrui 1995; Menkhaus 2003; Migdal 1988; Reno 1995, 1998; Rotberg 2004; Warner 1999; Zartman 1995).

Despite what might appear as conceptual and theoretical differences between the numerous scholars who use the conception of state failure to explain what they see as the political failures of southern societies, and the different situations in which they have come to apply the different labels with which they have come to describe the phenomenon, they take the capability of states to perform certain functions or achieve specific outcomes as central to conceptualising the phenomenon of state failure. These functions or outcomes are usually defined in terms of social contractarian yardsticks and what they describe as the coercive and non-coercive functions of the state. The coercive functions of a state are usually conceptualised in Weberian and Hobbesian terms: i.e., in terms of a state’s capacity for monopolistic control over violence and, with that, the capability to enforce contracts, maintain law and order, and provide security within a given territory. The non-coercive functions are conceptualised in terms of the provision of social goods and services, the durability and efficacy of a state’s governance structures and its social and economic redistributive functions. A state that performs these functions is successful; those that are unable to perform them are failed states (Hill 2005).

According to Jean-Germain Gros (1996) for example, failed states are those ‘in which public authorities are either unable or unwilling to carry out their end of what Hobbes long ago called the social contract but which now includes more than maintaining the peace among society’s many factions’ (p. 456 ff.). Like Gros, I. William Zartman (1995) conceptualises state failure in terms of a state’s capacity to properly perform those basic functions that he claims are required for a state to qualify as one. When a state can no longer, with traditional, charismatic, or institutional sources of legitimacy, properly perform its basic functions, or claim legitimacy to govern, and when it has lost control over its own political and economic spaces, it has failed. The legitimacy of a state then is derived from the functions it performs, thus a state fails when ‘it has lost its right to rule’, i.e., when ‘the structure, authority (legitimate power), law, and political order have fallen apart’ (Zartman 1995). To Robert Jackson (2000, p. 296), a state fails when it ‘cannot or will not safeguard minimal civil conditions for their populations: domestic peace, law and order, and good governance’. Legitimacy in this conception then is derived mainly from the functions a state performs or the outcome it is capable of achieving. (By these conceptions, the colonial state, for example, would be legitimate insofar as it performs those functions that by the conception of these scholars give states their legitimacy.)

Conceptualised thus, a hierarchical stratification of states along a continuum that ranges from strong to fragile/weak to collapsed/failed state is erected (in the same way in which human beings, societies and cultures are classified and placed on a falsely constructed and imagined temporal hierarchy of human progress and social development). Robert Rotberg for example, constructs this hierarchy in terms of what he calls ‘performance criteria’, i.e., the capabilities of states to effectively deliver the most crucial political goods (security,
political freedoms, economic well-being and social welfare such as health care etc.): ‘strong states may be distinguished from weak states and weak states from failed or collapsed ones’ in accordance with the degree of their performance and capabilities to deliver these goods (Rotberg 2004, p. 2 ff.). Joel Migdal, one of the early proponents of this phenomenon, also constructs this hierarchy based on capability: strong states are those with high capabilities to complete the tasks of successfully penetrating society, regulating social relations, extracting resources, and appropriating or using resources in determined ways, while weak states are on the low end of a spectrum of such capabilities (1988, pp. 4–5).

With specific reference to Africa, where the phenomenon of state failure is supposedly pervasive, the economy of discourse which has emerged since the 1990s has tended to largely account for this phenomenon in another ubiquitous concept: a crisis of neo-patrimonialism (Bayart 1993; Bayart, Ellis and Hibou 1999; Boas 2001; Boyle 1988; Bratton 1989; Bratton and van de Walle 1994; Callaghy 1984, 1987; Chabal and Daloz 1999; Chazan 1988; Chege 2002; Clapham 1982, 1985, 2003; Englebert 2000; Jackson and Roseburg 1984; Joseph 1984; Keen 2005; Reno 1995, 1998; Richards 1996; Sandbrook 1985, Le Vine 1980; van de Walle 2001). Coming in various guises and forms, neo-patrimonialism has become a catch-all conceptual staple in Africanist scholarship for accounting for and explaining nearly every perceived African sociopolitical malaise, difficulty or problem – corruption, institutional decay, communication breakdown, authoritarian rule, development failure, economic dysfunction, poor growth, civil and political unrest and especially armed conflicts (all of which are the markers of so-called state failure). Based on certain shared assumptions about what in these studies is an undifferentiated African state rationality and the political behaviour of its ruling classes, the neo-patrimonialist literature is united by the idea that it is the rent-seeking behaviour among African political actors faced with neo-patrimonial pressures that accounts for crisis on the continent: it is this behaviour that

produced the decline in African economies, obstructed the full realisation of the goals of IMF/World Bank structural adjustment programmes, nurtures a culture of informality/conviviality, and prevents the emergence of reform-minded coalitions able to initiate and govern far-reaching change in the form of economic and political liberalisation. (Olukoshi 2005)

Neo-patrimonialism depicts African states as aberrant political formations, pathological constructs, dysfunctional entities and, recently, criminal enterprises (Bayart, Ellis and Hibou 1999), which are said to be governed by corrupt, tyrannical and authoritarian regimes of ‘big men’ whose greed, rent-seeking behaviours and the intense politics of patronage that they engage in, more than any other factors, have led to the criminalisation the state and stymied its development into full-blown modern, rational-bureaucratic states and capitalist economies. In the words of William Reno (1998) for example, ‘These rulers reject pursuit of a broader project of creating a state that serves collective good or even creating institutions that are capable of developing independent perspectives and acting on behalf of interests distinct from their rulers’ personal exercise of power’ (p. 1). Through personal patron/client relationships and informal political and economic networks which function more like criminal enterprises than legitimate political organisations (Bayart 1999), these big men have turned functional states bequeathed to the various national entities that emerged as independent states into dysfunctional entities. They have personalised, criminalised and badly weakened state institutions through corrupt and shadowy business dealings. It is these processes and practices that have created or accelerated conditions for fragility and weakness, which in turn have ultimately led to state collapse or failure.
Two major tendencies have been identified in this body of literature: the state-centric and society-centric approaches, both of which, Mahmood Mamdani (1996) tells us, are united by their inability to come to terms with the specificity of African historical reality and as such have resorted to problematic Eurocentric evolutionist lenses that cast them in the shadow of the evolution of Western states and societies. Whether privileging the state or society in their analyses, both approaches see rent-seeking and corruption as inherent African pathologies which are central to the problem of governance and the building of viable state structures on the continent. Adebayo Olukoshi (2005) summarises both tendencies thus:

Irrespective of the explanation privileged by the different scholars on the nature of rent-seeking and patron/client relations, there is consensus among them that Africa’s political and socio-economic development has been obstructed because of such practices. Olukoshi tells us:


III
At the basic level (and on its own terms), the neo-patrimonialism is based on a problematic logical circularity that posits or infers the cause and effect of weakness and failure from the same source: rent-seeking behaviour of African political classes and their pursuing of power, influence and wealth through patron/client relationships and informal networks. It also posits a single conceptual framework to explain a multiplicity of complex and varied sociopolitical realities, and in doing this, makes the concept impossibly elastic, having an insatiable appetite for explaining everything: from the form of the state to the nature of politics and the behaviour of the political classes, through economic performance, processes of accumulation and economic rent distribution as well as development practices and failures, to civil strife, political unrest, armed conflicts and so-called state failure. This desire to explain everything, however, becomes an end in itself, for in its overambitious quest, neo-patrimonialism fails to explain anything other than construct the continent as a monument of the truth its proponents will (Mkandawire 2001).

While this should ordinarily make such a concept collapse under the weight of its own problematic and inconsistent formulations, as well as the weight of its selective applications of historical lessons and the fuzzy thinking on the part of the commentators invested in
its use, it has, on the contrary, allowed them to absorb or deflect criticisms through concep-
tual stretching and analytical elasticity, whereby a whole range of disparate and contradic-
tory logics and explanations are continuously added to its frame. Thus stretched beyond
its analytical capacity, every political reality on the continent can be, and has been, finessed
to appear consistent with a variant of the neo-patrimonialist logic: the state is too strong; it is
too weak; it is suspended above society and does not sufficiently penetrate it; it over-
penetrates society and constitutes a burden on it; conversely, society convolves with the
state and does not hold it accountable; it predates on the state and constitutes a burden
on it; it prevents the embrace of rational practice and the development of independent
bureaucratic perspective in government, and so on. And these multiple and contradictory
realities, as already pointed out above, are posited as both the cause and the effect
of the rent-seeking behaviour of the ruling classes and the clientelist politics that they
practise.

One would have expected that after almost three decades of trial and error, the propo-
nents of the neo-patrimonial thesis would have figured out exactly what is included in and
what is left out of their framework. However, they still have not been able make up their
minds about what to embrace and what to anathematise in their analyses of African state
forms and the behaviour of the political classes on the continent. As it stands, while every-
thing applies to their framework, nothing, save perhaps the rent-seeking behaviour of the
political elites and the clientelist politics they practise, is consistent in their analyses.
While this may appear as a problem associated only with the neo-patrimonialist framework,
it is in fact symptomatic of a more fundamental problem associated with the very condition
of Africanist knowledge, to which I turn presently.

Another major problem with the neo-patrimonialist literature is a vulgar universalism
that disregards specific historical experiences while subsuming them under the totalitari-
grip of a Eurocentric unilinear evolutionist framework. Explicitly or implicitly, this evol-
utionist framework produces a particular notion of history which holds that African
phenomena can only really be understood as mirroring an earlier European history. This
notion of history which Mahmood Mamdani (1996) has called ‘history by analogy’, ‘privi-
leges the European historical experience as the touchstone, and as the historical expression
of the universal’ (Mamdani 1996, p. 9 ff.). Relying on this conception of history which I
have identified elsewhere (Wai 2010) as a crucial epistemological stance of Africanism
and Africanist scholarship, neo-patrimonialism has been unable to come to terms with his-
torically specific African realities, and as such, has not only failed to comprehend, and
therefore incorrectly or problematically interpreted these realities, but also produced a par-
ticular mechanistic conception of history abstracted from the experience of Europe concep-
tualised as the historical expression of the universal that offers prescription for all to
emulate. The narrative produced in this way tends to denigrate social and political realities
in Africa, thereby reinforcing the image of the continent as the place for the absurd, the
aberrant or inadequate, occurring in the shadow of earlier European experiences. In the
process, the independent conceptual existence of the continent is denied, and its aberrance
is named. While its history is reduced to or interpreted as an imperfect recurrence of, or
deivation from, earlier patterns or stages in the evolution of European societies, its
future, which can only really make sense, or can only really be valid if modelled on the tra-
jectories of the evolution of Western societies, is supposed to be already determined
(Mamdani 1996).

Immanent in this move is the ideological effacement and the rendering invisible, hence
the normalisation of the relational and structural logic, of past histories of colonial domina-
tion and contemporary imperial power relations within which the states in Africa have been
historically constituted and continue to be reconstituted and reimagined. Indeed those scholars who have relied on these conceptual and methodological models and have elevated the Western liberal state to the position of normative model of state rationality against which the nature of African states are understood, do so precisely because it allows them to write over the historical constitutive relationship between the continent’s historical experience with Europe, while privileging the West, without accounting for or questioning the sociohistorical structures of domination constitutive of the relationship between the two. What this has led to is the casting as deviant or aberrant the resultant sociopolitical formations which emerge out of these relational trajectories, while internalising the source of the perceived pathology in the societies in which these forms are found.

It is interesting that even in their use of Eurocentric unilinear evolutionist lenses to understand African state forms, these scholars do not honour their own injunctions but instead selectively apply the historical lessons which they hold have universal relevance for understanding the nature of the state anywhere. For example, the US Civil War occurred about a hundred years after the so-called revolutionary war and US Independence, yet that event (the US Civil War) is understood as a pivotal moment in the evolution of that state as a political formation (when the US had to decide the form it would take and the economic system it would adopt, at least in relation to slavery), and not a moment of state failure. Similarly, the French Revolution is regarded as the single most important moment in the formation of the modern French state. From the initial storming of the Bastille in July 1789 to the defeat of Napoleon III’s army and his capture at the Battle of Sedan in September 1870, France was in a permanent state of turmoil, civil strife and political disorder. Yet, there is hardly a study that describes the French state during this period as a failed state; rather, this period is treated as the most important moment in the formation of the modern French state. African states on the other hand have on average been independent for 50 years, that is, half the time it took the US or the French to configure their respective states, and yet they are already conceptualised as failed states.

Which begs the question, when exactly does a state fail? What is the relationship between state formation and state failure: when exactly does one end and when does the other begin? These types of questions are hardly considered in studies purporting to explain ‘state failure’, in part because of the problematic assumption that the states that emerged out of the colonial imposition in Africa were complete and fully functioning political entities on the eve of independence. But what if they were not? What if they were unfinished political projects? Can they still be said to be failed states when they are in existence and being reconfigured or contested? The reason these questions are important is in part because of the history of the colonial genesis of the states in Africa which were arbitrarily and hastily put together under concrete conditions of political domination. Partly because of this history of constitution, the basic but fundamental questions about the nature of the state, the purpose it should serve, as well as questions about citizenship and political membership, especially in these societies with multi-ethnic populations hastily and arbitrarily forced into states that were intended to serve the interests of the colonial masters who created them, remain unsettled, and remain firmly situated at the heart of political struggles and contestations over the states everywhere in Africa. There is hardly a conflict on the continent (even in extreme cases such as the Rwandan genocide) that does not involve these questions as a central aspect. Rather than taking them seriously, the numerous Africanists who have come to rely on state failure and neo-patrimonialism as analytical concepts have tended to not only write over these questions, but have also ignored their own very theoretical injunctions, while jumping to hasty conclusions about civil wars or political crises on the continent.
Part of the problem is linked to the conception of state that these scholars privilege and base their analysis on. Like the reality of state failure it purports to explain, neo-patrimonialism has as its conceptual point of departure the Weberian ideal-typical state, and the history of the evolution of Western societies as its conceptual and analytical touchstone. William Reno in *Warlord politics and African states* writes that:

My definition of state borrows from Max Weber’s observation that states vary in their degree of resemblance to an ideal type in which they enforce regulations backed up with a monopoly of violence. I find throughout the four case studies that the exercise of political authority in these countries [Liberia, Sierra Leone, DRC and Nigeria] represent nearly the opposite of the Weberian ideal. (1998, p. 5)

A state’s ‘degree of stateness’, Jean-Germaine Gros (1996) maintains, can be determined by ‘using both the classical Weberian definition of the state and its non-coercive public services delivery capacity’ (p. 456). Even those scholars who claim to interpret African states and societies on their own terms – e.g. Jean-François Bayart (1999) or Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz (1999) – still privilege the Weberian ideal-typical state as foundational, being the modern normative model against which state rationality and performance can be modelled, analysed, inferred, referenced, compared and contrasted.

The fact that no modern state has ever, either conceptually or empirically, met the criteria of the Weberian ideal-typical model of statehood seems to be lost on the numerous scholars who scramble scurrilously to uncritically apply its conceptual parameters to African states. In fact, even Weber himself regarded his ideal-typical constructions only as abstract methodological and explanatory devices intended to help bring out the significance and meanings that humans give to their actions (as well as a guide to conducting comparative studies of phenomena, institutions etc.), and not a description of any empirically grounded or actual existing reality. However the proponents of the neo-patrimonial and state failure theses have turned abstract methodological or explanatory models into ‘real’ existing types and prescriptive norms of state rationality, constructed and based on a specific rendition of history, the West’s historical experience as the universal from which conceptual lessons are extrapolated for understanding every other form of state rationality and behaviour.

How do we move from abstract methodological constructs to actual empirically existing types? The answer lies in part in Weber’s scholarship and its complicity in the fostering of a Eurocentric vision of the world. His definition of state, though supposedly based on abstract ideal-typical constructions, defines a framework which is expressed in the service of political formations in the so-called Occident. In this framework, a particular type of state is privileged and celebrated as the universal standard of statehood. This imposition of a universalising logic on the nature of political formations and the struggles and histories they encompass, negates or denigrates specific historical realities of state formation, and minimises or writes over the specificities of the historical contexts within which they emerge, while disguising the systemic and structural power-political webs in which they are enmeshed. V.Y. Mudimbe’s (2009) question in another, but related, context is pertinent to inscribe here: can any phenomena – in this case the political – be theorised from the throes of a universalism that claims to transcend all transhistorical lines and their variations, when the very category masquerading as the ‘universal’ has now been sufficiently exposed to be a very specific localism with its own ethnocentric biases?

Indeed what may appear as a misuse of Weber’s methods and concepts is not an accident, for as Kieran Allen (2004) tells us, Weber himself was ‘deeply ideological’ with the
very ideas informing his conceptual presuppositions grounded in specific Western local sociohistorical realities. This immediately recalls Enrique Dussel’s (1995) point that Weber was a hopeless Eurocentric ideologue whose ethnocentric biases blinded him to other historical realities, a factor which pushed him to pose the question of world history from the certainty of a Eurocentric metaphor: that of Europe as the ultimate Hegelian historical subject and, as such, that which offers us conceptual and historical guidance. ‘Which chain of circumstances’, Weber asks in the introduction of his most famous book *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (1958), ‘has resulted in the fact that on western soil and only there cultural phenomena have been produced which, as we represent it, show signs of evolutionary advance and universal validity?’ (cited in Dussel 1995, p. 10).

Europe, Weber believed, is the touchstone of world history and only its historical experiences have universal validity to abstract from: ‘Neither scientific, artistic, governmental nor economic evolution have led elsewhere to the modes of rationalisation proper to the Occident’ (cited in Dussel 1995, p. 145, n. 9).

In fact there is a conspicuous absence of questions about colonialism in his work. *The Protestant ethic* for example, completely ignores capitalism’s bloody history and legacy of slavery, genocide, of violent appropriation, of European imperial expansion and colonial domination of non-European societies. Rather, it falsely locates capitalism’s origins in a rigorous morality of a so-called Protestant ethic (Allen 2004). Those of *The religion of India* (1958) and *The religion of China* (1951) which were written as part of his sociology of region, but also as inquiries into why capitalism developed in Europe and not Asia, contain some of the most vexatious orientalist views on Asia in any era. They are extraordinary in their caricature of Indian and Chinese religious and cultural beliefs, which he posits as responsible for their economic stagnation in the same way as the Protestant ethic is responsible for the development of capitalism in Europe. Throughout these texts, there is a conspicuous absence of the discussion of the colonial question and its impact on these societies.

This writing over of the colonial question should however not be explained away simply as a nominal oversight on Weber’s part. Rather, it should be seen as expressive of a larger problematique; that of his ideological and ethnocentric commitment to European superiority, from which he could not free himself. As Allen (2004) reminds us, Weber was self-admittedly ‘a class conscious bourgeois’ who advocated for empire (believing for example, that Africans were ‘kulturlos’ i.e. uncultured or uncivilised, and could be legitimately colonised). He ardently supported the carnage of the First World War, regarding Germany’s enemies in that war as ‘composed increasingly of barbarians’ and ‘the flotsam of African and Asiatic savages’ (Allen 2004, p. 6). His sociology however disguises its own political hierarchies and ethnocentric biases by defining itself as neutral and value-free science, while presaging some of the most disturbing orientalist ideas on non-Western societies. But, Allen tells us, ‘far from offering an “objective” value-free account of modern society, Weber’s sociology should more essentially be seen as deeply ideological’ and ‘passionately political’:

His own injunctions about the need for ‘value-free’ sociology were honoured more in breach than in the observance. Weber was an ardent German nationalist and a free-market liberal. His crude endorsement of nationalism offers few attractions for academics of today and so has often been ignored. When Weber, for example, writes at length in his classic book *Economy and society* about ‘the great powers and the inevitability of imperialist expansion displacing ‘pacificist’ forms of free trade, many sociologists simply ignore the passage. Their focus is on the more general remarks that apply to many different historical societies rather than concrete stances that Weber took. Weber has a tendency to write in generalities even while promoting the most specific political position. His overall style indeed lent itself to an apolitical reading of
his texts. The problem though, is that this abstract reading of Weber as the pure academic carries its own undeclared political punch. (pp. 4–5)

There are real problems associated with appropriating abstract methodological conceptions such as ideal-types as analytic devices to understand African states’ forms. To begin with, such an appropriation, as already pointed out, tends not only to ignore the violence built in its universalistic pretensions, but it also obscures the sociohistorical experiences and realities of the societies under investigation, while privileging Western liberal ideas of governance and state rationality as the normative model against which all other realities are measured and understood, without, as suggested above, accounting for the structural webs of power relations within which both are intricately interconnected and bound. It is this Eurocentric universalistic pretension, for example, that underpins the failed state and neo-patrimonialist literature and it is what potentiates the pathologisation of African state forms in the same way as the African human person is pathologised as the deviant and rejected Other of the rational Western thinking subject who is erected and promoted as the normative self. Jonathan Hill (2005, p. 148) sums it up thus:

Identification of failed states is achieved through the construction of a [normal or successful] state/failed state dichotomy built on a fixed, universal standard of what constitutes a successful state. Success is defined as the possession of certain capabilities and by the nationhood of the population of that state’s population. Western states represent the normative, universal standard of success and it is the inability of certain African states to replicate the political, economic, social and cultural conditions within western states that has, according to the failed state literature, resulted in their failure. Even those African states not described as failed are portrayed as inauthentic and ‘ramshackle’, as being somehow undeserving of the statehood that most of them achieved in the aftermath of the Second World War, precisely because they lack the requisite capabilities and their populations did not constitute real nations. It is the western universalism underpinning the failed state literature that leads it to position African societies as the West’s deviant Other. (p. 148)

This problematic hierarchical classification of states reinforces a paradigmatic binary opposition between what is constructed as normal and what is pathological: if what is Western is defined as normal, then the non-Western (in this case African) Other has to be abnormal, inadequate, deviant or pathological. This abnormality or deviance is in turn always explained in negative terms, and, remaining faithful to the conceptualities of what Mudimbe (1988, 1994) has called the colonial library – the body of texts and systems of representations which have over the centuries collectively invented and continues to invent Africa as a paradigm of difference and alterity (Desai 2001), draws on particular enduring images of the continent as the bizarre, the laughable and the negation of every ‘normal’ human experience. Indeed, it is in relation to Africa that notions of ‘absolute otherness’ are taken to their farthest possible extremes (Mbembe 2001, p. 2).

We now know how these ideas of Africa have had historical, and continue to have constitutive functions for both Western identity as well as its intimate but rejected African Other (Mudimbe 1988, 1994). Indeed, as Mudimbe suggests, Africa may be an empirical figure yet, as imagined and constituted by Africanism, it is and has always been by definition, perceived, experienced and promoted as the sign of absolute otherness, so that changes in the signs and symbols of its representations have never really fundamentally changed the meaning of Africa in the Western imagination. In this sense, Africa is a text that writes itself. The imaginary ‘Africa’, the mention of that name, immediately evokes or conjures up some of the most perverse and disturbing, yet powerful, images with which the name of the continent has come to be strongly associated: poverty, disease, crime, corruption,
repressive regimes, corrupt and incompetent governments, tribalism and tribal conflicts, failed states, hunger and famine (bloated-bellied, fly-covered, malnourished and emaciated children dying in the arms of their powerless and apathetic mothers), uncivilised or semi-civilised tribes inhabiting jungles with beastly animals and safaris (of the Madagascar and Lion King types).

The neo-patrimonialist and state failure literature are part of the textual reproduction of Africa and they constantly invoke, create and use these perverse images, even where they pretend to be against them. Jean-Francois Bayart (1999) is a case in point; while claiming to interpret Africa on its own terms, he reproduces and reinforces some of the most offensive, obtuse and cynically prejudicial stereotypes, which not only ridicules and disparages the continent’s political and social formations, but in fact calls into question the very humanity of the African person. Coarsely homogenising states on the continent under the pejorative moniker ‘felonious state’ (other such offensive labels include ‘vampire state’, ‘gangster state’, ‘warlord state’ and ‘shadow state’) where the logic of rule is based on criminality and a ‘politics of the belly’ (Bayart 1993, 1999) (as if only a single undifferentiated rationality governs the logic of rule and the behaviour of the political classes on a continent with over 50 diverse states), Bayart claims, in a statement that is as hare-brained and ludicrous as it is offensive and prejudicial, that the essence of Africanness is perversity and criminality. He writes: ‘the “social capital” of Africa appears to display a marked affinity with the spirit of criminality’ (Bayart 1999, p. 34). It is this spirit of criminality as an innate character of Africans, as well as their perverse cultural predisposition that, he claims, allows for, or aids the emergence of clientelist politics of big men who, with no interest in (or by deliberately jettisoning) the building of strong and viable bureaucratic institutions, make corruption and shadowy business practices pursued through trickery and felonious activities as a social value, and informal networks the norm rather than the exception of state behaviour and rationality on the continent.

This is partly why Mudimbe (1994) insists that the issue with Africanism cannot be reduced to questions of theory versus empirical collection or of methods versus concepts in the production of Africanist knowledge. In vain do we worry about how the empirical aspect of a discourse attests to the truth of its theoretical formulation. Rather, we should be concerned be ‘about the silent and a priori choice of the truths to which a given discourse aims’ (p. 39). For there is always, he tells us, ‘beyond the dichotomy between rudimentary and scientific knowledge, illusion and truth [the differences between conceptual, methodological, theoretical and empirical choices] . . . a major problem concerning the very conditions of knowledge’ (Mudimbe 1994, pp. 39–40). Insofar as it incessantly deploys tropes that implicitly or explicitly pathologise the continent, its people and its political, social and cultural formations; and insofar as it vulgarises the continent’s historical experiences while disguising racist and stereotypical veneers in conceptual mumbo-jumbos that give academic respectability to the most perverse, absurd, vexatious and preposterous Eurocentric representations, images, biases and prejudices against the continent and its people, the neo-patrimonialist/state-failure literature should be called for what it really is and discarded or rejected for its ethnocentric biases, which are emergent from within and faithfully dependent, with almost religious devotion, on the conceptuailities of the colonial library which epistemologically is the locus of Africa’s invention (Mudimbe 1988, 1994).

Returning to ideal-types, they are not real; and even though they are usually uncritically deployed based on what their proponents construct as the certainty of the normative orthodoxy of the historical experience or reality of European states as the universal, they conceptually are not, and do not correspond to any historical or actually existing or empirically grounded reality. Rather, they are a-priori and ahistorical constructs which lay waste to
historical specificities and contingencies. The narratives that they produce do not necessarily correspond to the way life is. For example, by enabling the erection of ‘formal categories around which large segments of history are grouped’, specific sociohistorical contents of particular societies are over-written, ignored or negated (Allen 2004, p. 80). Anyone can, through the construction of ideal-types, easily make arbitrary connections between very diverse and disparate activities, events or phenomena in completely dissimilar sociopolitical conditions, and historical epochs under one rubric – for example, pharaonic Egypt and socialism could be linked together under the term bureaucracy; or ‘the ideal type “charisma” [can] connect revolutionary leaders and Hindu shamans’ (Allen 2004, p. 80). The real dangers with these arbitrary and artificial comparisons however is that they lead to the a production of a ‘formalistic’ and formulaic social science instead of a processual one that, rather than seeking to understand historical, social and political transformations in societies as processes, focuses instead on a desire to ‘set up typologies and arrange historical phenomena in [accordance with] these typologies’ (Allen 2004, p. 80). What this does is allow for the production of a formalistic and/or formulaic social science (and for our present purpose, the construction of a mechanistic conception of state rationality) that writes over, distorts, obscures, silences and negates (or reproduces in particular ways) specific experiences, realities and histories.

This is partly what Mamdani (1996) calls into question with his critique of history by analogy. It is what Kamil Shah (2009) points to when he suggests that ‘the ontological primacy conferred on the [Weberian] state renders complex trans-boundary social and political relations – and the struggles they encompass – invisible.’ Such a move, which is ‘premised on an ahistorical reification and naturalisation of the western liberal state’, he tells us, ‘is incapable of registering the possibility that the very [historical] processes of state formation and [contemporary strategies of] state building [favoured by the West and international policy community] may themselves be implicated in the production and reproduction of insecurities’ (Shah 2009, pp. 16–19). Indeed, as Shah insists, there is a co-constitutive, almost parasitic, relationship between states in the West and the so-called Third World, which were constituted under concrete conditions of Western colonial domination and which have remained immersed in the politics of global economic and sociopolitical structures of unequal power relations that produce wealth and affluence on the one hand and conditions of dependence and insecurities on the other. This immediately recalls Frantz Fanon’s timeless and incisive observation of a structural relation of power and violence in which the West and non-West are entangled: ‘Europe is literally the creation of the Third World’, Fanon (1963, p. 102) writes, ‘The wealth which smothers her is that which was stolen from the underdeveloped people.’ What Fanon is drawing attention to is the intimate relationship between the West and the non-West and how they co-constitute each other: the structural power which produces Western power, wealth, affluence and identity on the one hand is implicated in the reproduction of non-Western wretchedness and insecurities on the other.

The sociohistorical context of this political reality is usually ignored or written over and the manifestation of the violence that it potentiates is excised from the realm of the political and placed in the realm of the aberrant or pathological. Through this, conflicts, political unrest or so-called state failure become an aberration which has nothing to do with the politics of past histories and current manifestations of colonial domination; or the structural manifestation of contemporary imperial power relations of unequal exchange, violent appropriation and exploitation (what David Harvey [2004] has called ‘accumulation by dispossession’); or the violence that is an integral part of everyday social and power relations in a colonial state; or the tensions inherent in power-political struggles over the state, or the violence built in the process of state formation; but as a result of some primordial
orientalist/Africanist pathologies and conflictual instincts innate to the very nature, character and culture of Africans, instincts that outwardly and more explicitly get expressed in the form of tribalism, unrestrained religious fervour, rapacious greed and corruption, administrative ineptitude, rampant political failures, all of which are hallmarks of neo-patrimonial ‘big man’ politics (the worst expression of which is warlord politics).

The implications of these violent and objectifying discourses are grave. To start with, they internalise the causes of the so-called state failure in the states and societies under study. Indeed, whatever explanation is privileged as the cause — poverty or underdevelopment, neo-Malthusian pressures or resource competition, ethno-identitarian rivalries or tribalism, youth marginalisation, social exclusion or criminality, neo-patrimonial ‘big man’ politics, corruption or poor governance, authoritarian misrule, weak and dysfunctional institutions or lack of democratic accountability, lack of rule of law or human rights abuses, rebel greed or political grievance, and so on — the proponents of the state failure thesis broadly agree that it is a product of some inherent political, economic, cultural and/or social pathology, malaise or dysfunction that is endogenously produced within these societies and these are what constitutionally define their ‘static’, ‘backward’ and ‘unchanging’ social environment and historical reality. The underlying assumption (which is sometimes explicitly stated, though most times implicitly immanent) of these violent and objectifying narratives is that the ‘development’ or ‘progression’ of these states and societies from conditions of backwardness, poverty, ignorance and insecurity to one of enlightenment, modernity, development, prosperity and security, can only be set in motion and driven by the historically dynamic external agency of the West: Western political, economic, social, cultural and knowledge systems; Western development assistance; international financial institutions and aid agencies, international NGOs, corporate-led foreign direct investment, and so on.

The vision of this ‘atomistic social ontology’ (Dolek 2008), which sees ‘state failure’ mainly in terms of an inherent internally generated pathology of the states and societies in which they occur, becomes a discursive ploy, a legitimating trope and political strategy that is deployed in the service of the hegemonic global systems of control, power, violence and domination. It serves, among others, the purpose of justifying and legitimating past and ongoing imperial power relations and impulses (sometimes disguised under the cloak of humanitarianism) as the West intervenes and pursues its aim of controlling and shaping the histories and destinies of these societies by imposing its preferred political, social and economic policies and systems on them. Moreover, it helps in absorbing the West and the global system of exploitation, domination and control that they preside over from any complicity in the so-called ‘state failure’ and instead holds the states and societies in which they occur as responsible for its occurrence.

In addition to the tropes they construct for legitimating current and ongoing imperial power relations, the narratives that these power/knowledge systems produce, the regimes of truth that they construct, the politics that they make possible in terms of policy interventions, the very modalities of those interventions and the power relations that they potentiate, also help in providing a radical revisionist lens through which past histories, past imperial relations of power, past systems of exploitation, in essence past colonial regimes of violence and domination, appropriation and exploitation are viewed, reinterpreted, and reinscribed as the solution to problems the genesis of which are situated in their very modalities.

IV

Achille Mbembe (2001, pp. 5–9) has referred to an extraordinary poverty of the political science literature on Africa: a poverty that is seen in ‘the crisis of its language, procedures
and reasonings’. Stuck in the thraldom of the teleologies of theories of social evolutionism and ideologies of modernisation, this literature has undermined the very possibility of understanding African economic and political life. I have tried to demonstrate how the concepts of neo-patrimonialism and state failure, which enjoy near hegemonic status in Africanist scholarship, symptomatis this poverty of Africanist scholarship. But this poverty, I have suggested, is not merely a conceptual, methodological or even theoretical problem, but a power-political one situated at the very heart of the epistemological structures and conditions of possibility of Africanism and Africanist scholarship. Indeed, as Mudimbe (1988) has powerfully demonstrated, what Mbembe sees as a theoretical inability of Africanist political science to come to terms with African phenomena is not an accident, but the very condition of possibility of Africanist knowledge: a body of knowledge concerned not with understanding the continent, but with inventing Africa as a paradigm of difference while ‘producing its own motives, as well as its objects, and fundamentally commenting upon [and justifying] its own being’ (Mudimbe 1988, p. xi).

Fixing my critical gaze on these two ubiquitous concepts, their contradictory logics, problematic methodological formulations, their ideological and power-political postures, and the practical implications of the discourses they fashion for the continent and its people, I have tried to demonstrate how the neo-patrimonial and state-failure scholarship and the discourses they fashion on African political formations and realities are a function of a power which erects the continent as a monument of the truth it wills. These concepts and the discourses which employ them create a reality that is in the service of the hegemonic power which makes them possible. Neo-patrimonialism and failed states, I have argued, are not merely theoretical concepts; they are also power-political tropes for normalising relations of domination and exploitation, past and ongoing. None of those who employ these concepts to study Africa can therefore claim to stand outside of the power relations within which Africa is reproduced, because Africanist knowledge, especially those that employ such violent and objectifying narratives, is always already implicated in the politics within which Africa is fashioned or reproduced. Its will to truth is indissociably connected with a will to power that potentiates it and produces Africa as a paradigm of difference, an object of Western colonial fantasy, and ‘a polemical argument for the West’s desperate desire to assert its difference from the rest of the World’ (Mbembe 2001, p. 2; Mudimbe 1988, 1994).

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References


BRIEFING

Whither agrarian reform in South Africa?

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Introduction

The African National Congress (ANC), re-elected in 2009 for another five-year term, has made agrarian reform and rural development one of its key policy priorities. The executive has made several public promises to overturn entrenched inequalities in land ownership and lift rural communities out of deep structural poverty. For example, in May 2009, President Jacob Zuma announced the establishment of a new Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR); a month later, he said a comprehensive rural development strategy, linked to land reform and food security, would be government’s third most important priority; and the theme of his ‘100 days in office’ speech was agrarian reform and rural development.

The DRDLR has since produced a series of policy statements: various iterations of its Comprehensive Rural Development Programme, a strategic plan on rural development (DRDLR 2010), the Green Paper on Land Reform (DRDLR 2011), and the new Draft Land Tenure Security Bill. Collectively, these statements articulate government’s new vision for socio-economic prosperity in rural localities, and outline steps to achieve this. They also reflect a shift in rhetoric from ‘land reform’ to ‘agrarian transformation’, with the latter requiring a total restructuring of the political economy and the social systems that underpin rural underdevelopment and inequalities. The change in official terminology seems to herald a militant thrust towards holistic and systemic change.

Since the end of apartheid in 1994, the government has made various promises to prioritise land reform. For example, in 2005, the state-sponsored National Land Summit endorsed a resounding call for government to implement pro-poor alternatives to the seriously flawed willing-seller, willing-buyer land-reform model. A few months later, however, proposals to thoroughly overhaul land policy disappeared from national policy priorities, and the government has met only a fraction of its aim to transfer 30% of agricultural land to black owners by 2014. Government has also failed to address growing concerns around food insecurity and the adverse climatic impact of large fossil-fuel-dependent farms.

Against this backdrop, advocates of pro-poor agrarian reform question whether shifts in official agrarian policy, which began with the dramatic ANC leadership battle that took place between 2007 and 2009, will translate into meaningful improvements in rural
living standards. Two questions dominate this debate: (1) Do recent changes in agrarian policies demonstrate a clean break from government’s pre-2009 agrarian policies? (2) To what extent does the ‘new’ agrarian policy fulfil the aspirations of small farmers and farm workers? In this article, I attempt to address these two questions.

Neoliberal agrarian restructuring

Neoliberal agrarian reform is built on assumptions of individual optimisation, marginal utility and positivist deduction – the core analytical toolkit of neoclassical economics (Akram-Lodhi 2007, Bernstein 2009, Oya 2005). The model upholds atomistic markets (invisible hands) as the best resource exchange and allocation institutions, despite widespread market failures that regularly plunge capitalist societies into crises (Milonakis and Fine 2007). Market fundamentalists generally fail to analyse and expose the private profit accumulation and labour exploitation that underpin the model. While some neoliberal agrarian scholars support land transfers to efficient smallholder farmers (Binswanger-Mkhize and Deininger 2009, Kydd and Dorward 2001), others relentlessly defend the superior technical efficiencies of large-scale farming for profit (Olubode-Awosola, Van Schalkwyk and Jooste 2008).

At policy level, neoliberal ideologues continue to relentlessly assault state intervention under Keynesian social welfare and ‘socialist’ regimes (Lapavitsas 2005). This attack targets the dismantling of progressive forms of social redistribution, camouflaged behind critiques of economic inefficiencies and corruption. This does not mean that neoliberals oppose state intervention in all situations. On the contrary, the capitalist state often intervenes to defend the interests of powerful corporations at the expense of the rest of society. In essence, under neoliberal agrarian reform, the government actively safeguards an economic model based on private profit accumulation, labour exploitation and privileging corporate interests in land and agriculture.

Neoliberalism is hardwired into South Africa’s post-apartheid constitution, overarching macroeconomic strategies and sectoral policies. In general, the 1996 constitution promotes a limited range of progressive socio-economic rights but excludes, for example, the right to work, for the millions of people who are trapped in chronic joblessness. More importantly, the realisation of the limited range of rights that are guaranteed is, in practice, subjugated to conservative fiscal policies that are premised on corporate welfare and the need to please investor elites. Bureaucrats regularly claim that delivery of the promised socio-economic rights is unaffordable, yet the constitution does not oblige the state to take any proactive steps to overcome its tight budgetary restrictions and attempt to meet the needs of the poor.

The constitution’s property rights clause (Section 25) commits the state to land reform but upholds private landownership and the need to pay ‘willing sellers’ a market-derived compensation. Section 25 is controversial because it also permits ‘expropriation of land for public purposes’ on condition that the owners of expropriated land are equitably compensated. Given the concentrated nature of the farmland market, Lahiff (2007) notes that ‘willing sellers’ have a veto right in determining market values for land, and thus the amount of compensation. Historical factors are included in the ‘compensation formula’, but, as Ntsebeza (2006, p. 124) underscores, this excludes ‘the naked exploitation of African labour which was central to the success of white commercial farming’ and capitalist accumulation. In summary, South Africa’s supreme law sanctions land reform grounded on transactions between willing sellers (white landowners) and willing buyers (state-assisted emerging black farmers).
In 1996, the ANC-led government adopted the Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) programme, a fairly standard package of investor-friendly neoliberal prescriptions. These counter-reforms included large-scale privatisation and fiscal austerity measures to reduce the economic role of the state and distribute additional wealth to the rich. Furthermore, labour-market flexibility effectively sought to raise corporate profitability and depressed the living standards of the working poor. Although GEAR has failed to deliver on any of its growth and job creation targets, more recent economy-wide development platforms are grounded in the same flawed neoliberal principles.

The state’s agro-food-market policies, updated in 1996, completed the removal of state-supported marketing boards and price-control bodies, and ignore food-price inflation and vital measures needed to ensure access to adequate food for impoverished families. The 2001 Strategic Plan for Agriculture reduces the state to a facilitator of a profitable and globally competitive sector. ‘De-racialise agriculture for profitable farmers’ has become a cliché for advancing the interests of the aspirant black elite. Codified in the Agricultural Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Charter (published in the *Government Gazette* in March 2008), this resonates with the goal of creating a black capitalist class, which will supposedly build a developmental state – thus decorating the neoliberal agricultural reform project in fashionable nationalist rhetoric.

### Post-apartheid land reforms

The ANC’s landslide victory in the first post-apartheid election in 1994 gave the party a mandate to implement its election manifesto – the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). Among other things, the RDP aimed to overturn land-ownership inequalities through a meaningful land reform programme. Its vision was to transfer 30% (roughly 25 million hectares) of white-owned land to black owners by 1999 (Republic of South Africa 1994). How the ANC arrived at its 30% target is unclear and highly contested, but it has been speculated that the party adopted this figure on the advice of the World Bank and other neoliberal advisers (Hall 2004).

The RDP outlined a three-pronged strategy (land restitution, tenure reform and redistribution) to achieve greater equity in South Africa’s land ownership, but the government has failed miserably to achieve its own targets (Lahiff 2007). At the time of writing, 17 years since apartheid ended, a derisory 6% of white-owned farmland has been redistributed, mainly bought from white landowners willing to sell at prevailing market prices. Furthermore, this figure reflects quantitative indicators (hectares transferred) only; it does not consider qualitative indicators (such as the quality of land transferred, available water, measures of environmental damage resulting from large-scale farming, etc.).

