Scholars increasingly agree that the ‘Mauritian Miracle’ was enabled by the country’s significant level of state capacity. This article probes Mauritius’s state-building past to identify the early sources of Mauritian state capacity. Specifically, I find that the close collaboration between the island’s export-oriented sugar planters, known as the Franco-Mauritians, and colonial officials accounts for the growth of Mauritian state capacity during the nineteenth century. Following the island’s first major commodity boom, in 1825, sugar planters pressed colonial officials to ‘regulate’ the island’s labour supply, improve its transportation infrastructure, and undertake research and development initiatives. These efforts collectively promoted the growth of state capacity and laid the groundwork for the country’s relatively capable state. The influence of Mauritius’s export-oriented coalition on state building may shed light on the country’s comparative success to other African countries, where export-oriented coalitions have been rare both historically and in the contemporary era.

Keywords: Mauritius; sugar exports; commodity booms; coalitions; state building; political development


Mots-clés: L’île Maurice ; les exportations de sucre ; l’explosion des matières premières ; les coalitions ; l’édification de l’État ; le développement politique

*Email: ryan-saylor@utulsa.edu
Mauritius is an African success story. Today, it is one of Africa’s few Upper Middle Income countries, with a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) six times its regional average. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, Mauritius had annual per capita GDP growth similar to that of Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore. Mauritius’s Human Development Index is similar to theirs as well. It is a democratic and well-governed country. Mauritius is one of only five African countries to have earned a positive ‘stateness’ measure from the World Bank, an index used to represent its political stability, governmental capabilities, and rule of law (Bratton and Chang 2006, Appendix 2, Lange 2003, p. 402, Subramanian and Roy 2001, pp. 6–9). Mauritius is, by all accounts, extraordinary by African standards.

Explicating the causes of the ‘Mauritian Miracle’ has attracted considerable attention from economists and political scientists in recent years. They have found that, like many of the East Asian ‘Tigers’, Mauritius achieved its impressive economic growth since 1970 without strict adherence to the orthodox economic policies of the Washington Consensus (see Subramanian and Roy 2001). Instead, the strength of Mauritian state institutions seems to be at the core of its developmental success (e.g., Meinsenhelder 1997, Minogue 1992, Subramanian and Roy 2001). Mauritius has been successful because it possesses significant levels of what political scientists call ‘state capacity’. State capacity refers to the ability of government officials to implement their decrees – whether to collect taxes, regulate the economy, or provide public goods such as roads and schools (Mann 1984). In Mauritius, bureaucrats are recruited according to meritocratic criteria, helping to render the state relatively immune from rent seeking and corruption, particularly when compared to many African states. These rationalised bureaucratic precepts, and the existence of state capacity more generally, have played a central role in forging the Mauritian Miracle.

Yet this assessment of the Mauritian state begs the prior question: what were the sources of Mauritian state capacity which laid the groundwork for the country’s developmental success after 1970? Recent studies point to some historical sources of Mauritius’s contemporary accomplishments. For instance, Lange (2003, 2009) contends that the ‘directness’ of British rule in Mauritius, something brought about by labour unrest in the 1930s and 1940s, promoted the island’s distinctive trajectory. Bräutigam (2008), alternatively, maintains that haggling between colonial officials and sugar planters over taxation positioned Mauritius for success, though she too emphasises developments in the twentieth century. While I agree that the colonial era helped Mauritius embark on a trajectory unlike that of most African countries, I accentuate factors that lie even further in the island’s colonial past. In this article, I highlight how Mauritian sugar planters and colonial officials collaborated to encourage sugar exports in the nineteenth century and how their efforts promoted the growth of state capacity. This reservoir of state capacity almost certainly played an important long-term role in Mauritian economic and political development, given that scholars largely regard state building as a path-dependent phenomenon which centrally influences economic development (Evans 1995, Kohli 2004).

At the core of Mauritius’s state-building projects was an export-oriented coalition between the island’s sugar-exporting elite and the British colonial government. A narrow stratum of sugar planters, known as the ‘Franco-Mauritians’, dominated politics when the island’s first major commodity boom, in sugar, began in 1825. This article depicts how the Franco-Mauritians lobbied British officials to assist export production, which propelled a tenfold increase in annual sugar exports from the island. Export growth revealed a number of economic bottlenecks, including an insufficient labour supply, rising transport costs, and problems with the island’s undiversified sugarcane stock. Sugar elites organised
themselves through groups such as the Chamber of Agriculture and pressed the state for help resolving these barriers to expanded export production. The state repeatedly aided the Franco-Mauritians by promoting immigration, ‘regulating’ the island’s labour supply, building railways, and undertaking research and development initiatives. Collectively, these endeavours enhanced the capabilities of the Mauritian state as the century progressed.

The influence of this export-oriented coalition may help explain why Mauritius has been able to transcend pitfalls that have bedevilled other African countries, many of which seemed better poised for economic and political development than a far-flung island east of Madagascar. Indeed, although Mauritius exhibits some manifest differences from other African states, they share something fundamental: they were integrated into the world economy as colonial dependencies and thus relied heavily on primary commodity exporting, which should have sensitised them to export opportunities. Yet many post-war African governments undermined the vitality of their export sectors in the midst of unprecedented commodity booms. Others similarly failed to deepen nascent capitalist industries that seemed poised for success. Scholars from different perspectives suggest that coalitional politics affected these economic perplexities. Ruling political coalitions in Africa have typically not been led by groups with deep connections to economic production (e.g., Bates 1981, Boone 1992, pp. 4, 20–23). Whereas exporters were marginalised politically in many African countries, the opposite was true in Mauritius. The export-oriented nature of Mauritius’s ruling coalition was central to why the colonial state eagerly assisted export producers via state building when they requested it.

Yet although Mauritian state building eventually had beneficial ramifications, it also had serious and brutal consequences. Mauritius’s state building success came on the backs of relentlessly exploited slaves and indentured labourers. Sugar planters compelled the government to ignore mistreatment on sugar estates, implement unreasonable fines and annual passport fees in the name of preventing ‘vagrancy’, and harass those workers who tried to search for a better life in urban professions. Planters’ actions were expressly designed to subjugate and repress the politically powerless in order to maximise their economic power. Moreover, the fact that class divides coincided with racial difference meant that economic and political contention between elites and labourers on Mauritius became imbued with what was, at times, virulent racism. The worst of these endeavours were related to the planters’ quest to secure an adequate labour supply in the four decades after 1825. Later initiatives, such as railway construction and research and development programmes, were fairly benign. Together, these undertakings transformed the island’s economy and governmental capabilities. In Mauritius, then, one finds something of a developmental paradox: although the long-term consequences of state building have led to a regional ‘miracle’, the way in which the island’s elite and government laid the groundwork for it was normatively reprehensible.