A complicating factor is that official statistics do not accurately reflect the status quo. Under former Minister of Agriculture and Land Affairs Lulu Xingwana’s infamous ‘use it or lose it’ policy, land-reform beneficiaries who are part of projects that have become dysfunctional have lost their land. Thus the gap between the government’s stated delivery target and the amount of land actually transferred may actually be growing. However, no comprehensive evidence is available from official sources, and it is difficult to build a coherent picture from such scattered media reports as are published from time to time.²

The price of the country’s most productive farmland has risen sharply, driven partly by large-scale speculative selling and buying of land. This has dramatically increased the cost of government’s market-based land-delivery project. Limited state funds have meant that vast tracts of underused or idle fertile land cannot be purchased for redistribution, and some of the land that is affordable is of marginal quality. Almost all of the really valuable farmland,
which is used for capital-intensive export-oriented agriculture, has remained outside the government’s grasp because it costs too much. In the words of one newspaper article:

For now, previous plans to redistribute 30% of agricultural land to black people by 2014 have been abandoned. [Minister of Rural Development and Land Reform, Gugile] Nkwinti has said it was no longer practicable to meet the ambitious target, as the government could not raise the R75 billion [needed] to acquire 82 million hectares that still needed to be reclaimed and redistributed. (Molefe 2010, p. 13)

In 2005 the government hosted the National Land Summit. This assembly critically assessed the state of land reform and inspired hopes among a wide range of stakeholders that government would break with what had evolved into a neoliberal land policy. Participants at the summit, including activists from landless people’s movements and farm-worker unions, unanimously agreed that South Africa’s land-reform programme was in crisis and that its underlying assumptions were profoundly flawed. Summit resolutions underscored the need to thoroughly reconfigure land reform and restore the pro-poor thrust articulated in the RDP.

In response, the government took several steps, two of which received widespread publicity. First, proactive state purchases of land and area-based planning were introduced through the Land and Agrarian Reform Project (NDA 2008). Second, the government commissioned a high-level investigation into foreign land ownership. Unfortunately, instead of addressing the structural drivers of the land crisis and confronting the entrenchment of private property rights (guaranteed in South Africa’s constitution), these interventions merely tinkered with sideline concerns and failed to yield significant results. It is against this backdrop that the ANC adopted its resolutions on agrarian reform and rural development at its national conference in Polokwane in 2007.

Polokwane resolution

Among the resolutions taken at the Polokwane conference, is one on rural development, land reform and agrarian change (known as RDAC) (ANC 2007). The extraordinary volume of information contained in the resolution bears testimony to extensive research and soul-searching in the party about the unsatisfactory speed and trajectory of agrarian transition. It weaves together a number of fundamental arguments and has become a key reference in the discourse of the 2009 cabinet.

RDAC resolves to combat ‘environmentally damaging agriculture’ and highlights frequent water shortages as an immediate and growing threat. Implicit here is the view that industrial-scale farming-for-profit, which depends on environmentally destructive chemicals and inefficient water use, plays a significant role in threatening the future of the planet. Unfortunately, however, RDAC does not go so far as to propose replacing industrial agriculture with sustainable agro-ecology in service of pro-poor agrarian change. Instead, RDAC covers a myriad of practicalities about post-1994 land and agricultural reforms. Concerns range from the land-delivery crisis to the way in which rich countries use tariffs and subsidies to advance their own agricultural sectors at the expense of developing countries. It contains a brief yet sober evaluation of the land-delivery crisis, forthrightly conceding that:

We have only succeeded in redistributing 4% of agricultural land since 1994, while more than 80% of agricultural land remains in the hands of fewer than 50,000 white farmers and agribusinesses. The willing-seller, willing-buyer approach to land acquisition has constrained the
pace and efficacy of land reform. It is clear from our experience that the market is unable to
effectively alter the patterns of land ownership in favour of an equitable and efficient distri-
bution of land. (ANC 2007)

However, if viewed in proper context, this remarkably bold self-critique comes as no sur-
prise. In 2007, factional infighting, based on self-enrichment and personality cults rather
than political principles, was tearing the ANC apart (Basset and Clarke 2008, Fikeni
2009). Thus the party’s acknowledgement of more than a decade of blunders can be seen
as a way of scoring political points against political adversaries associated with then-Presi-
dent Thabo Mbeki who was ousted as ANC leader during the 2007 conference. Moreover,
now that scathing critiques directed at Mbeki and his supporters have receded, it is clear that
state bureaucracy has become utterly corrupt, inefficient, arrogant, greedy and repressive.

Regarding policy interventions, RDAC restates the ANC’s aim to ‘redistribute land to a
modern and competitive smallholder sector’, ‘re-build the culture of agricultural livelihoods
and rural entrepreneurship’ and ‘integrate smallholders into formal value chains and link
them with markets’ (ANC 2007). The World Bank and proponents of neoliberalism actively
champion these ideas. At the same time, they warn that concentration of farmland owner-
ship in the hands of powerful economic and political elites combined with mass rural misery
could fuel social instability (Binswanger-Mkhize and Deininger 2009, Kydd and Dorward
2001). However, their best alternative is to pontificate about so-called free competition
among small-scale capitalists. The RDAC resolution fails to unambiguously reject this out-
dated and fraudulent mantra. On the contrary, it proudly upholds this myth.

RDAC targets several technical hurdles perceived to have impeded land delivery,
arguing that a key barrier is an apartheid-era law blocking the subdivision of agricultural
land. However, belated promises to remove this legal obstacle are unlikely to prevent the
consolidation of land ownership driven by the logic of industrial farming. RDAC backs
the idea of a land tax as a multi-pronged instrument to expand the supply of redistributable
land. Presumably the idea behind this is to introduce a very high land tax to reduce the
amount of underutilised or idle farmland, absentee landlordism and land speculation.

At several points RDAC laments the woeful lack of organisation and mobilisation
among the rural poor, an essential part of a pro-poor solution to the agrarian question.
Many barriers obstruct a handful of small trade unions from organising farm workers in
South Africa (Jara and Hall 2009). Large numbers of workers live on the farms where
they work, and many farm owners keep union organisers off their properties. Most South
African farmers do not tolerate any questioning of their authority. Job shedding is further
eroding the farm-worker unions’ membership base; farmers increasingly opt for casual
workers, hired mainly through labour brokers, who find it difficult to enforce their rights.

Weak or non-existent organisation applies also to mass-based small-farmer movements
across rural villages, albeit for different reasons. Judging from 1994–2005 resistance in the
countryside, the Landless People’s Movement (LPM) arguably marked the highest and
most inspiring development in rural mobilisation and organisation. However, the LPM’s
biggest mistake was to model its activism on donor-dependent rural advocacy groups
and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Ad hoc protests and land occupations
failed to grow into militant grassroots rural movements. Campaigns were limited to exerting
reformist pressure on government rather than fighting for anticapitalist agrarian change. In
the absence of principled leadership, the once-promising LPM seems to have withered into
oblivion. There is an urgent need to reconstruct an independent agrarian social movement,
rooted among poor farmers and farm workers, to mobilise and agitate for agrarian change
based on a rejection of neoliberalism.
In summary, RDAC concedes that land reform in post-apartheid South Africa has been a failure. This bold self-criticism, coupled with alternatives phrased in fashionable rhetoric about the developmental state (Jara and Hall 2009), has become the key reference point of the political leadership appointed to serve in Zuma’s 2009 cabinet. However, whether agrarian reforms initiated by the Zuma administration will meet the needs of poor rural people who find themselves at the bottom of South Africa’s socio-economic pyramid remains to be seen.

Post-2009 vision for agrarian change

As the Zuma government nears the end of its (first) five-year term in office, information is trickling into the public domain about the administration’s vision for agrarian and rural development: things do not look promising for those hoping for fundamental change. A statement on the July 2010 cabinet lekgotla promotes a farming model that rests on private profit accumulation while paying lip service to human needs. Under the subheading ‘rural development and land reform’, the statement reads:

In our discussion on strategies to improve the lives of citizens that live in the rural areas of our country, we recognize that we need a two-pronged approach. We will focus on the expansion of commercial farming and agri-processing opportunities to stimulate local economic growth and employment, while also increasing the number of smallholder farmers and their market share. In addition, a parallel strategy of providing predictable income for the poor through work in the Community Work Programme will be intensified. (Zuma 2010)

Commercial agriculture prioritises profits for investors over human needs and the generation of sustainable employment. From the viewpoint of the rural poor, this inherently flawed farming model causes rather than cures contemporary agrarian crises. As fewer giant agribusinesses exert increasing control over agriculture, many small farmers have been driven to ruin. Consumers also face soaring food prices related to expensive farm inputs and speculation in agro-food futures markets (Greenberg 2010, Magdoff and Tokar 2009).

The Community Work Programme is a recent invention as government desperately battles to reduce mass unemployment through public works programmes. It delivers short-term poverty-wage jobs instead of a reliable pathway out of poverty for participants. It is not based on the constitutionally guaranteed right to work and excludes the unemployed from the direct management of public works activities. Moreover, it is not part of any attempt to shift society away from neoliberalism towards an alternative economic model that fosters socio-economic equity, participatory democracy or ecological sustainability.

At the end of August 2011, the cabinet finally approved the long-awaited Land Reform Green Paper and, one month later, published it in the Government Gazette, thus making it available for public comment (DRDRLR 2011). What agrarian-development framework does this Green Paper advocate and how does it compare with the bold and potentially far-reaching rhetoric that was bandied about from 2007 to 2009? The core of the document proposes the establishment of agencies to administer and manage land allocations, and it details the mundane technicalities of the powers and functions of each agency. Perhaps in acknowledgement of its own restrictive scope, the Green Paper goes on to promise further Green Papers on ‘rural development’ and ‘communal land tenure’ that are to be published at some unspecified future date.

A lengthy and meandering introduction precedes the so-called substantive parts of the Green Paper. The introduction covers familiar territory: the historical significance of South
Africa’s ‘agrarian question’ and the conciliatory spirit in which it has to be resolved. It reiterates that ‘unjust past land dispossession’ forms a compelling rationale for the restoration of land rights to the dispossessed. It calls for greater appreciation of the ‘cultural value of land’. ‘Agrarian transformation’ appears among the disjointed array of terminology, but the document lacks the vision of a new agrarian future and pathways towards the radical restructuring that is needed.

The single land-tenure regime that it outlines, consisting of four tiers, is not different from the existing structure of land ownership and control. It proposes that private landholding, as entrenched in the constitution, will remain intact alongside insecure tenure in the former Bantustans. The Recapitalisation and Development Plan, which is already in place to sustain productivity on farms that fall under the land-reform programme, places agricultural development in the hands of big agribusinesses. This scheme to rescue ‘collapsing land-reform projects’ is marketed as ‘skills transfer’ through joint ventures with commercial farmers, and it commits the state to investing public resources in a dubious farming model for profit, capital accumulation and labour exploitation.

To conclude this brief comment on the new Green Paper, some remarks on the proposed land-administration and management structures might be in order. If the paper becomes policy, two of these agencies, the Land Management Commission and the Land Valuer-General, would be concerned with fairer market-dictated land prices and would aim to protect the quality and values of land. The idea is to set up autonomous bureaucracies that report to the Rural Development and Land Reform Minister on land-related matters. The overlap with the existing deeds registry, which keeps a repository of land valuation data and transactions, is considerable. However, the Land Management Commission might enjoy greater legal powers to ‘seize or confiscate land gotten through fraudulent or corrupt means’ (DRDLR 2011, p. 6). However, expecting these regulatory bodies to correct for ‘land market failures’ merely reinforces the myth that property markets can work for the resource-poor landless. Both agencies focus on cleaning up peripheral administrative irregularities and inefficiencies that have bedevilled land reform, but fail to pave the way to an alternative agrarian framework.

To protect the land-tenure rights of farm dwellers and workers, the Green Paper proposes another two structures: the Land Rights Management Board and Land Rights Management Committees. However, a review of the Green Paper reveals that farm workers stand to benefit little, if at all, from this or from the other land policies that seem to be in the pipeline. Government’s 2010 Summit on Vulnerable Workers in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing heard evidence of the widespread violation of laws designed to protect farm dwellers’ rights. From the viewpoint of farm workers and rural development NGOs, neither the Labour Tenants’ Act (No. 48 of 1996) nor the Extension of Security of Tenure Act (No. 67 of 1997) have countered relentless job-shedding and casualisation in the agricultural sector. The Draft Land Tenure Security Bill of 2010 ostensibly closes the loopholes in the earlier Acts. Its objectives include harmonious farm relations and enhanced tenure security for farm dwellers, but the Bill also calls for the establishment of agri-villages and there is a danger that these could develop into cheap-labour reserves.

Indeed, it is intriguing that land disputes in the former Bantustans are excluded from the Bill’s purview. It is common knowledge that the Bantustans were designed to function as reservoirs of cheap labour for industrial development in apartheid South Africa (Ntsebeza 2006), and most households in the former Bantustans still struggle to survive on plots of marginal land allocated by tribal autocrats. Overturning land-based inequities in the Bantustans is an essential element of a holistic solution to South Africa’s agrarian problem.
Conclusion
The conceptual substance of the new agrarian transformation rhetoric touted by ANC politicians is questionable. New policies that purport to deliver a so-called equitable agrarian landscape adhere tenaciously to post-1994 neoliberal agrarian thinking. The government’s ambitious rural service-delivery proposals rest on a mix of bureaucratic, cost-recovery and privatisation principles that contradict lofty goals to uplift rural living standards. Limited to minor reforms to the land management bureaucracy, the 2011 Green Paper clearly falls short of the 2007–2009 rhetoric which pointed towards a possible break with the failed neoliberal land reform model. It fits within the framework imposed by the investor-friendly constitution and associated macroeconomic policies, making it a blueprint for uneven development. Furthermore, ongoing efforts to de-racialise capitalist agriculture promote the twisted logic of neoliberal agrarian political economy. Stripped of its fashionable nationalist rhetoric and myths about small-scale capitalism, the new policies are likely to widen agrarian inequalities. Capitalist agriculture thrives on labour exploitation and monopolistic resource ownership; it fuels ecological and food insecurity crises; it works against the interests of resource-poor small farmers, landless farm workers and the unemployed.

South Africa needs an agrarian restructuring plan that breaks from the flawed trickle-down logic of neoclassical political economy. The minimum principles of this alternative framework must be human needs, social equity and participatory democracy. The structure and workings of agricultural value chains must be grounded on these basic values to restructure, among other things, land ownership, employment, agro-processing, investment and distribution networks. Guaranteeing access to healthy food for all and expanding ecologically sustainable farming must be at the heart of twenty-first-century agrarian development. Progressive rural social forces, particularly small farmers and landless farm workers, must mobilise around this complex agrarian transformation agenda, as they hold the key to unlocking future possibilities.

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Notes
1. I do not interrogate the questionable perspective that South Africa’s contemporary agrarian question is reducible to the transition to capitalism, except that ‘the dispossessed’ rather than ‘capital’ must now spearhead and complete this transition (Cousins 2007).
3. Under South African law, a president may serve a maximum of two five-year terms.

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References


Rubbishing: a wrong approach to Eritrea/Ethiopia union

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As part of a revisionist discourse, it has been contended that the core of Eritrea’s political, cultural and economic identity is based on colonial premises and these three premises are false. As a result, Eritrea is in a dilemma. It is further contended that Eritrea’s future lies in seeking unity with Ethiopia. This article is a rejoinder to the contention. It shows the truthfulness of the premises and argues that, save for the prevalent dictatorship, it was and it still is a correct decision for Eritreans to opt for an independent Eritrea. Avoiding the old talk, this rejoinder recommends that as sovereign states, Eritrea and Ethiopia should govern their relations by principles of civilised nations.

Keywords: Eritrea; Ethiopia; secession; independence; ghedli; political economy

Introduction

Eritrea was declared a colony by Italy in January 1890 and remained a colony until 1941. Among other things, the colonisation of Eritrea by Italy brought modernisation to Eritrea, in clear contrast to Ethiopia, which was never colonised except for a short spell of five years. By 1941, British forces that were advancing from Sudan evicted Italy from Eritrea and Italy was made to renounce its title over Eritrea in February 1947 by the Treaty of Peace (Ghebre-Abr 1993, pp. 39–40). Pending the final disposal, the parties to the treaty agreed that the British occupying forces would continue to administer Eritrea, which marked the beginnings of the British Military Administration in Eritrea. The final disposal was left to be determined jointly by war-time allies – the governments of the Soviet Union, the United

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Kingdom, United States of America and France – within one year of the coming into force of the treaty.

In a joint declaration, the four states agreed to deal with the final disposal of Eritrea and the appropriate adjustment of its borders in the light of the wishes and welfare of the inhabitants and the interests of peace and security, and taking into consideration the views of other governments, one of which was the Ethiopian government, which was quick to claim Eritrea in the wake of the departure of the Italians on the grounds of ethnic, historical and economic links. Ethiopia’s argument was that she had stood as a country for approximately 3000 years and that Eritrea had been an integral part of the empire. The four states also agreed that in the case of disagreement between them, the affairs of the country will be referred to the General Assembly of the United Nations for recommendation, which they committed to accept and take appropriate steps to put into effect.

To facilitate their endeavours, both the UN General Assembly and the four states set up separate commissions of inquiry to explore the wishes of Eritreans. This consultation and the effort of the British administration provided Eritreans with their first opportunity to talk about their political fate and to foster democracy. The multi-ethnic and multi-faith nature of the Eritrean polity and the involvement of foreign interests (Italy and Ethiopia in particular) divided and polarised the Eritrean polity.

Two years after the setting up of the commissions, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 390(V)A, by which Eritrea became ‘an autonomous unit federated with Ethiopia under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian Crown’ (United Nations 1950). Resolution 390(V)A consisted of 15 paragraphs: ‘the first seven paragraphs of the Resolution embodied what was termed the Federal Act. This Federal Act might rather be designated a fragmentary federal constitution’ (Schiller 1953, p. 377). The rest regulated the establishment of the federation.

As one of the main authorities of this time observed, the ‘terms of the resolution were commendably brief and simple, but, in being so, left much that should have been said unsaid’ (Trevaskis 1960, p. 114). Among the few things it said, it provided that the ‘Eritrean Government shall have legislative, executive and judicial powers in the field of domestic affairs’ ‘not vested in the Federal Government’ which had enumerated powers (Resolution 390(V)A, Paras. 2 and 3). Resolution 390(V)A also provided for developing a constitution for Eritrea, and to this end the General Assembly appointed a commissioner with legal advisers and supporting staff to draft that constitution.

To the delight of the UN and its agents in Eritrea and those who hoped the new international body would meet its objectives and expectations, the establishment of the federation took place on time on 15 September 1952 (Erlich 1981, p. 175). However, within 10 years, the federation was completely dismantled, resulting in the annexation of Eritrea – a development which witnessed the abrogation of the constitution of Eritrea. What happened in the period between 1941 and 1961 is highly contested along three different narratives: (1) Eritrea’s narrative, (2) the UN and the British narrative, and (3) Ethiopia’s narrative.

More than 50 years later, the contestation with respect to the events of these years has not only continued unabated but a new revisionist discourse, discussed below, has emerged. Generally, one version from the Eritrean narrative holds that Eritrea, which had been fully developed into an Italian colony from the 1890s to 1941, deserved to be asked to freely determine its political future. However, Eritrea was unhappily federated with Ethiopia despite its inhabitants’ desire for an independent state. The federation, so the argument goes, ‘failed to meet the demands of the majority of the Eritrean people; they wanted independence’ (Selassie 1989, p. 75). To make matters worse, Ethiopia reneged on Eritrea’s autonomy by quickly dismantling the federal order to subjugate Eritreans to Ethiopian hegemony.
The UN and British narratives coalesce by arguing that everybody’s interest was duly considered and the federation ‘was essentially a middle-of-the-road formula’ which at that time ‘appeared to be the best possible compromise’ (Cumming 1953b, pp. 18–24, United Nations 1996, United Nations and Boutros-Ghali 1996). The UN and British narrative accords with the Eritrean one in holding that Ethiopia abrogated the federation (United Nations 1996, pp. 13, 42).

However, the Ethiopian narrative emphasises historical links between parts of Eritrea and Ethiopia. This narrative asserts that the majority of Eritreans and Ethiopians were in favour of unconditional union with Ethiopia and it holds the majority of Eritreans responsible for the abrogation of the federation (Negash 1997, p. 144).

Ethiopia’s gradual 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 390(V)A). Most commentators argue that the majority of Eritreans did not welcome this move, though Negash (1997) holds a contrary view. The first to rise to arms were Muslims of the western lowlands of Eritrea, who, in 1961, launched the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) (Selassie 1989, p. 48, Kibreab 2008, p. 152). 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, a significant number 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 later became the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) (Kibreab 2008, p. 169). The breakaway group was already in a civil war with ELF. Twenty years later, after a second eruption of civil war in 1980–81, the EPLF and its allies in the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) drove the ELF out of Eritrea. 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 (renamed the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice – PFDJ – in 1994) alone has remained in power in the de facto single-party state of Eritrea.

**Opportune moment for revision**

The second decade of Eritrea’s independence witnessed the worst form of repression in Africa. All the commitments that had been promised evaporated and an atmosphere of frustration enshrouded the revolutionary regime, providing an opportune moment for revisionist discourse. In the last five years, Eritrea’s opposition in cyberspace, mainly www.asmarino.com, has hosted a fierce revision of Eritrea’s political and economic history. The front in power in Eritrea has been writing its own version of history. In light of this, the opposition in exile, with its roots in Eritrea’s 30-year liberation struggle, has been, understandably, eager to tell its version.

However, the recent revision is not from the mainstream opposition, rather, it comprehensively dismisses the narratives of the two rival Eritrean liberation fronts – the EPLF/PFDJ and the ELF. It adopts ‘guilt parity’ between both sides for the sake of appearing fair (Younis 2009b). In brief, the revision, championed by Ghebrehiwet (2008b, 2008a) is generally known by the title of the first series – ‘Romanticizing ghedli’ (ghedli being struggle in one of Eritrea’s languages) and calls on Eritreans to de-romanticise the 30-year liberation struggle.
Revisionist discourse and its value

In the context of criticism and society, Edward Said observed that the role of the intellectual is ‘to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma’ and ‘to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug’ (1994, p. 9). However, for the intellectual to be relevant, he must not be seen to be a weird creature by fellow citizens, but should be regarded as a fellow human being capable of articulating their interests. As David Hume (quoted in Merrill 2005, p. 257) hinted, sometimes it is even ‘laudable to hide the truth from the populace’ as the value of truth is not intrinsic but dependent on the effect on others. It is vital to respond to the common good of the day. When the intellectual community is jubilant about its achievements, the intellectual is more likely to focus on the positive sides. When the common good needs hope and inspiration, it is up to the intellectual to deliver. In short, there is a time for positivity and a time for critical inquiry. Robotic objectivity may result in the social isolation of the intellectual.

The latter phenomenon is apparent in the literature on Eritrea’s political history produced by Eritrean nationalists in the last 30 years. It is understandable why Connell’s Against all odds came out in 1997 and why the same author has to say ‘enough’ in 2003; why Kibreab’s Critical reflections on the Eritrean War of Independence appeared in 2008 and not before; why Ghebrehiwet’s Romanticizing ghedli was not written in the 1990s in the era of romanticism, but in 2007 when a huge frustration against the deeds of ghedli had already accumulated; why questions pertaining to the value of Eritrea’s independence were not asked in 1993 at the right time – the referendum – but in 2009. Now, Ghebrehiwet (2011) ponders the lack of scholarly curiosity in the past, but he was not always as strong a critic as he has been recently.

Initially, the revisionist discourse was welcomed, though with some objections and qualifications. Critics of the revisionist discourse such as (Younis 2009c) happily welcome the contributions of the revisionists for ‘crossing over to taboo land and removing the heavy makeup of the Revolution’. Younis (2009a) admits that ‘[a] nation needs its skeptics and eye-rollers to keep check on the natural tendency to think that it is exceptional’. Ghebrehiwet, the critics agreed, ‘deserves credit for the courage he showed to talk about certain taboos. For that, he impressed many people’ (Weldehaimanot 2009).

However, soon it was not just an issue of ‘just de-romanticizing Ghedli ... but defacing it’ (Younis 2009b). Indeed, ‘in their zeal to de-romanticize the Eritrean Revolution and expose its excesses, the ghedli de-romanitizers de-emphasise all its great qualities – including the fact that without it, we would be talking about Eritrea only in the abstract’ (Younis 2009a). Weldehaimanot (2009) sees a ‘tendency of going too far’. Hidrat (2008) warns of ‘the peril of ignoring the success of Ghedli’. Idriss (2009) laments that Ghebrehiwet ‘goes for the throat’. Ghebrehiwet (2009b) himself has confessed that some readers are wondering what is it that he is trying to do with his latest article, where he questions whether Eritrean independence is worth all the sacrifice.

Contextualising the rubbishing campaign

Eritrea now finds itself in an unfortunate situation. Opposition to the initially highly popular EPLF has intensified in the last decade. More recently, about 10,000 Eritrean youths have congregated around Facebook under the banner of Eritrean Youths Solidarity for Change (EYSC). Many are demanding socio-economic and political changes at home. While the upheavals in northern Africa may be the catalyst for this unprecedented development, the initiators of the idea credit the simplicity of their objectives that include the immediate resignation of Isaias Afwerki’, Eritrea’s dictatorial president. Indeed, dominant thinking
among Eritreans seems to hold that Afewerki is the man who holds the key to the country’s destiny. Younis (2009c), for example, attributes authoritarianism in Eritrea to the president. Undeniably, there is a contributory pre- and post-revolution culture which Younis (2008, 2011) acknowledges as an ‘authoritarian-accommodating culture’. For this reason, some civic Eritrean organisations (Eritrean Movement for Democracy and Human Rights 2006, pp. 26–40) have urged Eritreans to challenge their authoritarian-accommodating culture.

Contrary to the position that sees the problems in Eritrea as a result of the repressive regime, the revisionists are seeking to take advantage of the huge frustration among Eritreans. The discourse is not fresh but it now has a new twist to it. Those in the revisionist group – Ghebrehiwet and Negash amongst them – have been arguing that the problem with Eritrea is one of identity and that removal of the dictator is not a solution. This group has doubts about attributing everything that now ails Eritrea to President Afewerki and they reject the explanation of Eritrea’s predicaments in the Orwellian trajectory of *Animal farm*.

To them, the solution is that Eritrea must rethink its relationship with Ethiopia, and the closer and stronger the union, the better. They recommend that for the opposition to play a constructive role, it has to rapidly begin a process of demystifying Eritrea and its inhabitants. The Eritrean opposition ought to begin the process of building a new future for Eritrea based on the links that unite it to its major neighbour, namely Ethiopia (Negash 2007, Medhanie 2009). A recent discussion paper issued by Menghistu (2011) captures the sentiments of this group.

No case can be made against peaceful neighbourliness and co-operation. In some cases, it is even wise for small countries to forfeit interests that they are entitled to as a matter of international law in exchange of peace. Even young Eritreans concede that the referendum on Eritrea’s independence should have taken all foreseeable variables into consideration ‘as opposed to a mere complimentary and nationalistic discourse’ (Weldehaimanot 2009). Prophetically, Trevaskis (1960, p. 131) had argued that Ethiopia’s ‘temptation to subject Eritrea firmly under her own control will always be great. Should she try to do so, she will risk Eritrean discontent and eventual revolt, which, with foreign sympathy and support, might well disrupt both Eritrea and Ethiopia herself.’

It is illuminating to look at this recent campaign of rubbishing. As Reid observed, ‘Eritrea has aroused strong feelings in most people who are acquainted with the country, both during its struggle for independence (1961–91) and since its achievement of that independence’ (2005, p. 469). Furthermore, Reid noted that ‘[t]hose who have observed Eritrea keenly over the last decade or so may be divided into two groups: those who feel deeply disappointed, and those who feel vindicated’ (*ibid*). The first, according to Reid ‘includes those who believed that in the EPLF the new nation of the early and mid 1990s had a progressive, pragmatic and purposeful set of leaders, set apart — according to received wisdom — from much of Africa’s political class in their modesty and clarity of vision’ (*ibid*). These were the advocates of *Voix Érythrée*, to use Akinola’s term (2007, p. 47).

However, it was not long that the joy and happiness of independence was transformed to disappointment and melancholy. Many Eritrean scholars and expatriates, whom Negash and others belittle as ‘intellectuals’, started raising their concerns. For example Connell (2003) has argued that enough is enough; Selassie (2011) and others who contributed to the 2000 Berlin letters wrote about a ‘wounded nation’ that has been ‘betrayed and its future compromised’. Kibreab (2009) described it as ‘a dream deferred’.

There are those who had doubts all along about Eritrea’s independence, who now feel vindicated. According to Reid:
this eclectic congregation comprises those who had never been, at the very least, particularly impressed with the new nation of Eritrea, for one reason or another (Alemseged Abbay 1998; Henze 2000; Marcus 2002; Tekeste Negash 1997). For them, for example, it was obvious that the ‘feisty’ little country would in time become the ‘prickly’ and ‘bellicose’ one. Broadly, this group was, and is, ‘sympathetic’ to Ethiopia, which represents, in the Eritrean psyche, a dark, brooding presence in the background of our story throughout. Many members of this group believe that Eritrea should never have been given its independence – a sentiment often expressed in a way that suggests that it was in Ethiopia’s gift to grant or deny it – or at least that the EPLF was a ‘bolshy’, aggressive and intransigent bunch of so-called ‘revolutionaries’, in whose image the nation-state would inevitably be made. (2005, pp. 469–470)

The above position is not a case of a scholarly prediction but rather a desire. Some got it wrong. Henze (1995, p. 21) for example wrote that ‘Eritrea has been fortunate in having a leader, President Isaias, who has recognised the realities of today’s world and learned from experience. Isaias insists on Eritrea’s commitment to democracy and an open society and economy.’ But others continued wishing and also working to the realisation of their wish. As Reid (2005, p. 470) explains,

one of the most compelling factors behind the seemingly automatic hostility felt towards Eritrea after the achievement of its independence was that so many scholars and writers had spent large portions of their careers either studiously ignoring the ‘Eritrean revolution’ or actively arguing against it.

After Eritrea became a separate state, the last recourse for this group was to predict the country’s demise (Reid 2005). Reid goes further in accusing them: ‘[t]hey are waiting still for the worst to transpire, but they have had much to encourage them in the meantime’ (Reid 2005, p. 470). Since Eritrea’s dictator turned the country into what it is now, it has been a vindication. When the dictator goes further, it is an opportune moment to be exploited.

With those new revisionists, some would argue, the case is (1) frustration and (2) they have not been part of the events they mercilessly trash. Because they ‘haven’t tried it’, so explains Younis (2009c), they ‘have no appreciation for it. Those who have never stood up to anything are always confounded by those who have.’ It is true, as Dorman (2005, p. 11) observed, that ‘[t]he penetration of state and nation-building projects into every sector of Eritrean life means that all social research is deeply politicised’. But, at the same time, those who are not penetrated are not necessarily objective.

There are several trademarks of the revisionist group. Unity with Ethiopia is all they want. Being territorially obsessed, they are also strongly against the ethnic-based current federal order of Ethiopia. They belong to an old school that, as Weller and Wolff (2005, p. 1) argued, looks at autonomy as ‘at best a highly unusual tool, or at worst a highly dangerous one’ ‘that a state would only employ at its own peril’. However, ‘in a 180-degree reversal of the previous position, autonomy was now considered as a possible tool in accommodating separatists without endangering the continued territorial integrity of an existing state’ (Weller and Wolff 2005, p. 2). Had Ethiopia not tampered with Eritrea’s autonomy in the 1950s, there would have been no war to begin with. But equality was sought by subtraction (subjugating Eritrea) rather than addition (federalising the entire Ethiopia as practised now).

The size of the Tigrinya ethnic group in Eritrea is inflated to 60% or more to make a case for a close connection between Eritrea and Ethiopia (Negash and Tronvoll 2000, p. 7). Eritrean Muslims are downsized to 17.5% (Giorgis 1989, p. 73). They are not at ease with the Arab and Islamic elements of Eritrea’s identity, knowing fully that it was this element of
Eritrea that resisted union with Ethiopia. A good example is the excessively negative comments on asmarino.com to proposals for Arabic to be made the second official language of Eritrea. As Younis (2009c) summarises, they present Eritrea’s struggle in an exaggeratedly negative or distorted light:

1. that both Eritrean Muslims and Eritrean Christians were opposed to Eritrean partition in the 1940s because they each secretly wanted to dominate each other; (2) that the Eritrean founding fathers were not nationalists but motivated by religious grievances; (3) that the Eritrean revolution is responsible for more innocent Eritrean deaths than the Ethiopian occupation; (4) that the Eritrean revolution did not have sufficient justification to be waged; (5) that the jury is still out whether the Eritrean revolution met its objective because it didn’t know what its objective was; (6) that the jury is still out whether the sacrifices that have been made so far are ‘worth’ the outcome.

This group targets those Eritreans who are extremely frustrated with Eritrea so much so that they now see solutions in being part of Ethiopia. Their preferred option is for Ethiopia to invade Eritrea ostensibly to free the latter of the dictator. A notorious commentator among them has taken ‘Marcus’ as pen-name for his/her comments at asmarino.com – Marcus being a noted advocate of greater Ethiopia. Others have named themselves advocates of union – ‘Andnet hzbey’. Though articulate, their discourse is not scholarly, but constitutes a campaign. Ghebrehiwet, for example, has dealt with similar themes in many of his posts for almost four years.

Drawing on the sense of frustration, Ghebrehiwet’s subgroup works to serve the young and the frustrated with a ‘toxic brew’ (Younis 2009b). Occasionally the water is tested on Facebook which allows some sort of balloting: what would you vote if you are given a second referendum on Eritrea? Or assertions are made to the effect that if given a second chance, Eritreans would go for unity with Ethiopia. This group has support mainly from anonymous bloggers who blog with multiple accounts with the aim of inflating their number.

There is another subgroup which follows a totally different approach but to the same end – flattering Eritreans with praises and compliments. This group alludes to Eritreans having held a significant and exaggerated role in Ethiopia’s history; how Eritrea was a significant part of the Kingdom of Axum; how Eritreans bravely guarded Ethiopia’s coastline; how sophisticated and advanced Eritreans had become under Italian colonialism; how to Ethiopian soldiers in the 1960s visiting Eritrea was akin to visiting Europe; how Eritreans could play a leading role in a reformed, democratic but unified Ethiopia; how autonomy less than full sovereignty was readily available in 1991, etc. (Giorgis 1989). It duly recognises the suffering of the Eritrean people and all the blame is attached to previous Ethiopian administrations. At the extreme, this group was even willing to let Eritrea’s dictator, Isaias Afwerki, rule the entire Ethiopia in the hope that the throne would tempt the strongman to get Eritrea back (Gadi 2011). Afwerki was even awarded the Man of the Year honour by the Ethiopian Review.

A rejoinder

Claiming to correct history, the revisionist discourse has gone too far and a rejoinder is indeed warranted. For example, Ghebrehiwet (2011) has ultimately gone to the extent of disregarding all history books written by pro-Eritrea writers. Granted, scholarly biases cannot be denied but it seems that it is Ethiopia’s history that is more full of myth than Eritrea’s history (Reid 2001). In this context this article takes Negash’s 2007 speech as the basis for a rejoinder. According to Negash (2007), the core of Eritrea’s political, cultural
and economic identity is based on colonial premises and these three premises are false. It is possible to rebut this assertion even based on the very authorities Negash recommends as objective.

The truthfulness of the economic argument
Negash (2007) holds that the ‘first [false] premise stated that Eritrea had a more developed economic infrastructure than Ethiopia’ and ‘the forced union of Eritrea with Ethiopia turned a hitherto prosperous economy into a poor province/colony within the Ethiopian imperial framework’. The reading of economic history, Negash holds, motivated and justified the struggle for the independence of Eritrea; a view with which this article partially agrees. Negash (1997, p. 20) has advised that as ‘a person who combined a solid knowledge of history and anthropology’ and as the one who wrote ‘by far the best introductory text on the history of the region’, Longrigg’s position on the disposal of Eritrea was sound. Yet, Longrigg contradicts Negash.

In disposing Italian East Africa, consideration of stability and the need to create ethnically, geographically and economically homogenous states influenced Longrigg – sound considerations accepted by many writers (Mutua 1995, Ratner 1996). Thus, he suggested partitioning Eritrea to Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and Abyssinia along racial lines. Hence, he drew the map of a homogeneous Tigrinya-speaking unit (see Figure 2). ‘This Greater Tigrai, with its capital Asmara and its Port Massawa’, Longrigg (1945a, p. 369) suggested, ‘should be handed to the Emperor to be an integral part of his Empire’. But this was a ‘tragic’ decision as he himself confessed in the same breath:

But the northern half of such a unit is highly developed: it has superb roads, a railway, airports, a European city as its capital, public services up to European standards and a population of whom many have notoriously sided with Italy against Ethiopia. Can it be handed, without reserve, to the sort of administration seen today elsewhere in Ethiopia? Scarcely; the loss in progress, the increase in human misery, would be too tragic. The Tigrai unit should, it is suggested, be administered, at least for a considerable term of years, on the Emperor’s behalf and authority, by a European Power in alliance with him.

It is interesting to note that while Longrigg cared about ethnically, geographically and economically homogenous states, the 1976 manifesto of the TPLF defined Tigrai with a complete disregard of ethnic homogeneity (see map on the left in Figure 2). The map shows that all the brotherhood talk from Ethiopia’s side is a disguise for getting access to the Red Sea. According to Longrigg, the reason small ethnic groups like the Afar, largely...
historically autonomous, should not have a state of their own is because they would have been unable to govern themselves in a volatile area. Even when Longrigg (1945a, pp. 366–367)imaginatively brought the Somalis in Kenya, Ethiopia and the Somalilands together, he saw them unable to govern themselves and in desperation he looked at Britain, France, the United States and even Egypt – according to him, all (except the unwanted Italy) hesitant to take on the task of governance. Therefore, it was truly a time of disposal. The word ‘disposal’, commonly used as a title by writers of these days (Cumming 1953b; Longrigg 1945a), is telling – dispose colonies in consideration of the security and other interests of international powers despite the tragic nature of the disposal.

Independent Eritrea: the right decision

Surprisingly, Negash’s group finds it hard to understand the fact that some Eritrean elites of the 1940s and 1950s opted for an independent Eritrea. If the British historian whom Negash recommends as the best saw the merger of Eritrea and Tigrai with the rest of Abyssinia as too grievous in terms of ‘the loss in progress’ and ‘the increase in human misery’, how come one has qualms with Eritrean elites of that time wanting to be a separate nation? Negash holds that ‘Eritreans were constantly reminded (not least through primary school textbooks) that they were far better off under Italian colonialism than under the yoke of the ‘uncivilised Ethiopian empire’. But it was not only the Italians, but also the British, including Longrigg. Ordinary Eritreans certainly have some pride in the modernity Italy brought about but to say there is an identity problem is pure exaggeration.

As Younis (2009c) noted, the ‘arguments Eritreans made for not joining Ethiopia are more sophisticated than the caricature’ the critics are drawing. Eritreans argued in terms of international law, morality and economics. One may suspect that the primary consideration of Eritrea’s elites could have been power – one of the main reasons politicians rush to claim autonomy or secession. Yet, even based on economic calculus, advocating an independent Eritrea was the right move to retain the colonial legacy (however small) and, of course, to monopolise access to the Red Sea. Purely from consideration of Eritrean interests, this was and is the right decision. In a recent interview (Awate Team 2011), the Ethiopian prime minister indicated that Eritrea could get half a billion US dollars in a year from
Ethiopia for port services. The prime minister further indicated that Ethiopia is growing rapidly economically and may be in need of another port along the Eritrean coast. One senses elements of political expediency in his statement but it is not off the mark.

This kind of calculus, as noted before, should have been part of the referendum. There are many things not yet known, such as the respective natural resource endowments of Eritrea and Ethiopia. In this situation, one can only take all unknown things as being equal – essentially Rawl’s (1971) theory of the veil of ignorance. Further assuming good leadership in Eritrea and Ethiopia, it is arguable that it is beneficial for Eritreans to be independent and have a landlocked country of about 80 million people behind them. Even if Ethiopia becomes a perfect democracy ahead of Eritrea, Eritreans may still have economic interests in removing the dictatorship rather than becoming part of Ethiopia for the sake of avoiding authoritarian rule. After all, the claim that Ethiopia is already an irreversible democracy is far from the truth. Some pro-Ethiopia scholars have been very dishonest with the value of access to the Red Sea while it is apparent that the significance of the sea is behind their mania and the many unsound arguments they make.

Comparative studies of federal regimes show that had Eritrea been a federal unit of Ethiopia, port income would have been a federal income to be divided to all federal units (Watts 1996, pp. 119–122, Hannum and Lillich 1980). Whether or not the federal government in Ethiopia has been distributing half a billion US dollars even to the presumably preferred state of Tigrai is a matter of evidence. Second, Eritrea’s independence means the resources of the Red Sea is now for four to five million people only; union with Ethiopia means resources are to be distributed to about 80 million citizens. Third, independent Eritrea has a political power in the region that it could use to secure its economic interests. In various forums, states carry one vote, small or big regardless. International personality is significant in other ways too. For example, almost all federal states prohibit their states from borrowing from international monetary institutions (Plekhanov and Singh 2006). Sovereign Eritrea can borrow at ease.

**Multi-ethnic but manageable Eritrea**

In addition to the economic argument, the claim that a small country is more manageable than a big one is empirically supported. It is a fairly easy proposition that ‘smaller countries are easier to govern than large ones because they tend to be less complex’ (Dahl and Tufte 1973, p. 40; see also Griffith 1956, p. 102). Many Eritreans such as Younis (2009c) rightly hold that ‘[t]he great secret about Eritrea is that it is probably one of the easiest states to govern’.

The most suitable system of governance for multi-ethnic states such as Eritrea and Ethiopia is a consociational democracy – a variant of federalism for small states that Eritrea seems to fit nicely. In terms of multi-ethnicities, for example, two separate elements are important: ‘(1) a balance, or an approximate equilibrium, among the segments, and (2) the presence of at least three different segments’ which, together, mean that all segments are minorities (Lijphart 1977, p. 56). This is a tricky proposition which, as much as it does set a lower limit, also imposes an upper limit. The reason is that while two segments may opt for majoritarian formula by tipping the 50 + 1 balance in their favour, on the other hand ‘cooperation among [ethnic] groups becomes more difficult as the number of groups increase’ (Dahl and Tufte 1973). According to Lijphart (1977, p. 56), the leading political scientist in the area, the ‘optimal number of segments therefore remains about three or four’.

In terms of population size of the country that fits consociational democracy, Lijphart tends to take 12 million as the upper limit (Lorwin 1971, p. 148). At least in the warfare era, a feeling of external threat which induces elites of small countries to unite to face a
common enemy is considered as one of the favourable conditions for a consociational democracy (Lijphart 1977, pp. 65–75).

It is true that Longrigg, consistent with his position, did propose that rich or great Eritrea should not become a state but rather ‘disappear as a political unit completely from the map’ (1945b, p. vi). Historians such as Negash have been cherishing this position. Some of them conveniently ignore the fact that the same Longrigg (1945a, p. 367) also argued that ‘[t]he Ogaden should remain as part of Somalia; it is completely alien to Ethiopia, and was unhappy under its rule’. To his credit, Negash and Tronvoll (2000, p. 6) hold that ‘[f]or most of its history Ethiopia was made essentially of two closely related ethnic groups, the Tigreans/Tigrinya and the Amhara’.

If it is acceptable for Ethiopia to keep the Ogaden based on respect for colonial boundaries, why is that so difficult to appreciate that Eritrea is in the same position? In the 1970s Somalia took almost the entire Ogaden by force and Ethiopia’s reaction was to fight to the last man. Giorgis (1989, p. 40) quotes Mengistu Hailemariam: ‘I think our responsibility is to keep fighting, no matter what the outcome. We will die fighting and even if we lose, the next generation will continue the struggle until victory.’

That was a fight to separate Somali brothers by a colonial boundary. In fact, Ethiopia under Mengistu even tried to resettle them somewhere else in Ethiopia because the Somali nomads were so oblivious of the boundary. If that was not a nihilist policy, how come Eritrea’s struggle justified by economic considerations is nihilist? Put in other words, would Ethiopia allow the state of Tigrai or Afar to be part of Eritrea so that brothers will be in the same country? In fact, Abbay (1998, p. 1), another credible scholar from Negash’s perspective, strongly argues that the Tigrayans, south of the Mereb River, and the highland Eritreans, north of the Mereb River, ‘are ethnically one people, tied by common history, political economy, myth, language and religion’. Researching at the time that the EPLF/TPLF friendship was at its peak, Abbay (1998, p. 151) came up with some empirical evidence showing that Tigrayans have a stronger affinity with their brothers north of the border than with the Amharas. This revived Longrigg’s greater Tigrai argument. Thus Abbay (1997, see also Reid 2007) talks in terms of ‘trans-Mereb’ identity. It is apparent that greater-Ethiopia advocates such as Medhanie (2009, p. 90) do not like this.

Figure 3. Map (right) showing Abyssinia in 1891. Map (left) showing the same Abyssinia or Habesha core in red. Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Abyssinia1891map_excerpt2.jpg and Johar (2011) respectively.
Eritrea is not founded on myth

It has been asserted by greater-Ethiopia scholars that Eritrea’s statehood is based on myth. But an exploration of the foundational documents of the Eritrean liberation movements does not suggest this. The ELF is based on the abrogation of the Federal Act – a question of law (Tagadlo harnat Ertra 1977). In law, Eritrea had a strong case to be an independent state. Eritrea is a strong justifier of the founding principles of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) though this was not appreciated in the past (Selassie 1988). Below is what the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal ruled in 1980, and with which the International Commission of Jurists (1982) agreed:

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 … [of Human Rights]. 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 recognized 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 1982)

Even if one accepts that the federation was what Eritreans wanted, its abrogation was illegal as it was unamendable, even by unanimous agreement between Eritreans and Ethiopians (Meron and Pappas 1980, p. 211). The UN Commissioner on Eritrea who oversaw the transition observed in his final report that Resolution 390(V)A would remain an international instrument and that the United Nations General Assembly would be seized of the matter in the event of any violation of its provisions (United Nations 1996, Para. 19–20). Provision of the Federal Act, the UN Commissioner warned, ‘can in no way be modified by their incorporation in the Constitution of Eritrea’ (United Nations 1996, Para. 514). Similarly, ‘the federation [Eritrea and Ethiopia combined] certainly does not possess a unilateral power of decision as regards the application of these provisions’ (Para. 515). The provisions of the Federal Act were ‘therefore binding on Eritrea, Ethiopia and the Federation simultaneously’ (Para. 518).

Negash did not pay adequate attention to the rule of law in his discourses – that the Ethiopian government, in its dual capacity as the federal government was obligated to prevent abrogation of the federation even if Eritrean Christians wanted to dissolve it. It is not contested that it was Eritrean Christians who wanted unity with Ethiopia. However, this was not all of them, and not all the time. As a close observer of the events surrounding the establishment of the federation, Hussey had immediately recorded that ‘all sections of the people [of Eritrea] are beginning to take a pride in their nationhood and would not at present welcome a complete merger with Ethiopia’ (Hussey 1954, p. 322). Thus, neither not here nor in the accounts of Longrigg (1946, p. 126) – Negash’s credible historian – was there overwhelming support for unity.

Contrary to this, to absolve Ethiopia of any wrongdoing, Negash (1997) went to the extent of asserting that it was Eritreans themselves that destroyed the federation, a position widely contradicted even by pro-Ethiopia writers. For example, Giorgis noted that ‘Haile Selassie set out at once to turn federalism into complete unification. He did nothing to ensure Eritrea’s special status. Nobody in Ethiopia understood or cared to understand what federation meant; most simply thought it meant unification with Ethiopia’ (Giorgis
1989, p. 79). ‘Haile Selassie never even tried to take into consideration the special situation in Eritrea’ but ‘believed he could yank the entire province back into the feudal system’ (Giorgis 1989, pp. 79, 80).

As Connell (1997) observed, the ‘embryo of the EPLF’s vision was expressed in ‘Our struggle and its goals’ – the famous or infamous Nhnan Elamanan. The manifesto may have exaggerated accusations against the ELF but when it comes to Eritrea’s statehood it has no myth. It listed the ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious diversity in Eritrea and argued that the variations in livelihood, ethnicity, language, geography and culture prevalent in Eritrea are present in Ethiopia and the Sudan. In fact, it argued that the diversity is more significant in the other two countries. Nor did Nhnan Elamanan exaggerate Eritrea’s resource endowment to create the nation on myth of resource-abundance as some have claimed. Rather, it held that Eritrea is endowed with natural resources such as land, vegetation, animals, and minerals and can sustain itself.3 For this reason, the manifesto argued that it is not shameful nor something that threatens a unified Eritrea.

**Rubbishing too much**

According to Negash, the ‘second [false] premise closely interlinked with the first stressed that the Eritreans are superior (in terms of cultural and political sophistication) to other Ethiopians’. At one time this premise was not false as Longrigg has recorded. In addition, many Ethiopian scholars and politicians did admit this. For example, Giorgis argued that:

> The Eritreans, with their 60-year exposure to Western government, were more sophisticated and politically advanced than the rest of Ethiopia. The Eritreans were a hard-working, meticulous people; their cities were like Italian cities. For the Ethiopian army, going to Eritrea was like going to Europe. The Eritreans had certain expectations: they voted on issues that affected them; they elected representatives; they had labour unions and political parties; they were used to airing their views. (1989, p. 80)

In fairness, the Amharas, too exhibit superiority over the southern peoples whom they conquered in the early twentieth century. Negash (2007) rightly notes ‘that the comparison is always made with Ethiopia and Ethiopians. The neighbouring countries like Somalia and Sudan did not function as identity markers’. This assertion is true, but for a good reason. For one thing, it is not the Nigerians but the Tunisians and Algerians who are the rivals of the Egyptians, for bad or for good: see how the uprising is easily copied even in Yemen. In fact, as Gadi (2011) explained, rivalry between the elites of both countries has been an intra-Habesha row. More precisely, it has been between those whose loyalty is to greater-Ethiopia and those who value their autonomy.

According to Negash, the third false premise ‘emphasized the invincibility of the EPLF’. He holds that it is the ‘failure of the Ethiopian army in 1988 [that] eventually led to the breakdown of authority within the Ethiopian armed forces’ not the military prowess of the EPLF. But Negash’s project of discrediting the military prowess of the EPLF is adjudged by his peers, such as Reid (2000, p. 167), as ‘one final attempt by the author to rubbish both the concept and the reality of an independent Eritrea’. Negash asserts that ‘the Cold War played a very important role in the making of Eritrea’, and listed the Cubans, the Chinese, the Western world led by Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan and regions in the Middle East as those who supported Eritrean liberation movements at different times. This assertion is not only exaggerated but also ignores the giant US and later Soviet military assistance to Ethiopia. Similarly, evaluating the situation in
the 1940s, Negash mentions Italian financial support to pro-independence Eritreans but he omits to mention the financial support the unionists received from Ethiopia. As Reid (2000, p. 166, see also Markakis 1998, pp. 153–155) observes:

The Unionist Party is depicted as a well-oiled machine with popular support, a clear programme and talented leaders; the ‘separatist’ parties, however, including the Muslim League and the Liberal Progressive Party, are dismissed as virtually insignificant, with confused leadership and ‘internal contradictions’. But it is the contradictions in the narrative which are rather more apparent.

**Adoring Ethiopia’s victory; belittling Eritrea’s side**

With all due respect, Negash himself manifests a small-minded mentality in being overly indulgent of Ethiopia’s military victory over Eritrea in the third round of the 1998–2000 border war. In *Brothers at war* (2000, pp. 75, 167), he, with Tronvoll, takes pleasure in Eritrea’s defeat as ‘humiliating’. Reviewing *A dream deferred*, Negash (2010) again takes issue because he thought ‘Kibreab glosses over the impact of the humiliating peace agreement signed in Algiers in June 2000’. In the article under review, he states that ‘The Eritrean–Ethiopian war demonstrated once and for all that the invincibility of the EPLF was just a myth’. Indeed, Negash cherishes Eritrea’s defeat but he fails to understand when Eritreans take pride in defeating Mengistu.

The manner in which Ethiopia defeated Italy at the battle of Adwa could also be regarded as a unique event. In fact, a huge Italian army which could have reversed the situation was delayed by a few days but Ethiopia was prepared to let the Eritrean highlands go (Longrigg 1945b). Ethiopians and pro-Ethiopia writers celebrate the battle of Adwa and invite all black Africans to take pride in the black warriors. In fact, they urge that ‘revisionist’ historiographers should not be ‘insensitive’ and ‘disrespectful of Ethiopia’s historical achievements’, one of which is Ethiopia’s victory at Adwa (Medhanie 2009, p. 133). So why is it that this feeling of invincibility is portrayed as part of an identity problem? Coming from a historian this is indeed surprising, because history is full of nations winning one war and losing the other, rising in pride and falling in disgrace.

Negash (2007) maintains that Eritrea is ‘unable to solve its conflict with Ethiopia, either by continued war or by negotiation’. Coming from a scholar who co-authored *Brothers at war*, this comment is also surprising. The border conflict is settled in accordance with guidelines enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. The commission set to settle the dispute has finalised the matter demarcating the boundary virtually, and so legal and so precise is the virtual demarcation that even Google Maps has now uploaded it. On this issue, Eritrea remains in compliance with international law while Ethiopia is now occupying Eritrean territory (Weldehaimanot 2011).

At present, there is huge frustration among Eritreans with their new state. Close to 100,000 young Eritreans have already sought asylum in Ethiopia, and hundreds, if not thousands, are added every month. The regime in Eritrea has bankrupted its popular support, with significant economic effects. In addition, a 2009 Security-Council-imposed sanction (Resolution 1907) on military spending has invited Ethiopia to contemplate military action and recently Ethiopia bought 200 tanks (Martin 2011). The military preparations and the refusal to leave Eritrea’s territory seem like provocations calculated to draw Asmara into a war that may reverse Eritrea’s statehood. Because Asmara is so isolated and such a pariah internationally, it can not count on international support and invocation of international law should an invasion occur. In light of these facts, and as many Eritreans believe, Negash (2007) is right that the Eritrean government has ‘chosen the path that would certainly
bring it to the dissolution of the country’ but it is this predicament that Negash’s group cherishes. What is left is a claim that Eritrea is not viable and Eritreans cannot administer themselves. In fact, Negash (2007) has already stated it in overblown terms. He maintains that ‘the Eritrean diaspora all lack intellectual resources to think things through. There are virtually no Eritreans who could carry out a sustained analysis of Eritrea and its neighbors.’

Conclusion

Negash (2007) recommends that ‘[t]he Eritrean opposition ought to begin the process of building a new future for Eritrea based on the links that unite it to its major neighbor, namely Ethiopia’. This is not new. Indeed, too much is said about historical and ethnic links, ignoring the same links Ethiopia had with the rest of its neighbours. It is time to talk in terms of the rule of law of civilised nations. Thus, Eritrea’s relationship with any nation should be governed by the principles of international law, particularly by the Charter of the United Nations and the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States. Anything less would be a violation of international law and anything more must get the blessing of both peoples.

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Notes

3. ‘አርአር ከውር የመሆን ልምግባት: ከራስቸው የማይያግ Trollip: ከሮ ከማ የከትል ... ከሮ ከማ የምስክር ከምስክር የአርአር ከምስክር ከምስክር.”

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Victim of its own success? The platinum mining industry and the apartheid mineral property system in South Africa’s political transition

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The South African platinum industry has grown phenomenally since the mid 1990s to become the single largest component of the national mining sector in employment and sales-value terms. In line with Fine’s (1992) contribution to a general theory of mining, this article presents an initial political economy of that industry by considering the critical role that the apartheid mineral property system played in its dominant strategy of competitive accumulation in the years leading to the current platinum boom. Emphasis is placed on the different forms of minerals ownership that mediated the access of platinum capital to mineral resources in the Bophuthatswana and Lebowa Bantustans, where the bulk of South Africa’s vast platinum reserves were geopolitically located under apartheid and how the reproduction of these strategic mineral property relations was secured during the political transition to the benefit of the white platinum corporations. It concludes that the industry’s very success in maintaining its proprietary control over the world’s largest platinum endowment would combine with an unprecedented surge in global platinum demand to simultaneously position it as the most dynamic element of the post-apartheid mining economy and as the primary target of the new ANC government’s minerals reform policy.

Keywords: platinum mining; mining rights; South Africa; landed property; Bophuthatswana; Lebowa

[Victime de son propre succés? L’industrie minière de platine et le système apartheid de propriété minière dans la transition politique en Afrique du Sud]. L’industrie du platine sud-africain a connu une croissance phénoménale depuis le milieu des années 1990 pour devenir la composante principale du secteur minier national en termes d’emploi et des ventes des valeurs actualisées. En ligne avec la contribution de Fine (1992) à une théorie générale de l’exploitation minière, cet article présente une économie politique initiale de cette industrie en considérant le rôle crucial que le système apartheid de propriété minière a joué dans sa stratégie dominante d’accumulation compétitive dans les années qui avaient conduit à l’actuel boom économique de platine. L’accent est mis sur les différentes formes de propriétés minières qui ont servi de médiateur à l’accès du capital de platine pour les ressources minières dans les bantoustan Bophuthatswana et Lebowa, les endroits géopolitiques de la majeure partie des vastes réserves de l’Afrique du Sud en platine sous l’apartheid, et comment la reproduction de ces rapports des propriétés minières stratégiques a été obtenues lors de la transition politique au profit des sociétés de platine caucasiennes. Il conclut que le succès même du secteur dans le maintien de son contrôle exclusif sur les réserves mondiales de
In response to skyrocketing prices since the mid 1990s, the South African platinum mining industry has rapidly risen from comparatively humble beginnings to a position of increasing dominance at the heart of the post-apartheid mining economy. Between 1994 and 2009, platinum output grew by a staggering 67%, while production in the historically premier gold industry continued its long-term decline at a virtually identical rate of 63% during the same period (KIO 2010, p. 10). By 2010, over 24,000 more workers were employed in platinum mining than in gold, and platinum sales were generating higher returns than any other local mineral commodity (Chamber of Mines 2010, pp. 6–8). With global platinum demand predicted to keep rising (Genc 2008) and a domestic resource base estimated to be capable of meeting it for decades to come (Cawthorn 1999, 2010), industry commentators are now suggesting that the position of the South African platinum subsector is analogous to that of gold at its peak half a century ago (Stilwell and Minnitt 2006, p. 285). For all its significance, however, the story of platinum’s meteoric rise has yet to be told from the perspective of political economy. This article takes a first step down that road by considering the critical role that the prevailing system of mineral property relations played in the industry’s dominant accumulation strategy in the years leading to the current platinum boom. In keeping with Fine’s (1992) contribution to a general theory of mining, it thus highlights the manner in which different, historically given configurations of landed property can either inhibit or promote the access of capital to the mineral resources embedded in the soil, and hence fundamentally condition the dynamics of productive investment and inter-firm competition in a specific mining sector. This analysis is developed in five parts.

The article first briefly introduces the South African platinum industry by locating its modern trajectory within the broader development of the apartheid-era Minerals Energy Complex. It then goes on to show how the unique geological and world-market conditions of platinum production combined under apartheid to generate a distinctive strategy of competitive accumulation, based on the control of South Africa’s vast platinum reserves – by far the largest in the world. Part three investigates the uniquely favourable mineral rights regime that made such control possible, focusing on the mineral property forms of the former Bophuthatswana and Lebowa Bantustans (‘homelands’), where the bulk of these reserves were geopolitically located at this time. The fourth part establishes how the conditions of the reproduction of these strategic mineral property relations were secured during the course of South Africa’s political transition (1990–1994), as the outgoing apartheid government rushed to protect the historic privileges of white monopoly capital and the Bantustans were (re)absorbed into the new, unitary dispensation. The article finally suggests that the industry’s success in maintaining its proprietary control over the national platinum endowment would combine with an unprecedented surge in global platinum demand to launch it onto its new growth trajectory. Yet, this would also have the unintended consequence of turning it into the primary target of the new ANC government’s minerals reform legislation, thus threatening the very conditions of its core accumulation strategy.
Platinum in the apartheid MEC

As is well known, the mining industry stands at the heart of the modern South African political economy. Fine and Rustomjee (1996) have captured its historically pivotal role in terms of what they call the Minerals Energy Complex (MEC). This concept refers both to the core set of heavy industries and institutions that have evolved in and around minerals extraction and processing, and to their interaction as a distinctive system of accumulation, whose linkages and dynamics have determined South Africa’s unique industrialisation path. The critical actors in the MEC have been the six giant mining houses – or ‘group producers’ – that grew out of the ‘minerals revolution’ of the late nineteenth century, fused with Afrikaner finance capital in the 1960s, and diversified out of the minerals and energy core to spread an ever widening net of conglomerate control across the national economy through the 1970s and 1980s. Their meteoric rise was, however, no ‘miracle’ of the ‘free market’. The intense concentration and centralisation of industrial and money capital in the MEC rested on a combination of massive state support in key economic sectors, and the extreme exploitation and national oppression of the black majority: the first achieved through the creation of giant parastatals to service the energy and other needs of the mining industry, alongside favourable tariff and pricing policies; and the second through the systems of labour control, racial exclusion and geopolitical segregation that came to define ‘grand apartheid’.

The South African platinum mining industry may be conceived as a specific subsector of the MEC whose trajectory has been shaped by that which is specific to it, and by the changing dynamics and structures of the wider system of accumulation in which it is embedded. Although the commercial mining of platinum began in South Africa in the 1920s, and the odd burst of speculative activity aside, the industry itself remained small, marginal and even occasionally fallow for the first 40 years of its existence (Edwards and Silk 1987, pp. 9–24). However, platinum’s fortunes dramatically improved from the 1960s as more favourable world market conditions combined with broader changes in the MEC to lay the productive foundations of the modern industry. These changes were of three closely related and mutually reinforcing orders.

First, the productive activities and holdings of the MEC began to diversify, both within and out of the mining and energy core (Fine and Rustomjee 1996, pp. 147–157). Diversification within the mining core saw platinum emerge as one of the ‘new’ raw and processed mineral products (others included vanadium, copper and ferrochrome) whose now more intensive development would gradually reduce (though by no means end) the economy’s historic dependence on diamonds and gold (Fine and Rustomjee 1996, pp. 98–99). Second, the interpenetration of large-scale money capital into mining – the principal expression and form of the erosion of the inter-war disjuncture between Afrikaner political and English economic power – saw new platinum mining capitals emerge, and existing ones reorganised, in the context of accelerating mergers and acquisitions, often with direct state assistance (Fine and Rustomjee 1996, pp. 96–111). Finally, these twin processes of diversification and integration were facilitated by the evolution of a distinctive structure of corporate ownership in which numerous subsidiaries and groups were bound to the mining houses through interlocking directorships and extensive cross shareholdings (Davies et al. 1988, pp. 51–65, Fine and Rustomjee 1996, pp. 96–111).

The established and emergent platinum capitals were intimately bound up in this pattern of corporate consolidation, being little more than subsidiaries of one or more of the great mining houses, often held alongside a range of other mineral, industrial and even agricultural concerns. By the mid 1970s, the typical institutional form of a platinum capital was
that of a semi-autonomous company locked in a wider, and distinctly labyrinthine, structure
of conglomerate control. Three such producers dominated the platinum industry from this
period onwards: Rustenburg Platinum Holdings (RPH), Impala Platinum Holdings
(Implats) and Western Platinum Mines (Westplats), which, by the mid 1990s, accounted
for 51.6%, 39.1% and 9.3% of national platinum production, respectively (Vermaak
1995, p. 69). RPH and Implats were in turn the subsidiaries of Johannesburg Consolidated
Investments (JCI) and Gencor, themselves held by the giant Anglo American and Sanlam
corporations, while for its part, Westplats was majority controlled by Lonmin, the mining
arm of the London-listed Lonrho. The intensely monopolistic character of the apartheid
platinum industry was not, however, simply the result of its location within the MEC. It
also reflected a particularly powerful tendency towards the centralisation of capital that
arose from the interrelationship between the accumulation dynamics specific to the plati-
num industry and the distinctive system of landed property that mediated its access to
South Africa’s platinum resources. We shall now establish how the geological and
world-market conditions of platinum production shaped that accumulation dynamic, and
then go on to investigate the historically specific system of mineral property that the indus-
try confronted.

The geological and world-market conditions of platinum production
The starting point in the analysis of the accumulation dynamic that has historically charac-
terised the platinum industry is the geological properties of the resource that it has sought to
exploit. In any mining sector, such properties both set absolute and relative physical limits
on the course of industrial development and competition, and constitute the natural basis of
the surplus profits which, in the presence of landed property, may be transformed into
royalty revenue and other forms of ground rent (Bina 1989, Fine 1992, Massarrat 1980).
As the platinum mining industry was from its earliest days global in scope, the peculiar
qualities of South Africa’s mineral endowment must, moreover, be set in their world
context. The concern here, then, is with international and national differences in the
quality of platiniferous ore and reef as the geological drivers of uneven industrial develop-
ment and differential production costs in the South African platinum industry.

Platinum is one of the family of six chemically similar elements that make up the plati-
num group metals (PGMs). The others are palladium, rhodium, iridium, osmium and ruthe-
nium. Although PGM deposits are known throughout the world, commercially viable lodes
are rare and intensely spatially concentrated. South Africa is estimated to hold 87% of the
world’s PGM reserves and, in 2009, accounted for 76% of world platinum production and
33% of palladium (Chamber of Mines 2009, p. 31). Russia was the second largest PGM
producer, while the remainder was made up by mines in North America and elsewhere,
which extract PGMs as a by-product of other minerals, such as nickel.

South Africa’s unique PGM deposits are located in a vast geological formation, the Bush-
veld Igneous Complex (BIC), which also contains the world’s largest chromium and
vanadium reserves. Shaped like an enormous bowl, the BIC spans an area of 66,000 km²
with a western limb rising in what are now the Gauteng, North West and Limpopo Provinces
and northern and eastern limbs breaking out in Limpopo and Mpumalanga (see Figure 1).

The BIC system encompasses three narrow but extensive PGM Reefs that vary in
quality and location. The first and most significant is the Merensky Reef, which is found
in both the western and eastern Bushveld and has been at the heart of South Africa’s plati-
num mining industry since discovery in the 1920s. Second is the Upper Group 2 (UG2)
Chromite Horizon, which runs at variable depths below the Merensky; and finally the
palladium-rich Platreef, exclusively located in the BIC’s northern limb near Mokopane (formerly Potgietersrus).

As this brief sketch suggests, there are significant natural variations both between the PGM deposits in South Africa and elsewhere, and within the BIC itself. Unevenness within the BIC includes differences in ore quality, PGM composition, reef structure and depth. Together these natural variations dictate different mining and extraction techniques; different applications of labour and capital; and hence the differential production costs which form the basis of surplus profits in the South African industry. This in turn has generated powerful competitive pressures to win control of superior portions of the BIC.

The prospect of surplus profits is not, however, the only incentive to monopolise superior natural conditions of production. Three distinctive factors have also combined to shape the productive organisation of the South African platinum subsector, giving it an extreme monopolistic character. The first, as noted above, is the natural rarity and intense geological concentration of the world’s PGM reserves in the BIC. Second, the extraction and beneficiation of platinum requires considerable applications of capital, technological capacity and expertise.\(^1\) Yet, paradoxically, the high price of platinum commodities has historically resulted in a narrow and highly volatile range of global demand – the third factor.

The platinums are unusual metals in that their commercial applications (i.e. use values) are limited and the end-users extremely sensitive to price (Edwards and Silk 1987, p. 47). This is mainly because PGMs are utilised in sectors which produce consumer durables with relatively high income elasticities of demand. In the closing years of apartheid, the jewellery, chemical, electronics, dental and autocatalyst industries had emerged as the major PGM consumers – and the demand of each was profoundly linked to the overall health of the global economy and its regions of greatest purchasing power (Vermaak 1995, pp. 70–90). Moreover, much of this consumption is vulnerable to non-PGM substitution, efficiency drives or recycling particularly when prices become too high. The tension

Figure 1. (colour online) The Bushveld Igneous Complex and its platinum mines in the early 2000s. Source: Johnson and Matthey Annual report, 2002; www.platinum.com/img/sideimg/prodafricares.jpg
between the (limited) use and (high) exchange values of the PGMs has resulted in a notoriously volatile commodity market historically punctuated by sharp booms and slumps, and hence an industry characterised by extremes of productive expansion and contraction. Faced with PGM reserves whose scale could easily flood the world market, the South African producers pursued a strategy of regulating the rate of global supply from their inception (Edwards and Silk 1987, p. 11).

As elsewhere in the minerals sector, the South African producers attempted to control output, costs and competition through intensive horizontal and vertical integration (Fine 1992, pp. 15–25). There were a number of elements in this strategy that appeared at different levels of the value chain. First, starting downstream and moving up, the major producers heavily invested in ‘marketing research’. This typically translated as the technological development of new platinum use values and aggressive promotional drives to establish and expand existing markets. The South African industry’s attempts to ‘create and grow demand’ were historically coordinated by the producer organisations Platinum Guild International (PGI) and, later, the International Platinum Association (IPA) (Vermaak 1995, p. 95). However, the PGI and IPA were not quota-fixing cartels. In the early 1990s, around 85% of platinum was sold directly to established clients (such as the motor industry) through long-term contracts that guaranteed supply at specific future dates (Vermaak 1995, p. 95). This hedging strategy enabled the majors to plan productive expansion in line with future demand. But they still needed to strike the balance between meeting their supply obligations without flooding the market, and so the control, if not total elimination, of rival producers and new entrants remained a pressing issue throughout this period (Vermaak 1995, p. 197).

Second, the complex and highly specialist metallurgical processes required to extract, concentrate and refine the PGMs from mined ore forced massive scale economies in mineral processing. This compelled the South African producers to develop and integrate beneficiation capacity, which often overlapped with private research and sales activity. The classic industry example is Johnson and Matthey, the UK-listed refiner and marketing agent that had been controlled by Johannesburg Consolidated Investments (JCI, itself a subsidiary of the Anglo American Corporation) since 1946. Impala likewise developed its own beneficiation plant at an early stage (c. 1970), some of which was later ‘contracted out’ to smaller domestic producers. Aspects of these mineral-processing operations were located in South Africa while other facilities were based overseas. Whichever the case, the horizontal and vertical integration of mining and beneficiation capacity itself represented a major form of monopolistic concentration in the platinum industry that simultaneously generated mid-range barriers to entry, and shaped the character of productive expansion, across the apartheid platinum sector.

Finally, and most significantly, the platinum producers achieved an unusual degree of effective control over mineralised land, during the apartheid era. This enabled them to unilaterally deploy or sterilise their reserves in response to boom and slump, and so attempt to stabilise, or at least ride out, the sector’s characteristically extreme commodity price fluctuations. As Fine (1992, p. 16) notes, competitive control over current or future mineral reserves does not usually act as the major source of cartelisation in the mining industry. Rather, mining capitals tend to establish market dominance through regulatory mechanisms in the chain of supply. However, two unique factors allowed the South African producers to regulate platinum supply through their collective control over the minerals resource base. The first, as seen above, is that the world’s known reserves are overwhelmingly concentrated in South Africa. This means that control over the BIC effectively translated as control over global platinum supply. The second is that a distinctive mineral property system emerged under apartheid that made such control possible. It is to this that we now turn.
The apartheid mineral property system in the Bantustans

Fine (2006, p. 139) observes that, ‘For Marx, the particular form and content taken by landed property has a more-or-less favourable impact upon the accumulation of capital both as potential promoter of, and barrier to, access of capital to the land’. The particular form and content taken by landed property in the South African platinum mining industry was determined, in the first instance, by the generic mineral rights regime of the apartheid state, and, in the second, by the specific types of minerals ownership that had emerged in the Bophuthatswana and Lebowa Bantustans, where the major platinum reserves of the BIC were at this time geopolitically located. The result was a unique configuration of mineral property that would prove particularly favourable to the accumulation strategy of the platinum capitals. We will first consider the universal features of the apartheid mineral rights regime and then the specific forms that it assumed in these two Bantustans.

The jural framework regulating minerals ownership and exploitation under apartheid turned on three key distinctions. The first was a legal distinction between mineral and surface rights. The historic development of South Africa’s minerals legislation was extremely uneven, with each new legislative development a response to the changing imperatives of either the state or the mining industry (Badenhorst et al. 1994, pp. 1994–1995, Cawood and Minnitt 1998, pp. 369–372, Dale 1997, pp. 15–16). Nevertheless, it was grounded in the basic common law principle that ‘the owner of the surface of the land is the owner of the whole land and the minerals underneath it’ (Smith and MacDonald 1998, p. 621). Over time, however, an ad hoc combination of administrative practice and legislation led to the statutory recognition of the severance of mineral rights from surface rights (Smith and MacDonald 1998, p. 621). The extent to which the separation of mineral and surface rights took effect varied between the major territories of South Africa (LRC 2002, p. 4), but its overall effect was to constitute each as a separate form of landed property defined and regulated by a specialised subset of property law. A South African ‘mineral right’ was thus constituted as a tradable title that variously combined rights to possess, sell, use and lease specified mineral resources (Badenhorst et al. 1994, pp. 289–292, Department of Minerals and Energy [DME] 1998, pp. 10–11).

Second was a distinction between public and private categories of mineral rights ownership, which evolved in tandem with that between surface and mineral rights. Although ‘Western-legal’ conceptions of individualised private property had been ideologically dominant from the earliest days of conquest, South Africa’s fledgling colonial administrations were not adverse to expropriating mineral resources from private landowners when it suited their strategic purposes (Dale 1997, pp. 15–16, Cawood and Minnitt 1998, pp. 370–371). These initial forms of public minerals ownership were generally short lived, but, with the political unification of South Africa the early twentieth century, the state had fully emerged (and would continue to grow) as a major landowner in its own right. At this point, the principle was established that any mineral rights attached to this ‘state land’ were a national resource under public control, and hence that they would remain in government hands, even if the surface rights were later sold on. The basis was thus laid for the development of a ‘dual’ minerals ownership system in which mineral rights could be held both by private entities (individuals, corporations) and by the state, which would receive any royalties arising from their exploitation (Cawood and Minnitt 1998, p. 373, DME 1998, p. 10).

Finally, this public/private duality closely mapped the contours of the racial order, with its generic distinctions between the property rights of whites and blacks. Private minerals ownership was the exclusive domain of whites, who enjoyed not only the full rights of
mineral property law and minimal state regulation, but a range of additional measures designed to maximise the benefits of minerals exploitation. According to the Legal Resources Centre, white mineral proprietors, surface owners and tenants thus shared the exclusive right to prospect on their land, and a first option to take out a prospecting permit and subsequent mining lease. These leases guaranteed white mineral owners a 25% share of profits or royalty payable to the state, while white surface owners or state lessees were entitled to at least a 32% share in mines on their land (Legal Resources Centre 2002, p. 3). In contrast, black minerals ownership was subject to the same restrictions as all other forms of African landed property under apartheid. Black mineral rights were thus overwhelmingly constituted as group rights owned nominally or absolutely by state trusts, and hence embodied a distinctive public dimension in contrast to the fully commoditised rights of whites.

The key distinctions in the apartheid minerals framework – between surface and mineral property rights, and private/white and public/black ownership – combined to generate a highly complex and fragmented structure of mineral property in South Africa. Nevertheless, it was one in which two dominant patterns of resource access by the major platinum producers would emerge.

First and foremost was the access to the mineral resources owned and controlled by the Bantustan states. A striking feature of the platinum mining industry under late apartheid was that the bulk of its mineral reserves fell within the borders of two of the nominally independent homeland territories into which the black majority had been racially segregated and ethnically divided. Bophuthatswana encompassed a substantial swathe of the western Bushveld while the lion’s share of both the northern and eastern limbs of the BIC rose within Lebowa. The access of platinum capital to the greater part of its mineral resources was thus mediated by the dominant forms of minerals ownership that had emerged in these Bantustans. For present purposes, we may briefly identify three such categories of Bantustan mineral property that would play a significant part in the platinum story.

**State trust property**

The first form of black minerals ownership was common to all Bantustans and may be termed ‘state trust property’. This refers to the vast areas of mineralised and other land that were legally owned and administered by the South African Development Trust (SADT). The registered property of the SADT included both the land ‘reserved’ for African occupation in terms of the 1913 Natives Land Act and the additional ‘trust’ or ‘quota’ land ‘released’ through the 1936 Natives Trust and Land Act for addition to the reserves after 1936 (Platzky and Walker 1985, pp. 89–93). In 1971, all SADT land falling within the jurisdiction of the new Bantustans was legally transferred to their emergent governments and simply renamed ‘state land’.

The Bantustan territories were overwhelmingly comprised of state land, which was formally conceived as a ‘national resource’ and therefore had an overt public character. This public status in part reflected the fact that large areas of state land were occupied by the homeland population. While these areas fell under the local administrative jurisdiction of tribal authorities, all major decisions concerning surface and mineral rights in state land were the preserve of central (i.e. Bantustan) government.

The Bantustan administrations had the sole right to negotiate surface leases with mining capital and appropriate the surface rents in respect of state land. These revenues were normally paid into state-land trust funds and earmarked for the acquisition of more state land.
(usually before transfer in 1971) or for ‘economic development’ (South African Institute of Race Relations 1964, p. 165). The situation with mineral rights was considerably more complex. Land ‘released’ in terms of the 1936 Act could come with minerals attached, or with specified mineral rights separated by the previous proprietor, often on sale to the state. These separated rights would remain the property of private (white) owners and could potentially be sold or utilised independently of the state-land administration. Conversely, the state could itself separate mineral rights for sale to third parties; or it could lease mineral rights in state land to mining capital and realise royalty revenue in the much the same way as surface rents. These mineral revenues were generally set at an average, and staggeringly low, rate of 10% of mine profits (ibid.).

The rights of the occupants residing on state land were minimal in relation to mining activity. As the legal owner of surface and/or mineral rights, the Bantustan administration was charged with a fiduciary duty to consider the interests of any people living in the vicinity of proposed prospecting activity or mine development. This could extend as far as setting conditions, ‘by operation of law’, to benefit the local population (Legal Resources Centre 2002, p. 7). However, what these ‘benefits’ meant de facto varied greatly, and mining leases were invariably negotiated without the active participation or majority consent of those affected. Forced removals to make way for mines on state land were common (Levin, Solomon and Weiner 1997).

**Tribal trust property**

The second type of black minerals ownership tended to predominate in Bophuthatswana and may be termed ‘tribal trust property’. This refers to land historically purchased by Africans through a variety of routes, and subsequently registered to a state official ‘in trust’ for a recognised ‘chief and his tribe’, in terms of the distinctive property laws that emerged in the colonial Transvaal during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although far less common than state land, such tribal trust land was acquired on a particularly significant scale in what were then the Rustenburg and Pilanesberg Districts of the western Transvaal, where it would form the basis of the local tribal authority areas (‘reserves’) designated by the Land Acts. Crucially, these areas encompassed some of the richest platinum resources on the western limb of the BIC, and would later be incorporated into the Bophuthatswana ‘national’ territory when that Bantustan was granted its fictive independence from South Africa in 1977.

Although the mineral rights had often been severed from tribal trust land, in some cases they remained attached. This potentially endowed the tribal authorities in question with far greater autonomy in respect of mining activity than their counterparts on state land. However, under apartheid, the interests of mining capital were safeguarded by the trusteeship element of this property arrangement. In his capacity as the trustee of tribal land, the Minister of Bantu Affairs mediated every aspect of the relationship between such tribal authorities and the mining corporations, from the negotiation of the initial prospecting agreement to the monitoring and control of royalty payments. Although the tribal authority was supposed to play the leading role in the contracting the process, with the minister merely ‘authorising’ its decisions, the minister could unilaterally modify and consummate the requisite mineral and mining leases, in turn raising the question of which entity – the tribal authority or the trustee state – formally represented the corporate interests of the ‘tribe’ at the ownership level. Moreover, while the minister was duty-bound to ensure that ‘the proposed contracts will be beneficial to the tribes concerned’ (South African Institute of Race Relations, 1964, p. 165), neither the extent nor
the content of this fiduciary responsibility had ever been formally defined in South African law (Bennett and Powell 2001, p. 619). On ‘independence’ in 1977, the powers (and ambiguities) of state trusteeship were transferred wholesale from the South African government to the Office of the President of Bophuthatswana (Jeppe 1980, pp. 60–61).

The benefits of this arrangement for mining capital are illustrated by a celebrated case in the platinum-rich Rustenburg area between Gencor’s Impala Platinum and the Bafokeng Tribal Authority, over the control of the mineralised land historically registered ‘in trust’ to the latter. Impala had operated in the Bafokeng area since the mid 1960s in terms of a highly favourable minerals lease brokered with the tribal authority under the oversight of the (South African) Minister of Bantu Affairs. Such was the mine’s success that, by the mid 1980s, Impala was seeking to extend its operation into a new and unexploited portion of the Bafokeng reserve. However, at this point, the Bafokeng chieftaincy began to assert its interests as a form of landed property by questioning the level of past royalty payouts and, more significantly, offering the rights to the new mining area to a rival venture. With its planned expansion blocked, Impala appealed to Lucas Mangope, the autocratic president of Bophuthatswana, to intervene in his (inherited) capacity as state trustee of the tribal land in Bafokeng. The result was an entirely new set of agreements, unilaterally negotiated by Mangope ‘on behalf’ of the Bafokeng tribal authority, which not only opened the new mining area to Impala on a low royalty rate, but granted it perpetual rights in its existing lease area. Despite repeated legal challenges from the Bafokeng chieftaincy, these agreements would remain in place for the remainder of the homeland period, thus underlining how the interests of platinum capital could be served by the state trusteeship element of this property form.

Mineral trust property

The final type of black minerals ownership considered here was unique to Lebowa, and may be termed ‘mineral trust property’. In 1987, the mineral rights in the former SADT land held by the Lebowa government were separated and transferred wholesale to a new structure – the Lebowa Minerals Trust (LMT) – in terms of the Lebowa Minerals Trust Act (No. 9 of 1987). The LMT was explicitly defined as a corporate body possessing mineral property in a similar manner to a private rights holder, as opposed to mineral rights held by the state (DME 2000, p. 2). This endowed the LMT with absolute authority to grant mineral rights to third parties to prospect and mine, and to receive the entire revenue.

The LMT was a particularly transparent instrument of appropriation for the (notoriously corrupt) Bantustan elite (Delius 1996, pp. 173, 211). In 2000, the LMT was reported to control 1500 title deeds to mineral rich farms, of which 1432 were registered in the trust’s name. The total value of these assets were estimated to be in the region of R280–R300 million, while the LMT’s royalty income was close to R20 million a year (Kindra and Beresford 2000). The LMT was also a means of ensuring that the ‘barrier’ of landed property was distinctly porous on the eastern Bushveld. By 1994, Anglo American’s Rustenburg Platinum Holdings (RPH) had gained exclusive control of the mining rights to 26 farms through a series of agreements with the Lebowa government, which resulted in the formation of several joint-venture companies (ibid.). As mining rights were perpetual rights in law, this effectively enabled RPH to monopolise the entire eastern limb of the BIC.

Despite their variations, it is apparent that these different categories of mineral property collectively presented platinum mining capital with little more than a partial barrier to
accumulation in the Bantustans. Homeland mineral leases were easily acquired, royalty rates low and the Bantustan regimes always on hand to ensure that the way was eased for white mining capital to access and control the giant reserves falling within their fictively autonomous domains. This, however, was not only the pattern of resource access in the platinum industry. Portions of the BIC also fell within ‘white’ South Africa, and here a second pattern of resource access emerged based on the direct ownership of mineral rights by the platinum capitals themselves. This may be considered more briefly.