**Mauritian society at the start of the sugar boom, circa 1825**

During the nineteenth century, Mauritius was a colonial dependency of Britain, but it was a marginal part of the British Empire. The colonial governor received few directives from London, so he had ‘considerable discretionary authority’ in policymaking and became closely aligned with sugar interests, since the colony’s economic viability depended on sugar exports (Lange 2009, pp. 67, 76–77). In reality, the Franco-Mauritians ‘dominated island politics despite the façade of British rule’ and ‘pulled the levers of the colonial state’. Sugar elites controlled most of the seats in the colonial parliament and staffed much of the bureaucracy (Storey 1997, pp. 37, 55, 57). British officials may have formally exercised control in Mauritius but they did so in close collaboration with sugar planters.
Sugar elites formed the upper stratum of Mauritian society, representing around nine per cent of the population in the 1830s but holding most of the island’s economic and political power (Lange 2009, pp. 72–73, Storey 1997, pp. 19–20). The development of Mauritius’s landed elite was facilitated by the fact that the island was uninhabited prior to Europeans’ arrival, thereby removing impediments to land consolidation that existed elsewhere in colonial Africa (Greig, Turner and D’Arcy 2011, pp. 158–160, Phillips 1989). Some sugar planters had obtained their landholdings as grants during French rule (1715–1810), which preceded British colonialism, and were therefore known as the Franco-Mauritians. Other sugar planters began as merchants and later diversified into landholding as export opportunities blossomed after 1825. The Franco-Mauritians were a small group, with a mere 150 large sugar planters in 1832 (Teelock 1998, pp. 297–301). Their main advocacy group was the Chamber of Agriculture, formed in 1853, though sugar planters mobilised collectively before the 1850s through groups such as the Royal Society of Arts and Sciences (Storey 1997, pp. 27, 35–37, Napal 1984, pp. 34–50). Sugar planters were also given half of the 14 seats on the colonial legislative council in 1831 (Carter 1995, p. 13). At mid-century, the colonial governor, George Anderson, increased the slots allotted on the legislative council for ‘unofficial members’ – drawn from the ranks of sugar elites and merchants – giving local interests a majority on the most important governing institution in the colony (Selvon 2001, pp. 285–288). The Franco-Mauritians were undeniably the leading economic, political, and social force in Mauritius.

At the other end of the spectrum, the popular classes were politically marginalised throughout the nineteenth century. Around 1830, slaves, freedmen, and Creoles constituted nine-tenths of Mauritius’s population. The French began importing slaves to Mauritius in the 1720s, and slaves were critical to the island’s plantation economy. But Britain abolished slavery in its colonies in the early 1830s (slavery was officially abolished in Mauritius in 1835), which changed the composition of the labouring classes in Mauritius. Sugar planters accelerated the importation of indentured workers from India, as 338,000 Indians came to the island between 1843 and 1865; another 112,000 Indian and Chinese workers did likewise before 1920. Not all of these workers remained on the plantation, however. Maroonage during slave times and, later, desertion by indentured labourers were perennial concerns for sugar planters, as labourers often sought a better life in the capital of Port Louis as dock-workers, artisans, or in other urban jobs. Many planters suspected that many middle- and lower-class urban workers had deserted the rural sugar economy and believed the state should compel them to ‘re-engage’ on the plantation. Some labourers even became small-scale landowners once they fulfilled their service contracts, giving rise to a class of ‘Indo-Mauritian’ smallholders later in the nineteenth century (Lange 2009, pp. 72–77). Much of the island’s politics consequently pivoted on sugar planters’ desire for an adequate labour supply and the attendant conflict this need created with the popular classes, igniting class- and race-based discord that remains today.1

State building in colonial Mauritius largely stemmed from the exigencies of the expanding sugar economy and the economic goals of the Franco-Mauritian elite. In 1825, at the beginning of the sugar boom, the Mauritian state was characteristic of what scholars regard as a weak state. There was no countrywide system of taxation; instead, the government depended heavily on customs duties and other taxes collected in Port Louis. The island had virtually no transportation infrastructure, which can be useful to governments when they need to rapidly deploy their agents. The main road on the island, which would eventually connect Port Louis on the west coast to Mahebourg on the east coast, was under construction but not complete (Lamusse 1964b, p. 356). There was no standing state institutional presence outside of the capital city. The countryside was the unfettered
dominion of sugar planters. In short, although the Franco-Mauritians exerted profound influence over the colonial government, state capacity was low.

This state of affairs would change considerably in the wake of the country’s first major commodity boom, in sugar, beginning in 1825. A number of factors created a long-term secular trend of rising sugar prices between 1825 and 1865. First, Britain repealed a preferential tariff on West Indian sugar in 1825, making Mauritian sugar more attractive to British importers. The change ‘revolutionized Mauritian agriculture’ and stimulated the doubling of sugar exports in the second half of the 1820s. Second, sugar prices paid in London rose by approximately 45% from the early-1830s to the mid 1840s, and there was a spectacular growth of sugar demand in Britain throughout the nineteenth century (Mintz 1985, pp. 74–150). Finally, in 1851, Britain repealed a ban on foreign ships in its colonial ports, opening Mauritius to the wider global economy. Mauritius was the leading supplier of sugar to Britain at mid-century and then accounted for 9% of global sugarcane production. Throughout the century, sugar exports always accounted for at least 85% of Mauritian exports. Annual exports rose from 11,107 tons before the 1825 tariff repeal to over 123,000 tons by the early 1860s; their value exploded as well, from £170,342 in 1824 to over £2.1 million annually by the early 1860s (Allen 1999, pp. 12–30, quote from p. 12, Storey 1997, p. 38).