Under apartheid, the majority of the rights to the smaller and less economical platinum-ore bodies in ‘white’ South Africa were held by petty speculators, farmers and other landowners (Vermaak 1995, pp. 197–198). However, the rights to the more significant reserves outside of the Bantustans were the property of the platinum corporations. As South Africa’s sole producer in the two decades after the Second World War, it was Anglo American’s Rustenburg Platinum Holdings (RPH) that had been able to gain direct control of the most significant platinum resources: first, by pursuing an aggressive strategy of buying up mineral rights (with or without surface rights) when prices were low, and hence options cheap; and second, by ‘inheriting’ the mineral property of the smaller companies it had absorbed through the serial mergers and acquisitions that characterised the ‘grand apartheid’ phase of the MEC (Edwards and Silk 1987, p. 27). In 1972, for example, RPH gained mineral rights covering 460,000 hectares of the BIC through its acquisition of the Rand Mines–Anglo American–General Mining consortium (Edwards and Silk 1987, p. 27) and by 1995 controlled an estimated 80% of known platinum resources across the BIC.6 By incorporating and combining the otherwise separate functions of resource ownership and production, RPH was thus able to abolish the barrier of independent landed property in relation to those portions of the BIC it directly controlled (Neocosmos 1986, pp. 30–32).

Although the major platinum producers were locked in a fiercely competitive struggle, the net effect of these two patterns of resource access was to generate a common interest in the reproduction of the apartheid minerals property regime. The combination of Bantustan state control and direct minerals ownership significantly weakened, if not totally eliminated, the potential obstacle of landed property in the platinum mining industry. South African platinum capital thus had far greater freedom to exploit (and sterilise) its vast domestic reserves in response to changing world market conditions than might otherwise have been possible under a more stringent minerals regime. Moreover, by virtue of their effective control over the major limbs of the BIC, the South African producers were able to erect a powerful barrier to entry by potential competitors. The historically given form of the apartheid mineral property system thus represented the essential jural condition of the entire industry’s accumulation strategy. It would therefore be imperative that the conditions of the reproduction of these property relations were secured as the political transition from apartheid got underway. It is to this process that we now turn.

The apartheid mineral property system in the political transition

As South Africa stumbled towards a negotiated settlement in the early 1990s, the apartheid state rushed to protect the historic privileges of white corporate capital in a democratic dispensation. The long-held fear of white industry and agriculture was that an ANC government would adopt the radical programme outlined in the 1955 Freedom Charter. With the mass struggle at its height, and in the absence of coherent economic policy statements to the contrary, the National Party took the ANC at its written word and pursued a twin-track strategy. On the one hand, the outgoing apartheid government successfully negotiated a universal ‘property clause’ in the constitutional settlement to safeguard (white) private
property from redistributive pressures in the new dispensation (Ntsebeza 2007). On the other hand, it hastily legislated a range of measures designed to protect and promote white capitalist interests in discrete economic sectors. Key here was the Minerals Act No. 50 of 1991. As with the Abolition of Racially Based Land Measures Act (the ‘Land Act’) passed the same year, the 1991 Minerals Act was a key component in the National Party’s last-ditch outpouring of state handouts and prophylactic legislation on white capital’s behalf (Bernstein 1996, pp. 24–25, Francis and Williams 1993). Its principal aim was to narrow the scope for the statist control and redistribution of mineral property in the new dispensation, and its main instrument the further privatisation of mineral rights through the selective deregulation of the minerals property system (Badenhorst 1991, p. 113, Badenhorst et al. 1994, p. 289, Dale 1997, p. 16). Accordingly, the legislation provided for the disposal of state-owned mineral rights in ‘white’ South Africa, so ‘releasing’ them for market acquisition by the mining houses; ‘encouraged’ the market transfer of private rights from ‘small’ holders (like farmers) to the same; enhanced the protection of any mineral leases acquired in terms of previous legislation; and radically reduced overall state regulation of the industry (DME 1998, p. 12, Smith and MacDonald 1998, pp. 513–515). In the words of future platinum ‘empowerment’ entrepreneur Patrice Motsepe, the Act was thus ‘a preposterous attempt to maintain the status quo of privileges to those in the mining industry who benefited in the past, and to constrain any restructuring attempts by the new government’ (1993, paraphrased by Smith and MacDonald 1998, p. 513).

How, then, did this impact on the platinum industry’s strategic imperative of securing its proprietary control of the BIC? Certainly there is little doubt that, as Cawood and Minnitt (1998, p. 371) put it, the 1991 Minerals Act represented ‘the biggest step towards a system of exclusive private mineral rights ownership in the history of South Africa’ (Cawood and Minnitt 1998, p. 371). Yet, as they go on to note, the outgoing apartheid government did not in the end exercise the politically charged option of redistributing state-owned mineral rights to the white conglomerates in the dying days of the old republic. Rather, a view was taken that there were sufficient provisions in the new legislation to enable the mining corporations to maintain exclusive control of this category of mineral property through their existing agreements, which, in effect, could be renewed indefinitely (Cawood and Minnitt 1998, pp. 371, 373). At the same time, those capitals already in direct possession of mineral resources in ‘white’ South Africa, like Rustenburg Platinum Mines, would see their extant private rights consolidated and strengthened. But, given the geopolitical location of the bulk of its resource base, of greatest significance to the platinum industry as a whole would be the essential continuity of the dominant forms of Bantustan mineral property in the new, non-racial dispensation itself.

After the first democratic elections of 1994, immediate moves were made to (re-)absorb the Bantustans into the unitary post-apartheid state through the dissolution of their old structures of central government and the generalisation of key national laws and institutions. Yet, the actual development of new policy and legislation was markedly uneven. This tended to force the new ANC government to work within existing jural and regulatory frameworks in what were now renamed the ‘communal areas’. Critical here is the manner in which the slow development of new minerals and land reform legislation would converge to keep the old mineral property relations of the former Bophuthatswana and Lebowa territories fundamentally intact.

In its 1994 election manifesto, The Reconstruction and Development Programme, the ANC had pledged to develop a new minerals policy that would radically transform the apartheid-era mineral rights system by vesting the ownership of all mineral resources in
the democratic state (ANC 1994, p. 99, Cawood and Minnitt 1998, pp. 374–375, Dale 1997, pp. 17–19). The antithesis of the 1991 Minerals Act, this policy of resource nationalisation thus represented a full-frontal assault on the proprietorial interests of the white mining houses in general and the platinum mining industry in particular. However, the ANC was reluctant to take on South Africa’s most powerful economic sector on assuming power, and so the minerals policy development process would not meaningfully get underway until the end of the 1990s. In the interim, the 1991 Minerals Act was generalised throughout the former homeland areas under the administrative control of the still largely ‘unreconstructed’ Department of Mineral and Energy Affairs (DMEA), which had developed strong formal and informal institutional linkages with mining capital since its formation in 1980 (Fine and Rustomjee 1996, pp. 97–98).

In contrast, the development of land reform policy, under the Department of Land Affairs (DLA), was ostensibly more rapid. A commitment to the three basic elements of the post-apartheid land reform programme – land redistribution, legally secure land tenure, and the restitution of land – had already been enshrined in the constitution and indicated an important area of exception to the universal property clause. However, the necessary legislation to put these principles into effect was developed at markedly different speeds – a reflection of the distinct political pressures to which each area was subject. Of these three elements, land tenure reform was the most significant in respect of the dominant categories of Bantustan mineral property. The prospect of tenure reform initially held great promise for former homeland populations whose land and mineral rights had been subject to the institutions and practices of state trusteeship. Early policy statements from the DLA signalled that the titles previously held by the erstwhile Bantustan states and the SADT would be devolved to the (long-term) occupants of state and tribal land, to be held and administered by a variety of forms ranging from individual, through group to tribal (now ‘community’) ownership. Title transfer thus had the potential to dissolve large swathes of landed property under the control of the central state and, in its place, create new and wholly independent types of black minerals ownership. This in turn raised the possibility that the terms on which mining capital accessed the mineral resources in these areas could change. However, the development of this tenure reform policy was hamstrung by the increasingly fraught politics around the place of the chieftaincy (now ‘traditional leadership’) in the democratic dispensation (Cousins 2008, Ntsebeza 2005). This would force the new government to institute – and then keep in place – a series of ‘interim measures’ whose overall effect was to reproduce the extant mineral property arrangements in these areas.

When the new South African Constitution (Act 200 of 1993) came into operation on 27 April 1994, the ownership of all land and minerals held by the former homeland governments reverted to the (new) national government (DME 2000). From 1995, all tribal and state land (including ex-SADT land) was thus unified under the trusteeship of the Minister of Land Affairs, who repeatedly stated his intention to treat the occupants of that property as putative owners, pending tenure reform. Yet, this would also mean that all of the old mineral and mining leases brokered by the apartheid and homeland authorities would remain in force, until there was substantive change in the mineral property regime. Moreover, for reasons that require further investigation, the Lebowa Minerals Trust was exempted from the new pattern of state trusteeship and instead placed under the administration of the (new) Minister of Minerals and Energy in 1996, pending specific legislation for its abolition at a future date (DME 2000). Critically, then, the platinum industry’s juridical control over the mineral resources of the former Bophuthatswana and Lebowa territories would remain untouched, thus safeguarding the essential condition of its accumulation strategy. At the
same time, however, there was the possibility that the actual development of these mineral rights through new platinum mining activity might be subject to more onerous regulation in the new dispensation. In his (inherited) capacity of trustee in the new dispensation, the Minister of Land Affairs now had a clearly defined fiduciary duty to ‘protect and uphold the rights’ of all those living on state and tribal land. This formally committed the DLA to ensure that there was proper consultation with rural ‘communities’ in respect of new mine developments and to enter into tripartite negotiations with mining capital that would guarantee them agreed benefits, including surface rent (DME 2000, Legal Resources Centre 2002, p. 6). The Department of Minerals and Energy (DME) was also obliged to consult the DLA and provincial government before granting prospecting and mining authorisations in respect of such land. However, the notoriously poor institutional capacity and coordination of regional DLA and DME offices meant that these good intentions were rarely put into effect. Over the course of the mid to late 1990s, the DME unilaterally approved a number of prospecting and mining deals in the former homeland areas that offered few if any ‘benefits’, which were generally brokered by chiefs and other agents claiming to represent such ‘communities’, often without their knowledge, let alone majority consent. Thus, it was not only the case that the platinum corporations retained their exclusive control over the national platinum endowment through the essential continuity of the dominant categories of Bantustan mineral property. The politically reconstituted practices of state trusteeship would, by default if not design, continue to present only the most marginal barrier to the exploitation of these resources whenever it suited the corporations to bring them on stream.

‘Globalised restructuring’ and the platinum boom

If these were the ways in which the platinum interest secured its strategic property relations during and immediately after the negotiated transition, it would also have much to gain from the ANC’s deepening commitment to a neoliberal macroeconomic policy position at this time. Critical here were the terms of South Africa’s re-engagement with the world economy. Though ineffective in many ways, the sanctions imposed on South Africa by the ‘international community’ in the final years of apartheid had succeeded in cutting off substantial sections of national capital from the world economy and significantly reducing the rate of foreign direct investment. However, the privileging of corporate interests in the ANC’s macroeconomic policy now meant that the beleaguered South African conglomerates could take full advantage of the opportunities presented by the brave new world of capitalist globalisation. From the perspective of the platinum corporations, the immediate effects were twofold. First, the phased reduction of apartheid-era capital and exchange controls enabled the conglomerates to relocate to the world’s leading financial centres, thus increasing their capacity to tap global equity markets, export capital and assets, and so discipline their home state. Second, they embarked on a vigorous programme of domestic restructuring (‘unbundling’) in which the diverse holdings and subsidiaries of the group producers were broken up, sold off where they were weak, or amalgamated into powerful new companies where deemed internationally competitive. This in turn enabled the divesting corporations to secure political cover and influence at home by offloading their ‘non-performing’ assets to aspirant ‘black empowerment’ entrepreneurs drawn from the ranks of the ruling party, while retaining the most profitable ventures for themselves. The conglomerate’s ‘globalised restructuring’ strategy thus simultaneously reproduced and modified the determining influence of the MEC in the post-apartheid political economy by integrating their core
domestic operations with their fast-expanding international interests, while increasing the
domestic power of the burgeoning financial sector (Fine 2008, also Freund and Padayachee

The first and most significant example of ‘globalised restructuring’ in the platinum sub-
sector was the formation of the Anglo Platinum Corporation (Amplats) out of the break-up
of Johannesburg Consolidated Investments (JCI). In May 1995, the giant Anglo American
Corporation (AAC) ‘unbundled’ its JCI holdings into three separate companies: JCI Ltd
with interests in gold, ferrochrome and base metals; Johnnies Industrial Corporation
(Johnnic) containing its nominal industrial holdings; and Anglo Platinum, which amalga-
mated the industry leader Rustenburg Platinum Holdings (RPH) with JCI and AAC’s
other platinum assets into a single, ‘focused’ entity majority owned by AAC (Coakley
1998, p. 3). Accounting for 40% of global output and with a blue-chip London listing,
Anglo Platinum was thus indisputably positioned as the world’s pre-eminent platinum
powerhouse.

With the advent of the ‘new’ South Africa, then, the platinum industry had not only
managed to retain exclusive control of its giant resource base, but produced a new and
streamlined breed of mining company retooled to compete on the global stage. The combi-
nation of these factors would in turn enable the platinum interest to take advantage of a his-
torically unprecedented platinum price boom that began in the mid 1990s. Driven by a
powerful surge in autocatalyst demand and the phenomenal growth of the ‘white metal’
 jewellery market, the world platinum price began a steep climb in early years of the new
dispensation that, as the price chart in Figure 2 graphically illustrates, would show no
signs of abating until the great financial crash of 2008. The effect of this ‘platinum
explosion’ was to propel the South African industry on a steep growth trajectory dis-
tinguished by three principal features.

First, the major platinum producers each announced, and then upwardly revised,
ambitious programmes to expand mining and refining capacity. In 2001, the combined
investment plans of the platinum subsector stood at R30 billion over seven years (Grau-
lich 2001b) and accounted for 34% of all committed capital projects (2000–2004) in the

Figure 2. Monthly average platinum price, July 1992–January 2011.
Source: www.platinum.matthey.com
national mining industry (Chamber of Mines 2001). Crucially, this growth was based on a combination of extensive and intensive development; that is, the opening of new mines in new areas, as well as the deepening of existing operations. Here the mining corporations were able to reap the gains of their continued jural stranglehold over the national platinum endowment. On the one hand, they could selectively bring on-stream the best resources from their vast portfolios of unexploited rights, and, on the other hand, continue to prevent potential competitors from gaining entry to the BIC. The rewards were enormous. In 2001, Anglo Platinum became the first South African company to report a profit of US$1 billion (R6918 billion) earned solely from its domestic operations (Graulich 2001a), while its annual profit rate increased by 87% from 1996 (Anglo Platinum 2001). Impala’s headline earnings likewise doubled between 2000 and 2001, with sales revenue rocketing by 71% to hit US$1573 million (R1197 billion) that year (Impala 2001).

Second, platinum’s overall strategic ‘weight’ in the MEC significantly increased relative to the historically premier gold industry, which had been locked in a spiralling decline since the early 1980s (Freund 1991, Marais 2001, p. 103). The nature of the diverging relationship between South Africa’s platinum and gold industries is clearly illustrated by the graph sets in Figures 3 and 4, which compare sales, production and employment trends in the period under consideration. The weighted comparisons in particular show that the PGMs began their rise relative to gold’s decline in the early to mid 1980s (depending on the indicator used) and that this medium-term trend was vastly accelerated by the boom in PGM prices, starting in the mid 1990s. That the total sales value of the PGMs would eclipse gold by 2000 is particularly striking and, while there was no guarantee that this position would be maintained given the commodity’s historic volatility, it was apparent that platinum was fast emerging as the new dispensation’s star primary export and leading mineral stock.

Finally, however, the political consequences of platinum’s meteoric rise would prove deeply contradictory. As was briefly noted in the previous section, the ANC had committed itself to radically overhauling the apartheid-era mineral rights system through the nationalisation of South Africa’s mineral resources in its 1994 election manifesto. Although the development of this policy had been effectively stalled by the power of the mining industry in the early years of the new dispensation, it would increasingly gather momentum towards the end of the ANC’s first term. Thus, in October 1998, the Department of Minerals Energy published its Minerals and Mining Policy for South Africa White Paper (DME 1998). This not only reaffirmed the ANC’s intent to transfer all privately held mineral rights to the state through new legislation, but elaborated that one of the main rationales for doing so was to ‘prevent hoarding or sterilisation of mineral rights’ which acts as ‘a barrier to entry against potential competitors’ (S1.3.2[iii] and S1.3.3.1[ii)a]). Yet, this was the precise moment that the platinum subsector was emerging as the most dynamic element of the post-apartheid MEC. Moreover, as a Business Day editorial would put, it was the only one ‘in which the mining houses are sitting idly on vast payable ore deposits’ (Business Day 2001). The platinum industry’s very success in securing its control over the national platinum endowment thus had the unintended consequence of turning it into the primary target of the ANC’s stated policy of nationalising and redistributing all categories of mineral property. It would therefore now be confronted with the prospect of nothing less than the dissolution of the essential conditions of its core accumulation strategy.
Figure 4. PGM and gold production, 1980–2001.
Conclusion

As this article has shown, the unique geological concentration of platinum resources in South Africa had historically combined with the extreme volatility of the world platinum market to generate an accumulation strategy based on monopoly control of the BIC. The essential element of that strategy was a unique mineral property system that enabled the major platinum producers to lay exclusive claim to the great platinum reserves in the homeland areas, while hoovering up private rights in ‘white’ South Africa. Despite the redistributive pressures building up in the transition from apartheid, a variety of political factors had enabled the platinum corporations to simultaneously reproduce and strengthen their strategic mineral property relations in the new dispensation. Yet, whilst this placed the industry in the optimal position to take advantage of the new global platinum boom, it also made it the primary target of the ANC’s new minerals reform legislation, which was released for public consultation in December 2000. The platinum corporations had, in short, become victims of their own success. Their subsequent struggles over the final form and benefits of the new minerals dispensation (c. 2000–2002) would thus open a dramatic new chapter in the platinum story. This is beyond the scope of the present article, but will be considered in a future contribution to this journal.

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Notes

1. On average, 10 tons of ore must be mined to produce one ounce of platinum. Moreover, while platinum mining itself is relatively low cost, as shallow deposits are still generally available for exploitation, the platinum beneficiation process is far more challenging, not least because base metals first have to be recovered before the PGMs can be refined. Even then, the refining process itself involves a succession of complex and energy intensive procedures, which typically take six months to complete.
2. According to Cawood and Minnitt (1998, pp. 370–372) the principle of the severance of mineral from surface rights was first established in the British Cape Colony by the Craddock Proclamation of 1813 and later adopted in the Afrikaner Transvaal Republic by Law 1 of 1883, following the discovery of gold (1871). The principle was eventually formalised and generalised throughout the Union of South Africa – what would become the ‘homeland’ territories included – by the Deeds Registry Amendment Act No. 47 of 1937.
3. SADT land falling within the jurisdiction of the emergent homelands was transferred in terms of the Self-Governing Territories Act of 1971. Further SADT land was acquired for purposes of
homeland ‘consolidation’. Any remaining SADT land in ‘white’ South Africa continued to be owned and administered by the SADT. When the SADT was disbanded in 1992, this was transferred to the then Minister of Regional and Land Affairs. Whichever the case, the pattern of state land ownership and administration was virtually identical in the homeland territories and South Africa.

4. The historic evolution and tensions of this particular corporate property form is discussed at length in chapters four to six of the author’s PhD thesis (Capps 2010).

5. For an accessible account of the legal dimensions of this story, albeit told from the perspective of the Bafokeng chieftaincy and its lawyers, see Manson and Mbenga (2003); for a political economy, see chapter seven of Capps (2010).

6. The estimate of RPH’s mineral holdings was given to the author in an interview with the Human Resource Manager of Impala, RPH’s main rival (27 November 2001). The figure of 80% is supported by Vermaak (1995, p. 197), though we should note that it probably also includes the rights granted by the LMT on the eastern and northern Bushveld. Whatever the case, RPH was positioned as the undisputed leader of the South African platinum industry by virtue of this vast resource base.

7. In the horse-trading that followed the 1994 elections, the ANC assented to the installation of the former Foreign Affairs Minister, Pik Botha, as the new Minister of Minerals and Energy Affairs in the Government of National Unity (GNU) to reassure monopoly capital that minerals and mining reform would be a ‘no go area’ in the early years of the new dispensation (Ben Fine, pers. comm. 3 June 2003; on this point, see also Cawood and Minnitt 1998, p. 374). When the National Party quit the GNU in 1996, Botha was replaced by the ANC’s Penuell Maduna, but even then, observes Patrick Bond (2000, p. 221), the new incumbent’s tenure was most notable for its ‘failure to transform power relations in the mining and energy industries’. The ANC’s Minerals and Mining Policy for South Africa White Paper was eventually published in October 1998, and is discussed further below.

8. This was initially in terms of Proclamation No. 60 of 1995, and further defined by the 1997 Interim Procedures Governing Land Development Decisions which require the Consent of the Minister of Land Affairs as the Nominal Owner of the Land.

9. JCI Ltd was bought on credit by a ‘black empowerment’ consortium led by ex-Robben Islander, Mzi Khumalo, while Johnnic was purchased by Cyril Ramaphosa’s National Empowerment Consortium. Anglo American’s move was thus emblematic of the wider ‘unbundling’ strategy of combining economic rationalisation with canny political positioning. It is salutary to note that both ‘empowerment companies’ ran into major difficulties after the sales.

10. Impala Platinum Holdings (Implats), Amplats’ main domestic rival, would later follow suit when it was finally ‘unbundled’ from its parent company Gencor (itself wound down in 2003) and globally repositioned through a London listing.

11. The upturn in autocatalyst demand was the direct result of the accelerating global spread of ever-tighter vehicle emission controls, which were first introduced in North America (and subsequently Europe) in the 1970s (Chunnett 2006, p. 6). Because the platinum metals are a key and non-substitutable element in both petrol and diesel autocatalyst systems, as well as in future ‘fuel cell’ technologies, demand had become inextricably linked with the successive growth and technological development of the global ‘clean car’ market by the mid 1990s. At the same time, China’s rapid emergence as a leading centre of the ‘white metal’ jewellery industry would see its platinum imports rocket from virtually zero in 1995 to over one million ounces per annum by 2000 (Graulich 2001c). By 2007, autocatalysts and jewellery would account for 54% and 20% of global platinum demand, respectively (Gencl 2008, p. 401).

12. These graphs were prepared by the author in 2003 from sales, production and employment statistics published by the Department of Minerals and Energy and South African Chamber of Mines.

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BRIEFING

Sierra Leone at 50: confronting old problems and preparing for new challenges

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The celebration of a 50-year anniversary in most parts of the world evokes the high-sounding phrase ‘golden jubilee’ – with the word ‘golden’ depicting all that is bright in the history of the person, institution or activity.1 In this type of celebration, individuals and states share one important thing in common: at 50, a person can no longer blame his or her parents for failures associated with choices during the life cycle; the person may have started life with a weak foundation that can be traced to parental circumstances, but at 50 that person is assumed to be mature and is expected to bear responsibility for at least some of the outcomes of their choices. The same goes for a state. When a state celebrates 50 years of independence, it cannot place all the blame for its failure or backwardness on its former colonial master, even though the colonial encounter may have imposed constraints on the life of the new state. The big question such a state will face, especially from its citizens who did not experience colonial rule, is: what did our leaders do to overcome the constraints of colonialism, improve our lives, and justify our quest for independence?

On the other hand, 50 years is a small step in the life of a nation. Indeed, many countries count their history in millennia. Seen from this perspective, a 50-year-old state has many advantages. It can correct mistakes, however terrible they may have been, and set itself on a different trajectory that will lead to better outcomes. Demographically speaking, Sierra Leone is a youthful nation. The overwhelming majority of its population is under 50. What all this suggests is that if we get our priorities right and resolve to correct our bad ways of conducting the affairs of state, we can catch up very rapidly with countries that have developed. In doing this, we do not have to rediscover the wheel and we have the vibrancy of youth to make things happen.

The history of newly industrialising states suggests that it is possible to transform our economy and society within a generation. Take, for example, a country like Malaysia, which was not very different from Sierra Leone or Ghana or Nigeria in 1960 in terms of per-capita income, poverty levels and resource endowment. Following the New Economic Policy, initiated in 1970 and which set the stage for economic transformation, Malaysia succeeded in attaining middle-income status and drastically reduced its poverty rate within a timescale of 30 years. In Malaysia, manufacturing employment expanded rapidly from 7% in the 1960s to about 28% in 2000. Whereas 55% of Malaysians

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earned a living from agriculture in the 1960s, this share fell to 16% by 2000. Poverty fell from about 50% in 1970 to less than 6% in 2004 (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development 2010, Khoo 2012). However, overcoming backwardness requires a frank and dispassionate look at how we spent our last 50 years, and a strong commitment to confront old problems and prepare for new challenges. It is to these that I now turn.

Political and economic trajectories

One of the compelling lessons of Sierra Leone's development in its last 50 years is how strongly our political trajectory tracks our economic development. We entered statehood during a boom in the world economy. This was a period that development policy analysts have come to describe as a golden age of capitalism. We registered a moderate level of growth during the first 10 to 15 years of independence. We had confidence in the ability of our new leaders to transform our society and make the very limited but fairly well-functioning state deliver the benefits of independence to everyone. We also had a fairly robust multi-party system, which in 1967 set a record in postcolonial Africa as we became the first country on the continent to change a government through the ballot box. Unfortunately, that democratic change was almost immediately thwarted by the military. After the winners were restored in 1968, we then, within a few years, entered a long period of authoritarian, corrupt and repressive one-party rule, which degenerated into further military and thuggish rule as well as a brutal civil war in the 1990s. This series of reversals at the political level correlated with economic decline and institutional decay, from which it has been difficult to recover. We regained democratic life in 1996, and, except for the one year of military usurpation of power in 1997, we have enjoyed, in the last decade or so, some moderate level of growth. However, as most development policy analysts know, it is easy to restore growth when the fighting stops, but much more difficult to improve the lives of people, restore institutions and make them work for citizens.

The key lesson from our history is that authoritarian rule and economic development are incompatible in our terrain, even if they correlated well in other countries such as those in East Asia. We always make progress, however limited, when our politics are democratic; and regress, sometimes really badly, when we allow a single party, the military, big men or warlords to lord it over us. Indeed, it has been shown, for the period 1991 to 2004, that growth nosedived into negative territory when there were major rebel attacks (1992, 1995, 1999) or a coup (1997) and rose rapidly when civil democratic rule was restored (post-2000) (World Bank 2009; Sierra Leone Government 2003). However, our history also suggests that democracy alone will not generate the kind of growth that will transform our economy to the benefit of all citizens and prevent us from sliding back to dictatorship and conflict. We need to build additional sets of institutions, policies and strategies to direct our growth and sustain our democracy and make both growth and democracy work for everyone.

Old and persistent problems

I would like to focus on three issues that I have characterised as old problems, but which have continued to make it difficult for us to attain our full potential. These are how to harness our abundant natural resources for economic growth and transformation that will improve living standards; how to rebuild and expand our highly degraded human capital; and how to rework our politics to make it serve an agenda of economic and social transformation. I would then address a few challenges we are likely to confront in the
coming decades, which are climate change and global pressures for a green economy. My basic message is that we cannot confront the new challenges if we are unable to deal with the old and persistent problems. So, I will start with the old problems.

Harnessing resource wealth for economic and social transformation

The story of our resource endowment needs no recapitulation. Our resources include diamonds, bauxite, rutile, iron ore, and gold; and there are strong prospects for oil, which, if realised, will produce a sea change in terms of revenues. We are also blessed with rich marine life, lush forests, and arable land. It is difficult to put a value on these resources, but it is clear that if we only harness them well, even the goal now being set by the government of attaining middle-income status looks modest. Small mineral-rich countries can jump several stages in the world income classification by simply earning rents from their products. We know that this is what Equatorial Guinea, which is now a high-income country, has done. But this corrupt, wasteful and largely dysfunctional country is not what I believe should be our development model. We want a transformation that can be judged not just in terms of economic growth but that also translates into real incomes and supports sectors where the majority of people work. Such a transformation should stimulate and create real value and improve productivity across the economy. In other words, we should be aiming for a world income status that allows for substantially improved yields to the national economy, that cuts capital flight or wealth repatriation by local elites and foreign companies, that transforms our agricultural sector so that we can feed ourselves, that boosts industrial production so we can stop being a nation of imported second-hand products, and that transforms our urban informal sector of petty traders into real producers of wealth. In short, such a transformation should connect agriculture, industry and services productively. This kind of transformation will not happen without strategic planning, coordination and discipline.

It is an established fact that mineral resources are often difficult to control and the resource curse tends to define the lives of many mineral-rich poor countries. Even the colonial power, Britain, had problems controlling our mining sector, as it was forced to make deals with chiefs in mining areas who appropriated state transfers and mineral rents for their own benefit. However, even though the colonial mining companies reaped most of the benefits and transferred them overseas, the problem of mass leakage of revenue from the formal state sector was not extensive. The colonial state also had very limited ambitions with respect to developing the country, and it administered Sierra Leone and other colonies on the cheap. As a colonial state, we were allowed to spend only what we could generate as revenue: less revenue generation meant less expenditure. Our people therefore did not expect much from the colonial power.

It is, however, a different matter when the state has lofty ambitions, or when expectations are raised through slogans about independence delivering prosperity for all. The most important change in the way our revenues were harnessed occurred between 1973 and 1985, which also marked our rapid descent into authoritarian rule, large-scale corruption and, subsequently, economic decline. It is important to grasp two key issues in this change, as they came to define the path that transformed us into a failed state in the 1990s.

The first was the failure to develop a healthy and productive relationship between the state and the budding business elite, for economic growth and transformation. Concerned primarily about political domination and illicit accumulation of rents from our natural wealth, the political
leadership distrusted indigenous African entrepreneurs and refused to cultivate them as partners in the lucrative mining sector that would have provided a foundation for investment in other sectors of the economy. Instead, Lebanese businessmen, who were perceived as apolitical and therefore non-threatening to the political elite, became the state’s partners in the production and sale of our natural resources. The American political scientist William Reno (1995) provides data on licensed diamond dealers, which show that whereas in 1968 African dealers accounted for 85% of the licences and Lebanese dealers only 15%, by 1973, the Lebanese had become the dominant players, accounting for 78% of the licences and Africans only 22%. Now, the unfortunate thing about this development is that the same state that favoured Lebanese enterprise in the mining sector had (and indeed still has) a racist citizenship law that discriminated against this key business group. The Lebanese were thus given free rein to exploit our resources and make money, but the citizenship law was such that this group did not have the incentive to invest that money locally in productive sectors; and nor did the state – now run by a kleptocratic elite – compel members of the group to do so despite the enormous patronage given to them. Compare this experience with Malaysia, which is also a multi-ethnic state. Even though the Malay were considered indigenous, the citizenship status of the Chinese, who dominated business, was never questioned; and the Chinese joined the Malay (even if as unequal partners) in forming the political coalition, Barisan Nasional, that governed the country and advanced the project of economic transformation.

The second development that formed the basis for economic decline and state collapse was the informalisation of our economy and public sector. The institutions established during colonial rule and the first decade of independence to manage our resources were systematically dismantled after 1973. The transnational mining company, the Sierra Leone Selection Trust, was rendered ineffective; and the state-dominated company, the National Diamond Mining Company (NDMC), was stripped of its monopoly on mining and export activities. Individuals with strong patronage links with the state took control of the mining sector. The end result was a concentration of the national wealth in the hands of a few powerful individuals (the most well-known being Jamil Mohamed and Tony Yazbeck) but without state incentives and sanctions to channel such wealth into the productive sectors. By 1980, Reno reports that the official mining company, the NDMC, accounted for only 29% of legally produced diamonds, compared to 94% in 1973. The informalisation of the mining sector was extended to other sectors, such as the produce marketing board and a host of parastatals, such as the ports (Luke 1984) and the trading, hotel, transport, communication, banking and utility sectors. Government revenue dried up very quickly, debts mounted, especially after the organisation of the extravagant Organisation of African Unity Summit in 1980 that was estimated to have cost US$200 million, and the state became highly dependent on foreign aid. All of this occurred in an international environment that was now increasingly unfavourable as terms of trade for primary commodities deteriorated. Informalisation of the economy and the public sector meant that the state even lacked the discipline to implement IMF reforms in the 1980s, leading to triple pain for the nation: austerity that further reduced living standards, more debt and no growth.

What does all this mean for nation building and economic transformation today? We have surely made important strides since the war in rolling back informalisation, as can be seen in the increase in domestic revenue and the value of exports that pass through official channels,
as well as efforts to revive the agricultural sector and improve our infrastructure and energy supply. However, we are still a long way from combating the problem. The indictment of a large number of public figures by the Anti-Corruption Commission and emergence of new cases underscore the point that private interest continues to trump the public good when individuals are entrusted with public office. Indeed, the challenge of effective resource management and dangers of informatisation, corruption and capital flight are even more acute today because of the exponential growth of our resource base and rise in global prices of mineral resources. And the danger of a few players monopolising our resource wealth and colluding with political and administrative elites for ridiculously high tax concessions, low royalties, and to transfer wealth illicitly overseas is still real. The recent decision to renegotiate mining contracts, in response to pressures from donors and civil society advocacy groups, and attempts to rush through new mining legislation in parliament without proper debate, send conflicting signals. They buttress the point that there are still huge governance problems on matters relating to resource management.

Controlling the resource curse and informality is not rocket science as there are successful models around the world to learn from. Even if we ignore the experience of high-income Norway (and I would recommend that we seriously study that experience and engage their researchers and policymakers), there a number of positive examples of resource management in developing countries that we can learn from. Mineral-rich Botswana adopted policies that discouraged exchange-rate overvaluation, as well as fiscal strategies that set targets on government spending, and created special funds that stabilised mineral revenues. Through such measures, the government has consistently maintained a stable macroeconomy that has avoided the resource curse (Siphambe 2008). However, its success in governing its economy has not translated into broad-based and diversified growth. The share of agriculture in GDP has fallen drastically since 1960, but per-worker output in agriculture has not increased. The diversification of the economy into manufacturing has not been seriously pursued since the share of manufacturing in GDP has declined as well. Levels of unemployment, inequality and poverty remain high.

However, the story is different in mineral-rich Malaysia and Indonesia. These two countries, which are among the top 10 developing-country exporters of manufactured products, have fared much better in transforming their economies from minerals to manufacturing. In these countries, the resource sector was not treated as an enclave, but was firmly anchored in, and supported, the primary goal of industrial transformation. Although informality and corruption existed in the two countries, they adopted variants of East Asian industrial strategies, by building strong and effective states, which were able to influence the investment decisions of foreign and domestic entrepreneurs, forcing them to adopt labour-absorbing and export-oriented manufacturing strategies.

Sierra Leone cannot become another Malaysia or Indonesia or Korea. It will have to chart its own development path. But building strategic and enforcement capacity will be vital in the search for that path and in supporting state–business relations that will deliver agricultural and industrial transformation.

Rebuilding and expanding human capital

No country can develop without strong and sustained investment in human capital. The value of human capital – principally education and health – in promoting growth, improving well-being and reducing inequality is now widely acknowledged in
development circles. An educated and healthy workforce contributes to economic growth by improving skills and labour productivity, which in turn leads to improved incomes and life chances. To talk meaningfully about a transformative agenda in the context of Sierra Leone is to take human-capital formation and its expansion seriously.

Educationists, historians and social-sector analysts (Sumner 1963, Fyle 1993, Beckley 1993, World Bank 2009) have over the years documented the major trends and challenges in our educational and health sectors. My reading of what they say can be summarised into a few basic points. We entered statehood with severely limited health and educational services that touched the lives of just a fraction of the population. The literacy rate was just 9% (Beckley 1993) and we had only 52 doctors and a little over 1000 hospital beds for a population of two million (Fyle 1993). Most services were concentrated in Freetown, rural towns performed better than villages, and women had less access to these services than men. The new state had a big ambition to provide education and health for all, but could not match its policy rhetoric with concerted action.

Spending on education and health as a proportion of the national budget increased but was insufficient to meet the very real and high levels of need. Economic crisis in the 1980s and the implementation of market reforms in a highly disorganised and corrupt political environment plunged the education and health sectors into protracted crisis. The funding share of education and health in the national budget remained largely stable even when the economy experienced crisis, but this stability disguised the uselessness of the allocations in real terms as the value of the Leone depreciated dramatically and inflation skyrocketed. Salaries lost their value and could not even be paid on time; primary and secondary school teachers and nurses moved out of the middle class as they struggled to make ends meet; books, drugs and other supplies could not be bought; school and hospital infrastructure experienced decay; class sizes expanded; and standards of instruction and delivery of health services collapsed. This happened well before the civil war in the 1990s, which plunged the sector into further decay, from which it is now slowly recovering.

One important point stands out in this story of human-capital degradation. The first one to two decades of independence could be characterised as a period in which a limited and uneven social sector had centres of excellence, not only in Freetown, but also in the provinces. I am referring to the good primary and secondary schools that produced students who could compete anywhere and were the envy of our African neighbours. Indeed, these schools and the university – the oldest in the region – trained many public servants and academics in Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia and other African countries. Significantly, at independence, the state assumed an active role in sustaining these schools. Indeed, during my time, only those considered under-achievers or who could not compete in what was then called ‘common/selective entrance examination’ for admission into these schools attended private schools. Today, even though more schools have been built and more children are enrolled in school, we seem to have lost these centres of excellence that offered opportunities to children from poor backgrounds with good grades to rise to the ranks of the modern middle class. Instead, a very pernicious two-track system has developed in which the really rich parents send their children to private schools, which now clearly out perform these former great schools, and children from poor backgrounds are condemned to very poor schools or none at all.

Rebuilding and expanding our human capital requires a focus on several fronts, many of which have been articulated by
our educationists and those concerned with human-capital development in poor countries. A major report on educational reform dubbed ‘The Professor Gbamanga report’ was also recently submitted to the government. There is clearly a need to build new schools and rehabilitate existing ones in order to ensure that all children who are supposed to be in school actually are in school at both primary and secondary levels. Indeed, progress has been made in the building of new schools and enrolment levels have risen sharply. But building schools or tackling infrastructural deficits and raising enrolment levels is only one part of the solution. The other is the software part: what is put in the schools in terms of books, modern teaching aids or equipment; keeping the schools clean with properly functioning toilets; keeping class sizes manageable; motivating teachers through training and retraining, decent salaries and housing; providing feeding programmes to keep children healthy and mentally alert; and quality control. All of these constitute the other vital elements of reversing the human-capital degradation and moving the country up the skills ladder. It is the quality of the software that will keep children and teachers in school and motivate them to achieve good grades.

An often-neglected part of human-capital development is extracurricular reading and the value of public bookshops and libraries. There is need to balance the explosive interest in popular music by our youth with a reading culture that is not tied to textbooks. In the 1960s to 1980s, many young people had easy access to, and read, popular magazines, books and comics, such as Reader’s Digest, Drum, Spearman, West Africa, and most of the African Series novels, such as Things fall apart, No longer at ease, A man of the people, Weep not child, The beautiful ones are not yet born, Mine boy and Passport of Mallam Ilia even before proceeding to university. We memorised interesting passages to impress each other about our knowledge of these books, and adopted the names of key characters, such as Okonkwo, Lans Spearman, Rabon Zolo and Mallam Ilia. Compare this to the preference for more war-like names today among our youth, such as Bomb Blast, Leather Boot and 555. There is a strong need to restore and deepen the culture of extracurricular reading through the production of interesting reading materials and incentives for their absorption by youth.

Rebuilding our human capital obviously requires substantial funds. World Bank (2009) estimates suggest that households are the main contributors (44%) to the funding of education, followed by the government (35%) and donors (22%); and that households’ contributions are half of total expenditure at the primary-school level and 60% at the secondary-school level. Given the low incomes of most households, it is clear that the burden of financing human capital formation for transformative change cannot rest on them. Education at the primary and secondary levels has a high social return and should be collectively funded through the state. A strong case can be made to tie some of the revenue collected from the goods and services tax to education and health, as Ghana has done; and to also pursue the possibility of including a social tax in mining contracts that will support these two sectors. Part of the tax proceeds can also be used to finance our tertiary institutions, which also require massive investment in infrastructure and facilities and decent remuneration for those who work in them.

**Politics of transformation**

Let me now turn my attention to the problem of how to rework our politics for economic and social transformation. Perhaps, our biggest problem is how to engineer our politics to achieve the high goal of transformation we have set ourselves since the war. Kwame Nkrubah
once famously said that Africans should first seek the political kingdom, by which he meant political independence, and ‘everything else will be added on to it’. We now know that the struggle for progress is more complicated than this. Africans can mess up their independence through bad politics, which can retard economic development. We have only really enjoyed 21 years of relatively stable competitive politics in our 50-year life – and those 21 years were interspersed with a long period of one-party and military dictatorship, and a brutal civil war. Part of the reason for our failure to consolidate democratic rule is our inability to manage our ethnic divisions in ways that are inclusive, transparent and respectful of difference. We have also been unable to embed our political parties in broad movements or organisations concerned with welfare or redistributive issues. And we have taken delight in infusing thuggery into our politics. Indeed, thuggery, which involves recruiting sections of the poor and marginalised into the security wings of parties, compensates for our failure to make our parties meaningful to the aspirations of the poor.

Before I address these issues, let me state that there is one area of public life that we have done extraordinarily well as a nation – that is in the sphere of religious tolerance. I recently watched the wedding video of one of my nieces and I was pleasantly surprised that even though it was a Muslim wedding, during the opening part of the ceremony when the leader of the bridegroom’s group was doing the rituals of greeting and paying tribute to the bride’s relations and friends, which is often done with gifts in envelopes, he had an envelope for an anonymous Christian representative. Small gestures like these reinforce my belief that ordinary people can handle social divisions if they are not manipulated by power seekers. And I want to add that even though our politics seems to be polarised along ethno-regional lines, there is a lot of intermarriage across ethnicities and regions, and people get along socially when the politicians and elites who are greedy for power, resources and positions keep out of their lives.

But we should take our ethno-regional division seriously. In the two elections when power was transferred from one political party to another (in 1967 and 2007), the margin of victory was very small, and voting tended to mirror, though not in absolute terms, ethno-regional lines (Foray 1988, Kandeh 2007, Bangura 2000). Such sharp divisions may cause winners to monopolise state power and exclude individuals from regions that belong to opposition parties from government jobs. Individuals from opposition regions in turn may withdraw support from the government even if it is doing well in the development front. This may lead to multiple and competing publics. When this happens, political parties may only be credible to one segment of the public at best. And if some parties want to be credible across the ethnic divide, voters may be less flexible, rewarding primarily those parties that are perceived to be led by kinsmen and women. The vote may thus lose its significance as a sanctioning device against bad performance. Politicians may perceive the ethnic vote as a vote bank that cannot be claimed by rival politicians or parties from other groups, making electoral politics unlikely to work for development and the poor (Bangura 2007). A government that functions on the basis of an ethnically bifurcated public is also deprived of all available talent to implement a transformative agenda. Indeed, it may become captive to less-talented or less-capable ethnic bigots who may perceive inclusiveness as a threat to their access to or control of posts, power and resources. The state then performs below optimum and fails to deliver on its promise of transformative change. It may also run the risk of militant opposition from excluded groups and regions.
No democracy can embark on transformative change if it fails to pursue a policy of inclusiveness. Indeed, many of the laudable programmes, such as tapping the savings and talents of the diaspora through the Diaspora Office, and developing a long-term plan for economic development that transcends the electoral cycle, are unlikely to work without elite consensus across ethnic groups and regions. Developing a depoliticised and professional army and police force is also difficult without consensus that cuts across ethnicities and regions. We also need to think seriously about a programme of national service that is targeted to the youth. But this will not work without political consensus that allows individuals from all regions and ethnicities to feel included in the national project.

The solutions have been recounted many times and in many places. They can be summarised in two parts. The first is to ensure that cabinet and other top-level government appointments, including in the state bureaucracy, reflect the ethno-regional make-up of the country. In Nigeria today, no government can be formed that does not include at least one minister from each of the 36 states. And the rule of power rotation adopted by the governing party ensures that no region can now dominate politics indefinitely if the rules are followed. The composition of the federal bureaucracy also tends to reflect the ethnic make-up of the country. In Switzerland, which has three major language groups – German (74%), French (21%) and Italian (4%) – the executive council is composed of seven members (at least two are often French-speaking and one Italian); the presidency rotates each year among the seven members, so that someone of French or Italian origin can also become president within a seven-year cycle; and the federal bureaucracy is amazingly balanced in terms of the representation of the three groups (Linder and Steffen 2006).

The second policy is to transform our political parties into multi-ethnic parties. The real test of our success will come when the average person in Bo and Makeni can walk into a polling booth and is not held hostage to the perceived ethno-regional identities of the candidates’ parties. There are a number of rules that can help to bring this about. Today, the leading political party in Nigeria, the People’s Democratic Party, is highly multi-ethnic. The series of electoral reforms introduced in the last 30 or more years has led to a situation in which Nigerian politics has been transformed from ethnic competition ‘between parties’ to ethnic competition ‘within parties’. There are a number of rules that can be adopted if we want our parties to become truly multi-ethnic. These include primaries of the US type, threshold rules of vote shares across regions for declaring winners of presidential elections, and the alternative vote that ranks candidates, all of which may force candidates to appeal to voters outside of their ethno-regional strongholds in order to win elections; and power alternation among the key ethno-regional clusters.

However, ethno-regional elite pacts are not sufficient to drive economic and social transformation. The masses need to be brought into the bargain. Pacts that address the interests of popular-sector groups are needed in order to filter out non-developmental, predatory elites in the political system. If the political elite are to be made to take development seriously, elite bargains need to be complemented with development bargains between governments and citizens involving the participation of groups in agriculture, the informal sector and industry. This will help to set the country on a trajectory of growth that will deliver jobs and equity. One positive point to note here is that in Sierra Leone, many economic-activity-based groups are non-ethnic. Even in cases where they are ethnic, encouraging groups to scale up for...
effective bargaining may ultimately weaken the ethnic dimension for collective action.

Unfortunately, rather than meaningfully incorporating the poor into the political and economic system, sections of the poor have instead been allocated the task of doing the dirty work of political parties. They guard politicians and party offices; and are fed, drugged and given money to intimidate opponents or unleash violence during election rallies or when parties are dissatisfied with election outcomes. During the 2007 elections, both parties used ex-combatants with a history of marginality as security insurance. With a huge youth bulge and high levels of underemployment, this kind of popular-sector incorporation into parties can be very destabilising. One danger in incorporating individuals with a propensity for violence into the security wings of mainstream parties is that even if parties do not want to provoke violence, the self-interest of those who serve as security guards will be to provoke violence in order to remain relevant and keep their jobs. Political parties and the government must find better ways of keeping these young people productively engaged if they are serious about a transformative agenda.

**New challenges**

I have spent considerable time on our old problems because I believe that our success in meeting new challenges depends on how well we are able to tackle the old problems. Now let me turn to two big challenges we are likely to face in the coming decades. These are climate change and global pressures for a green economy, that is, pressures to make our economies less dependent on resources, technologies and production systems that are carbon-intensive. Sierra Leone, like other poor countries, faces a triple injustice, as one speaker described the problem in a recent conference on the subject organised by UNRISD.

Because of our underdevelopment, we are less responsible for carbon emissions, but because of our location, we are likely to pay a higher price than the countries responsible for the pollution if the planet warms up; and our underdevelopment makes us less resilient to cope with the catastrophe when or if it happens. Most of the emissions were, and are still, caused by the industrialised countries, with fast-growing, energy-guzzling China now the biggest polluter in the world. In this crime against nature, Sierra Leone’s contribution is really insignificant. In one estimate, Sierra Leone ranks 192nd out of 214 countries in terms of carbon dioxide emissions per capita – spewing just 0.2 metric tons of carbon per capita between 1990 and 2006. However, much of our coast, from Kambia to Pujehun, hardly rises above sea level. If global temperatures rise, the sea level will also rise, and large parts of our coastal towns and villages will be submerged and become part of the Atlantic Ocean. The world is already witnessing the gradual disappearance of small islands in the Pacific. We lack the infrastructure, resources and organisation to cope with a disaster of such magnitude.

Two issues inform the global debate on climate change: mitigation and adaptation. It is clear from my analysis of our old problems that we can only be successful in adapting to climate change if we manage our resources and economy well, improve our human capital and system of social organisation, and develop an inclusive political system. Mitigation on the other hand refers to measures that can slow down or reverse climate change, and it involves targets on, and strategies for, reducing global emissions generated from various aspects of human activities. The details are complex and should not detain us here. But one issue I would like to address and which is likely to affect us profoundly is pressure to adopt green technologies, production systems and habits. Again, this is a very complex subject that is likely to dominate debate at the Rio +
20 Summit in mid 2012. One thing seems clear: despite strong opposition from business sectors that benefit from carbon-intensive industries and fossil fuels, many industrial countries, including China, are already investing heavily in alternative, low carbon energy and technologies. The world may not get rid of old industrial and consumption practices in the next 50 years, but it is quite possible that much progress could be made in this area, rendering old energy sources, methods of production and habits illegitimate. I should add here that part of the reason the economies of Sierra Leone and many poor countries are not in recession, as they often tend to be when Western economies stagnate, is largely because of high growth in China and other emerging economies. Such growth is fuelled by rising consumption of raw materials from poor countries. It is doubtful that this demand can be sustained when these countries complete their industrial transformation and join the ranks of rich countries.

These developments have serious implications for a resource-rich country like Sierra Leone. It underscores the need to move up the value chain in industrial and agricultural development. I think it was the famous Guyanese historian, Walter Rodney, who said that the African farmer entered colonialism with a hoe and left colonialism with the same hoe. A similar point can be made about our natural resources. Since we started mining diamonds and iron ore and exporting them in their raw form during colonialism, we have not moved from this very basic level of specialisation that devalues our effort and offers higher value to foreign companies and lands. There is a strong case for a bold and systematic strategy, coordinated with our neighbours – Guinea and Liberia, who are also rich in minerals – for better bargains to be struck that can allow for the processing of our minerals and adding real value to our domestic economies. We should not wait to manage the negative consequences of other countries’ transitions to the green economy. We should actively strategise to shape the transition to our benefit.

The drive for green energy in industrialised countries is also having one big effect on us – land grabbing. There is a big rush by Western and Asian companies to control African land. This land is needed to grow crops, such as sugar cane, sweet potatoes, cassava, and corn, which can be processed as ethanol fuel for use in automobiles. High global food prices are also pushing some emerging economies with less arable land, such as those in the Middle East, to buy African land and grow crops to feed their populations. And there is the speculative side to this new development. As the financial crisis deepens and interest rates become unattractive in Western economies, investors shift to African lands which can be acquired cheaply. Such land is often not put to productive use, but held in reserve for speculative purposes. As the value of land transactions is often very low, investors believe that land prices can only go up in future, thus providing huge gains if they want to sell back the land. The net effect of these developments is likely to be higher food prices. Africa is the focus for land grabs because it is believed that it is the only continent with surplus or under-utilised land that is priced very cheaply. Given the system of shifting cultivation practised in many countries, in which land is left fallow for many years before reuse, it is doubtful whether much of the land being grabbed, including in Sierra Leone, is actually free.

The danger of future land scarcity, pressure on rural livelihoods and missing the goal of food security should be taken seriously. External investments in agriculture can stimulate growth and bring benefits to rural producers, but such investments need effective scrutiny and regulation to ensure that the benefits are real and that the investments do not end up crowding out our poor farmers from their land.
They should also not be in conflict with the primary goal of food security.

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Note

1. This briefing is based on the keynote address for ‘Policy dialogue on Sierra Leone @ 50’, organised by the UN Institute for Development and Economic Planning (IDEP) and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, Sierra Leone Government, Freetown, 28 October 2011.

References


DEBATE
Dag Hammarskjöld, the United Nations and Africa

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Once upon a time there was a Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), who was elected into office during the Cold War era because the big powers believed he was just a humble servant to their interests. They were wrong. Even-handedness, integrity, moral leadership, respect for otherness, loyalty to principles and ethical values, as enshrined in the UN Charter, were among the core values he represented. Dag Hammarskjöld held a firm belief in the autonomy of the office of the UN Secretary-General and the Secretariat, which ought not to be degraded to a mere instrument and conference machinery serving the interests of the powerful states. Hammarskjöld was determined not to surrender the power of definition to individual member states.

During his term in office from April 1953 until his untimely death in September 1961, Dag Hammarskjöld (who succeeded the Norwegian Trygve Lie) was also heading the world organisation during the period that its transformation from an almost exclusively Western, post-Second-World-War body towards a more global governance institution took place. This was due to a growing number of newly independent countries, not least from the African continent, which impacted on the international policy and geostrategic interests during the bipolar times of the so-called superpower rivalry.

Half a century and six secretaries-generals later it is opportune to recall some of the virtues and convictions uniquely represented among those in this office by the Swedish diplomat. Against all odds, and at times bordering on stubbornness, he defended the autonomy of the office vis-à-vis the efforts by the big powers to execute their dominance through the UN. This is in marked contrast to the role the world body has played since then in many international conflicts and subsequent interventions. Hence, revisiting the role of the Secretary-General as defined and practised by Hammarskjöld during the initial years of Africa’s decolonisation is not purely an exercise in cultivating historical reminiscences.

Given the current shifts in the global policies and interventions in which the UN is even more involved than it was during Hammarskjöld’s times, it is worthwhile recalling what the cosmopolitan Swede represented during his time in office, not least for those in the global south and in particular the former African colonies struggling for sovereignty and self-determination. It is more than a mere coincidence that the Chinese Permanent Representative to the UN, Li Baodong, during a debate in the UN Security Council on 26 August 2011, demanded that the peacekeeping operations of the

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organisation ‘should adhere to the Hammarskjöld principles’ (People’s Daily Online 2011). In a similar vein, the Foreign Minister of Cyprus, Erato Kozakou-Marcoullis stressed in a speech on the occasion of a United Nations Day event on 20 October 2011 that ‘especially small states like Cyprus would like to see the United Nations acting more solidly and with consistency to defend international law when it is being violated’ and praised Dag Hammarskjöld ‘as the dove of preventive diplomacy’ (Famagusta Gazette 2011).

**Integrity, colonialism and solidarity**

On 31 October 1956, during the Suez crisis, Hammarskjöld stated before the Security Council in no uncertain terms that ‘the discretion and impartiality . . . imposed on the Secretary-General . . . may not degenerate into a policy of expediency’ (Falkman 2005). He reiterated this point in his introduction to the Annual report of the UN for 1959–1960:

> It is my firm conviction that any result bought at the price of a compromise with the principles and ideals of the Organization, either by yielding to force, by disregard of justice, by neglect of common interests or by contempt for human rights, is bought at too high a price. That is so because a compromise with its principles and purposes weakens the Organization in a way representing a definite loss for the future that cannot be balanced by any immediate advantage achieved. (cited in Falkman 2005, p. 71)

There is also anecdotal evidence of such steadfastness. In this case, the last personal assistant to Dag Hammarskjöld. He recalled:

> During an intermission in a debate in the Security Council, Dag was talking with the British Ambassador Sir Pierson Dixon in the corridor behind the podium. Sir Pierson suggested that the Secretary-General should make a statement in support of the British position. Dag refused. The ambassador insisted that, ‘After all, there is something called political sense’. I stood there together with Dixon’s assistant, Douglas Hurd (later to become Mrs Thatcher’s foreign secretary), when Dag, stressing each syllable, declared, ‘And there is something called integrity’, turned around and closed the door behind him. (Wachtmeister 2011, p. 82)

As UN Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld displayed some fascinating leadership qualities and set standards as an international civil servant. A trained economist, he was a far cry from the later versions of office-bearers and was often referred to as rather more general than secretary. But this did not mean that he had a closed mindset. When once asked over dinner by his friend John Steinbeck what would matter most during a world tour, Hammarskjöld reportedly answered: ‘Sit on the ground and talk to people. That’s the most important thing’ (cited in Lind and Thelin 2005, p. 99). He had followed a similar approach (though not necessarily sitting on the ground while talking to the people) during a five-week trip through large parts of Africa. The journey lasted from 22 December 1959 to the end of January 1960. It took him to more than 20 countries on the continent, over which the ‘winds of change’ had begun to blow. Upon his return to New York on 31 January, he declared at the airport:

> I would say that this experience over this long journey makes me less inclined than ever to generalize, less than ever willing to say this or that about Africa or this or that about the Africans, because just as there is very much in common, especially the aspirations, there is also an enormous diversity of problems, of attitudes, and of traditions. In such a way, the journey makes me both a little bit wiser and a lot more humble.¹

In a subsequent press conference, Hammarskjöld elaborated on the approach he had outlined to his friend Steinbeck:
You can say that to stay in a country one night or two nights cannot give much of an experience. Well, first of all, it can. It can because, if you break through the walls and if you have the necessary background knowledge, even a talk of one hour can tell you more than volumes... It is not in particular what you can learn in this or that city or from this or that man that gives you valuable understanding of the situation. It is what he says and what you see in one city seen in the light of what you have heard others say and what you have seen in other cities.2

The trip attested to his general mindset and practice of seeking dialogue with others to explore the common ground of humanity. For Hammarskjöld, the UN was, as he had already stated in an address at Stanford University in June 1955, ‘an expression of our will to find a synthesis between the nation and the world’.3 When, upon his return from his visit to the African countries, a journalist inquired at the press conference whether the ideological trends in Africa ‘stem from the inner realities facing African life today or whether they reflect the often repeated clichés of foreign ideology’, Hammarskjöld’s clarification left no doubt:

I do not think that the rights of man is a foreign ideology to any people and that, I think, is the key to the whole ideological structure in Africa at present. It may be that the most eloquent and the most revolutionary expressions of the rights of man are to be found in Western philosophers and Western thinking, but that certainly does not make the idea a Western idea imposed on anybody.4

The fundamental ethics that were his moral compass as a global leader guided his engagement not only with African realities. Unsurprisingly, his role as the highest-ranking international civil servant representing the global governance institution established after the Second World War was based on values that were permeated by a notion of solidarity. On 26 January 1960, towards the end of his African journey, he declared at the second session of the Economic Commission of Africa in Tangier:

Partnership and solidarity are the foundations of the United Nations and it is in order to translate these principles into practical measures of economic cooperation that we are gathered today in this hall.... The emergence of Africa on the world scene, more than any other single phenomenon, has forced us to reappraise and rethink the nature of relationships among peoples at different stages of development, and the conditions of a new synthesis making room for an accelerated growth and development of Africa.5

Hammarskjöld then reverted to a speech he had given a few months earlier at the University of Lund in Sweden, on ‘Asia, Africa, and the West’. On that occasion, he had reminded his audience that ‘nobody should forget that colonization reflected a basic approach which may have been well founded in certain limited respects, but which often mirrored false claims, particularly when it touched on spiritual development. Applied generally, it was untenable.’6

Commenting on the Western perspectives of the early twentieth century, Hammarskjöld found it striking ‘how much they did not see and did not hear, and how even their most positive attempts at entering into a world of different thoughts and emotions were colored by an unthinking, self-assured superiority’ (Cordier and Foote 1974, p. 382; original emphasis). For Hammarskjöld, the ‘richest satisfaction’ lay in ‘meeting different spiritual traditions and their representatives’, provided one ‘approaches them on an equal footing and with a common future goal in mind’ (Ibid.). He was confident that this approach would ensure progress ‘in the direction of a human community which, while retaining the special character of individuals and groups, has made use of what the various branches of the family...
of man have attained along different paths over thousands of years’ (ibid.).

He clearly dismissed any claims to superiority over others based on any kind of naturalist concept of dominance rooted in supposed biological advancement and also questioned the legitimacy sought by dominant classes to justify their privileges:

The health and strength of a community depend on every citizen’s feeling of solidarity with the other citizens, and on his willingness, in the name of this solidarity, to shoulder his part of the burdens and responsibilities of the community. The same is of course true of humanity as a whole. And just as it cannot be argued that within a community an economic upper class holds its favored position by virtue of greater ability, as a quality which is, as it were, vested in the group by nature, so it is, of course, impossible to maintain this in regard to nations in their mutual relationships. (ibid., p. 383)

He therefore concluded:

We thus live in a world where, no more internationally than nationally, any distinct group can claim superiority in mental gifts and potentialities of development.... Those democratic ideals which demand equal opportunities for all should be applied also to peoples and races ... no nation or group of nations can base its future on a claim of supremacy. (ibid., p. 384)

Social and economic justice

Hammarskjöld also had a strong sense of the need for economic justice. In his last address to ECOSOC, he linked the principles of national sovereignty to the belief that international solidarity and social consciousness must go hand in hand by

accepting as a basic postulate the existence of a world community for which all nations share a common responsibility ... to reduce the disparities in levels of living between nations, a responsibility parallel to that accepted earlier for greater economic and social equality within nations. (quoted in Fukuda-Parr 2005, p. 222)

This corresponds with his earlier and continued emphasis on the need to address the economic imbalances inherent in the existing world order. As he stressed in an address as early as February 1956:

the main trouble with the Economic and Social Council at present is that, in public opinion and in practice, the Council has not been given the place it should have in the hierarchy of the main organs of the United Nations. I guess that we are all agreed that economic and social problems should rank equal with political problems. In fact, sometimes I feel that they should, if anything, have priority.7

He testified further to his awareness of the needs for global economic justice only a few months later in his opening statement during a debate on the world economic situation in ECOSOC. In his remarks, he bemoaned

the absence of a framework of international policy that compels the underdeveloped countries each to seek its own salvation in its own way without reference to wider horizons. How often have we not heard the voices of those who bewail the fact that this underdeveloped country is moving along the slippery path to autarky, that that country is neglecting its exports, whether agricultural or mineral, or that yet a third country is manipulating its exchange rates in a manner contrary to the letter and spirit of the Bretton Woods agreements? And yet how many of those who belabor the underdeveloped countries in this fashion have given adequate thought to the structure of world economic relationships which has forced these countries into unorthodox patterns of behavior?8

The introduction to the 16th annual report of the UN became Hammarskjöld’s last programmatic statement. Submitted a month
Before his untimely death, it underlined his firm belief in the equality of peoples and societies, as different from each other as these might be perceived to be:

In the Preamble to the Charter, Member nations have reaffirmed their faith ‘in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small’, a principle which also has found many other expressions in the Charter. Thus, it restates the basic democratic principle of equal political rights, independently of the position of the individual or of the Member country in respect of its strength, as determined by territory, population or wealth. The words just quoted must, however, be considered as going further and imply an endorsement as well of a right to equal economic opportunities.

Importantly, Hammarskjöld once again does not content himself with proclaiming noble postulates by making lofty reference to an abstract equality. As a trained economist, he never lost sight of the socio-economic dimensions of inequality. It is therefore no coincidence that he returns to stress the right to equal economic opportunities:

So as to avoid any misunderstanding, the Charter directly states that the basic democratic principles are applicable to nations ‘large and small’ and to individuals without distinction ‘as to race, sex, language and religion’, qualifications that obviously could be extended to cover other criteria such as, for example, those of an ideological character which have been used or may be used as a basis for political or economic discrimination. ... The demand for equal economic opportunities has, likewise, been – and remains – of specific significance in relation to those very countries which have more recently entered the international arena as new states. This is natural in view of the fact that, mostly, they have been in an unfavourable economic position, which is reflected in a much lower per capita income, rate of capital supply, and degree of technical development, while their political independence and sovereignty require a fair measure of economic stability and economic possibilities in order to gain substance and full viability. (Cordier and Foote 1975b, p. 545)

In his last words to his staff, Hammarskjöld reiterated one of his fundamental principles:

If the Secretariat is regarded as truly international, and its individual members as owing no allegiance to any national government, then the Secretariat may develop as an instrument for the preservation of peace and security of increasing significance and responsibilities.

The UN, big powers and the Congo

Hammarskjöld’s steadfastness when navigating through the manifold international interests vested in the Congo, all seeking to influence his policies, was exemplary. Despite all efforts he resisted the pressure from the hegemonic states both in the East and the West to give in. When the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, following the coup against the government of Lumumba, accused Hammarskjöld of being a lackey of Western interests and demanded his resignation at the UN General Assembly in early October 1960, the Secretary-General responded with the following historical words:

It is not the Soviet Union or indeed any other Big Power who needs the United Nations for their protection, but all the others. In this sense, the Organisation is first of all their Organisation, and I deeply believe in the wisdom with which they will be able to use it and guide it. I shall remain in my post during the term of my Office as a servant of the Organisation in the interest of all those other nations, as long as they wish me to do so. (cited in Falkman 2005, p. 86)

He continued to stay on course, including in the subsequent debates in the Security Council. Refuting the allegations that the
UN acted in compliance with Western interests and should be held responsible for the brutal murder of Patrice Lumumba, he stated the following on 13 February 1961, in response to further demands in the Security Council for his resignation – which were now supported by the Belgians, French and British, who saw their economic interests in the region at stake:

For seven or eight months, through efforts far beyond the imagination of those who founded this Organization, it has tried to counter tendencies to introduce the Big-Power conflict into Africa and put the young African countries under the shadow of the Cold War. It has done so with great risks and against heavy odds. It has done so at the cost of very great personal sacrifices for a great number of people. In the beginning the effort was successful, and I do not now hesitate to say that on more than one occasion the drift into a war with foreign-power intervention of the Korean or Spanish type was avoided only thanks to the work done by the Organization, basing itself on African solidarity. We effectively countered efforts from all sides to make the Congo a happy hunting ground for national interests. To be a roadblock to such efforts is to make yourself the target of attacks from all those who find their plans thwarted...

His even-handedness towards the big powers is documented by another incident, shared by Sture Linnér (1917–2010) with an audience attending his presentation at the annual Dag Hammarskjöld Lecture in October 2007 in Uppsala. Linnér was at the time of Hammarskjöld’s death Under-Secretary-General in charge of the UN mission in the Congo. In July 1961 President J.F. Kennedy tried to intervene directly in the situation. Afraid of Antoine Gizenga, who was suspected of sympathising with Soviet interests, coming to power and campaigning for election as prime minister, Kennedy demanded that the UN should prevent Gizenga from seizing office. It was hinted that if the UN did not comply with this request, the United States and other Western powers might withdraw their support to the UN. Hammarskjöld in a phone conversation with Linnér reportedly dismissed this threat with the following words:

I do not intend to give way to any pressure, be it from the East or the West; we shall sink or swim. Continue to follow the line you find to be in accordance with the UN Charter. (Linnér 2008, p. 26)

Sture Linnér ended his Dag Hammarskjöld Lecture with the conclusion:

The Congo crisis could easily have provoked armed conflicts in other parts of Africa, even led to a world war. It was Dag Hammarskjöld and no one else who prevented that. And it is certain that for a suffering people he came to be seen as a model; he brought light into the heart of darkness. (ibid., p. 29)

Dag Hammarskjöld, and with him 15 other people (entourage and crew), died in the wreckage of the DC6 airplane which crashed on the night of 17 and 18 September 1961 a few miles from the airport near the Northern Rhodesian mining town of Ndola. He was due to meet the leader of the Katangese secessionist movement, Moïse Tshombe, in an effort to negotiate a peaceful solution to the civil war in the Congo, after military efforts by the UN to bring an end to the Katangese secession movement had failed. The circumstances of the plane crash remain – despite the findings of several official commissions of enquiry concluding that it was most probably pilot error – a matter of speculation.
Too many questions have not been satisfactorily answered and it is not surprising that half a century later these questions continue to resurface.\(^{16}\)

**The Hammarskjöld legacy**

The legacy Dag Hammarskjöld created during his lifetime remains unsullied by continued speculation regarding the circumstances of his death. Suspicions centre on the idea that Western and settler-colonial interests, in alliance with big mining companies operating in the region, could have played a role in orchestrating the plane crash. This in itself points to the outstanding relevance attached to Hammarskjöld’s anti-hegemonic convictions and role as second UN Secretary-General, as summarised in this paper. Hammarskjöld’s principles have renewed significance when the world body has become an increasingly integral part of interventionist strategies, often pursuing the interests of the powerful.

Hammarskjöld’s ethics, his concept of solidarity, his sense of fundamental universal values and human rights in combination with his respect for the multitude of identities within the human family, as well as his responsibility in assuming global leadership as the world’s highest-ranking international civil servant, set standards that have to this day lost none of their value and relevance. The way he defined and executed his duties, particularly with regard to the people of Africa, can undoubtedly be seen as an act of international solidarity of a nature that is often lacking today.

The most comprehensive examination of documentation relating to Hammarskjöld’s plane crash to date has provided a new perspective on the evidence, suggesting that the crash was anything but a straightforward pilot’s error:

Hammarskjöld’s unswerving high principles and his determined search for peaceful solutions contributed to his death. A different Secretary-General, faced with the Katanga crisis in 1961, might have found an easier option than flying, exhausted, to a small town in central Africa to negotiate with an enemy of the United Nations. (Williams 2011, p. 240)

In one of the many review articles welcoming this investigative study, Michaela Wrong found herself chafing at the detail, hungry instead to know more about the ideological convictions and strategic calculations that set Hammarskjöld, his Irish deputy Conor Cruise O’Brien and others at the UN on their high-risk course of geopolitical confrontation. Hammarskjöld once said ‘It is better for the UN to lose the support of the US because it is faithful to law and principles, than to survive as an agent whose activities are geared to political purposes never avowed or laid down by the major organs of the UN.’ I would have liked to know what UN officials in New York think of such sentiments today, whether they regard Hammarskjöld as dangerously naïve or superbly high-minded, and how UN policy since then has been influenced by the sneaking, terrible suspicion that a former boss paid for such defiance with his life. (Wrong 2011)

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**Note on contributor**

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**Notes**

10. Hammarskjöld defended his PhD with no less a person than Gunnar Myrdal as disputant, who disagreed with Hammarskjöld’s arguments, but advocated awarding the highest mark for the undisputable quality of his analyses.
11. ‘Last words to the staff – from remarks on staff day’, 8 September 1961, in Cordier and Foote 1975b, p. 564.
15. See for a critical analysis that shifts the blame from Hammarskjöld to some of his closest assistants, some of the chapters in Hill and Keller (2010).
16. For a concise overview on the different theories see Manuel Fröhlich (2008, pp. 27–33). See, as the latest, most coherent and comprehensive effort to explore the dubious aspects of the plane crash, Williams (2011).

**References**


BOOK REVIEW

The European Union’s Africa policies: norms, interests and impact, by Daniela Sicurelli, Farnham, Ashgate, 2010, 212 pp., £55.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781409400981

This is a well-researched and insightful book that covers a number of significant aspects of EU–Africa relations. The book begins with an outline of the theoretical framework employed in the analysis. Three empirical chapters then follow that focus on key areas of the relationship: conflict management, trade and development, and environmental protection. The analysis of each issue follows a similar structure. Firstly, a historical review of Europe–Africa relations in the specific area, informed by an awareness of wider global debates, is provided. Then a specific case study is introduced within each issue area (Darfur for conflict management, Economic Partnership Agreement [EPA] negotiations for trade and development, and global climate change negotiations for environmental protection). The final section of each chapter provides analysis of the European policymaking process and, in particular, assesses the complex dynamics between different EU institutions. Primary research in the form of 35 formal interviews with relevant policymakers provides much of the basis of this analysis of policymaking. The concluding chapter then assesses the EU’s Africa policies with specific reference to the promotion of regional integration in all three issue areas.

Sicurelli adopts a sociological institutionalist approach to understanding EU–Africa relations. Put simply, this suggests that norms are embedded within institutions and that, as a result, a ‘logic of appropriateness’ shapes the behaviour of actors within an institution. Consequently the book focuses on the normative agenda of the EU and the policymaking process within the EU. By doing so it reminds us that in our analysis of Europe’s external relations the EU should not be understood simply as a unitary actor. It also provides a convincing critique of the realist approach, which suggests that the EU’s Africa policy can be reduced to the sum of the strategic interests of the member states. Sicurelli’s analysis suggests that there are competing normative agendas within, and between, both the Council and the European Commission. For example, in the chapter on trade and development it becomes clear that the Directorate-General for Trade (DG Trade) and the Directorate-General for Development (DG Development) within the European Commission have competing views about what the priorities of EPAs should be. DG Trade has ultimate responsibility for negotiating with its African partners compared with the secondary role of DG Development. This goes some way to explaining the strong focus on trade liberalisation within the EPA negotiations and the refusal to accept a proposal from the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states for an adjustment fund in addition to European Development Fund money. Divisions between member states are also apparent in a number of cases. For example, Sicurelli argues that different positions emerged during the debate over whether to implement a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) operation to
support African Union peacekeepers in Darfur. The UK, Italy and the Netherlands initially opposed an ESDP operation and were in favour of a NATO operation instead, whereas France was particularly keen on the idea of a European operation.

In the concluding chapter Sicurelli suggests that this sociological institutionalist approach reveals aspects of EU–Africa relations that a normative approach, such as neo-Gramscianism, does not. This thesis partly rests on the claim that the EU’s approach is not always reducible to a neoliberal framework. The book often contrasts EU policy to Africa with that of the US in attempting to demonstrate this. Whilst these contrasts are useful, and in areas such as climate change, differences between the EU and US do clearly exist, it is questionable to what extent they represent an approach that departs from a broadly conceived neoliberal agenda. Sicurelli does highlight one significant difference between the EU and US approaches to Africa. This is the promotion of regionalism within Africa, which informs the EU’s policies in all three issue areas considered in the book. As Sicurelli notes at a more general level, ‘the representation of the EU as an example for African integration dominated the negotiations for the creation and development of the AU’ (p. 152).

The book also adds another key dimension to the analysis by considering how African elites respond to the norms being promoted by the EU. This is a particularly significant issue given that in recent years China has increased its interest in the continent and the so-called Beijing Consensus does offer an alternative development path for African policymakers. As the author acknowledges in the introductory chapter, by only focusing on the views of representatives of African regional organisations we do get a rather limited assessment of the response of Africa to EU policy. It might have been interesting to contrast these responses with those of civil society organisations, who, whilst not being directly involved at the level of negotiations, may well have an opinion on EU policy. In essence, by seeking to steer a course between both rationalist and critical approaches, Sicurelli is naturally reticent to discuss the potential consequences of the EU’s policies for the development and security of African populations.

In sum, the claims by European institutions themselves and many in the academic literature that the EU is a ‘good international citizen’ are, to some extent, problematised by the contradictions revealed in the various case studies discussed by Sicurelli. Therefore, the book prompts a reconsideration of the idea of ‘normative power Europe’. In doing so there might still be a need to consider both the material basis of the norms that inform the EU’s policies towards Africa and the wider ideational contours of the contemporary global political economy. This book provides a key contribution to both theoretical debates about how to understand the EU as an actor in international relations and our empirical knowledge of its policies towards Africa.

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BOOK REVIEW


The nexus of war and state building is a staple theme in Western historiography. Succinctly put by Charles Tilly, the scholar credited with its formulation, ‘war made the state, and the state made war’ (1985, p. 183). That is because waging war requires resources, and extracting them requires organisation and institutions which promote power centralisation and state making. This analysis of state formation refers to the early modern history of Western Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Because state building in that region is linked to the onset of modernity and technological progress, particularly in warfare, this concept has not been tested in Africa. Warfare in precolonial Africa has not shed the ‘primitive’ label stamped on it by colonial historiography. It is not simply crude technology and artless tactics that define it so. It is also the absence of wider strategies and broader aims allegedly lacking in precolonial warfare in Africa, and the implication that it seldom served grand political designs or stimulated social change. While fascinated with the colourful ritual and religious symbolism that attended ‘tribal warfare’, historians found the rest of it meaningless: ‘African war was seen as less the mother of invention than an ongoing process of wanton destruction’ brought to an end by colonialism (Reid 2007, p. 2). This generalisation is challenged recently by Richard Reid in a study of warfare in precolonial eastern Africa – the Great Lakes region and the Ethiopian Plateau – which concludes that warfare there had similar motives and objectives as elsewhere, and that ‘war facilitated social, political, cultural and economic innovation, as well as causing great suffering’ (2007, p. 235). State building at the time did not involve nation building because the concept did not exist then. Later, when the nation state became the universal model, it involved a far more complex and difficult building process that not many modern states have managed to complete successfully.

Tronvoll’s study is a variation on the theme of war and nation-state building. It strives to ascertain the impact of war on people’s self-perception, their national identity and loyalty to the state; neither of which is unambiguous or can be taken for granted in many countries, and especially so in Ethiopia. Ethiopia’s history conforms closely to the notion of war as the midwife in the birth of states. Dating back to the thirteenth century, Ethiopia’s royal chronicles record the martial achievements of its rulers, and more recently ‘there was no time at which the empire as a whole could have been said to be at peace’ (Clapham 2000, p. 5). These were not ‘tribal skirmishes’, but involved large, well-equipped armies. In the Battle of Adwa (1896) the Ethiopians mustered a force of more than 100,000 to annihilate an Italian invading force of some 20,000. To field an army of this size required a degree of organisation and tactical sophistication which, in this instance at least, out performed a European force sent to colonise Ethiopia.
Ethiopia at the time was in the midst of its own expansion which turned the legendary Christian kingdom known as Abyssinia into a veritable empire. Not a victim but a participant in the imperialist ‘scramble for Africa’, Ethiopia doubled its territory and population, and thereafter proudly styled itself the ‘Ethiopian Empire’. The title is not a misnomer, since Ethiopia’s rulers exploited their new possessions in more or less the same way as other imperial powers have done. Subsequently Ethiopia fought a series of wars against African and European rivals to preserve its independence and territorial integrity, and in the process forged a state that is by far the most powerful in the Horn of Africa. In the heyday of African nationalism during the second half of the twentieth century, Ethiopia’s rulers sought to reinforce its foundations with cultural homogeneity and a distinct national identity for its vastly heterogeneous population. Unsurprisingly, the model they chose was the Abyssinian cultural tradition and the policy pursued sought the assimilation of the rest. This met with stiff resistance within and outside the state’s borders, from ethnic groups incorporated in the imperial expansion, and from neighbouring states with their own rival nation-state building projects.

The response of Ethiopia’s rulers was twofold. Resort to force, the initial instinctive reaction, led to a steady growth of the military and its gradual autonomy from political authority, until finally the soldiers took over the running of the state. A parallel search went on for a formula that would give the state legitimacy and secure the loyalty of its subjects, and at the same time define a national identity broadly enough to represent a heterogeneous population. After an aborted attempt at ‘Abyssinianisation’, resort was had to socialism and more recently to cultural pluralism and federalism. None of these addressed the fundamental political issue that continues to galvanise resistance, which is the assumed exclusive right of the ruling elite to govern the state and unilaterally plot the course leading to national integration.

The war referred to in this study is the second round in a bloody conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea that dates back half a century. Beginning in 1998, this round came to a halt in 2001 with a ceasefire that left the rival armies glaring at each other across a narrow buffer zone occupied to this day by UN peacekeeping troops. Tronvoll sets out to test the common assumption that war galvanises peoples’ national consciousness and reinforces their loyalty to the embattled state, using this incident as the prism that reflects war’s diverse impact on the politics of identity and attitude towards the state. Predictably, given the convoluted nature of politics in this country, the pattern that emerges is exceedingly complex, reflecting, as one would expect, every political split and grievance that has accumulated over recent times. Out of this murky water the author, who was able to carry out research in the area during the conflict, draws conclusions. One is that war, while it may impact positively on national solidarity, also creates fragmentation, division and distinctions which dilute national solidarity. This is not solely due to the complex nature of existing social relationships, but also due to the reshaping of these relationships by the war itself. This is a valid point and one worth making.

The reshaping process provides the entry point for actors striving to manipulate feelings stirred by war for their own ends, with incumbent regimes at the forefront. The thick cloud of mendacious official propaganda that rose from both sides in this conflict effectively concealed its causes, leaving nonplussed observers to label it ‘senseless’. Tronvoll rejects this ‘simplification’, believing ‘the war made sense to the holders of power in Eritrea and Ethiopia, and to many people participating in it’ (p. 7). Obviously the criteria that ‘made sense’ are different at the two levels, and this difference is reflected in the regimes’ own spin and the way people perceived the war and their involvement in it.
People’s perception is formulated and framed within the boundaries of their particular identity, and given the multiplicity of identities, people’s reactions are highly diverse. Whether such divergence renders the war ‘sensible’ is a moot issue. Much ink has been spilled searching for the objective causes of the conflict. This book is about consequences rather than causes; even so the author cannot avoid giving his own reading of it. Casting aside notions of clashing identities and loyalties, he perceives the war as the latest incident in ‘a long chain of conflicts and wars fought by the Abyssinian elite as part of their constant internal state power struggle’ (p. 203). The impact of the war on the politics of identity in Eritrea is not part of this study. However, in his own reading of the conflict’s essence, the author seems to attribute identical motives to ruling elites on both sides.

References

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BOOK REVIEW


Moeletsi Mbeki’s book is a critical contribution which seeks to disentangle some of the reasons Africa remains less developed (while Asia forges ahead), or, in his words, why ‘Africa is marking time at best, and, at worst, marching backwards’ (p. 3). While he acknowledges that reasons for Africa’s limited progress on the development stakes are very complex and stretch through various historical epochs, Mbeki identifies a number of them for critical reflection. His point of departure is that ‘the problem with Africa is that it is still locked in the mercantile stage of capitalism’ (p. xi). The continent is failing to modernise, and failing to industrialise and achieve post-industrial status. Africa’s political elite (the powerful) – who are meant (ideally) to drive Africa’s development – seem not to learn (or care) that mercantile capitalism is a road to nowhere. This mindset of the political elite has its roots in the nature of narrow African nationalism; itself one of the causes of Africa’s economic problems. It is so because, despite narrow African nationalism’s parade (or pretension) as a broad-based movement fighting for everyone’s liberation, the movement was in fact a small grouping of Westernised black elites who fought ‘for inclusion in the colonial system so that it, too, could benefit from the spoils of colonialism’ (p. 6). Consequently, newly independent African states were not economically transformed, instead colonial economic inequalities such as those implicit in the exploitation of resources and of the black masses were entrenched by the new black ‘liberation’ governments. This is a compelling argument by Mbeki, however, not all will agree or find his assertion that liberation struggle leaders were an elitist, self-centred, conspicuous-consumption class entirely convincing. Such an argument unfairly disparages a genuine liberation, racial equality and democratisation agenda that motivated and inspired many African nationalists to resist colonialism.

Admittedly, Mbeki’s incisive criticism of postcolonial Africa’s ruling political elites in pushing their countries’ economies backwards will find many backers, with the IMF and the World Bank – the main protagonists of this argument – part of that line of thought. He makes the point that Africa’s ruling political elites – in collaboration with Western powers – have massively mismanaged Africa’s economic surplus. They exploit their strong position in relation to the private sector, undertake half-hearted, loss-making industrialisation projects and transfer vast amounts of economic surpluses generated by agriculture and extractive industries to developed countries as capital flight (p. 9). Through, for example, taxation systems, political elites also use their control of the state to extract surplus or savings from peasants and divert these to finance their own consumption and to strengthen the repressive instruments of the state. Multinational corporations – including the mighty Western oil companies – partly fuel political elite
corruption and consumption through bribes and huge payments into foreign private bank accounts. This elite and state consumption is import driven; hence it is not a catalyst for local productive investment. Nigeria, Libya, Algeria and Angola (all oil rich) are graphic illustrations of how surplus is misappropriated to fund elite conspicuous consumption while the rest of the population languishes in poverty. In other parts of the world such elite excesses would be resisted and the perpetrators removed from power; but part of the problem in Africa is that there is a leadership crisis: Africa has failed ‘to produce the type of leaders required to take society forward in an ever-changing global environment’ (p. 34).