The Franco-Mauritians were the principal beneficiary of the growth in sugar exports. They doubled the area devoted to sugar production in the first decade of the boom, from 24,967 arpent(s) in 1826 to 57,933 arpent(s) by 1835. From the 1860s on, sugar production spread across 123,000 arpent(s) (Teelock 1998, p. 84).2 Throughout the century, sugar planters leaned on colonial administrators to help them achieve their economic goals. Gradually, the Mauritian state expanded its power and oversight of Mauritian society. During this early phase of expansion, the Franco-Mauritians’ major policy concern was whether they could secure an adequate labour supply. In the second half of the nineteenth century, sugar prices stagnated with the rise of beet sugar production in Europe; after 1880, they steadily declined. In this later era, Franco-Mauritian planters pursued new public goods to reduce transport costs and improve the quality of their cane stocks, in order to remain internationally competitive. Subsequent state–elite collaboration helped the sugar industry remain viable amid hard times, and export production remained steady from the late 1850s to the early 1890s (usually around 115,000 tons annually) (Allen 1999, p. 23). The next two sections successively discuss how sugar planters impelled the state to intervene in the political economy during these two phases of growth and stagnation. The result of these efforts was an accretion of new state capacity.

Sugar planters impel labour coercion by the state, 1825–1871

The principal economic threat to the sugar elite in the early boom years was planters’ uncertainty over the island’s labour supply, particularly after the abolition of slavery in 1835. The way in which the state responded to help planters secure labour reflected both the government’s sensitivity toward export elites, as well as its indifference toward the well-being of the majority of the island’s population. The international competitiveness of Mauritian sugar hinged on abundant cheap labour, and until 1835, African slaves constituted the island’s labour supply. But Britain banned the slave trade in 1807 (though the colonial governor in Mauritius, Robert Farquhar, lobbied unsuccessfully for the island’s exemption from the ban). Mauritian planters turned to importing slaves illegally, but this practice ended in 1835, after the British banned slavery in its colonies following a large and deadly slave revolt in Jamaica, then Britain’s leading sugar supplier.3 London compensated Mauritian

The state assisted sugar planters to obtain labourers in two main ways. First, the state helped planters acquire workers from India through a subsidised immigration programme. Second, the state used the judicial branch to tilt legal decision-making in the planters’ favour, thus providing labourers flimsy legal recourse against their overlords once on the island. Immediately after slavery was outlawed in Mauritius, sugar planters took to importing Indian labourers on their own because they believed it would be easier than coercing the newly emancipated slave population. Between 1834 and 1838, nearly 24,000 labourers arrived in Mauritius, which amounted to roughly 35% of the slaves who had been emancipated in 1835. Treatment of these workers was as bad as during slavery, though the government did little to temper the harsh treatment of Indians. In some respects, the judiciary buttressed planters’ behaviour. A group of bureaucrats known as the stipendiary magistrates was responsible for overseeing labour relations. Stipendiary magistrates had been appointed originally to implement the abolition of slavery in Britain’s colonies and were retained afterwards as the judicial officials who oversaw vagrancy and breach of contract cases. By 1837, there were 16 magistrates in Mauritius (Green 1974, pp. 43–44, Nwulia 1978, p. 91, Smith 1995, p. 268). Few had proper legal training, and most were half-time military or naval officers. More important, stipendiary magistrates were given ‘wretchedly low salaries to adjudicate cases arising between masters and apprentices’ (Green 1974, pp. 43–44). Low salaries and improper training limited the ability of the stipendiary magistrates to act independently of powerful social forces.

Stipendiary magistrates in Mauritius typically sided with planters in their investigations of labourers’ circumstances and zealously awarded corporal punishment for transgressions by labourers, so much so that officials in London inquired about the high rates of corporal punishment in Mauritius during the late 1830s. Magistrates’ sensitivity to planters’ interests was due to their low pay, as well as the influence planters had to sometimes remove magistrates if they infringed on sugar elites’ behaviour. A British missionary noted in 1838 that: ‘It is said that those who have been removed from the office of special magistrate have universally been those who filled it the most efficiently, in the performance of their duty as the protectors of the Apprentices [labourers]’ (quoted in Nwulia 1978, p. 95). Magistrates’ site visits to plantations were ‘cursory and largely ineffective’. They had little de facto power to sanction estate owners, and the interpreters magistrates needed to communicate with the labourers were chronically lacking. Overall, ‘stipendiary magistrates and appeal court judges closed ranks against the Indian immigrants’ (Carter 1995, pp. 209–212).

The harsh treatment of Indian labourers created opposition to the labour trade among abolitionists in both India and Britain. In 1838, India outlawed emigration to Mauritius due to planters’ labour practices, creating a dire labour supply problem. Sugar production declined by one-third despite rapidly rising global prices (Allen 1999, pp. 23, 55–56, Carter 1995, pp. 18–21, Lamusse 1964b, p. 357). Planters responded quickly to the immigration ban, holding public meetings and forming the Mauritius Free Labour Association (MFLA). They desperately wanted to resume the labour trade because indentured Indians cost them about one-third less than employing freedmen. Sugar planters used the MFLA to outline plans for improved treatment of indentured Indians, from their well-being on the voyage from India to a free passage back there upon the completion of service contracts. The MFLA built support for the resumption of labour imports by getting the colonial government to pledge to better regulate labour practices, which bolstered confidence in Indian and British officials. The emigration ban was repealed in 1842, mainly due to planters’
collective action. The state subsidised the cost of new labour imports, at the rate of £7 per immigrant. The subsidies were financed by wine and liquor duties, which were spread among the population, not levied solely on sugar elites. The immigration subsidies cost the government £423,579 between 1843 and 1848, representing one-third of the colonial state budget (Lamusse 1964b, p. 357). The Mauritian state was clearly doing the bidding of sugar planters.

Yet, despite the promises of Mauritian officials, the state exercised virtually no oversight of labour treatment on the plantation. It concentrated instead on ‘regulating’ labourers outside of the plantation system by passing anti-vagrancy statues and internal passport requirements in 1847, both of which planters sought in order to intimidate the masses. The harshest policy was the ‘double cut’ system, which imposed a penalty of two days of extra work for each day (or partial day) missed on the plantation. This system effectively extended a typical labour service contract from five to seven years. These actions helped sugar planters alleviate their labour supply problem, as nearly 94,000 indentured Indian migrants came to Mauritius during the 1840s, with another 1840,000 following in the 1850s (Napal 1984, pp. 88–98, Northrup 1995, pp. 115–119, 159).