Quite rightly, Mbeki is careful not to paint a misleading picture of investment flows in and into Africa. He correctly observes that there continues to be new investment in petroleum, other extractive industries, mobile telecommunications and in some tourism and retail infrastructure. An interesting development is the entrance of new investors from South Africa, Mauritius, and corporations from Asia and Latin America. While this is encouraging, the problem is that most of these new investments are not in manufacturing, suggesting that local manufacturing and productive capacity remains under funded with obvious negative consequences for the continent’s development agenda.

Given this myriad of problems, Mbeki asks pertinent questions: How can Africa meet its development challenges in current political circumstances? Is a new middle class emerging in Africa that can provide the leadership required to drive the continent’s industrial and agrarian revolutions in the face of foreign interventions that foster the continent’s traditional role in the world economy as a source of raw materials and cheap labour? He justifiably observes that one of the key factors which will determine the continent’s path and level of development is the degree to which it is able to reassert control of its own political, economic and social policies from foreign multinational corporations, multilateral financial institutions, foreign state and non-state players such as donors and creditors (pp. 144–145). This has to be done in conjunction with market structural transformation that reforms the nature of Africa’s current integration in world markets so as to create enabling conditions for Africa to exploit world markets to develop its own industries. At the same time, policies that promote investment in social capital (health, education, housing etc.) and capital accumulation must be promoted throughout Africa as has been done with phenomenal developmental success in Mauritius. There must also be a practical shift in the way economic surplus is spent in Africa: it should be directed towards productive investment rather than financing elite private consumption and the running of largely unaccountable states. While acknowledging that the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) Peer Review Mechanism can partially address some of the worst excesses of political elites, Mbeki is sceptical of its capacity to drive economic development. Frankly, it would be too optimistic to expect NEPAD to regenerate and spearhead Africa’s development. Its poor delivery record since inception needs no emphasis.

Reforming Africa’s ‘style of democracy’ does not escape Mbeki’s scrutiny. He observes that if Africa is to develop, it needs a new type of democracy — a democracy that will empower the region’s private-sector producers (including peasants), and restore the growth of an independent and productive middle class as well as facilitate the development of autonomous civil-society institutions (p. 160). There are foundations of this new type of democracy being laid in Southern Africa; e.g., a young promising democracy in South Africa, the emergence of the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) in Zambia and a bruised, battered Movement for
Democratic Change (MDC) in coalition government with its nemesis ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe. These are promising democracy-oriented political developments, but they are happening at a small scale. For widespread ‘democratic’ political change to occur there is need for a complete change of mindset among Africa’s political elite. They have to stop being ‘parasitic on the limited productive capacity in their countries’ and develop a sense of ownership of their countries rather than viewing them as ‘cash cows that enable them to live extravagantly on imported goods and services as they attempt to mimic the lifestyles of the colonialists’ (p. 174).

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BOOK REVIEW


In recent years, several new books have sought to explain armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. While these books have provided great insight into the complex international and internal conflicts in Congo, they have tended to focus on Congo’s Kivu provinces and to neglect war in other areas of the country, such as the Ituri District of Orientale Province. Alex Veit’s book on war and intervention in Ituri is a good first step in filling this gap.

The story of war and peace in Ituri provides an interesting case for examining ‘the relationships between armed groups and international interventions, as well as ... externally steered statebuilding projects after civil war’ (p. 23). Veit uses the term ‘Congo wars’ (p. 110) to refer to the polywar of international and internal conflicts that have taken place in Congo since 1996. In Ituri, these conflicts were Uganda’s interstate war against the Congolese government, intercommunal conflicts, conflicts among non-state armed groups, and civil wars pitting the Congolese state against regional and Iturian armed groups. The international intervention – which included deploying 4800 UN troops to bring peace to a rugged area more than double the size of Belgium – faced numerous obstacles and was not without scandal, but succeeded by late 2007 in producing a fragile peace in most parts of Ituri, which continues in late 2011.

Veit is one of the few academics to have ventured into Ituri during the war (he conducted three trips totaling five months between late 2005 and mid 2008), and is the only one who has produced a book exclusively on Ituri. The book covers considerable historical ground, but focuses on the nature of international intervention after 2003. Veit’s main argument is that intervention sought to create direct rule in Ituri, but instead reinforced historical patterns of indirect rule. Through a central theoretical framework of figurational sociology, Veit explores relationships and power differentials among three actor groups: non-state armed groups; intervention organisations, especially the United Nations Organisation Mission in Congo (MONUC); and Congolese groups including governments and non-governmental organisations. Veit addresses the fourth major actor group in Ituri – the Ugandan and Rwandan governments – only superficially.

Veit’s book has several strengths that make it relevant to those interested in peacekeeping, post-conflict development, and politics in Congo and Ituri. In addition to its theoretical exploration of the structure and effects of international intervention, it provides a useful account of Ituri’s history, the strongest part of which is the description of precolonial ethnic relations (pp. 58–67). It includes interesting biographies of Ituri’s main armed group leaders (pp. 126–134), and tells the little-known story of the emergence and failure of a veterans’ organisation following demobilisation (pp. 163–169). Veit also sheds light on the abuses and shortcomings of
the Congolese army (Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo – FARDC) in Ituri, particularly during the critical period of 2005–06, when MONUC worked closely with FARDC to defeat Ituri’s armed groups and pacify the district (pp. 220–235). Overall, Veit is very critical of the international intervention in Ituri, which he claims ‘has reconstructed, strengthened and modified patterns of indirect rule’ (p. 239). While acknowledging that intervention ended the brutal war in Ituri, he asserts ‘those societal groups in need of a more just, equitable and calculable political structure may well have been done a disservice by the international statebuilding project’ (p. 239). Veit has a valid point, but places too much blame on international staff within Ituri, and does not analyse how national politics and geopolitics affected statebuilding in Congo and Ituri. Decisions taken by President Kabila in Kinshasa – namely to postpone local elections, to forego making Ituri a province, and to appoint Kabila loyalists to ‘run’ Ituri and Orientale Province – arguably have more to do with the deplorable state of rule in Ituri than the statebuilding efforts of MONUC and other international actors.

Empirical lapses undermine other arguments about the shortcomings of intervention in Ituri. For example, in discussing factors that negatively affected peacebuilding, Veit accuses MONUC staff of having a ‘fear of local society’ because staff drove cars and stayed in secured compounds (p. 199); however, he does not adequately discuss just how dangerous Ituri was between 2003 and 2007 (particularly after dusk), or otherwise evaluate whether heightened security measures were justified. Veit is critical of international distrust of local actors due to perceived corruption (pp. 217–220), but he never addresses the extent to which local actors were – or were not – corrupt; i.e. whether this distrust was grounded in reality.

Other problems relate to Veit’s account of war in Ituri. His description of the first and second Congo wars lacks depth (pp. 111–116), and he unfortunately repeats a flawed but popular narrative about the start of the intercommunal war in 1999, i.e. that greedy Hema businessmen hired the Ugandan army to evict Lendu villagers from their land (pp. 123, 127). The start of the war was in fact much more complex, including provocations orchestrated by both Hema and Lendu elites. Veit had a self-acknowledged ‘urban bias’ in his fieldwork (p. 34), and did not travel to northern Djugu territory to investigate the war’s origins.

While Veit is mainly concerned with exploring the theoretical aspects of international intervention, he also states: ‘The key policy lesson of this study… [is] to strengthen and create mutual dependencies between interventionists, local representatives, and society’ (p. 255). Regardless of the book’s shortcomings, this is a sound prescription.

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BOOK REVIEW

A swamp full of dollars: pipelines and paramilitaries in Nigeria’s oil frontier,

Michael Peel’s book presents a rich compendium of narratives on oil and armed militancy in Nigeria’s oil-rich Niger Delta. The region boasts one of the richest oil reserves in the world, but has at the same time proven to be one of the most dangerous spots for oil exploitation – a poisoned chalice for multinational oil companies. A strategic alliance between the country’s greedy political class and oil companies has ensured an irresponsible, but lucrative, mining business leading to environmental degradation and the dispossession of local communities. In response, local armed militants have emerged, thus disrupting ‘business’ through clandestine activities such as the kidnapping of oil expatriates, destruction of oil pipelines and oil bunkering. The state has responded by deploying overwhelming power aimed at crushing these militants, but this has largely failed. Recently, the Nigerian government initiated an amnesty deal with the militants involving monetary inducements, job creation, scholarships for foreign study, and business start-up schemes for armed militants in return for disarmament and the cessation of violence. This, too, has achieved little success owing to allegations of political corruption on the part of the officials of the newly established Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs (MNDA), the Nigeria Delta Development Commission (NDDC), as well as high-ranking political appointees and representatives associated with the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme.

Given the foregoing sordid picture, Peel’s book is a timely effort to capture all sides of the story. It chronicles, in equal and engaging measure, the voices and actions of the key actors – militants, state officials, multinational oil companies, peasants and other subaltern groups. Peel renders the whole story in simple and accessible format, particularly for those who want to understand the political economy of the Niger Delta oil exploitation and militancy in a style devoid of intellectual bravado and complex theorising. What Peel does in this work – with spectacular efficiency – is to employ a combination of journalism, history, biography, ethnography, prose, poetry and placid intellectual talk to explore a very complex story. His empirical data are quite privileged, and most of his information was sought through ethnographic techniques. Peel worked as a journalist in Lagos and travelled regularly to the Delta where he met all stakeholders. Of particular importance are his dangerous encounters with armed militants who have built a reputation for abducting oil expatriates and foreign journalists. Peel apparently took huge risks but he survived to tell this incredible tale.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part chronicles the evolution and reality of the Niger Delta conflict using, as a reference point, the author’s encounters with some key local figures and armed militants, such as Alhaji Muhajid Dokubo-Asari (Chapter 1), Giedia Dangosu, Chief Inengite and his nephew Sunday Nyigife (Chapter 2) and General Chuwuemeka Ojukwu, the leader of the Biafran secession movement.
during the country’s civil war of 1967–70 (Chapter 3). In addition to encounters with these key actors, Peel also recalls personal conversations with peasants who bear the brunt of oil exploration and its huge environmental hazards to show the horrible human misery associated with primitive accumulation of global capital. The local people lay the blame on Nigerian leaders who, according to them, subjected oil-bearing communities to misery and deprivation by destroying their habitat and denying them any recompense. In this part of the book, one finds graphic accounts of the Niger Delta conflict as one that is unmistakably rooted in the ruthless and carefree policies of multinational oil companies and the local state, which rakes in huge benefits from oil profits, yet subjects the local population to systematic marginalisation, repression and dispossession. In Niger Delta, the ‘paradox of plenty’ has given rise to armed militancy as a form of perverse protest against the irresponsible state and its foreign allies. Decades of ruthless exploitation have seriously damaged the Delta’s habitat and people’s livelihoods. Thus, militancy and associated activities – the pillaging of oil pipelines, oil bunkering and hostage taking – have emerged both as forms of protest and alternative means of livelihood for the affected communities. The chief target of these militants is the oil pipelines which pass through communal land, plantations, farmlands and fish ponds.

In all this, the limitations of the state are laid bare, and people are compelled to devise creative means of livelihood and survival. Of particular importance is the rise of urban subcultures – such as slums and ‘local areas’ – as self-governing and self-perpetuating spaces with improvised rules and social hierarchy. Indeed, they give rise to new forms of exploitative relations – or caricature capitalism – as exemplified by the ‘area boss’ named Adekunle Godwon Talabi who held sway in Lagos Island. Talabi ‘is the sovereign master of government and business. He combines the roles of, among others, tycoon police force and immigration officer. His commercial interests include DVD retail, a barber’s saloon, building contractor business and a security company. Most crucially, he is “chief of all boys”’ (p. 67). Talabi’s domain and other similar urban subcultures are not necessarily egalitarian or effective, but they are indicative of human ingenuity in building relations of production even in the most hopeless of circumstances. Such urban spaces have defied state control largely for two reasons. First, because they do not pose a significant threat to ruling elites, as the state means of coercion are decidedly geared towards the protection of the elites. Second, because these places provide the bulk of foot soldiers for anti-state protest and networks. No wonder, with its many urban slums, Nigeria’s southern regions constitute the hub of environmental militancy and popular democratic struggles in the country.

The third part of the book, ‘The new Gulf conflict’, chronicles the repercussions of the expansion of oil exploitation in Nigeria’s wider frontiers – the Gulf of Guinea. In light of the global fuel crisis the Gulf of Guinea has become a new domain of interest for the United States and its allies who are increasingly disconcerted by the unpredictability of crisis-ridden Middle East oil economies. Curiously enough, the US vessels are maintaining ‘a persistent presence’ (p. 138) in this region under the newly established
Africa Command (AfriCom). Peel explains the reasons behind this strategic shift:

the region ... is a key theatre in the quest to satisfy growing world demand for crude. The US Energy Information Administration has forecast that world oil consumption will rise 37 per cent between 2006 and 2030, although that estimate was made before the global financial crisis and the subsequent sharp fall in prices. The Administration forecast that West Africa production will climb 72 per cent over the same period. ... New Gulf of Guinea production ... is essential to achieving those growth rates. (p. 145)

With increasing attention on this region, the US and its allies have taken cosmetic steps to reverse the excesses of multinational oil companies but such steps are nowhere near efficient or effective. The sufferings of the masses continue under the watchful eyes of Nigeria’s political class and its foreign paymasters. The book implicitly reveals the function of class relations in the misery of the Niger Delta people and their neglect by the state and international capital. The Nigerian state is ruled by a tripartite alliance involving ruling political elites based in regional and federal centres of power (Abuja, Lagos, Kaduna, Port Harcourt); local leaders in the Niger Delta (traditional rulers, community/grass-roots leaders); and multinational oil companies. This unholy alliance does not give any consideration to the excesses of oil companies. Indeed, the opposite appears to be the case. Peel notes the material and spatial repercussions of state neglect and corporate irresponsibility, for instance, in terms of the sharp contrasts that exist between oil-producing communities in Nigeria and in Europe and North America. Consider the following first-hand observation of Oloibiri and proximate communities, the first site of oil exploration in Nigeria:

Oloibiri and a galaxy of other Deltan communities [have been] transformed [for the worse] by oil production over the past half-century. If it had been in the Western world, Oloibiri might have been a city built on the wealth of the oil it sat on, a Houston, or at least an Aberdeen. Instead the motto of its grammar school – ‘sacrifice, sweat and success’ – seemed like a cruel joke in a community where getting a fair deal from life was more elusive than the mantra suggested. (p. 28)

Here is a story of Niger Delta crises and violent militancy told masterfully by someone with first-hand knowledge and experience of the field. Michael Peel has no doubt added an indispensable dish on the menu for scholars of transnational companies and mining in Africa and their repercussions on local political economy. As one of the book’s endorsements notes, ‘in this long awaited book, Peel has told the history of Nigeria and oil in a way that makes this important subject accessible to all. In doing so, he has done a service to everyone who is interested in development and in Africa’ (Joseph E. Stiglitz, Nobel Laureate, back cover). I can’t agree with Stiglitz enough! The book has been shortlisted for The Guardian First Book Award (2009), and received sparkling reviews in The Financial Times, The Independent, The Guardian and The Times, among others. Nevertheless, the book’s greatest shortfall is its material rather than intellectual inaccessibility. My experience shows that local scholars, policymakers and other consumers of knowledge often find it difficult to lay their hands on Western books about their own societies. Peel’s book is likely to be inaccessible to Nigerian and African scholars and broader audiences, largely due to profit-driven and flawed marketing and distribution structures of Western publishers. It is high time Western publishers ‘twin’ with their local counterparts to produce highly subsidised editions of the books written about African communities and issues.
BOOK REVIEW


Congo masquerade by Theodore Trefon is a very well-written account of the largely disappointing results of aid-promoted reform in the Democratic Republic of Congo, ongoing since 2001 following the resumption of formal relations with donors. The deliquescence of the state apparatus, brought about by decades of economic regression and war, poses huge challenges; redress however, hinges on Congo’s fragmented political landscape and its relations with its aid partners, as external funding remains behind much of the impetus of pursued initiatives. As the metaphor employed by the author suggests, reform failure is analysed as the outcome of a process whereby strategies characterised by hypocrisy and the art of the unsaid dominate, as much on the side of Congolese political elites as among Congo’s development partners. In a climate of corruption and impunity, amplified by misunderstanding and powerlessness by partners, the frail perspective of success is nullified by the divergent objectives of the various parties, present at multiple levels.

The book provides useful coverage of recent developments, from the elections to debt reduction, the Chinese engagement, and the climate surrounding the celebrations of 50 years of independence. This is followed by analysis of several reform processes in the areas of security, decentralisation, infrastructure and industrial logging. The reform of administration is given particular emphasis in a richly documented separate chapter. In the chapter on political culture, Trefon develops several themes recurrent throughout the book, such as the challenge posed by the country’s diversity and its various layers of social stratification – the peculiar position of Kinshasa, the acuteness of social inequality – as well as issues related to the media and transparency, political repression and corruption.

The book’s argument is solidly woven over six chapters and reflects the author’s extensive research experience in Congo. The chapter on the administration contains a wealth of observations that both reinforce the argument and add valuably to existing literature. The analysis examines the complex state of accommodation accounting for the persistence and reproduction of the administration by civil servants and the population, and the personalisation of the administrative process in addition to its privatisation. Trefon argues that the expected involvement of administrative services as a premise of reforms is a crucial ‘administrative reform flaw’. The emphasis placed on the game of claims – raised expectations followed by disillusionment – is very apposite, and shows how much of the process remains suspended at the level of appearance. Additionally, the author’s insistence on the implication of the Congo’s external partners in the process, through the steering of the transition process, elections, and development aid, shows how these partners have in no small part posed for themselves the dilemmas they face today: ‘The whole spectrum of partners … persists in wanting to
transform a political establishment that opposes change and in trying to develop a deprived population that has not been consulted’ (p. 124).

If the analysis of current dynamics is cogent, some elements might leave the reader perplexed, or avid for more. The book is fairly short, at 153 pages of text, which accounts for the brief mention of several points that could have benefited from further commentary. Further elaboration on the historical dimension of Congo’s state formation and political economy through particularly the various phases of the colonial period and post-independence politics would have added depth to the argument. In particular, given its saliency, the larger question of the inadequacy of institutions carried forward by successive regimes, many of which bear birthmarks derived from colonisation, would have benefited from more detailed treatment.

Additionally, the imposed character of aid-promoted reforms and the ambivalent dependence they express could have been analysed beyond the binary of success/failure. Further treatment might have been given to the ‘building’ of economic policy: the economic choices made, and the conditions that favoured them, much of which bear the imprint of neoliberalism – a term conspicuous by its absence in the book. Also welcome would have been a theoretically informed analysis of concepts such as privatisation, ownership, or good governance, especially when Congolese realities provide such a challenge – and potent critique – to the usual ‘dev-speak’ meanings and (ab)uses of such notions.

The insertion of such explorations might have helped address another issue: an unresolved ambiguity regarding the value of international expertise in reforms. This varies from the juxtaposition of praising yet perplexed appraisals in the early parts of the book (‘Yet, despite ... the talent and strategic thinking of international experts and consultants ... there is little tangible evidence of success’ (p. 1); ‘a strong contingent of international experts will not necessarily guarantee success despite their sophisticated work plans and project management cycles’ (p. 4)) to growing disillusionment in the analysis of reforms, ascribed to miscalculation (decentralisation, administrative reform) or misunderstanding (industrial logging, political culture). All of the above points towards Congo’s specific insertion in the world economy, at the intersection of extraversion and external intervention, and whose appraisal need not be polarised by the extremes of assumed benevolence or cynicism. The book is, in this respect, an outstandingly vivid picture of the mechanisms at play in the travesty of ‘political dialogue’ and reform failure, but whose perspective could be greatly enriched by deepening and widening the analysis provided.

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THEME: TANZANIA AT 50
Kicking off a debate on Tanzania’s 50 years of independence
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This collection, occasioned by one of the latest anniversaries, is a call for more extensive debate on Tanzania’s experience of half a century. This experience of half a century is especially noteworthy as its early decades attracted much attention across the continent. It is especially fitting for this anniversary to be marked in these pages, as Tanzania, and its dramatic experiences in searching for a new direction of post-independence development and its central role in liberation struggles, was one of the key inspirations for the launching of this journal. Several of the founding editors of ROAPE had been fortunate to see at close hand these forces at work. Here three of those who have been associated with the Review from the outset offer their perspectives on those 50 years. These differing contributions can only be a small mark of respect to a significant date in history, with an emphasis on the early decades, and only a first step in any evaluation. The hope is that they will raise enough issues and unanswered questions to spark off a continued debate in these columns on the lessons and legacy of the Tanzania experience. Some articles and debate pieces, by Tanzanians as well as outside observers, and on the more recent periods, are provisionally lined up for later issues, but here is an open call for others to consider engaging in this dialogue.

These three contributors focus on the first decades: associated with Nyerere’s leadership, and including the ‘ujamaa period’, when Tanzania proclaimed a socialist path and sought to redefine a self-reliant stance in its political and economic relations with the dominant forces in the world. Sadly, the commitment to public ownership of industry and finance, and to cooperatives in agricultural production and marketing, and an independent and sceptical relation with the international capitalist system had been reversed by 1986 – the same year that Nyerere resigned the presidency. These coincidences prompt an approach to the historiography of the last 50 years as a period divided clearly into two distinct and almost equal halves. It is hoped that these views of the first half of the period can still be instructive, and some effort is made in them to pose questions about this legacy of the 1961–86 period. But more importantly they are offered as a stimulus that will lead to further reflections in subsequent issues; especially invited are future contributions that concentrate on the second period. It may well be that future contributions might want to explore continuities as well as disjunctures, using a different periodisation.

Debate that aims at re-evaluating and advancing perspectives on a crucial half century offers several kinds of opportunities. First it can be an occasion for a straightforward setting out and setting to right of the historical record. In this ROAPE debate, different memories

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are offered of Nyerere’s stance towards radical students and the liberation movements. A second, more analytical challenge is to the weight given to past dynamics and explanatory factors, and to the importance of certain, seemingly key, events. Thus, for instance, the contributions of Shivji and Saul here both put the policies and beliefs of the early years, and especially the perceptions and initiatives of Nyerere centre stage. Maybe other retrospectives might question how far outcomes are the translations of explicit policy ideas, and see other forces as being more decisive, whether they be global economic steamrolling or local people’s initiatives pursued in a lightly structured social and political environment. Another example of possible widening of analytical agendas is to search for the gaps in what is well known about the recent past and identify what has not been thoroughly researched. This is the major focus of the final piece, ‘Fifty years of making sense of independence politics’.

A third challenge posed by recognising this milestone is to seek to illuminate not the past but the future. What are the legacies, the constraints and prospects for twenty-first century developments in Tanzania, given its particular history? Specifically, a whole range of investigations could be constructed by simply asking what difference the *ujamaa* experience, highlighted in these pieces, will make to today’s options? For instance:

- If villages did not become production cooperatives, as the *ujamaa* model intended, do they offer a locational and legal basis for an alternative to total individualisation of land – or any other legacy?
- In a global crisis where banks and financial institutions do not offer security and can be a liability, and where privatised social infrastructure does not deliver to all, are there relevant lessons from the period of public ownership in Tanzania?
- Can education that is national, non-elitist, and wide-reaching be reconstructed?
- What institutional mechanisms can curb corruption and make leaders accountable?

Perhaps some such themes can be taken up by future contributors.
Fifty years of making sense of independence politics

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Writing almost exactly fifty years since first going to newly independent Tanzania in 1962, I offer thoughts on three of the reassessment tasks isolated in the introduction to this section: setting the record straight, unearthing key but neglected themes; remembering the dynamics beyond politics.

Getting the record straight

First, examples of correcting or adding to the historical record offer some counter-evidence on a couple of matters. Saul recounts the admittedly harsh treatment meted out to the Student Union President, Simon Akivaga, in 1971 – used as evidence not only of Julius Nyerere’s authoritarianism, but the breakdown of any discourse between him and the radical students that had been an important intellectual and political ingredient of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Shivji alludes to the fact that there were links in the couple of years previously. But not only had they existed, they were never severed: the president’s office reached out immediately after to the dramatic arrest of Akivaga to reinstitute admittedly clandestine discourse with the radicals, behind the back of the university authorities, as I can testify, being then the director of the political-education programme, Development Studies, I was asked to be a lowly go-between in restarting that dialogue.

Thereafter, the distinguished historian Arnold Temu’s disaffection with Nyerere is related as an example of how the president was seen by the ‘left’. Instead one of my strongest personal memories is of a conversation in Addis Ababa, where the late Charles Kileo, who had been in the original University Students’ African Revolutionary Front (USARF) was now Tanzanian ambassador, and although it was a couple of years after his death, when Mwalimu was mentioned there were tears in Charles’s eyes. No single anecdote embodies the broader truths of course, but together these two point to the complexity of interrelations between Nyerere and other influential Tanzanians, especially those on the ‘left’.

Another story is used to downplay Nyerere’s contribution to the liberation struggle in Southern Africa. It cannot be denied that Zambia and Tanzania conspired to put South West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO) dissidents beyond the reach of Zambia’s habeas corpus law, and moved these Namibians to detention in Tanzania. And it does not exonerate Tanzania and Nyerere to say that there were many instances of front-line states intervening in the internal workings of liberation movements. By comparison,
some of these had disastrous implications for the pursuit of struggles: Zambia’s dismantling of the Zimbabwean armed struggle in 1974–6 or its prolongation of the ‘civil war’ by backing the intervention of the US Central Intelligence Agency and the apartheid regime into Angola; or the withdrawal of the African National Congress (ANC) structures from Mozambique with the Nkomati Accord in 1984 (albeit enforced). Indeed, Saul draws a distinction between Tanzania’s ‘interference’ in Frelimo, but one on the side of the ‘good guys’, and that into SWAPO. At issue here is a major question of weighting. At no point did Tanzania ‘betray’ the cause. But the occasions of Tanzania’s intervention should not shake the general assessment of the strength of its backing of the liberation cause in southern Africa – to a degree that exceeded those of other states, and without the overall ambivalence that several showed.

**Gaps in the recorded history**

The main emphasis of my recollections is to offer a collective self-critique of those in the first generation of scholars grappling with an independent country and point not to debates about what did happen but to explore some topics that were not dealt with as thoroughly as they deserved. Hopefully some contemporary scholars can be encouraged to address such an agenda of neglected issues.

For those who were alive to see it, the great dawn of African independence from 1960 was an exhilarating moment, and for those who sought to understand its dynamic it also posed a challenge. But there was no better place to observe and seek to understand than the new university in Dar es Salaam.

There have been institutional histories of the university, but its intellectual history is what should be celebrated. In its first decade it became the site of the most stimulating and innovative hothouse of ideas in Africa. Crucial aspects of that process in the fields of political economy and society posed questions about the significance and meaning of that very independence, rooting these questions in an understanding of Africa’s indigenous dynamics, and in the totality of the ‘colonial situation’ – a term we used at the time to denote far more than the fact of colonial rule and the wellsprings of imperialism but also the responses of its people in interacting with those forces. This work sought to identify the options and prospects of independence, and also the dangers.

In what have been seen as the classical debates in the 1970s, the discussion of imperialism and differing views of its metropolitan economic logic, and of its African impact – underdevelopment – took centre stage. The nature of classes and of ‘basic contradictions’, and thus what political issues were deemed to be central, were derived from this model. Criticisms were voiced at the time: that this debate was ‘scholastic’, or (by Babu) that it was at times overly intense in the bitterness of its rhetoric. There was also a tendency for the theoretical debate to be isolated from the rich harvest from much detailed empirical work that was undertaken in the 1960s and 1970s. With hindsight the intellectual intensity and stimulus of this debate tended to overlook the emerging nature of politics in Tanzania. Beyond identifying and debating the ‘essential’ class character of the state and the over-simplifying tendency to see class struggle as limited to anti-imperialism, there was little attention to the fractions of capital, the complex relations of production and reproduction of different strata of working people, and the forms of their resistances. In particular the processes of politics were either not fully explored or not related back to the political economy framework. Some instances are offered below, in the hope of stimulating new investigations of the last 50 years of history. It should be said that some issues – the post-single-party structure of
politics and the politics of neoliberalism – were addressed in the 1990s and 2000s, notably in Issa Shivji’s collection, *Let the people speak: Tanzania down the road to neo-liberalism*.

The relative neglect of any close scrutiny of politics and political processes was exemplified by the failure to analyse some potentially significant events and episodes in independent Tanzania’s early history. Indeed the limits in the historical record make it difficult in retrospect to appreciate which were the key moments that were decisive and system defining. The lack of attention to certain moments also represents a missed opportunity to offer case studies of what kinds of political forces were determining outcomes. Some possible key events can be indicated that may now repay retrospective analysis of a more thorough kind than the often superficial mention they received in contemporary writing. Among them are a few that seem, on reflection, to have shaped the location of power in the new state.

First, historically, would be Julius Nyerere’s resignation in early 1962 as prime minister within just a few weeks of achieving independence. It would still provide illumination of what comes after, to ask whether this move was simply a convenient manoeuvre to give time for the constitutional change to a republic with a president who was head of state as well as head of government. Or was it a symptom of internal divisions, and if so what were these splits over, and were they between leaders, between them and members, or between the party and the broader public?

Another shift in the power base of personalities that arguably reflected policy clashes and broader political forces and may in turn have had decisive impacts on the broader working of politics, was the removal of Oscar Kambona as minister and secretary general of the ruling party, and eventually from the country. In the latter role especially he carried major influence with party officials, many of whom owed him some loyalty. A note in a recent *Chemchemi* (No. 3, April 2010) does hark back to his role, but the issue of his integrity and whether he was a ‘socialist’ are not the only questions worth posing. Just how powerful was he; could he have represented an alternative politics? What were the political consequences of the fact that every one of his successors in the party secretary’s role came from the state bureaucracy rather than being a ‘politician’? These are questions still worth probing.

Another decisive episode that had repercussions on the nature of the party and power relations was the restructuring of the national executive of the ruling party, Tanzania African National Union (TANU), just after the Arusha Declaration, when its composition was made more representative by increasing the membership elected from the regions – in part to give a more grass-roots voice to the implementation of *ujamaa* villages. But when the membership were sent for orientation to existing *ujamaa* villages in Ruvuma, they reacted against the democratic practices they were exposed to, and returned to vote for centralised control of villages, and the abolition of the Ruvuma Development Association (see Saul in this issue). Thus this structural change in the party hierarchy was arguably counter-productive and lead to a commandist approach to *ujamaa*. The details of these events and whether or not they were indeed the seed for the later form of villagisation by compulsion after 1973 (discussed by Shivji and Saul) deserve historical probing.

Examples can be cited of other potentially decisive shifts, in the actual structures of power, not just leadership and personalities, which also deserve revisiting. The first was the abolition of the formal powers of chiefs and sub-chiefs by the Act of 1963, and their marginalisation into ceremonial roles, being replaced by executive officers under the elected district councils. Many African countries in the last 50 years have not just retained, but often resurrected or the enhanced powers of traditional leaders over their ‘subjects’ on behalf of a distant and alienated central government (just as under colonial rule). Tanzania’s experience in transforming the nature of inherited power, and the resulting tendencies for
inhibiting patronage politics and unaccountability, is thus so distinct it deserves to be placed centre stage. But the lack of attention given to this development and its long-term outcomes underlines how fundamental an omission it was in the work of those of us who studied Tanzania in the 1960s. We collectively overlooked a transformation that makes Tanzania’s path distinct from almost all others in the last 50 years. It only received a two-line mention in the 1969 *History of Tanzania*, for instance. What would probing the abolition of chiefs have told us about the nature of emerging politics: how was it possible for those traditional authorities to be swept aside, seemingly without demur? Where is there an evaluation of its later significance: how have the realities of local power played out in practice? Do chiefs retain influence unofficially despite the law? And should one see this step, as I am inclined to do, as a curbing of arbitrary and unaccountable power, or as the loss of one of the few local institutions with legitimacy? One area where other countries have chosen to retain or revert to chiefly power is over *land tenure*, indicating a failure to come up with a system that develops indigenous practices as an alternative to capitalist property relations. One particular question about the outcome of abolition in Tanzania is thus to wonder whether it created the context wherein a category of ‘village land’ could emerge?

A second set of structural changes were those that governed the nature of the ruling party and its relations with the state. At independence there was notionally a competitive party system, but in practice a dominant party – just like today. Then in 1963, there was the enactment of a single-party system. One dimension of this was the introduction of competitive elections among a pair of candidates selected by the party. How that worked over the years, and the extent that it offered some degree of democratisation was the subject of a series of electoral studies. But to what extent any such legacy was carried over into the phase of political liberation has not been probed. Nor were some other features of the single-party system: what was the logic and the politics behind it being a mass party rather than a vanguard party? What was the consequence of fusing party and state bodies at local levels, and the legacy for the post-single-party period?

There are also profound analytical questions about the very nature of politics in Tanzania that have not received the attention they deserve – and that could be illuminated within a comparative conceptual framework. One is *nationalism*. It is often treated in the passive sense of avoiding ethnic or religious political conflict; and it is simply recognised that Tanzania has a sense of national unity, without much probing into its roots. In the decades of intense debate about the country, mentions could be found of the importance of the ‘national question’, but its social, cultural and economic base and how it was actually played out in practice in Tanzania were not subject to rigorous empirical analysis. Nor were the reasons Tanzania avoided what Basil Davidson (in *The black man’s burden*) called the ‘curse of nation-statism’ (the unthinking strategies whereby the complex make-up of populations arbitrarily grouped together within colonial borders was assumed away by anti-tribalism rhetoric), problems that have bedevilled most African states in the last 50 years. These historical and comparative questions still need fuller answers, through for instance a fuller probing of the politics of Swahili, and could illuminate the risks of any ‘new tribalism’ that is a current fear in some Tanzanians’ minds.

A comparative view also poses another basic issue – about what Tanzania politics is *not*. It is arguably distinctively different to the many African states that are characterised by *clientelist politics*, in the managed or crisis/failed state forms, or *neo-patrimonialism*, the fashionable term in Western political science (see the article earlier in this issue). So long as one does not believe these labels *explain* these outcomes, they are useful descriptive rubrics. And they bring home the fact that although Tanzania shares some of the features, such as corruption and even some nepotism, it is not characterised by the same systemic hierarchies of tribalism and other forms of structured patronage. But insofar as that is true, how to explain the difference, and how does it
operate? And what of the future risk? Or could it be one of the most fundamental embodiments of the ‘hope’ that Shivji sees as the most basic legacy of ujamaa.

Beyond politics

Hopefully these reminiscences of what was not covered by past scholarship on Tanzanian politics may suggest some agendas for present-day Tanzania historians. They may also prompt, along with responses to the other pieces published in this issue, possible contributions to ongoing debate in future Issues of ROAPE. But for a thorough exploration of the political economy of the past 50 years, other themes not addressed by the first three contributions require attention. Each of them recognises, indeed even tries to delineate, the greatness of the first president. But their authors would also accept that as central as his role was, for better or worse, other actors – politicians and officials, institutions of state, party, and increasingly civil society bodies, international and bilateral agencies – played parts in the political processes of the last 50 years. So too should the broad class and other social forces that shaped politics be recognised.

In fact, one error would be to seek all the main events and trends of the post-independence period as resultants of the conscious political choices of elites or even broader social forces. Among many major determinants of outcomes in this period have to be inherited features: ecology, economy and history. For me, one of these is the happy melange of demographic, ethnic and cultural factors – many small- to medium-sized ethnic entities without one dominating from the centre or a squabble for power between few contenders, and the widespread and active political promotion of Swahili, as mentioned by Saul. But for me the importance of the latter lies not merely in a handy lingua franca and a common language of politics that is not colonial, but also in a degree of cultural self-confidence among Tanzanians, not just those formally educated, that might make them slightly more proof against imported ideologies.

A second assemblage of forces are the environmental variations and mixed history of colonial economic sectors (between peasant and settler) that makes for a range of agricultures and of farming and livelihood systems with very limited industry in the 1960s. The ‘failure’ of socialist development may thus owe less to the inadequacy of explicit strategy, inappropriate as it was in several respects, and more to the intractability of that structure to efforts to promote expanded reproduction – a problem that has still to be faced up to in any future of Tanzania.

Note on contributor

Lionel Cliffe was lucky enough to work in Tanzania from ‘Day 2’ – from 1962 teaching at Kivukoni College, itself reaching 50 years that are worth celebrating, then 1967–71 at the university, though also involved in the university college’s in-service courses, the first offerings 50 years ago.

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Tanzania fifty years on (1961–2011): rethinking *ujamaa*, Nyerere and socialism in Africa

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December 8, 1961. Fifty years ago: Tanzanian Independence Day (it was actually still Tanganyika then, until the union with Zanzibar a few years later changed the country’s name to Tanzania). But, of course, many countries in Africa were obtaining their independence from the British and French colonial states in those years. What set Tanzania apart in the 1960s, much as Ghana had been set apart in the 1950s by Kwame Nkrumah’s ‘Black Star’ (as Basil Davidson once entitled a book chronicling Osagyefo’s moment of ascendancy) was Nyerere’s own star. For the latter was then, and however briefly, on its ascent, with Nyerere linked, by the late 1960s, to the moment of *ujamaa* – and to the possibility, even the promise, of a distinctive socialism in Africa that could be the touchstone for something beyond the kind of ‘neo-colonialism’ and ‘false decolonisation’ that great thinkers like Frantz Fanon have already identified as the sobering stigmata of the overall African decolonisation process. It is time, perhaps, to revisit that Nyerere moment, that *ujamaa* moment, and to evaluate it afresh.

Of course, one must pause at the outset at the very term ‘African socialism’. Perhaps the most notable further attempt to construct a meaningful socialism in Africa came in the early ‘socialist’ years of Mozambique’s post-liberation emergence (which, as with the case of Tanzania, I had the opportunity of witnessing, off and on but at close hand, during much of its all too brief lifespan). But the Mozambican leaders I knew were actually very scornful of the concept of African socialism and indeed of Tanzania’s own ‘socialist’ practices (which did not stop them from making many similar mistakes themselves, it should be emphasised). They (as they affirmed forcefully) were socialists in Africa, not ‘African socialists’.

Tanzanians are speaking for themselves on this subject, of course, as can be witnessed in such recent books as Chambi Chachage and Annar Cassam’s edited volume *Africa’s liberation: the legacy of Nyerere* (2010) and an illuminating special issue of the Dar es Salaam-based journal *Chemchemi* (Shivji et al. 2011). Indeed, I was myself honoured with an invitation to contribute to the latter *Chemchemi* symposium and it is from my essay there that I will principally draw many of the observations that appear in the present article, observations appropriate, I hope, to celebrate both the fiftieth anniversary of the independence moment that inspires them and the memory of the man, Nyerere,

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who personified that independence moment as well as the subsequent *ujamaa* experiment itself.

I also have the privilege of recalling all of this at first hand, if not precisely the moment of independence itself then of its immediate aftermath, the ‘*ujamaa* years’. For I had the opportunity to live and work in Dar es Salaam for seven exciting years in the 1960s and early 1970s, years which, to my good fortune, were, precisely, the years of the Arusha Declaration and of *ujamaa* in their fullest flower (see Cliffe and Saul 1972, 1973; Arrighi and Saul 1973, chapter 6). Indeed, it is the emotions of that time as well as my sober reflections over some 50 years regarding things Tanzanian that I bring to this article.

The ‘moment’ of *ujamaa* may have been brief but in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Tanzania was certainly an exciting place to be. True, as we will see, the implications of what had been begun with the Arusha Declaration in 1968 were just too dangerous and too radical even for its initial champion, Julius Nyerere. Thus, while Horace Campbell (2010, p. 45) is correct to eulogise Nyerere himself as ‘a great human being who demonstrated his respect for the ordinary African and for the lives of all human beings’ (and Campbell then proceeds to compile a convincing list of Nyerere’s many achievements), the continent will learn too little by not also registering the man’s – and the *ujamaa* project’s – weaknesses. As Firoz Manji explicitly notes in his own preface to *Africa’s liberation* (2010), while we ‘should not be shy in celebrating his achievements … at the same time, he would be among the first to condemn any attempts to romanticise his period in office’.² It is in this spirit that I offer the present article.

Thus Nyerere spoke of empowering the people and with *Mwongozo* – Tanzania African National Union (TANU) guidelines 1971 – seemed to have persuaded his fellow TANU leaders actually to embrace the notion of genuine control by the people from below. Yet when that same ‘people’ actually began to move – workers at the Mount Carmel Rubber Factory, peasants in Ruvuma, students at the university³ – Nyerere joined with the state and its bureaucrats, political and administrative, to slash back: to crush the workers; to smash the Ruvuma Development Association, and then forward *ujamaa vijini* only from on high and by means of a self-defeating policy of ‘enforced villagisation’; and to have student president Simon Akivaga whisked away from the campus and summarily dispatched back home to Kenya in a waiting plane (his crime, apparently, having been to invoke the *Mwongozo* directive, with its official encouragement of the exercise of power from below, in criticism of the university’s hierarchy!).⁴ Tanzania: an exciting place, momentarily, to be, then, but ultimately and in many ways a sad and defeated one.

Against my memories of the excitement of the time two images pull me back to sobriety. One was the aforementioned Akivaga incident, seared in my mind by the cold wind of reality. Here I refer to the invasion of the campus of the University of Dar es Salaam by the Field Force Unit in 1970. Standing nearby, I saw my own student Simon Akivaga, the Kenyan leader of the University Student Council, who, having been summoned for a meeting with the principal, was being dragged, at gunpoint, down the cement stairs at the front of the administration building, tossed like a sack of old clothes into a waiting army vehicle and sped away to his aforementioned expulsion both from the university and from the country.

No more can I forget those (admittedly few) Tanzanian faculty members who had tended to side with the students at the time, for they were also to be disciplined (as were a number of non-Tanzanians, for we were very soon to find our contracts not renewed). Arnold Temu of the history department provides a particularly sobering case in point: thrown out of parliament for questioning the regime’s handling of university matters and later sacked from the university itself, he was soon sent effectively into exile as an itinerant
Indeed, one of the most poignant moments of a research trip I took to Dar es Salaam in the summer of 2001 was my running into Arnold, our subsequent chat then bringing, unsolicited, a startling statement from him: he had sworn to himself not to return to live in Tanzania as long as Nyerere was alive. He thus offered a perspective on ‘Mwalimu’ and his ‘democratic sensibility’ that is, at the very least, worth pondering.6

Much else was happening, at least momentarily, of a far more positive nature of course. After all, this was the period when Fanon was writing eloquently of the dangers of a neocolonialism spearheaded by, precisely, the emergent African elite itself. And this potential problem was exactly what the Arusha Declaration and Mwongozo seemed, equally eloquently, to be about: the concrete attempt to control elitism within the ranks of the newly emergent nations. True, both declarations were more powerful in their mere statement than in the substance of their realisation. Yet I found some of the most forthright (and most Fanonist!) perspectives on the postcolonial reality to surface during the Arusha years – perhaps most strikingly in a newspaper account in The Nationalist of a public speech given by Nyerere at that time:

Nyerere called on the people of Tanzania to have great confidence in themselves and to safeguard the nation’s hard-won freedom. Mwalimu [Nyerere] warned that the people should not allow their freedom to be pawned as most of their leaders were purchasable. He warned further that in running the affairs of the nation the people should not look on their leaders as saints and prophets.

The President stated that the attainment of freedom in many cases resulted merely in the change of colours, white faces to black faces without ending exploitation and injustices, and above all without the betterment of the life of the masses. He said that while struggling for freedom the objective was clear but it was another thing to remove your own people from the position of exploiters. (Nationalist 1967)

This sounds good, but was a lot more of substance actually possible? Much of the scholarly debate of the time centred on this question. Tanzania was, after all, a small, economically backward country, with, it was argued, no really strong and coherent internal class forces pressing from below. There were also global constraints of course: neocolonial pressures and the like. Most strikingly, however, much of the country’s radical project seemed to have been hatched in the sensibility of one man, a man (Nyerere) who had, as we know, his own limitations, both of possibility (vis-à-vis his own colleagues and vis-à-vis the external world), but also of vision. Of course, Nyerere did remain usefully suspicious of the congealing Western-dominated global system. Unfortunately, however, and despite his (entirely accurate) nervousness about the Soviet Union and its own ‘alternative’ model, he was not strengthened in his thinking by a reluctance to give any very clear Marxist resonance and analytical edge to his voice as a critic of imperialism and global capitalism.

True, he did continue to offer a usefully critical voice, remaining one of the sharpest commentators on the negative role of the international financial institutions until the very end of his life. Moreover, he committed both himself and Tanzania to the ongoing liberation of southern Africa – although here it was also unfortunate that he did not envisage any particularly democratic or expansively liberated future for the people of the countries of southern Africa so freed (as foreshadowed by Nyerere’s taking the accused ‘leaders’ of the South West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO) opposition into Tanzanian custody when the latter, seized by the Zambian army on behalf of Sam Nujoma and the SWAPO elite, threatened to seek their legal self-defence through the right to habeas corpus still available to them in Zambia – but not in Tanzania!) (Leys and Saul 1994). Yet Nyerere did counsel staying the course of the struggle in the southern part of the
continent and it is also true that with regard to Frelimo in Mozambique, for example, he backed, against the strident opposition of some of his own ministers, the most committed of the movement’s leaders in the internal struggle that followed the assassination of Eduardo Mondlane.

These latter incidents were important, of course. For, whatever their other implications, Nyerere’s lack of democratic sensibility with reference both to the internal dynamics of the regional liberation struggle (in the SWAPO case if not the Mozambican one) as well as to Tanzania itself was troubling (see, more generally, Saul 2010a). Thus, for all his own suspicion of the Soviet Union, Nyerere embraced, for Tanzania itself, an all too similar vanguard party model to that which the Soviets exemplified – even if he sought to sweeten that system with an ingenious (too ingenious?) innovation of his own: ‘one-party democracy’. In short, Mwalimu as ‘teacher’ too often became, at best, the benign autocrat of the classroom and, at worst, a stern and officious headmaster – at great long-run cost, one fears, to the emergence of a strong and self-confident citizenry. Indeed, if one had not learned to be sufficiently suspicious of the vanguard party model from the experience of socialism in Eastern Europe, Tanzania and Mozambique would have been useful refresher courses as to the real price to be paid for choosing uncritically what was, in essence if not always in name, a vanguardist option.

Neither TANU nor Frelimo quite learned enough about the complex dynamics of rural development either. Suspicion of peasants – as of any genuinely democratic empowerment of the mass of the population from below – proved to run deep in Tanzania, and the same, for all their criticisms of Tanzania’s own practice, was equally true of the Mozambican leadership. Thus, in spite of their many statements as to the crucial ‘class belonging’ (as workers and peasants!) of ‘the people’, such class descriptors were all too readily collapsed into merely populist categories – instead of their facilitating a view of such ‘classes’ as being potentially ‘empowerable’ in genuinely radical terms.

Leander Schneider (Schneider 2004, 2006) – one of the most careful and incisive of all scholars of the *ujamaa vijijini* initiative – suggests that in this central rural policy:

> several of the most inspiring strands of Nyerere’s politics flow together – in particular, an exemplary commitment to improving the condition of the poor, as well as his theorizing about the nexus of development, freedom, empowerment, and participation. However, it is also in the field of rural development that problematic dimensions of Nyerere’s leadership become, perhaps, most starkly apparent. Not only did the policy of enforced *ujamaa/villageization* fail to improve the material conditions of Tanzania’s rural population, but the adoption of coercive means to further it also points to the authoritarian side of Nyerere’s rule.

The word ‘authoritarian’ is not chosen lightly by Schneider. In fact, its use lies at the very centre of the argument he wishes to make. Nor is it accidental that he concludes his analysis of what he calls the ‘statist bent and the related overtly coercive character observed in 1970s Tanzania’ with the observation that ‘Tanzanian history shows, above all, that turning a blind eye to the tensions of participatory development will neither make them go away nor allow one to avoid the serious costs implied by swiftly reducing participation to near meaninglessness’ (Schneider 2004). Shocking then that much-cited analysts like Cranford Pratt can demur somewhat at Nyerere’s *too leftist* economic policies but laud him for his fervent embrace of democracy! Because, put quite simply, the latter emphasis is almost entirely inaccurate.

In this connection I am forced to recall an all-too-acrimonious debate I had several decades ago with Pratt himself regarding the Tanzanian experience. Pratt professed to find in my then criticisms of Tanzania’s politics a preference for an approach that was
far more dangerously and self-righteously authoritarian, far too Marxist and Leninist, than anything that Nyerere was inclined towards. Indeed, for Pratt, Nyerere’s political practice was essentially democratic, albeit a practice that sought assertively to guide from above the consolidation of democracy in such a way that the country could weather the very real threats to national consolidation that Pratt apparently thought to characterise the immediate post-independence years.

For my part, while rejecting Pratt’s charge that I had favoured some extreme and overtly authoritarian approach (although I did later concede that I myself had erred in too uncritically sanctioning the embrace of ‘vanguardism’), I argued that Pratt had himself quite seriously underestimated both the authoritarian nature of Nyerere’s own ‘democratic’ practice and the very high costs that the president’s chosen methods (and that of TANU, the party he led) had inflicted upon the movement for progressive change in Tanzania. Accepting, at the time and with Pratt, the prevailing framework of the one-party state, I argued that Nyerere’s polity could only hope to provide this as a framework for nurturing democracy if popular forces – workers, peasants, students, women – were empowered to act quite dramatically from below in order to ensure the safeguarding of their own interests and the maintenance of a socialist direction for the country.6 But this was not to be.

There are those who still argue at this point that Nyerere was merely blocked in his own high-minded intentions by the global realities of power and by recalcitrant politicians and bureaucrats in his own camp. There is some truth in this, of course, but not, I would argue, nearly enough to cover all the data nor to explain all the contradictions in the ujamaa project. Not that anyone would wish to argue that Nyerere’s intentions were anything but benign. Nor would one suggest that ‘Tanzanian socialism’ could ever merely have sprung ‘spontaneously’ from the Tanzanian populace. No, leadership, clearly explaining costs and benefits and the complexities of seeking to realise progressive outcomes while helping to ‘raise popular consciousness’, would inevitably have to have been part of any revolutionary political equation. And no doubt much of Nyerere’s political practice squares with such a model. Yet surely twentieth-century history has taught us, if nothing else, the extreme dangers of any such ‘leadership’, even at its most benign, slipping the leash of popular control and doing what it perceives by its own lights to be ‘best’ for its ostensibly ‘backward’ wards. And just as surely one might legitimately fear that Nyerere drifted much too close to the authoritarian horn of this dilemma on numerous occasions for one to be entirely confident of his own good judgment in each case.

Additional support for Nyerere’s political project is also offered by scholars precisely along the same lines originally hinted at by Pratt. Even if acknowledging (albeit somewhat sotto voce) that Nyerere may well have blunted the assertions of workers and peasants in Tanzania, it is claimed that in enacting a ‘guided democracy’ he nonetheless derailed any overly regionalist or tribalist political projects and this was in the long-term interests of a unified and pacific Tanzania.7 A tempting argument if one compares developments in Tanzania with those elsewhere on the continent. Yet one also recalls that it was often stated in the early days how fortunate Tanzania was both in the multiplicity of its diverse ethnicities (without any one being too overbearing numerically to be considered a particular threat by others) and in having Swahili as a national lingua franca. Some points may nonetheless be granted to TANU for its politics of self-consciously downgrading and transcending ‘tribalism’ by means of ‘one-partyism’ and the like, but, as noted, this was surely at the expense of any very radical form of ‘class struggle’ – with the price of downplaying the latter being very high in terms of the realisation of a possible socialist outcome.

Moreover, any genuinely rural tilt in the country’s macroeconomic strategies was lost too. After all, economists like Samir Amin, in his own voluminous writings, have argued...
that only an ever more radical decolonisation of Africa from central capitalist control – in Amin’s dramatic word, in an actual ‘delinking’ of the economies of the Global South from the Empire of Capital that otherwise holds the South in its sway – could actually be developmental in any meaningful sense. Yet, as Amin readily admits, there is no realistic haven of ‘autarky’ that one can look to, no way of avoiding some involvement in the broader market (as opportunity, though not, he argues, as seduction). What must occur, however, is the substitution of the present political economy of recolonisation with an alternative that tilts effectively towards delinking as a national goal – invoking an autocentric socio-economic alternative that is at once effective, efficient and productive. What would the programme of a national strategy erected on the premise of a strong tilt towards radical delinking from the presently existent and profoundly cancerous global capitalist system look like? The answer to this question could only begin to be found in a new project of genuine socialist planning – established on a national or regional scale – that sought to smash, precisely, the crippling (il)logic of present ‘market limitations’ upon development.

This, in turn, suggests the need for a programme that (following the formulations of Clive Thomas, the Guyanese economist who also taught in Tanzania) would embody ‘the progressive convergence of the demand structure of the community and the needs of the population’ – this being the very reverse of the market fundamentalist’s global orthodoxy. One could then ground a ‘socialism of expanded reproduction’ (in the name of the presumed imperatives of accumulation), one that refuses the dilemma that has heretofore undermined the promise of the many ‘socialisms’ which have then proven prone to falling into the Stalinist trap of ‘violently repressing mass consumption’. For, far from accumulation and mass consumption being warring opposites, the premise would then be that accumulation could be driven forward precisely by finding outlets for production in meeting the growing requirements, the needs, of the mass of the population!

An effective industrialisation strategy would thus base its ‘expanded reproduction’ on ever-increasing exchanges between city and country, between industry and agriculture, with food and raw materials moving to the cities and with consumer goods and producer goods (with the latter defined to include centrally such modest items as scythes, iron ploughs, hoes, axes, fertilisers and the like) moving to the countryside. Collective saving geared to investment could then be seen as being drawn essentially, if not exclusively, from an expanding economic pool. Note that such a socialism of expanded reproduction makes the betterment of the people’s lot a short-term rather than a long-term project and thus promises a much sounder basis for an effective (rather than merely rhetorical) alliance of workers, peasants and others – on a democratic road to revolutionary socialism.

But this is, of course, precisely an emphasis that Nyerere and company turned their backs on. Thus Bill Luttrell (1986), writing quite explicitly within the framework established by Thomas, demonstrates the almost complete failure of the ‘bureaucratic class’ in Tanzania to do so, their continued subservience to the logic of global capitalism, and thus ensuring their long-term failure to actually develop the country. He then spells out an alternative track that might have been taken had the elite really wanted to pursue transformation. Moreover, while Luttrell says little about Nyerere himself, another crucial missing link – industrial strategy (to be added to silences about democracy and failures of imagination in the rural sector) – in Nyerere’s presumed socialist strategy here stands starkly exposed.

There are other fronts upon which to locate such a critical perspective. Thus, as noted earlier, Borbonniere (2007, p. 146), in discussing students as a ‘social category’ of potentially radical provenance, concludes her account of the early years at the university by
suggesting that ‘the Akivaga crisis, which was seen as a failure to follow through on the promise of Mwongozo at the university, was the first indication of a gap between Nyerere’s political theory and practice’. And what of women, the entire sphere of struggle for gender emancipation and gender equality? This was a front of ‘liberation’ little discussed at the time in Tanzania, and, indeed, the record was not an encouraging one. For example, Bibi Titi, admittedly no great socialist but a prominent TANU leader in the early days, underscored some years ago the starkness of the male sense of entitlement that marked TANU in those years, the vital role of women militants in the liberation struggle itself soon being more or less depassed, passed over.

When power was transferred to the nationalist government … the story changed. Women’s experience was no longer relevant to the postcolonial struggles against neo-colonialism, imperialism and the management of the start apparatus. In [our] discussion Bibi Titi ironically said, ‘I started smelling fish’ when the first cabinet was named. (Meena 2003, p. 148)

Indeed, so incensed by this was Bibi Titi that, by her account, she actually refused Nyerere’s offer to co-author with him a joint history of Tanzania’s nationalist liberation struggle! Meanwhile, the prevailing silences of that time have continued to scar present-day reality in Tanzania, despite the best efforts of many women activists then and now to keep the struggle for gender emancipation alive.

Strengths and weaknesses, then. But the question remains: should not Tanzania’s socialist moment constitute a very real learning experience for a continent that has still not fully confronted the threat of continuing subordination by global capital (including in its present-day Chinese form)? A lot depends, of course, on what you wish to learn. But in a very real sense one is tempted to say that nothing has been learned – or, if something has indeed been ‘learned’, it has been entirely the wrong thing. Thus, in South Africa, to take one example, the latter is precisely the case. There, the cases of Tanzania and Mozambique have been viewed, particularly by that country’s black elite, entirely one-sidedly and quite opportunistically – as having been, quite simply, case studies of misguided policies, case studies of, precisely, what not to do.

In short: not to attempt to realise socialism but instead to settle for a virtual recolonisation by global capital! For, the truth is that the lesson actually taken has been not to dare: not to dare to challenge such capital, not to dare to challenge local hierarchies, not to dare to critique fundamentally the presumed logic of the market place. But is this really what Africa should learn from Tanzania? No, I would suggest the lesson could be quite a different one: the very real costs of not to have dared enough. Indeed, with respect to this issue posed in this way the jury is surely still out. The deeper problems and challenges that existed in the 1960s and 1970s continue to confront Africa today. They had begun to be sketched by Nyerere and the early TANU leadership, as they had been earlier by Nkrumah (for all the weaknesses of his own project), by Cabral and Fanon, and later by the likes of Eduardo Mondlane and Samora Machel.

Yet the fact also remains that in Tanzania there still reside many of the poorest of the continent’s (and the world’s) poor, the failed promise of the Arusha years long since a distant memory but mocking the present nonetheless. In consequence, the experience of Nyerere, the Mwalimu, continues—warts and all – to have much to teach us: in its aspirations and its praxis, for better and for worse. Whether, either in Tanzania or elsewhere on the continent, Africans can or will choose – any more effectively than the rest of us around the world have done in parallel situations of unfulfilled dreams and unrealised possibilities – to learn from such experience, to take up with ever greater effectiveness the struggle, and to
confront successfully a sobering postcolonial legacy in order to overcome it, these remain open questions.

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Notes
1. On 28 November 2011 I presented the paper which served as draft of the present article at an Oxford seminar. I also draw here on a related paper I have recently published in an issue of Tanzanian journal Chemchemi (Shivji et al. 2001), an issue that was prepared, quite specifically, ‘in celebration of 50 years of Tanzanian independence’.
2. As Annar Cassam also adds in her introduction to this volume (Chachage and Cassam 2010): ‘The words “living memory” acquire a deeper meaning when one considers the place that Mwalimu Julius Nyerere occupies in the minds, hearts, lives, consciousness and subconscious of those who knew him and those who did not, those who live in Tanzania and those who do not, those who pay attention to Africa and those who judge it, from near and afar’.
3. On the workers see, inter alia, Mihyo (1974) and Mapolu (1976), on the peasants in Ruvuma, Schneider (2003, 2004), and on the students at the university, Saul (2009) and Borbonniere (2007).
4. As seen above (pp. 122–123), Borbonniere (2007) concludes that the manner of ‘resolution’ of the Akigava crisis should be seen as a particularly grim portent.
5. I draw here on my account of the Akigava and Temu cases to be found in Saul (2005). Nor can I, as further evidence of the texture of the approach of the Tanzanian state under Nyerere both to ‘Mwongozo’ and to ‘academic freedom’, ignore the first-hand accounts of other witnesses who, a few years later (1978), recorded the way in which protesting students were savagely beaten by security forces as they marched in protest down the Morogoro Road to town.
6. Here again – in writing on the views of both Pratt and Nyerere in these paragraphs – I draw on some of my own formulations in ‘Julius Nyerere’s socialism’ (Saul 2005) where my perspective on such matters is advanced more extensively.
7. In this regard one notes the importance, shortly after independence, of the dramatic disempowering and rapid neutralisation, by Nyerere and the new Tanganyikan state, of the various traditional authorities previously at work in Tanganyika. This initiative is an important aspect of the Tanzanian story not well covered in the literature on the country to my knowledge (although when in Oxford to present an earlier version of this essay I learned of a recent doctoral dissertation there by Festo Mkenda on this subject which I have not yet read).
8. I have cited Amin’s concept of ‘delinking’ in preparing the essay ‘The empire of capital, reconlonization and resistance: rethinking the political economy of development in the Global South’ for its inclusion in my Revolutionary traveller (2009), pp. 354–367, and I have here only mildly rerafted that argument for present purposes. Delinking is defined by (Amin 1990) as ‘the submission of external relations [to internal requirements], the opposite of the internal adjustment of the peripheries to the demands of the polarizing worldwide expansion of capital’ and seen as being ‘the only realistic alternative [since] reform of the [present] world system is utopian’. In his view, ‘history shows us that it is impossible to “catch up” within the framework of world capitalism’; in fact, ‘only a very long transition’ (with a self-conscious choice for delinking from the world of capitalist globalisation as an essential first step) beyond the present global polarisation will suffice (Amin 1990, p. x).
9. I first sounded the rudiments of this argument in Saul (1985) but have since managed to present it with somewhat greater clarity – thanks to the writings of Thomas (1974) and Luttrell (1986) – as, here, in complementing my use of Amin’s concept of ‘delinking’, see also my Revolutionary Traveller (ibid., pp. 353–367) and Saul (2010b).
10. This position is also spelled out at greater length in Saul (2010b).
References


Nationalist, 1967. 5 September.


Nationalism and pan-Africanism: decisive moments in Nyerere’s intellectual and political thought

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The celebration of 50 years of Tanzanian independence is a timely point at which to reconsider the political and intellectual contribution of its first leader, Julius Kambarage Nyerere. I first develop a conceptual framework for structuring, periodising and laying bare the tensions in Nyerere’s thought. Subsequent sections tentatively periodise the trajectory based on decisive moments or turning points in his political journey.

Nyerere belonged to the first generation of African nationalists, amongst whom he was one of the most articulate, intense and militant. Leading a country like Tanganyika, which was essentially a semi-commoditised peasant society and then ruled as a United Nations trust territory, provided space to an individual leader which was not available, for example, in the much more unequal society of Kenya under white settler rule, or Uganda with its history of fairly developed kingdoms. Marx reminds us that while individuals may make history, they do not choose the circumstances in which they do so: these are given by history (Marx 1869/1973, p. 146, Carr 1961, Plekhanov 1969). The circumstances of the then Tanganyika, where social forces were not developed, produced a prominent individual like Nyerere who no doubt appeared to tower above society, as did the state which he headed after independence. An understanding of the trajectory of Nyerere’s intellectual and political thought is not only rewarding in its own right but also because it reveals a lot about the context, circumstances and the lives and struggles of his fellow Tanganyikans.

Nyerere was no doubt a great man of principle. But he was also a politician at the pinnacle of state power and as such, at times pragmatism, even Machiavellism, overshadowed his avowed principles. Unlike others, though, Nyerere had a great ability and talent to rationalise his political actions with an astute exposition of principles. (In that respect he could have his cake and eat it.) He was a great thinker and stood intellectually head and shoulders above most of his political contemporaries. He could be truly described as a philosopher-king.1

The conceptual framework

Mwalimu Nyerere was an ardent and militant African nationalist and an equally convinced and persuasive pan-Africanist. Unlike, Nkrumah, though, Nyerere arrived at continental pan-Africanism through Tanganyikan nationalism. Nkrumah arrived at Ghanaian
nationalism through pan-Africanism. Nyerere saw an irresolvable tension between nationalism and pan-Africanism. As head of state he was forced to build and nurture ‘territorial nationalism’ based on a sovereign independent state, whereas pan-Africanism would require him to dissolve individual sovereignty. He perceived this as the ‘dilemma of the pan-Africanist’ in his famous 1966 address (Nyerere 1968). For Nkrumah, Ghanaian nationalism and sovereignty were a momentary expression in the struggle for pan-Africanism, captured in his famous dictum that Ghana’s independence was meaningless without the independence of the rest of the continent. This brings out two other dimensions of tension — imperialism and ethnicity or tribalism.

Nyerere counterposed nationalism to tribalism. He constantly emphasised that the newly independent countries had to weave together a nation out of diverse tribes and ethnicities. He would not succumb to the ideologisation and politicisation of tribe. On this he remained steadfast throughout his political life. In a dialogue with academics in 1991, when he was questioned as to why he saw tribal identities as inherently negative when he himself was a ‘proud Mzanaki’, Nyerere retorted: I’m a good Mzanaki, but I won’t advocate a Kizanaki-based political party.... So I’m a Tanzanian, and of course I am Mzanaki; politically I’m a Tanzanian, culturally I’m Mzanaki (Sandbrook and Halfani 1993, pp. 31–32).

Nyerere perceived a further tension between ‘imperialism’ and the ‘state’, but he did not sufficiently problematise these concepts. To be sure, as a leader of the independence movement, and later as a head of state, he hated colonialism and imperial power. His opposition and resistance to colonial forms of imperialism and imperial power was articulated in terms of the sovereign right of a people to make their own decisions, that is, in the language of the right of peoples to political self-determination. He thus located the tension with imperialism at the level of the sovereignty of the state. His opposition to colonial power, and occasionally to imperialism, was politically perceptive and often couched in very caustic terms. However, he did not always fully understand or appreciate imperialism as a world system based on the political economy of capitalism. For Nkrumah, on the other hand, neocolonialism was a stage of imperialism embedded in the processes of capitalist accumulation (Nkrumah 1965).

As for the state, Nyerere’s perception was strongly coloured by the fact that he was its head. He held a typically liberal view of the state. Given that at the time of independence there was no organised force other than the state, Nyerere perceived the state as the agency both for nation-building and economic development as well as a unifier and organiser of society. Being a head of state, such conceptualisation of the state logically led to the suppression of any independent initiative of the people to organise themselves, independent of, and opposed to the state. This is where the greatest contradiction in Nyerere’s political practice lay. His well-intended policies were meant for the people executed by the state from the top. A top-down approach is a distinctive feature of Nyerere’s political rule (see, for instance, Havnevik 1993). He had little faith in the people and people’s own initiative. While he recognised the limitations of his own bureaucrats, he sought to overcome them partly by training and partly by keeping their excesses in check using his fiat as the head of state. The result was that Nyerere’s politics became typically authoritarian and destructive of people’s organisational capacity (see generally articles in Shivji 1986).

The conceptual framework in which we have deployed a number of conceptual categories and ideological constructs, namely, imperialism, state, nationalism, pan-Africanism, and ethnicity, helps us to organise our discussion of Nyerere’s thought. The tensions between them and in his thought are of course in the last instance a reflection of real social relations and struggles. History is not made by tensions between abstract categories; rather it is the
product of the interaction and struggles between real social beings. As Marx says, ‘History does nothing, it possesses no immense wealth, fights no battles. It is rather man, real living man who does everything, who possesses and fights’ (quoted in Carr 1961, p. 49).

In a planned larger work I hope to locate the contradictions of Nyerere and his thought in the real men and women who possess wealth and fight battles. The present paper only schematically identifies some of the decisive or critical moments both in his thought and the historical events in Tanzania.

Contradictions of nation-building and political survival: 1961–1966

The immediate post-independence period in Africa was generally tumultuous. More than a dozen countries got their independence at a go. Many of them, almost immediately, faced problems of stability and survival. In 1966 alone there were eight military coups including the one that overthrew Kwame Nkrumah (Nyong’o 1998, p. 78). Among them the Congo experience was the most traumatic, with the assassination of Patrice Lumumba and the outbreak of violence and chaos. In 1964, there were army mutinies in all the three East African countries. In Tanganyika, a mutiny almost succeeded whilst Nyerere went into hiding for a week. Eventually the mutineers were subdued with the assistance of British troops. Nyerere’s nationalist ego was wounded. Soon after, he called a meeting of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) foreign ministers to explain his actions (Nyerere 1967, pp. 286–290). Nyerere then took one of the most dramatic steps of his rule: he disbanded the colonial army completely. During a period of one year whilst the new army was being rebuilt and soldiers recruited from the youth wing of the ruling party Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), Nigerian troops looked after the country’s defence.

In the same year there was another momentous event, the revolution in Zanzibar, which overthrew the newly independent government led by a coalition of the Arab-dominated Zanzibar Nationalist Party and the Shirazi-dominated Zanzibar and Pemba People’s Party. Influenced by Umma, the left-wing party led by Abdulrahman Mohamed Babu, the revolution immediately attracted Cold War rivalries on the doorstep of the East African mainland. Nyerere came under intense pressure from Western powers to do something about the ‘communist’ revolution on the islands. Only three months after the revolution, Tanganyika and Zanzibar formed a hurriedly put together union. The preparations had been made under great secrecy (Shivji 2008). Nyerere’s later rationalisation of the union as a step towards pan-Africanism did not cut much ice. He would have preferred an East African Federation of the three East African countries and Zanzibar. He had passionately advocated an East African Federation and was prepared to delay Tanganyika’s independence should the three East African countries agree to federate (see Nye 1966). When Uganda pulled out of this, he was prepared to go ahead with Kenya and Zanzibar. When this too failed he had no alternative but to go it alone with Zanzibar. There can be little doubt that the Tanganyika–Zanzibar union was driven more by pragmatism and the necessity for political survival in the storm of Cold War rivalries, than principles of pan-Africanism. Zanzibarian nationalism continued to test Mwalimu’s pan-Africanism throughout his political life.

Nyerere also clashed with the West Germans. The East German Democratic Republic had been among the first to recognise the Zanzibar revolution and had established an embassy there. After the union, the embassy was renamed a consulate. West Germany then threatened to withdraw aid should Tanzania continue to allow East Germany to have its consulate in Zanzibar. In a strident response Nyerere asked West Germans to take away all their aid. In an assertion of the country’s sovereignty, he insisted we would not allow our friends to choose enemies for us.
While Nyerere refused to see the problem of the union as a quintessential expression of Zanzibar nationalism against his dream of territorial pan-Africanism, the tension between Tanganyikan territorial nationalism and ethnic/racial parochialism had been dramatically expressed only a couple of months before independence in a debate over the citizenship law. The government (under internal self-rule) had proposed a Citizenship Bill, which would allow all residents of Tanganyika, regardless of their race, to obtain Tanganyikan citizenship provided they satisfied certain conditions. A large number of militant members of parliament from the ruling party opposed the bill, arguing that citizenship ought to be restricted to indigenous Africans. Nyerere retorted with an uncompromising condemnation of the racial position and threatened to resign.

You know what happens when people begin to get drunk with power and glorify their race, the Hitlers, that is what they do. You know where they lead the human race, the Verwoerds of South Africa, that is what they do. You know where they are leading the human race. These people are telling us to discriminate because of the ‘special circumstance of Tanganyika’. Verwoerd says, ‘the circumstances of South Africa are different’. This is the argument used by the racialists...  

[T]his Government has rejected, and rejected completely, any ideas that citizenship with the duties and the rights of citizenship of this country, are going to be based on anything except loyalty to this country. (Applause.) ... The views of those Hon. Members and those of the Government could not be further apart. I am therefore asking for a free vote, and the moment the majority of the representatives of our people show that their views are different from ours, we resign at that point. (Applause.) (Nyerere 1967, pp. 128–129; for a detailed discussion see Listowel 1965)

Immediately after independence, Nyerere’s regime was threatened from not only external but also internal forces. Two other centres of power besides the state were the army and the trade unions. The army was dismantled following the mutiny. The state took the opportunity also to ban free trade unions on the allegation that some trade union leaders had collaborated with the mutineers. Instead parliament passed a law establishing a single trade union subordinate to the state. The subsequent year saw the establishment of the one-party state, which marked the end of independent organisation of civil society.

Centralisation of power in the state had an obverse effect though. As in many other African countries, the new petty bourgeoisie that had come to power in Tanzania began to fragment. State positions were used by some to gain a foothold in the economy, giving birth to what came to be called wabenzi (meaning owners of Mercedes-Benz cars, then a symbol of the political nouveau riche). The state became a terrain of accumulation. This development would have a twofold effect. It would fracture the unity of the new rulers with the masses built around the promise of independence and mobilised under nationalist rhetoric. Secondly, the new political class would fortify and safeguard the unequal structures inherited from colonialism. Nyerere saw this and agonised deeply over what should be done about it.

The opportunity came in October 1966 when university students of the then University College, Dar es Salaam (the only university in the country, established on the eve of independence) demonstrated in opposition to the national service law that required all graduates to work in national service camps for six months and then contribute 40% of their salary to the state for the next 18 months. Nyerere ordered that all the demonstrators be brought to State House. The cabinet was there sitting at a high table as Nyerere listened carefully to student demands. Then he erupted like a volcano, reaching a crescendo with an order: ‘Go home’. ‘Go home’ meant that over 300 students were expelled from the university.

You are right when you talk about salaries. Our salaries are too high. You want me to cut them? (some applause)... Do you want me to start with my salary? Yes, I’ll slash mine (cries of ‘No’).
I’ll slash the damned salaries in this country. Mine I slash by twenty per cent as from this hour...  
The damned salaries! These are the salaries which build this kind of attitude in the educated people, all of them. Me and you. We belong to a class of exploiters. I belong to your class. Where I think three hundred and eighty pounds a year [the minimum wage that would be paid in the National Service] is a prison camp, is forced labour. We belong to this damned exploiting class on top. Is this what the country fought for? Is this what we worked for? In order to maintain a class of exploiters on top?  
You are right, salaries are too high. Everybody in this country is demanding a pound of flesh. Everybody except the poor peasant. How can he demand it? He doesn’t know the language.... *What kind of country are we building?* (Smith 1971, pp. 30–31)

That event was a turning point. It paved the way for the adoption of the policy of socialism and self-reliance a few months later.


In February 1967 the ruling party, TANU, adopted the policy of Socialism and Self-reliance proclaimed in the document famously called the Arusha Declaration. It was a historic document. Its significance lay in providing a vision around which the masses could rally. Hitherto, Nyerere had made known his beliefs regarding socialism, or what he called *ujamaa*, in the famous 1962 article, ‘Ujamaa – the basis of African socialism’. There he announced: ‘Socialism... is an attitude of mind’ (Nyerere 1967, p. 162). He went further:

> The basic difference between a socialist society and a capitalist society does not lie in their methods of producing wealth, but in the way that wealth is distributed. While, therefore, a millionaire could be a good socialist, he could hardly be the product of a socialist society. (*ibid.*, pp. 162–163)

Nyerere’s conception of socialism could at best be described as Owenite, if not utopian. It did not inspire anybody nor did it mobilise the masses. It was not meant for them. In any case, it was written in English.

The Arusha Declaration was of a different genre. It was written in Kiswahili, perhaps the best, yet understandable, linguistic articulation. It inspired, it mobilised. It was a call for a revolution, yet not a call to arms. It went beyond the ‘attitude of mind’ to take concrete action. Major means of production – big plantations, banks, insurance, wholesale business, etc. – were nationalised. More importantly, it legally imposed ‘leadership conditions’ on top state and party leaders and civil servants, including executives in the public sector. Those occupying leadership positions were prohibited from having shares or taking directorships in private companies. They could not own houses for renting out. They could not have more than one income and so on. In short, they were legally barred from using their public positions to accumulate private wealth. The moving call of the Arusha Declaration echoed all over the country:

> We have been oppressed a great deal, we have been exploited a great deal and we have been disregarded a great deal. It is our weakness that has led to our being oppressed, exploited and disregarded. Now we want a revolution – a revolution which brings to an end our weakness, so that we are never again exploited, oppressed, or humiliated. (Nyerere 1968, p. 235)

The revolution was going to be made from the top, by the state, with the support of the masses – peasant populism at its best. Nyerere was making politics in the Leninist sense. ‘Politics begin where the masses are; not where there are thousands, but where
there are millions, that is where serious politics begin’ (Lenin 1965, p. 100). But he was also laying a basis for a hegemonic state. The great Caribbean historian, C.L.R. James, got it right when he said:

Dr. Julius Nyerere in theory and practice laid the basis of an African state, which Nkrumah had failed to do, and the Arusha Declaration in which Nyerere laid down his principles is one of the great documents of post-World War II. (James 1977, p. 7)

Nyerere had indeed laid the basis for a state. This helped him survive until he voluntarily retired from formal politics in 1985. Nkrumah did not. He was overthrown by a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)-engineered military coup with the collusion of right-wing Ghanaian politicians.

The period 1967 to 1974, the heyday of the Arusha Declaration, was undoubtedly the most momentous period in the political history of Tanzania. In terms of time it was short; in terms of politics it was epochal.

The most decisive moment of the period, and a turning point in Nyerere’s intellectual and political trajectory, was 1971. It marks the high point of Nyerere’s resolute nationalism, militant anti-imperialism and shrewd pragmatic politics. Nyerere’s speeches and lectures in the immediate post-Arusha period were some of the most militant and articulate, increasingly showing his appreciation of the political economy of capitalism and imperialism. He undoubtedly read Marx but perhaps much more Lenin. He gave a lecture in Kiswahili at the Kivukoni Ideological College – the equivalent of Nkrumah’s Ideological Institute at Winneba (Milne 2000, p. 119) – on ‘The part played by Labour in the transformation of Man’, which was very close to Engel’s article of 1876.4 But Nyerere was no Marxist or a proletarian revolutionary. He detested the notion of ‘class struggle’ although by his own admission he was no Gandhian pacifist either. Where all other means failed, he was prepared to support armed struggles waged by liberation movements in Southern Africa. He got on very well with and even admired freedom fighters like Samora Machel and Amilcar Cabral who were avowed Marxists. He often visited the university and conducted teach-ins on the Arusha Declaration. He was well informed of the ideological fervour on the campus where radical students had formed a militant organisation called the University Students’ African Revolutionary Front (USARF). To pre-empt and disarm ‘revolutionary students’ who advocated ‘scientific socialism’ and likened ujamaa to ‘utopian socialism’, he often quoted Lenin’s dictum of the need for ‘concrete analysis of the concrete situation’. In one of such teach-ins he made the famous statement that, ‘if Marx had been born in Sumbawanga,5 he would have come up with the Arusha Declaration instead of Das Kapital’ (author’s personal recollection).

Two events with lasting impact on Nyerere’s politics occurred in 1971. Guinea, then the rear base of the struggle of Guinea-Bissau against Portuguese colonialism, was invaded by Portugal. Although Guinean forces including the people’s militia rebuffed the attack, it was a clear warning to Tanzania, which was a steadfast rear base for a number of liberation movements including Frelimo of Mozambique. In the same year, as Uganda’s Milton Obote was attending the Commonwealth Conference in Singapore where he had strongly backed Nyerere’s opposition to arm sales to South Africa by Britain, his regime was overthrown by Idi Amin Dada. Amin was supported by Britain and Israel. Obote had started moving to the left and had become quite close to Nyerere. This was also the time when Numeiry in Sudan had declared for socialism. A kind of ‘corridor of progressive states’ was thus in the making. To break the chain, imperialist powers conspired to overthrow Obote while at the same time sending warning signals to Tanzania. Ngombale-Mwiru, one of the most articulate Marxists
in the party, was sent to Guinea to learn the secret of Guinean success against Portuguese invasion. He came back with the idea of a people’s militia (Ngombale and Shivji 2009).

Nyerere argued that the coup was ‘directed against progressive African countries in a desperate move to blow up the bridge between Sudan, Uganda, Tanzania, and Zambia (quoted in Shivji 1976, p. 124). Nyerere went further and interestingly linked imperialism with local reactionary forces antagonised by the measures taken by the Arusha Declaration and similar measures that Obote was contemplating to take in Uganda:

> When President Obote set for the control of the economy, naturally he angered some of the Uganda Africans who wanted to mass wealth and they branded him as their enemy and will work hard to slow the process of his return. When we in Tanzania nationalised the major means of production, we basically angered the British and even some of our leaders and to those aspiring for wealth we laid down a code of behaviour. President Obote was working for a similar goal to define the function of the leader and that was why some of these Ugandan Africans are enthusiastic towards the rebel regime in Kampala.6

Immediately after the Uganda coup, the National Executive Committee of the party met and adopted one of the most militant documents, the *Mwongozo* (‘Guidelines’). The *Mwongozo* analysed the security situation and underlined the need for the party to control the army and for the people to be armed. People must be involved in decision making, it demanded, and the habits of leaders must be scrutinised, it asserted. Clause 15 of *Mwongozo* was a short but succinct summation of the developing contradiction between the bureaucracy in the public sector and the working class. ‘For a Tanzanian leader it must be forbidden to be arrogant, extravagant, contemptuous and oppressive’. This set off a wave of strikes and workers’ struggles in the public and private sector. The struggle quickly moved from strikes to locking out of managers and then to taking over of factories. Between February 1971 and September 1973, there were some 31 industrial disputes involving almost 23,000 workers with a loss of some 64,000 working days. This was almost twice the number of working days lost and workers involved for the previous six years (Shivji 1976, p. 135). Almost two-thirds of these strikes were in the public sector.

*Mwongozo* was thus a document of a different genre to the Arusha Declaration. It was undoubtedly the work of the left7 in the party, in particular Ngombale-Mwiru and Abdulrahman Mohamed Babu (Ngombale and Shivji 2009, p. 69). Whereas the Arusha Declaration mobilised people’s demonstrations in support, the *Mwongozo* lit the fire of class struggle against the ‘new class’, the state-based proto-bourgeoisie. During the workers’ struggle Nyerere kept quiet. The sides to the contention did not know where he stood. But behind the scenes there seems to have been pressure on him in the usual language of the status quo. ‘Workers were causing havoc, there was no industrial discipline, the country and the economy would suffer’, etc. On 1 May 1974, Nyerere came down on workers in his famous speech ‘*unapogoma, unamgomea nani*?’ (‘when you strike, against whom are you striking?’). The logic was standard. Nationalised enterprises were public property, workers’ own property through their state. When they struck, therefore, they were hurting themselves. Nyerere had chosen his side; 1974 marked the end of Nyerere’s socialist militancy. Demagogues in the party took over. A number of events happened subsequently in quick succession.

**Demagogery sets in: 1975–1979**

Paradoxically it was statutory workers’ committees at the workplace which led the post-*Mwongozo* workers’ struggles. The committees, composed exclusively of elected workers from non-management cadres, were originally meant to help the employer
discipline workers at the workplace. They had no relationship with trade unions. During the post-
*Mwongozo* struggle, however, the committees spearheaded the struggle because they were the only organised and legitimate organs available at the workplace. The trade union established by the state had no role; in fact in many cases workers either ignored the trade union or were openly hostile to it. After the 1974 speech, managers managed to push through a law that abolished workers’ committees and substituted them with trade union branches. The aim was to bring workers under the control of the state through the corporate trade union (Kapinga 1986, pp. 87–106).

In the sister paper to the Arusha Declaration, *Socialism and rural development* (1968), Nyerere had advocated the establishment of *ujamaa* villages based on the collective ownership of the means of production and collective work. But they were meant to be voluntary associations. Between 1969 and 1972, the process of villagisation was slow. The party stalwarts pressed to speed up the process. In November 1973, Nyerere removed the element of voluntarism and directed that by the end of 1976, the whole rural population should have moved into villages. Thus began the forced villagisation in which millions of peasants were resettled in villages. There was no prior planning. Villagers were not consulted or involved in decision making (Land Commission 1994, p. 43). Politically the peasantry was alienated and Nyerere began to lose his popular rural base. Meanwhile, cooperatives, which had played a major role in the 1950s and early 1960s were abolished in 1976 by fiat. State crop authorities were given monopoly powers to buy crops. These authorities became a siphon to transfer the surplus from the peasantry to the state bureaucracy. Peasants were paid as little as 20–30% of the market price for their crops.