Desertion and ‘vagrancy’ perennially concerned sugar planters. Rates of desertion and illegal absences from plantations rose steadily after the abolition of slavery in 1835 and became particularly troublesome, from the planters’ perspective, in the 1860s (Allen 2008). By then, a considerable portion of former indentured labourers had fulfilled their service contracts and were moving into urban jobs; others became small landholders (i.e., the rise of the Indo-Mauritian smallholders). The labour supply utilised by sugar elites was shrinking, and, although immigration remained an option, planters had come to prefer the trained labourers that had previously worked on their estates. Sugar planters therefore lobbied the state to pressure former field labourers to ‘re-engage’ on the plantation, the result of which was Ordinance 31, passed in 1867. The new legal code was draconian. Internal passports, which now included the immigrant’s photograph, had to be carried at all times and tied Indians to their districts of residence. All Indians indentured or free – had to carry passports, at an annual cost of £1 (roughly two months’ pay). Planters also compelled the government to institute fines for early termination of service contracts and to apply special taxes on Indians who worked outside of the sugar industry as domestic servants, petty retailers or gardeners (Carter 1995, pp. 198–205, Napal 1984, pp. 109–117). The state created a legal labyrinth to control the labouring classes during the 1860s, a time when global sugar prices were stagnating and planters were feeling increasingly anxious about their international competitiveness. These actions substantially expanded the activity of the government in identifying, tracking, and coercing the masses through new state initiatives.

The state followed up its new legal code with a flurry of aggressive behaviour toward Indians in order to push them back onto sugar plantations. Police commonly entered Indian residences, ostensibly to search for so-called vagrants – which marked a new, palpable state presence. Harassment was common, even when one’s papers were in order. Throughout the 1860s, the state arrested approximately 20,000 Indians annually (about 12% of the Indian population) on vagrancy-related charges. The fact that police officers received half of the fines paid by their arrestees undoubtedly encouraged zealous arresting, but police officers’ behaviour nonetheless illustrates the remarkable activity of state functionaries in Port Louis, Indian towns, and the countryside (Carter 1995, pp. 196–198, 213, 219–220, Mishra 2009, p. 240). Labour coercion by state agents was pronounced in Port Louis, where 84% of contractual labourers were arrested for vagrancy annually, on average, from 1864 to 1871.
Government officials were trying to expel urban workers into the rural sugar economy (Allen 2008, pp. 149–150).

State action in the countryside was one-sided. Indians had little recourse, as the judicial officials overseeing labour law, the stipendiary magistrates, were aligned with the planters. In practice, the ‘Stipendiary Magistrates had made the punishment severe and harsh so as to discourage immigrants in doing liberal jobs [i.e., those outside the plantation economy], urging them to re-engage as a means of protection’ (Carter 1995, pp. 198–205, Napal 1984, pp. 109–117, quote from p. 113, Smith 1995, p. 273).4 Within three years of enacting the anti-vagrancy Ordinance 31, the proportion of Indians engaged on sugar estates rose from 48% to 59% (Lamusse 1964a, p. 120). Government intimidation of Indian labourers was coupled with worse repression on sugar estates. On the plantation, sugar elites exercised coercion through their estate managers, known as sirdars. Private jails were common and used by planters to exact extra-legal retribution on deserters, freed Indians who would not ‘re-engage’, and those who filed complaints with the authorities (Carter 1995, pp. 196–198, 213, 219–220).

This situation persisted throughout the century, despite an overhaul of the judiciary in the 1850s, when the state established a centralised legal system with district courts and placed the police forces under the authority of local magistrates (Lange 2009, pp. 71–72). But little changed. In 1871, Arthur Hamilton Gordon became governor of Mauritius and ‘found the judicial system in Mauritius biased and hopelessly intertwined with the planting interest’ (Smith 1995, p. 268). Napal (1984, p. 71) concludes that the ‘labour system was so bad that the labourers were powerless against the employers, the police were corrupt and violent, while some magistrates were said to be ignorant and partial’. Throughout the century, the state toiled to serve the narrow interests of planters by diligently repressing labourers.

In the process, the state’s presence in the countryside became palpable and was dramatically different than what it had been at the start of the sugar boom. State capacity expanded as government agents ‘regulated’ the labour supply throughout the island. The island’s court system handled over 20,000 cases in 1886 alone, for example (Lange 2009, p. 72). State efforts to surveil Indian labourers made them ‘legible’ to government officials, even after their service contracts were fulfilled, since passport requirements applied to all Indians, indentured or free. The Immigration Department became ‘a nucleus of registration and identification’ and supplied vital information to the Stipendiary Magistrates (Carter 1995, p. 206, Smith 1995, p. 273). Rendering populations ‘legible’ marked extraordinary leaps in state capacity historically in early modern Europe, as well, as governments created and then sustained new bureaucratization for the oversight of their societies. Governments gleaned much information about their subject populations through efforts to ‘simplify’ the complex societies over which they ruled. Such ‘legibility’ facilitated state intervention in society, whether for good or ill (see Scott 1998).

Mauritian state action in the labour sector during the nineteenth century portended a more institutional approach to labour regulation in the twentieth century. In the late 1930s, hard times in the sugar economy stoked popular consternation among small sugar farmers, as sugar factories owned by Franco-Mauritians resisted pressing the ‘Uba’ cane varietal because it was more fibrous and more taxing on their pressing equipment than other varietals. When some factories decided to purchase Uba canes for 15% less than other varietals, small planters mobilised, eventually spawning violence in August 1937. The state repressed the protestors easily. More important, it then created a set of institutions to manage collective bargaining, incorporate the budding farmers’ movement, and thereby control the avenues of political competition on the island (Storey 1997, pp. 141–149, see
also BrÄutigam 1997, pp. 55–56). State action in the 1930s continued the long-standing policy to control the subaltern classes in order to promote the interests of the Franco-Mauritians, a policy which began in the 1840s with efforts to identify and render the masses legible to the government.

State assistance to sugar exporters continues amid hard times, 1865–1895

The collaborative relationship between the Franco-Mauritians and the state continued in the second half of the century, when Mauritian sugar exports faced new challenges and uncertainty. A number of factors threatened the vitality of the sugar economy. First, beet sugar cultivation was growing in Europe, with France, Germany, Russia, and other countries generously subsidising their domestic producers. Beet sugar production exerted downward pressure on global prices for cane sugar, the staple of the Mauritian export economy. Second, the Suez Canal opened in 1869 and rendered Mauritius a more remote sugar supplier to many markets. Third, the island experienced climatic disasters in the 1860s, including a drought in 1866, a malaria outbreak in 1867, and cyclones in 1868 and 1874. Finally, the island had a borer pest infestation that threatened its non-diversified cane stock. These developments jeopardised the international competitiveness of Mauritian sugar. Planters responded by asking the Mauritian state to provide new public goods, specifically transportation infrastructure and research and development initiatives. In both cases, the state aided the Franco-Mauritians, and state capacity expanded as a result.

One means to promote sugar exports was by building railways, in order to reduce planters’ transport costs. In the first half of the nineteenth century, most of the sugar exported from Mauritius exited at Port Louis. Mauritian sugar estates were largely situated in coastal areas, so producers would transport their crop by boat to Port Louis. The island’s inland producers were served by a couple of main roads, built by the colonial government with convict and slave labour in the 1820s. A road linking Port Louis on the west coast to Mahebourg on the east coast was completed in 1832. A branch line to Souillac in the south was finished in 1830. Until the 1850s, this infrastructure sufficed, as high sugar prices dissuaded interest in railways or a substantial inland road network. There was some foreign interest in building a railway in Mauritius during the global railway bonanza of the mid-nineteenth century. Railway entrepreneurs in London bought advertising space in The Railway Times in 1845 to raise start-up capital for a then-unspecified project on the island (Jessop 1964, p. 1, Lamusse 1964b, p. 356). But there was little interest among the Franco-Mauritians because sugar prices were then at their highest level in 25 years. Prevailing transport costs were tolerable.

By the 1850s, transport costs were rising as the sugar economy continued to grow and sugar production moved further inland. (Mauritius exported about 56,000 tons of sugar annually in the late 1840s; 10 years later, exports were nearly 112,000 tons annually.) Expanding sugar production taxed the island’s paltry infrastructure, which carried an estimated 4500 carts and carriages on existing roadways. Inland estates created higher transport costs on both ends of production: first to build and equip a factory, which needed to be located near the point of cultivation, and then to transport refined sugar overland to Port Louis. The boilers used in modern sugar plants were of particular concern to inland sugar planters. At mid-century, transporting three boilers 18 miles inland cost around £1200, a significant sum for an estate owner. Falling international prices after mid-century heightened these cost concerns. In 1856, planters mobilised through the Chamber of Agriculture and lobbied the colonial government to survey the island for railways. The government did so in 1858–59, after the colonial secretary in London dispatched
an engineer to Mauritius (Jessop 1964, pp. 1–2, Lamusse 1964b, p. 359). The state assisted with the initial planning stages of Mauritius’s railways. The government would need to be involved with financing as well, as local merchant capital had dried up in the late 1840s (see Lamusse 1964b, pp. 355–359). Building railways in Mauritius, in other words, was necessarily a state building project.

State action reflected the political dominance of the Franco-Mauritian sugar exporters. About one year after the government surveyed the island for railways, it contributed £200,000 from its Reserve Fund for two railway lines, which were estimated to cost £1 million. Construction began in January 1862 (Jessop 1964, p. 2). The colonial state also obtained debt financing by issuing seven bonds in the London bond market between 1862 and 1876. The average rate of interest on Mauritian bonds was 5.5%, among the lowest rates secured by any colony or developing country at the time (Bräutigam 2008, p. 152). The Mauritian state was, in essence, externalising the costs of railway construction for the Franco-Mauritians, who were relatively capital-poor and could not finance the new transportation infrastructure on their own. The first railway was the North Line, completed in 1864 and stretching from Port Louis north into the island’s sugar-producing heartland and then around the northeast coast. The Midland Line was completed in 1865 and tapped into the south-eastern portion of the island known as Grand Port. A number of feeder lines were built off of the Midland Line over the next few decades. The government operated the railways at a chronic deficit, a sign of the industry’s weight in island politics (Jessop 1964, pp. 2–5, Napal 1984, p. 213). The state helped sugar estates remain profitable by coordinating and financing railway construction and then through an implicit subsidy (the operating deficit).

The new railways were of obvious benefit to the Franco-Mauritians, and they also held positive implications for the development of state capacity. Railways enabled the Mauritian state to more rapidly deploy its agents, and the ongoing regulatory oversight of railways promoted bureaucratisation as well. The Railway Department employed 863 people in 1888, for example (Jessop 1964, p. 19). By 1895, Mauritius had 167 kilometres of railway. This level of railway track yields a ‘railway density’ measure of 0.08 (kilometres of railway ÷ total square kilometres of land). The density of Mauritian railways was roughly 10 times larger than even those African countries, like Senegal, that were well-endowed with railways as of the mid twentieth century. In fact, only Gambia and South Africa had higher measures of road density in 1950 than Mauritius’s score for railway density in 1895 (Herbst 2000, p. 86). Mauritius’s road density in 1897 was 0.51, or 10 times the level typically observed in African colonies circa 1950 (Colony of Mauritius 1898, p. HH1). Of course, the fact that Mauritius is a tiny island helps account for these impressive measures (see Greig, Turner and D’Arcy 2011), though the country nonetheless had a precocious transportation infrastructure at the turn of the last century. It was the close collaboration between the island’s sugar exporters and colonial administrators that facilitated the creation of new transportation infrastructure and logistical power.

A second way in which the colonial state aided sugar exports after 1850 was through research and development initiatives. Much of what ailed the Mauritian sugar industry after mid-century were exogenous factors beyond the control of the state or sugar planters. They could not stop the cultivation of beet sugar in Europe, close the Suez Canal, or avoid occasional climatic disasters. But planters and government officials could do something about the island’s borer pest infestation. Much of Mauritius’s sugarcane stock was non-diversified, leaving it susceptible to a borer which was inadvertently introduced to the island around 1850. The Chamber of Agriculture solicited ideas to eliminate the borer menace in the mid 1850s, but the campaign and other individualised efforts at limiting
the impact of the borer failed. Government assistance could expediently address the situation because it could avoid the collective action problems associated with individualised solutions (i.e., the reluctance any one planter might feel to innovate and search for better cane varietals, given fears that others might copy the innovation without incurring any of its costs). By the mid 1860s, sugar elites were convinced that ‘if the sugar industry was to thrive, then [the state] needed to underwrite institutional efforts to discover new canes’ resistant to the borer (Storey 1997, pp. 50–51).