As the economy was showing signs of decline, politically the demagogues in the party began to wield more and more power, resulting in the state becoming increasingly authoritarian. In 1975, the party was declared supreme. The National Executive Committee of the party was now the real powerhouse. Parliament was sidelined. The line between the party and the state were blurred. Politics were monopolised as civil society was statised. Within the state, power was concentrated in the executive and within the executive in the presidency. Extreme concentration and centralisation of power was formally consecrated in the 1977 constitution – so much so that Nyerere could quip to a BBC reporter that, ‘I have sufficient powers under the Constitution to be a dictator’ (quoted in Mwakyembe 1986, p. 45). To be sure, Nyerere was not a dictator. That is commendable of the man. But the same cannot be said of the constitutional order which he created and presided over.

The straw that broke the camel’s back came in 1979 with the war with Uganda. Although the Tanzanian army was able to drive Idi Amin out of Kagera and finally even out of Uganda, it proved to be very costly to the economy. As it was, the economy had already entered into crisis. The Ugandan War only deepened it. The last term of Nyerere as president was the worst of his 25-year rule.

**The crisis: 1980–1985**

In his 25 years at the helm of the state, there was no period when Nyerere had to face such a deep crisis in his leadership. It was a crisis of both the economy as well as politics, when Nyerere’s own popularity and the legitimacy of his state were challenged. Foreign exchange was scarce. Commodities disappeared from the shelves. Traders and smugglers took advantage. Parastatals were running below capacity. There was no foreign exchange to import raw materials and spare parts (Coulson 1982). Corruption became endemic. The army that had tasted power in Uganda began to flex its muscles on return. An attempted army coup in 1982 came very close to success. Negotiations with the IMF and the World Bank
dragged on, as the latter proposed imposing unacceptably severe conditionalities. The Reagan–Thatcher duo had declared the ‘Washington Consensus’ to build the world in the image of a rampant neoliberal model. Even the social-democratic friends of Nyerere from the Scandinavian countries turned away as Europe turned to the right. Country after country in Africa succumbed to structural adjustment programmes mindlessly imposing liberalisation policies and the withdrawal of crucial subsidies. Nyerere’s rhetoric on the unfair international system and the need for the Third World to come together fell on deaf ears. Pan-Africanism was at its lowest ebb. In an interview with American academics in 1983, Nyerere put on a brave face but the despondency was clear: ‘At present, Africa is not in the mood for its continental unity, rather it has settled for economic cooperation. We are still Pan-Africanists but we have lowered our objectives and have become more realistic.’

The union with Zanzibar, which Nyerere had sacrificed his principles to maintain, was shaken to the core in a famous one-year debate in 1983. Zanzibaris openly questioned its legitimacy and demanded revisiting the Articles of Union that had ordained a two-government structure. In a seven-day meeting of the National Executive Committee of the party, convened to discuss what was dubbed the ‘pollution of political atmosphere’, Zanzibar’s president, Aboud Jumbe, was made a sacrificial lamb. He was forced to resign from all his state and party posts (see Shivji 2008). Nonetheless the crisis of the union was only hidden under the carpet. It continued to bedevil the Tanzanian polity.

Much research needs to be done to uncover the struggles and tensions in the party during this period. There can be no doubt that there was such a struggle. The 1981 Mwongozo of the party, one of the most candid documents ever produced, and no doubt the work of the left in the party (see Ngombale and Shivji 2009), openly admitted that under the umbrella of the Arusha Declaration and the parastatals, a new class had emerged. For the first time in any party document the Mwongozo talked about class struggle, which was anathema to Nyerere himself. Where did Nyerere stand? It is not clear, but indications are that he tried to steer a middle course, an impossible course of action at that time. In the 1983 conversation with American academics, when asked about factional struggles in the party, once again Nyerere in his characteristic style evaded the question. He tried to underplay the reality of such struggles:

It is much clearer, the left/right conflicts are more clearly contained in a single-party system than in a multi-party one where they break away. In a huge single-party system like ours, the right and the left factions are very strong. We find that the younger members are more theoretical and the older members are more to the right and ‘wiser’. This describes the socialists but I am not sure all CCM members are socialists! This is the problem with a single-party system. I am quite sure we have non-socialists and also sure that we have communists inside the CCM but the tendencies are to gravitate towards the centre – and I am supposed to be in the centre! (Nyerere 1983, see endnote no. 8).

The truth perhaps was that the right-tendency was gaining ground and it clearly reared its head once Nyerere stepped down in 1985. Edward Moringe Sokoine, the prime minister, put up the last defence of Nyerere’s socialism. Sokoine was a no-nonsense politician. He was a man of great integrity but at loggerheads with fellow politicians surrounding Nyerere. He was one politician who became popular with the masses in his own right, not under the shadow of Nyerere. In the process, he almost overshadowed Mwalimu, and Mwalimu did not always like it. When he was killed in a car accident on his way back from parliament in Dodoma, where he had promised to uncover and sack all corrupt leaders on his return to Dar es Salaam, no one believed that the accident was genuine.
In 1985, Nyerere stepped down from the presidency and left the reins of power to his vice-president, Ali Hassan Mwinyi. It is widely believed that Mwinyi was not Nyerere’s first choice. Nyerere would have liked Salim Ahmed Salim, whom he had appointed prime minister after Sokoine’s death, to take over. Like Mwinyi, Salim is from Zanzibar, but from Pemba Island, a neglected part of Zanzibar and the hotbed of political opposition. A seasoned diplomat and a Nyerere loyalist, Salim would have certainly been an obvious choice from within the mainstream politicians in the party. Rumour has it that an alliance between the right-wing mainland party stalwarts and hardliner ‘revolutionists’ from Zanzibar in the Central Committee of the party, thwarted Nyerere’s efforts using, ironically, the race factor against Salim (Salim is perceived to be half-Arab). If this is true, then it shows how far Nyerere’s power even within the party had begun to wane when he stepped down from the presidency.

‘Out of state power’: 1986–1999

Mwinyi’s regime quickly gave in to the dictates of the IMF and World Bank, out of necessity, if not choice. Mwinyi was no socialist nor were there any socialists in the party to pressurise him. Even the icon of the left in the party, Ngombale-Mwiru, abandoned ship. When the workers and peasants party opened its doors to capitalists and business people, it was Ngombale, deploying his Marxist rhetoric, who rationalised and justified it, including pulling in the example of one of the founders of ‘scientific socialism’ – Engels – who, he said, was after all an industrialist. It is revealing of Nyerere’s political style and practice that there was no one in his party or the state to defend his ideology.

As the Arusha Declaration was being abandoned, so the leaders of the party under Mwinyi abandoned the ‘leadership code’. The public-sector executives of yesteryear became the frontliners in clamour for the privatisation of the parastatals. They were a burden on the ‘poor’ Tanzanian taxpayer, they lamented. And, of course, they should be privatised to wazawa, that is, indigenous Tanzanians. Parochial ideologies against which Nyerere had stood steadfast in his attempt to build a nation were making a comeback. Nonetheless, Mwinyi moved somewhat cautiously, partly because he still worked under the shadow of Mwalimu, and partly because he was still an old-guard nationalist. His successor, President Benjamin William Mkapa, had no such qualms or constraints. He led the neoliberal counter-revolution at full steam. Mkapa’s 10 years in power (1995–2005) saw the final burial of all vestiges of the Arusha Declaration and the policy of socialism and self-reliance. Mkapa opened the doors to the financialisation of the economy, to the pillage of natural resources and to the uninhibited entry of speculative capital in the real-estate sector. State positions again became a means of private accumulation and wealth. Overnight Tanzanian politicians became ‘filthy rich’ as class polarisation deepened. Nyerere watched the beginnings of this development from the political sidelines. His last-ditch effort to save the state-owned National Bank of Commerce from being decimated and privatised failed miserably.

Out of power, Nyerere probably flowered much more as an intellectual thinker than an elder statesman although it is for the latter that he is often eulogised. He returned to his favourite subject of South–South cooperation as head of the South Commission. Coming at a time when neoliberalism was in its triumphal stage, it did not have much of an impact. In fact, some of the prominent members of his commission (Mannmohan Singh of India, for example) were to become uncompromising neoliberal reformers in their own countries. I am not sure if Nyerere fully appreciated the extent to which the countries in the South had become differentiated. The South of the 1990s was not the same South that Mwalimu spearheaded in the non-alignment movement and the new international economic order of the 1960s and 1970s.
Through the Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation he also ventured into the Burundian peace process. That initiative and Mwalimu’s leadership needs to be closely studied and analysed. My hunch is that it was only moderately successful. In any case, Mwalimu did not live long enough to take it to the end.

Another much less publicised attempt by Mwalimu on the African political front was in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the then Zaire. Given the mess that his protégés created there, it is doubtful if that initiative can be considered a roaring success either.

Much more refreshing and inspirational though was Mwalimu’s return to pan-Africanism. His speech in 1997, on the occasion of celebrating 40 years of Ghana’s independence, restates the case for pan-Africanism but is also one of the most candid admissions of the failures of the first generation of African nationalists. Reading between the lines, one gets the impression that Nyerere is admitting to the failure of the national project. One does not see the same agonising over the tension that he perceived between African (territorial) nationalism and pan-Africanism in 1966 in his address on the dilemma of a pan-Africanist (Nyerere 1968, p. 207). In 1997 he even comes close to admitting that in their 1960s debate, when he (Nyerere) advocated ‘gradualism’ and opposed Nkrumah’s call for ‘African Union now’, he was wrong. He no longer posits tension between ‘tribalism’ and (‘territorial’) nationalism; rather he sees Africa at a crossroads, either it goes down the road of pan-Africanism or descends into ethnic divisions and tribalism. He calls upon the new generation to reject the ‘return to the tribe’. He characterises the upsurge of ethnic, racial, and other forms of narrow nationalisms as fossilising ‘Africa into the wounds inflicted upon it by the vultures of imperialism’ (Nyerere 1997a). In his Reflections on the occasion of his 75th birthday, Nyerere returned to the issue of the Balkanisation of Africa which was prominent in the debate of the 1960s around the time of independence. Now he argues that the Balkans themselves are being ‘Africanised’ as they are absorbed in the larger European Union, whilst, we, Africans, are being tribalised! Mwalimu said:

… these powerful European states are moving towards unity, and you people are talking about the atavism of the tribe, this is nonsense! I am telling you people. How can anybody think of the tribe as the unity of the future, hakuna! (Nyerere 1997b, p. 22)

On the Arusha Declaration, Nyerere seems to have had an intellectually ambivalent attitude. He admitted that some mistakes were made under the declaration, in particular hasty and unplanned nationalisations, but still believed that the Arusha Declaration was the correct course of action for Tanzania then and that the country would return to the values and principles of the declaration (Nyerere and Bunting 1999). Intellectually, Nyerere’s analysis of the Arusha Declaration as an ideology is more interesting than his political position on it. Towards the end of 1980s and early 1990s, there were rumblings in favour of abandoning the Arusha Declaration and the leadership code. In a meeting of parastatal and state leaders, Nyerere made an ex tempore speech, one of his best. On whether or not the Arusha Declaration should be abandoned, he said:

It is not that peace has come by itself. The source of peace in Tanzania is not that the Arusha Declaration has done away with poverty even a little bit. Isn’t there this poverty we are still living with? This poverty is right here with us. Is it not the same economy we are grappling with? The fact is not that the Arusha Declaration has banished poverty even by an iota – nor did it promise to do so. The Arusha Declaration offered hope. A promise of justice, hope to the many, indeed the majority of Tanzanians continue to live this hope. So long as there is this hope, you’ll continue to have peace. Here in Tanzania we have poverty but no ‘social cancer’ [original in English]. It is possible it has just begun. But otherwise we don’t
have a social cancer. There isn’t a volcano [in English] in the making such that if you pressed your ear to the ground you’d hear a volcano in the making, that one day is bound to erupt. We have not yet reached that stage because the people still have hopes based on the stand taken by the Arusha Declaration. It did not do away with poverty but it has given you all in this hall, capitalists and socialists alike, an opportunity to build a country which holds out a future of hopes to the many.

To be sure, you few Waswahili [a colloquial for, in this case, ‘people’], do you really expect to rule Tanzanians through coercion, when there is no hope, and then expect that they will sit quiet in peace? Peace is born of hope, when hope is gone there will be social upheavals. I’d be surprised if these Tanzanians refuse to rebel, why?

When the majority don’t have any hope you are building a volcano. It is bound to erupt one day. Unless these people are fools. Many in these countries are fools, to accept being ruled just like that. To be oppressed just like that when they have the force of numbers, they are fools. So Tanzanians would be fools, idiots, if they continued to accept to be oppressed by a minority in their own country. Why? …

Therefore we cannot say that we have now reached a stage when we can forget the Arusha Declaration. Don’t fool yourselves. This would be like that fool who uses a ladder to climb and when he is up there kicks it away. Alright you’re up there, you’ve kicked away the ladder, right, so stay there because we’ll cut the branch. You’re up there, we’re down here and you’ve kicked away the ladder. This branch is high up, we’ll cut it. Your fall will be no ordinary fall either.

Let me say no more. It is sufficient to say we should accept our principles, we should continue with our principles of building peace and peace itself. Tanzanians should continue to have faith in the Party, in the Government and in you in positions. Tanzanians should see you as part of them, not their enemies. They should trust the Party, the Government and you who have opportunities for there is no country where everyone is equal. These fingers of mine are not equal, and in that sense there is no such equality anywhere. (Quoted in Shivji 1995)

In this speech, Nyerere is at his best as the philosopher-king. The Arusha Declaration was a legitimising ideology without which the country would break up into violence. You cannot have a society polarised into the filthy rich and the miserably poor and still expect the poor to maintain peace while the rich enjoy stability. So the Arusha Declaration did not bring about equality, nor was it meant to do so. The Arusha Declaration was meant to give hope, hope which would preserve peace both for the ‘capitalists and the socialists’.

Was Nyerere’s socialism then a strategy for political survival10 or a philosophical conviction of a vision for a future society or both? Perhaps both, as was Nyerere himself both, a king and a philosopher.

Note on contributor
The author is currently the Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Professor of Pan-African Studies. He taught law at the University of Dar es Salaam for 36 years before he retired in 2006.

Notes
1. No wonder one of his last works was the translation of Plato’s *The Republic* into Kiswahili. He revealed this to us at a conference commemorating his 75th birthday held at the University of Dar es Salaam. He had just completed the translation but to date unfortunately it has not seen the light of day.
2. Nyerere came from a small ‘tribe’ from around Lake Victoria called Wazanaki.
3. This was the nationalist movement which fought for independence and ruled as the only party under the one-party system until 1977. In 1977 TANU and the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP) of Zanzibar merged to form *Chama cha Mapinduzi* (CCM).

5. Ironically, Sumbawanga, a remote region in southwest Tanganyika, was considered Tanzania’s Siberia by militant students. It is the area to which some of the militant nationalists were exiled by the colonial government. When one of the radical students and a member of USARF wrote a piece critical of Nyerere’s Education for Self-Reliance, the over-zealous university administrators transferred him to Sumbawanga to the post of a junior officer.


7. Interestingly this historic document does not appear in the collection of three volumes of speeches and writings of Nyerere from 1952–1973. The documents of the Arusha period, on the other hand, are included.


9. It is interesting that in his interview with the author (Ngombale and Shivji 2009) Ngombale does not directly answer the question as to Nyerere’s stand on the 1981 Mwongozo. Ngombale admits though that for unknown reasons Nyerere refused at the last moment to present the draft document to the meeting of the Party Congress and ordered Ngombale to do so (p. 74).

10. Indeed two of his close expatriate associates, Roland and Irene Brown, trace the origins of the declaration to the need to survive both against external forces and the budding internal elites who would become a bulwark of the status quo (Brown and Brown 1999, pp. 12–13).

References


EDITORIAL

Five decades on: some reflections on 50 years of Africa’s independence

The South African sociologist, Omar Badsha in his book, *Amulets and dreams: war, youth and change in Africa* (2002) has drawn attention to a dilemma facing radical scholarship on Africa. For him the question is this: ‘... how does one represent Africa without extending the pervasive influence of Afro-pessimist?’ (p. 3). By embarking on a critical reflection on 50 years of the nation state and governance in Africa, one runs the risk of being trapped in the web of another ‘African pathology’ and the risk of reinforcing pejorative external perceptions that Africans are incapable of governing modern states effectively. Yet, not to speak out against the failure of leadership in Africa would not only reiterate the objectification of African leadership, it can also invite the accusation of collaboration with those who created the conditions that made it impossible for freedom of expression to prevail, human rights to be respected and economic liberation to be realised. To some extent the dilemma is false and self-imposed by a social science, which Alvin Gouldner (1962) has described as a Minotaur, based on labyrinthian logic that seeks ‘objectivity’ and ‘neutrality’; and what the late Nigerian political scientist, Claude Ake (1982) has referred to as ‘the most pernicious form of imperialism’.

The burden of the nation-state project

The 1960s has been described as the decade of African independence, and as the wind of change blew across the continent, scores of countries emerged from colonial bondage, starting off with Cameroons under Ahmadou Ahidjo on 1 January 1960 (earlier South Africa, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Ghana, Guinea Conakry and Sudan had gained their independence). By the end of the decade there were no less than 41 independent African states, mainly former British and French colonies; Portuguese ‘ultra colonialism’ had a strong hold on its African territories, awaiting the tide of the national liberation movement, which itself would bring an end to the Estado Novo regime of Salazar and Caetano in 1974. In the past year and a half, a number of countries have been celebrating their golden anniversary, including: Cameroons, Mauritania, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Tanzania (see Bangura and Shivji’s and the other Tanzanian contributions to this volume). On 1 October 2010, as Nigerians celebrated the golden anniversary of independence, home-grown terrorists from the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) detonated a large bomb in the nation’s capital, Abuja, killing several civilians. Not to be outdone by MEND, in 2011, another terror group, the *Boko Haram* (literally, ‘Western education is taboo’) bombed the head office of the United Nations in Abuja, killing scores of civilians.

Nigeria, the giant of Africa (one out of every four Africans is a Nigerian) continues to be plagued by ethnic, religious and regional identities, which had resulted in the bloody civil war from 1967–70, in which over a million lives were lost. The politicisation of religious and ethnic identities in Nigeria (and many other African countries) connects with the failure
to address the all-important question of citizenship: in short, who is a Nigerian? The failure to address this fundamental question of the nation-state project led to the ‘Shugaba affair’ in Nigeria in the early 1980s, when a leading opposition figure, who had become a thorn in the side of the government led by Alhaji Shehu Shagari, was unceremoniously deported to neighbouring Cameroons because it was alleged that he was not a Nigerian, as his mother hailed from that neighbouring country, part of which voted to leave Nigeria to join Cameroons at the time of independence in 1960. This undemocratic action soon produced a counter discourse by opposition forces, who suggested that the leader of the Second Republic himself was not a Nigerian, as he was born in a village (Shagari) in neighbouring Niger. Years later, President Frederick Chiluba of Zambia, in an attempt to ward off electoral defeat following years of poor performance, decided to disenfranchise ‘the father of the nation’, Kenneth Kaunda, by suggesting that he was from Malawi.

In a number of African countries, citizens from one region of the country are rendered as second-class citizens by being denied certain employment rights, because they are not ‘indigenes’ of the region or ‘state’ they have chosen to call home. Furthermore, certain ethnic groups are disqualified from land rights in one part of the country, whilst at the same time land is now being mortgaged in the biggest land grab sweeping through Africa, as multinational juggernauts and sovereign wealth funds from the ‘old’ and ‘new’ imperialist centres intensify the latest stage of accumulation by dispossession. Clearly the purchase of land for biofuels or the production of crops for the export market has potentially serious implications for domestic food production – in a continent that is already a net importer of food – and for global environmental change (Simon 2011). Rapid land alienation could worsen an already serious unemployment situation in a continent with high unemployment amongst its young people; and could be a threat to political stability, particularly in post-conflict societies.

Despite this flouting of rights to citizenship, African political actors have professed to be constructing an African version *sui generis* of the Westphalia project, in which citizens and rights of citizenship are at its core. In his critique of the inheritors of the postcolonial state, Basil Davidson (1992) has pointed out that they turned their back on traditional African institutions and elected instead to institute the European/Westphalia project of nation-statism. For Davidson, the crisis that Africa faces is a crisis of institutions. In his view, that African nationalism had been transformed into nation-statism is indeed a recipe for disaster. He argued that whilst initially nation-statism looked like liberation and really began as such, not only did this liberation peter out, but:

In practice, it was not a restoration of Africa to Africa’s own history, but the onset of a new period of indirect subjection to the history of Europe. The 50 or so states of the colonial partition, each formed and governed as though their people possessed no history of their own, became 50 or so nation-states formed and governed on European models, chiefly the models of Britain and France. Liberation thus produced its own denial. Liberation led to alienation. (Davidson 1992, p. 10)

Whilst colonialism had lobbed disparate groups of Africans ‘under one roof’, with little or no control over their movements, if only because of the vast nature of the area that had to be ‘pacified’, the new state-builders in Africa were quick to clamp down on the movement of people who had no perception of the artificial borders of the postcolonial state. The immediate effect was to alienate a significant section of the population. Indeed, for many rural Africans, the state has had little or no relevance, as it failed to provide security or any form of social citizenship. In truth, alienation was not monocausal, as peasants’ lands continued to
be alienated through mining and agricultural accumulation and dispossession; they were left at the mercy of the kulaks and rural gentry. The driver of this process of primitive accumulation has been widespread corruption among the governing classes, aided in many cases by the ruling classes in the metropolis. African postcolonial states are indeed a strange genre: as successors to the colonial state, they were created out of the images of the metropolitan ruling classes to serve their specific interests; they do not have a monopoly of violence over the territory that defines their authority; and their ability to collect taxation (the lifeline of the state) is severely impaired. Not surprisingly, they are at best treated with benign neglect by a large section of society, and their laws and regulations are ignored by an even larger section of society, including the lawmakers themselves.

Corruption and Africa’s two publics

In addressing the issue of corruption and Africa’s dual public (Ekeh 1975), the late Nigerian pan-Africanist and activist, Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem, drew a parallel between the members of the Yoruba elite, who he argued would have no qualm in raiding the national treasury, but in whose care the collective dues of the Yoruba Parapo will be totally safe even to the last penny (Abdul-Raheem 2008). The relevant questions here are: what is it that gives the Parapo sanctity and protection from predation of the faithful, which the state cannot attract? Is it to do with deterrent and punishment, which is easily understood by the membership, giving the fact that in some African states those who pillage the national treasury are never sent to prison, even when found guilty? Or is it simply that they respect the Parapo, with whom they share an affinity and common Weltanschauung? If the latter is the case, then the successors of the colonial state may have missed an opportunity to appropriate traditional institutions to discipline society.

In many African countries, the agricultural sector has been starved of investment (Winrock International and USAID, 1991), and the peasantry continues to produce raw materials for export, as victims of forced savings via merchant capital, with no serious attempts to transform them into manufactured goods. In a final attempt to render the peasantry irrelevant to the developmental effort, rather than boost production of local staples, African states sought solutions in the massive importation of food items, including American PL480 rice and maize in direct competition with local producers, unleashing taste transfer and impelling involution as peasant producers took evasive actions by retreating into subsistence production. This neglect of the rural sector had ripple effects on African development, as precious foreign exchange was expended on food importation, thus denying employment possibilities to local workers. These critical issues of economic mismanagement, corruption and poor governance formed the core of the ‘African crisis’: political instability, balance of payment problems, indebtedness, stagflation, high incidence of HIV/AIDS and malaria, and high mortality rates, particularly among children. Indeed, it is doubtful if the Millennium Development Goals can be met.

African crisis, structural adjustments and the lost decades

For many African countries, economic performance in the early years of independence has been described as ‘a story of modest progress’, with ‘human development indicators showing a decided improvement’ (Ndulu and O’Connell 2012), and the emergence of a small manufacturing sector. This consisted mainly of an import-substitution sector producing light manufacturing goods such as textiles, candles, beverages and plastic goods; and the more developed economies such as Nigeria’s actually had car assembly plants, steel industries and actually exported some of the light consumer goods to neighbouring
territories. However, the sector was plagued by many problems, including: competition from regions with lower production costs (‘dumping’); dependence on capital-intensive technology with negative impact on employment and the balance of payments situation, leading to indebtedness. According to Samir Amin (1974), this sector was geared towards the luxury- and export-goods sectors, thereby ignoring the mass domestic market. Following the oil crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, and as a consequence of the glut of petrodollars, numerous unsavoury loans were foisted upon African governments, a large proportion of which was directed to overseas banks by Africa’s vampire rulers. The net effect was indebtedness and widespread macroeconomic imbalance in the balance of payments.

As African governments trooped to the international financial institutions (IFIs) in the 1980s for assistance to deal with their balance of payments problems, they encountered a new genre, neoliberalism, which had seized the developed world, privileging the market whilst seeking to roll back the state, directing traditional state functions to Northern-based non-governmental organisations. In return for loans to help African governments overcome their growing deficits, they had to sign up to highly deflationary and destructive conditionality (not too dissimilar to what is now being foisted on the Greek people), which can only be imposed successfully by non-democratic regimes, a task many African leaders were initially unwilling to undertake. Thus one of the most brutal dictators of the era, who was given much leeway with the conditionality and who utilised the cover of structural adjustment to intensify looting and privatisation of state assets (Zack-Williams 1995), observed:

A few years ago, world recession and a sharp fall in the value of our main exports caused us financial difficulties. The IMF offered to assist us, but requested in the first place that we should devalue our currency by a fairly appreciable extent. This would have greatly increased our cost of living which, in a country like ours, is largely determined by the cost of imports, such as fuel and ... essential foodstuffs. Naturally, I was reluctant to support measures which would have had such an adverse effect on the lives of the vast majority of our people ... I felt that devaluation would hardly stimulate our exports, or make them more competitive, as it would have done in the case of an industrialised country. As regards our diamond exports, the only beneficiaries of devaluation would have been the international brokers, enabling them to buy our gem stones at a lower price in terms of hard currency without necessarily stimulating the world market by reducing prices to the end consumer. (Stevens 1984, pp. 67–68)

Structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) in a bipolar world presented opportunities for African dictators such as Stevens, Mobutu and Siad Barre to impose an intolerable political order on their people, thus forcing technocrats and intellectuals to migrate, depriving state and society of their contributions.

Whilst the aim of SAPs was to rectify macroeconomic imbalances and remove inefficiency within African state bureaucracy, the policy recommendation was a standard recipe, regardless of causation and the elasticity of demand for African exports. It called for a massive devaluation of the local currency; major cuts in public expenditure, causing massive unemployment in countries where the public sector remains the driver for modernisation; lifting of protective trade barriers to expose ‘infant industries’ to ‘dumping’ and unfair competition; removal of subsidies on essential products, thereby leaving the poor exposed to the market. In order to institute a new start, unprofitable state enterprises were to be liquidated and profitable ones had to be privatised, sold to individuals and corporations from the capital-owning North. Through SAPs, neoliberalism instituted a new experience of underdevelopment in Africa, as large sections of the
continent’s manufacturing base disappeared, physical and social infrastructure collapsed, indebtedness grew, and African states were exposed to challenges from social movements, resulting in bloody civil wars in many countries. Paradoxically, the solution to ‘Africa’s crisis’ worsened the African condition, as SAPs imposed an atmosphere of permanent austerity, which is anathema to economic growth and development.

**This time for Africa?**

In spite of the turbulence in North Africa which has resulted in the departure of three of the continent’s notorious dictators (Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Hosni Mubarak, and Muammar Gaddafi, who was murdered with the help of imperialist forces)\(^2\), and the arrest of Laurent Gbagbo by the International Court of Justice in The Hague, the outlook for Africa looks bullish, as good economic indicators continue to come out of the continent. Political stability is now a common feature of the African political landscape. Most countries on the continent have either returned to, or are planning a return to, constitutional rule. Many African countries have now successfully held elections, in which incumbent administrations have been unseated – for example, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Zambia and Malawi, Kenya and Ivory Coast. In other cases, whilst incumbency has triumphed, it has not resulted in a military coup or civil strife.

In terms of economic policies, whilst many African countries continued to implement neoliberal policies, such as SAPs and their successor, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), there has been a certain degree of new realism in many of these policies as reflected in low indebtedness, and greater attention to agricultural production in order to bolster output. In 2009, sub-Saharan African economies were in deep recession, but by 2010 aggregate GDP grew by 4.7%, and the forecast for 2012 is 5.3 to 5.8%, as opposed to 4% forecast for the world as a whole. For African oil-exporting countries the figures are higher, at 6 to 7% in 2012 (Seria and McGregor 2011). The spur to the current African economic performance has been the export of minerals, largely as a result of China’s entry into the African commodity market; and these developments are taking place at a time when the economies of the developed centre are all forecasting low growth rate for the immediate future. Does this mean that Africa has now put the unfortunate past behind it? That remains to be seen.

**Articles in this issue**

The contributions by Bangura and by Shivji, Saul and Cliffe directly address issues of the golden jubilee of the decade of African independence. Bangura looks specifically at the rather unfortunate postcolonial experience of Sierra Leone, once described as ‘the Athens of West Africa’, which at independence (with a relatively independent judiciary and efficient civil service) was considered as a country with much hope for economic development and sustainable democracy, a position critically addressed by Zubairu Wai in his critique of the neo-patrimonial paradigm. However, within two generations the country had been transmogrified to the poorest of the poor, due to poor governance, corruption and the impact of SAPs. Bangura draws attention to the wasted opportunities of the post-colonial years for a country which at independence in 1961 had a GDP per capita of US$142.92, higher than those of South Korea (US$91.63), India (US$86.23), China (US$75.87) and Botswana (US$56.17) (Zack-Williams 2012, p. 248). Bangura’s contribution, which was initially addressed to policymakers in Freetown, contains invaluable policy recommendations, such as how to harness mineral resources for economic transformation; rebuilding and expanding human capital and the politics of transformation.
We have seen how the inheritors of the colonial state turned their back on indigenous political institutions as they sought ‘modern tools’ of governance. Nonetheless, as Shivji has argued in the case of leaders such as Nkrumah of Ghana and Nyerere of Tanzania, who interrogated the core of Western liberal ideology and ethical individualism, they were able offer philosophical and ideological alternatives – Nyerere’s ‘*ujamaa socialism*’ and pan-Africanism, Nkrumah’s Consciencism and pan-Africanism – to give hope and ensure peace among their people. Shivji points out that for Nkrumah, Ghanaian nationalism and sovereignty were ‘a momentary expression in the struggle for pan-Africanism’, as is embodied in his famous maxim, ‘Seek ye first the political kingdom’, and his assertion that Ghana’s independence was meaningless without the liberation of the rest of the continent. In the philosophies of both leaders, the state has a major role to play in social transformation, which put them (Nkrumah in particular) on a collision path with the emerging anti-dirigisme of Western liberal ideology. Nkrumah, in particular, was distrustful of the local bourgeoisie, who he feared could become a comprador class, working as agents for foreign governments. The paucity of their size and their dependent nature meant that they could not fulfil the historic role of a bourgeoisie, thus, like Nyerere, much premium was placed on the state as a vehicle for economic transformation. Both emphasised the top-down method of revolutionary transformation by the state with the support of the peasant and workers, a strategy which tends to obfuscate the ideas of the masses, with the risk of alienating them from the party and state, which became the same under both leaders.

The concern over political and social unrest in these unstable states has been a major worry for the postcolonial rulers in Africa: initially the focus was on the military, the most organised sector of society, which was prepared to defend its interests at all costs when this was perceived to be under threat, leading to a series of coups stretching back to 1960 with the coup against the Congolese patriot Patrice Lumumba (see below) by Joseph Mobutu, and his untimely death at the hands of the United Nations forces. In 1963 Sylvanus Olympio of Togo was overthrown and murdered in a military coup, and this was followed by a series of coups in Zanzibar in 1964, Nigeria and Ghana (both in 1966), Sierra Leone in 1967, and by the end of the millennium there was hardly an African country that had not been affected by a coup or mutiny. However, by the late 1980s, as the Cold War was drawing to an end, a new source of challenge to the state emerged, that of social movement.

It is this phenomenon in the context of South Africa that Friedman examines in his contribution to this issue. He observes that despite the growing impoverishment of the masses in South Africa as a consequence of the current economic crisis, this has not resulted in ‘organised mobilisation by working people and the poor for a new economic order’. Friedman draws attention to two causal factors: first, the fact that the poverty of the African population predates the current economic crisis; second, the fraternal relations between the ruling African National Congress (ANC), the South African Communist Party and the trade union movement. In his view the lack of sustained challenge to existing power inequalities is a structural problem symptomatic of the manner under which the poor are mobilised. Indeed, he is scornful of any role that the formal trade union movement could play in posing a challenge to the ruling class, since this limitation on the trade unions reduces their bargaining power. This raises the fundamental question of the relevance of the trade union movement as a vehicle for mobilising the aspirations of the workers, given its articulation with the ANC. In his view, social movements are ‘unable to play the role once played by unions’ and are no longer in a position to unleash effective campaign for the redistribution of power and resources, or even policy change.
Friedman goes on to explain the reasons for this change in fortune of the labour movement as ‘social movement’: their alliance with the ANC which blunted their revolutionary edges; and the atomisation of production thanks to the growth of post-Fordism, which reduced the organic composition of labour whilst increasing the organic composition of capital, thus reducing the spatial concentration of workers. This form of production – including the modern cottage, or ‘putting out’, system of women in the Cape Province working from home – also tends to reduce employers’ reliance on labour. However, Friedman was cautious in dismissing the labour movement in South Africa as irrelevant to the project of economic and social transformation by pointing out that it is possible that ‘they could be playing that role but without appreciable success thus far’. The membership may not be desirous of change, but may simply want to extract resources from the system. Friedman draws attention to the successful campaign of Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) in obtaining antiretrovirals for HIV/AIDS sufferers, pointing to the fact that unions may no longer be the key drivers of redistribution politics, and though social movements’ growth may be limited by organisational constraints, they have obtained constituencies beyond the reach of the unions.

Zubairu Wai’s paper is a methodological critique of what he calls ‘the dominant Africanist discourse on African state forms and its relationship with what is seen as pervasive state failure on the continent’, namely neo-patrimonialism, which seeks to historicise state rationality based on the Western ideal liberal state by presenting a ‘vulgar universalism’, which ignores specific experiences. He argues that within this paradigm the African state is presented as demonstrating an undifferentiated state rationality and political behaviour defined by rent-seeking activities, as obstacles to the reform-minded activities of the IFIs and other Western agencies. Drawing from the work of Mudimbe, Wai asks whether it is possible to theorise from the throes of a universalism that claims to transcend all transhistorical lines and variations, when the template of ‘universal’ is demonstrating signs of ‘ethnocentric biases’ in the face of ‘very specific localism’. Furthermore, Wai berates attempts by neo-patrimonialists to excuse colonial rule from contemporary conflicts, political unrest and state failure. Whilst this is not a call for a return to the mechanistic syndrome of the dependency theory of old, nonetheless, it is a warning that the need to incorporate African agency within any serious analysis of the crisis of the African state should not mean that imperialism should be let off the hook.

Ben Nwosu’s contribution is also a methodological critique of Huntington’s Third wave: democratization in the twentieth century, as further developed by Jaggers and Gurr in the tracking of the third-wave transition to democracy by a wave of non-democratic polities. He notes that the study reveals ‘uninspiring promises’ for democracy, which in his view is not surprising since ‘the analytical tools of the study are rooted in the procedural third wave discourse on democracy’. Furthermore, such tools cannot explain why most of the third-wave states in Africa are generating defective versions of democratisation. He then goes on to argue that ‘the third-wave procedural discourse is not only an inadequate formulation, but it is also one of the sources of the perverse forms which democratic transitions are taking in several African states’. He warns that attempts by liberal-democracy theorists such as Huntington and Schumpeter to reduce democracy to elections run the risk of losing the social contract element of citizen claims on the state, which as we have seen is the Gordian knot of nation-state building in postcolonial Africa. As he observes: ‘This analytical thrust abandons the idea of people (demos) and privileges system reproduction. But de-emphasising people in favour of system or procedure theoretically reinforces political alienation’. Inspired by Macpherson’s critique of attempts to equate democracy and the market society, Nwosu warns against such a reductionist approach:
The procedural model treats democracy as a market mechanism in which voters are consumers while politicians are entrepreneurs. Consequently, the formal equality it professes at the political level of structure is empty because it is a carry-over of the principle of competitive equality in unequal market conditions. Protection of rights therefore means protection of the market ethos of competition and contract regime.

For Nwosu, this would not surprise even the casual observer, since:

... the epistemology is part of the hegemonic project that reifies capitalist modernisation and conflates it with democracy. It has a strong effect on the democratisation discourse with confinement of the meaning of democracy to only the easily measurable procedural referents. These referents, such as elections and regime of rights, fail to integrate the substantive elements that are related to socio-economic conditions which create social citizenship.

Weldehaimanot’s article is premised on an ongoing debate among Ethiopians and Eritreans about what he refers to as Eritrean identity, which he argues has significant implications for good relationships between these two neighbours. The debate centres on ‘a revisionist discourse’ that has recently arisen which challenges the core arguments for Eritrea’s political, cultural and economic identity, saying they are based on three essentially ‘colonial’ premises that are false. The first was that Eritreans are superior to other Ethiopians, because their territory had been fully developed into an Italian colony from the 1890s to 1941; that they deserved to be asked to freely determine their political future; and that against the will of the Eritrean people, their country was unhappily federated with Ethiopia. This failed to meet the demands of the majority of Eritreans who wanted independence, and to make matters worse, Ethiopia reneged on Eritrea’s autonomy by quickly dismantling the federal order to subjugate Eritreans to Ethiopian hegemony. By contrast, the Ethiopian narrative emphasised the historical links between parts of Eritrea and Ethiopia and that the majority of the two peoples supported the unconditional union. The third narrative was a coalescence between the UN and the British, asserting that the interests of both sides were duly considered and that it was a halfway agreement, as the best possible compromise. The revisionists use this critique to argue that it has been a rigid assertion of this ‘false’ identity that is at the root of continuing conflict between the two states and of the retention of support for the dictatorship of President Isaias Afewerki, and they urge a more flexible view of identity.

Weldehaimanot offers a brief historical analysis in order to refute the revisionists’ challenge, pointing to the process of incorporation of Eritrea into the Ethiopian federation with the resulting resistance to such a process, starting with the Muslims in the lowlands, who in 1961 founded the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). The incorporation led to further repression and growing resistance, plus a counter discourse among Eritrean nationalists which has continued into the post-independence era. He emphasises that the problems of Eritrea are not simply a reflection of identity, and believes that the issues of the dictatorship and future relations with Ethiopia need to be addressed through political processes of negotiation.

Gavin Capps’ contribution on the platinum mining industry in South Africa draws attention to the phenomenal growth of this industry since the mid 1990s to become the largest component in the mining sector, both in terms of value-added and employment provision. This article, which is the first part of two connected articles, seeks to contribute to the political economy of platinum mining by pointing to the crucial role that the apartheid mineral property system played in its principal accumulation strategy in the years leading to the current platinum boom. Capps points to the different and complicating forms of ownership in the former Bophuthatswana and Lebowa Bantustans, their geopolitical location under apartheid, and how the reproduction of these strategic mineral property relations
was secured during the political transition to the benefit of the white platinum corporations. The abundance of deposits in the country and the booming price of platinum have produced the unintentional effect of turning the industry into a major target for ANC reform legislation of the sector.

Henning Melber’s paper reminds us of another anniversary – that of the death of UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld of Sweden, who served as Secretary-General from April 1953 until his tragic death in a plane crash in September 1961. According to Melber, Hammarskjöld was head of the UN at a critical time for that organisation: not only did his tenure mark the height of the Cold War and the emergence of the Berlin Wall, but it was a period of transition for the UN body as it moved from being an almost exclusively Western organisation after the Second World War towards a global governance institution, which also saw the growing membership of African states. Indeed, to observe the death of the cosmopolitan Swede, who fought for the neutrality of the world organisation in the face of politicians who sought to turn the organisation into their poodle, we also have to pay tribute to Patrice Lumumba, that patriot of the Congo, who met his death at the hands of imperialism as he fought for the rights of his people to be governed by leaders of their choice. Indeed, the untimely and brutal death of Lumumba at the hands of UN forces that were sent to protect him has cast a long shadow over the Democratic Republic of Congo throughout its postcolonial history as one leader after another is assassinated and civil war continues to be perpetuated by those who seek to rape and pillage the resources of this nation at the heart of the continent.

**Promoting an ongoing debate evaluating Tanzania’s jubilee**

One notable 50th anniversary, mentioned above, was the recent anniversary in December 2011 of Tanzania’s independence on 9 December 1961. Seen by many as a beacon offering signs of hope and lessons to be learned for Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, it also gave specific inspiration in the founding of *ROAPE*. In a special section, three contributors associated with the editing of the *Review* from its outset offer their differing memories and reflections on this history, especially the first decades. These are offered as a first chapter in the more thorough deconstruction that the Tanzania experience deserves, and they do point to a possible agenda of questions for debate. We hope that potential contributors will be moved to submit views, challenging these and other perceptions, to bring the story not only up to the recent decades but also to consider the implications of this legacy for Tanzania’s future options.

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**Notes**

1. The *Parapo* or *Para po* is an ethnic cultural and economic organisation that seeks to foster strong relations among the Yorubas both at home and in the diaspora through fundraising, welfare provisions and the celebration of Yoruba tradition and culture.
2. See Roberts (2011) and the debate it aroused in *London Review of Books*, 15 December 2011, on how this slippage from humanitarian intervention to regime change occurred.
3. Muhammad Naguib and Gamal Abdel Nasser’s coup in 1952 which removed King Farouk I from power could be seen as the pointer of Africa’s immediate future.
4. The second part, on the Mineral Development Bill and BEE in the South African platinum industry, will appear in the next issue of this journal.
References