The state assisted the Franco-Mauritians with the borer infestation through research and development initiatives. As with state efforts to ‘regulate’ the island’s labour supply and build new railways, the government’s research and development efforts encouraged the growth of state capacity. At the request of the planters’ Chamber of Agriculture, the colonial government devoted its Royal Botanic Gardens in Pamplemousses (a town northeast of Port Louis) to the collection, husbandry, and dissemination of new cane stocks. Improving the island’s cane stock entailed significant effort to import cane varieties from around the world. The state financed these efforts upfront, recovering their costs in part through the sale of successful cane varietals later. Sales were robust, which underscored the continuing failure of growers to remedy the borer infestation through individualised efforts. By 1875, the Pamplemousses gardens were a recognised international leader in sugarcane research, as the colonial government had substantially improved its scientific capabilities to aid the sugar planters over the prior 10 years (Storey 1997, pp. 44–56).

The planters’ Chamber of Agriculture oversaw much of the day-to-day operations at the Pamplemousses research facility. Over time, the Chamber became so integrated with government officials that the distinction between the two groups blurred. The cooperation between sugar planters and the state helped the Franco-Mauritians obtain a handful of new, useful cane varieties (out of 250 different types tested). The government’s action, directed by the powerful sugar elite, was designed for their benefit. In fact, the records of cane sales from Pamplemousses do not list any small-scale Indo-Mauritian landowners as customers. The new cane varieties were purchased by the Franco-Mauritian elite. Moreover, the state subsidised its research efforts with taxes on the Indo-Mauritians, who ‘lacked access to the political arena, and . . . were not allowed to participate in debates about new sugar cane varieties’ (Storey 1997, pp. 55–67, quote from p. 55). Government assistance helped Mauritian sugar production weather deteriorating global price conditions, as sugar exports remained steady, averaging more than 111,000 tons annually throughout the remainder of the century (Allen 1999, p. 23).

The scientific expertise created at the Royal Botanic Gardens led to new bureaucratisation and the growth of state capacity. In 1909, the Franco-Mauritians’ Chamber of Agriculture officially requested that the government establish a Department of Agriculture to institutionalise its efforts in scientific husbandry. The Department was founded in 1913, and it was a bureaucratic progeny of the nineteenth-century collaboration at Pamplemousses (Storey 1997, pp. 103–108). After the Uba riots in 1937, the Department of Agriculture played a key role in defusing popular discontent. It undertook the ‘Uba Replacement Scheme’ from 1938 to 1944, whereby the department distributed alternative cane varietals to Uba growers and also instructed them in the use of fertiliser to improve their yields. The Department of Agriculture illustrated growing state power, as colonial administrators used it ‘as a means of staving off a social and political revolution’ during hard times (Storey 1997, pp. 150–151).

The expansion of state capacity through research and development, the creation of the island’s judicial machinery, and railway building was evident in growing bureaucratisation
on the island. In the early 1880s, the colonial governor Pope Hennessy began pushing for the ‘Mauritanisation’ of the colonial civil service. Bureaucratic development came quickly to the island, as the civil service grew to 4000 strong by 1900. In all, 93% of bureaucrats were Mauritians and obtained their posts through competitive civil service exams, rather than obtaining posts through personal connections, which had typified an earlier era (Bräutigam 2008, pp. 146–147, Lange 2009, pp. 69–70, Selvon 2001, pp. 296–297). The scientific rationalism that characterised the state’s efforts in Pamplemousses paralleled a more general process of rationalisation underway in the colonial bureaucracy.

Conclusion

Throughout the nineteenth century, Mauritius made impressive strides in state building. The state bureaucracy expanded, and the recruitment and promotion of bureaucratic officials became more meritocratic and rationalised in the Weberian sense. Scholars emphasise the importance of these bureaucratic norms to the Mauritian Miracle in the contemporary era (e.g., Meinsenhelder 1997), and their origins lie in the nineteenth century. The island’s relatively dense transportation infrastructure, which enabled the rapid deployment of state agents, also has its roots in the first century of British rule. So too did the development of the island’s judicial machinery, even though it was initially a tool to coerce labourers and promote the narrow interests of the Franco-Mauritians. Its aims may have been reprehensible, but it nevertheless helped state capacity take root.

Much of what enabled Mauritius to forge an atypical developmental trajectory in the twentieth century germinated from the close political alliance between the island’s coterie of Franco-Mauritian sugar planters and British colonial administrators. Indeed, Bräutigam (2008) notes that haggling between these groups over taxation promoted Mauritian state building. Yet haggling over taxation was but one part of a broader set of issues bound up with promoting the international competitiveness of sugar exports, dating from the initial boom in 1825. Similarly, while emphasising the reforms of the post-war era, Lange (2009, pp. 77–83) notes that Mauritius’s remarkable state building after 1945 would not have been possible without the precursors of the nineteenth century. This article identifies the causal origins of Mauritius’s early state building, in order to understand why the Mauritian state grew considerably stronger during the colonial period, even as most African countries recorded less impressive gains during their colonial eras.

Coalitional politics, especially with respect to exporters, may be at the heart of why Mauritius has succeeded in recent decades while other African countries have foundered. Historically, Mauritian sugar planters and the colonial government worked together to help planters maximise their export opportunities. The by-product of these efforts was the growth of state capacity. By the 1970s, the Franco-Mauritians may have no longer enjoyed the political dominance that they did at the turn of the century, but their earlier collaborations had left a state building legacy which, in part, enabled Mauritius to perform so well. It seems that Mauritian state capacity expanded impressively during the nineteenth century because an export-oriented coalition leader held political sway when the country experienced its first major commodity boom.

Such powerful, export-oriented coalitions have been rare in most African countries. The desire for political stability during the early phases of European colonialism on the continent typically meant that the interests of export-oriented actors were subordinated to those of local village chiefs, the principal political allies of European powers up until World War II. The imperative of political stability may have not only compromised economic development during the early phases of European colonialism (Phillips 1989), but also forestalled state
building such as that which occurred in Mauritius. After World War II, European powers turned to nationalist political elites as their governing partners. These new coalitions spawned urban bias and compromised the vigour of the export economy, even though there was unprecedented demand for Africa’s primary export commodities at the time (Bates 1981). Nationalist elites lacked a direct stake in exporting, and such non-export-oriented coalitions may be the reason commodity booms did not encourage the sort of state building observed in Mauritius. Variation in coalitional politics may go far to explain roots of the Mauritian Miracle, as well as why it has proven difficult to replicate in many other African countries.

Acknowledgements
Thanks to Richard Allen, Bill Storey, and the journal’s anonymous reviewers for valuable suggestions on prior versions of this paper.

Note on contributor
Ryan Saylor is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Tulsa. His principal research examines state building in the non-European world. He is completing a book entitled Windows of opportunity: commodity booms, coalitional politics, and state building in Latin America and Africa.

Notes
1. A recent noteworthy example was the rioting by the island’s marginalised Creole community in 1999, an episode infused with racial and class difference (Guardian, 24 February 1999).
2. An arpent is the landholding measure used in Mauritius. One arpent equals 1.043 acres.
3. Sugar planters were so concerned with securing an adequate labour supply that they revolted when, in 1832, John Jeremie, a known sympathiser to abolition, was appointed as the colony’s advocate-general. Sugar elites mobilised with ‘armed volunteer bodies’ and reduced ‘the lawful government to a mere shadow, and ... had effectually taken military possession of [Port Louis]’ (Jeremie 1835, pp. 26–28). Jeremie was forced back to England, only to be returned again to Mauritius by the Colonial Office. His second tenure was no more auspicious: lacking support from local colonial officials, he resigned his post in 1833.
4. Indians did have legal rights and filed thousands of complaints against their employers during the 1860s in particular. Most complaints were for late or non-payment of wages, something of obvious benefit to planters, whose labour costs then accounted for 30% of the value of sugar exports (Allen 1999, pp. 67–71, Carter 1995, pp. 201–211). Such contractual violations were easy to demonstrate, and judgments overwhelmingly favoured labourers. But Indians secured convictions on more contentious issues like assault at dramatically lower rates (see the data in Carter 1995, p. 211). Planters tended to win such cases.
5. In the early 1860s, the Chamber of Agriculture asked the government to reform mortgage laws and provide a detailed system of land registration in order to facilitate secured lending to planters, as capital was then scarce. The government complied (Lamusse 1964b, p. 360).

References


Rwanda’s Vision 2020 halfway through: what the eye does not see
An Ansoms\textsuperscript{a} and Donatella Rostagno\textsuperscript{b}

\textsuperscript{a}Université Catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium; \textsuperscript{b}EurAc, Brussels, Belgium

This paper considers the progress made in the implementation of Rwanda’s Vision 2020 programme since its launch in 2000. At the halfway point, the overall picture is quite encouraging. Rwanda’s economy is thriving and reported growth figures have been impressive. The country is on track to meet the Millennium Development Goals in the fields of education and health care. Its political leaders have been praised for their quality of technocratic governance and their proactive approach to creating an attractive business climate. However, some indicators remain problematic. This paper argues that the current strategy – one of maximum growth at any cost – is counterproductive to the objective of achieving the greatest possible poverty reduction. Strong economic growth, concentrated in the hands of a small elite, results in a highly skewed developmental path with limited trickle-down potential. A possible alternative lies in an exploration of a broad-based inclusive growth model founded on existing strengths and the notion of capacity building among rural small-scale farmers. Striving for a more inclusive concept of growth would appear to be crucial not only for successful poverty reduction, but also with a view to promoting long-term stability and peace in Rwanda.

Keywords: Rwanda; poverty; growth; development policy


Mots-clés: Rwanda ; pauvreté ; croissance ; politiques de développement

\textsuperscript{*}Corresponding author. Email: an.ansoms@uclouvain.be

ISSN 0305-6244 print/ISSN 1740-1720 online
© 2012 ROAPE Publications Ltd
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2012.710836
http://www.tandfonline.com
Introduction

‘How do Rwandans envisage their future? What kind of society do they want to become? What are the transformations needed to emerge from a deeply unsatisfactory social and economic situation?’ These are the promising opening words of the Rwandan Vision 2020 document, which was finalised in July 2000 (Government of Rwanda (GOR) 2000). The text outlines the main ambitions of the Rwandan government and the strategic pillars for achieving the envisaged objectives. Halfway through the implementation of the programme, the question that logically comes to mind is whether Rwanda is ‘on track’ to realise its ambitions.

At first glance, the overall picture seems quite promising. In terms of macroeconomic stability, Rwanda has performed extremely well. Indeed, as noted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), ‘growth has averaged about 8 percent a year’ over the last decade, which is in line with the general goal of Vision 2020 (IMF 2011a). There has been a slowdown in recent years in consequence of the global financial crisis, but Rwanda seems to be recovering well, as growth for 2010 was 7.5% (IMF 2011b), and is estimated at 8.8% for 2011 (IMF 2011c). The Rwandan case is also quite encouraging in terms of the UN’s Millennium Development Goals. In 2007, a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report asserted: ‘[A]chieving the Millennium Development Goals in Rwanda is possible, even with reasonable assumptions of economic growth and development assistance. Rwanda presents all the necessary fundamental attributes to showcase the potential of the new Post-Millennium Declaration’ (UNDP 2007, p. 1). Rwanda has, furthermore, received wide praise for its effective technocratic governance. The 2010 World Bank’s Doing Business report notes that ‘for the first time a Sub-Saharan African economy, Rwanda, led the world in Doing Business reforms’. It commended the Rwandan government for its overhaul of commercial laws, its facilitation of access to credit, and its measures aimed at speeding up trade and property registration (World Bank 2010). The latest good news is the spectacular decrease in poverty rates of nearly 12% that the government of Rwanda reported for the period 2005/6–2010/11 (GOR 2012).

So can we speak of a ‘new Rwanda’, a ‘Rwandan renaissance’? It would certainly appear so at first glance. However, on closer scrutiny, it becomes apparent that there are two sides to the story. Indeed, despite its positive assessment of achievements in the fields of education and health, the UNDP feels Rwanda is unlikely to reach the goal of eradicating extreme poverty by 2015 (UNDP 2010). Strong economic growth is concentrated in the hands of a small elite, resulting in a highly skewed developmental path. The majority of smallholder farmers appear not to fit into the government’s vision of a ‘modern Rwanda’. Moreover, the country remains highly dependent upon aid, while the evolution of political governance indicators is also less promising. Each of these aspects requires more in-depth analysis.

The present paper therefore examines whether Rwanda is on track to meet the ambitions formulated in its Vision 2020 document as elaborated in 2000. First, it provides a general assessment of evolutions in poverty, inequality, and international aid. Then the focus shifts to the six pillars of the Vision 2020 programme: (1) promoting good governance and a capable state; (2) investing in human resource development and a knowledge-based economy; (3) stimulating a private-sector-led economy; (4) investing in infrastructure development; (5) promoting productive and market-oriented agriculture; and (6) engaging in regional and international economic integration (GOR 2000). To conclude, the paper provides an overall critical assessment of the Rwandan development model and puts forward some alternative strategies towards more inclusive development.
Evolutions in poverty, inequality, and aid dependency

Before considering each of the Vision 2020 objectives in detail, this section provides a general outline of evolutions in poverty, inequality and international aid. The Rwandan economy is highly dependent upon aid money (Zorbas 2011). Although the relative dependency of the Rwandan government’s functioning on financial aid has decreased from 85% in 2000 to 45% in 2010 (Action Aid 2011), the budget at its disposal for investment in development initiatives has increased substantially with the rise in aid allocated to budget support (50% rise between 2007 and 2010). Overall, the total amount of net official development assistance and official aid grew by over 45% between 2006 and 2009 (World Bank 2011). These aid flows are generally considered to be important for creating a positive economic climate (Marysse et al. 2007).

On the whole, the Rwandan government has performed excellently in respect of information and communication management for the purpose of ensuring the continuity of aid flows. The government itself points to its efficient allocation of aid:

> We have shown donors that when we are in the driving seat – deciding how to allocate aid money ourselves – we spend donor money more effectively. Donors have responded to the results we have delivered by giving us more and more say over how we use their aid.
> (Ronald Knusi, Director of the External Finance Unit in the Finance Ministry, quoted in Action Aid 2011)

However, other factors may be at play here. Gready, for example, points to the fact that ‘donors have had to navigate a guilt complex that is both felt by the international community and manipulated by the Rwandan government’ (Gready 2010, p. 638). Reyntjens (2011a) and Pottier (2002) feel this largely explains why Rwanda has been able to secure continued donor support despite its direct involvement in the Great Lakes regional conflict. Next to the phenomenon of ‘genocide guilt’, Zorbas (2011, p. 104) identifies three other major contributing factors to the continued donor support: the ‘government’s donor-friendly language’, the ‘desire for African success stories’, and the ‘support for the RPF [Rwandan Patriotic Front, the ruling party in Rwanda] across the political spectrum in the United Kingdom and United States’ (the two major donors besides the World Bank and the European Commission).

Some donors (or influential actors within donor countries) have adopted more critical attitudes, including France, where the Bruguier report indicted Paul Kagame of the murder of President Habyarimana, and Spain, where judge Merelles issued arrest warrants against RPF officers for genocide, crimes against humanity and acts of terrorism committed in the 1990s (Reyntjens 2011a). When touching upon such taboo topics, donors are tackled aggressively by the Rwandan government. Other donors have raised criticism at specific occasions, for example in response to Rwanda’s involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 2004 and following a United Nations (UN) report documenting Rwandan support to the Nkunda militia in eastern DRC (Zorbas 2011). Most recently (summer 2012), donors such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and the Netherlands have held back or withdrew (part of) their aid budget in reaction to the UN’s accusation of Rwanda’s support to renewed rebel activity in eastern DRC. Other donors have raised concerns about controversial policies pursued by the Rwandan government in relation to ‘the handling of refugees, resettlement, justice, elections and regional security’ (Hayman, 2007, p. 2).

However, the lack of consensus and coordinated action amongst donor nations has resulted in altogether mixed messages, allowing the Rwandan authorities to push through their own vision and priorities. ‘A strong discourse of national unity and moral authority
[serves to demonstrate that the Rwandan government] will not compromise on certain core objectives regardless of international pressures' (Hayman 2007, p. 20). At the same time, the Rwandan government has enhanced its control over donor inputs through a ‘traffic light system’ that scores donors on the degree to which they provide budget support and on their use of the government’s own financial systems. While this may indeed reduce duplication and avoid certain transaction costs (Action Aid 2011), it also enhances the government’s control over the allocation of aid money and loosens the ties of donors with projects on the ground. This partly explains why donors’ criticism – if at all present – focuses mainly on macro-level issues that are apparent from an office in Kigali, while very little concern is raised over the situation at the local level.

That very situation on the ground is often assessed on the basis of national poverty statistics. As such, trends seemed to be worrying. Whereas the proportion of people living below the national poverty line decreased from 59% to 57% between 2000/1 and 2005/6 (GOR 2012), the absolute number of poor individuals increased by 560,000, while the number living in extreme poverty grew by 190,000. Almost 90% of these additional poor were living in rural settings (GOR 2006). However, on 7 February 2012, the Rwandan government launched the results of its third Household Living Conditions Survey. The evolution since 2005/6 seems to be spectacular: poverty decreased by 11.8%. Moreover, this seems to be mainly explained by improved living conditions in rural settings. In the Northern Province, poverty decreased by a spectacular 17.7%. And in the Southern Province – the only province with an increase in poverty between 2000/1 and 2005/6 – poverty decreased by a still spectacular 10.2% (GOR 2012).

Next to poverty, rising inequality seemed to be a major problem. In the mid 1980s, Rwanda qualified as a low-inequality country, with a Gini coefficient of 0.29. Due to a lack of nationally representative data, no Gini coefficient is available for the period between 1985 and 2000. However, by 2000/1, the Gini coefficient had risen substantially to 0.51, well above the UNDP Gini ‘alarm boundary’ of 0.40, and corresponding to a situation where the richest 20% enjoyed the same consumption level as the poorest 80%. Inequality continued to increase quickly over the 2001 to 2006 period, as the Gini coefficient soared to a problematic 0.52 (2005/6), implying that Rwanda ranked as a country with extremely high inequality. However, recent data show an improvement, with inequality supposedly decreased to a Gini coefficient of 0.49 in 2010/11 (GOR 2012).

These recent trends are extremely surprising. They are explained by the Rwandan government as being the result of improved agriculture production, agribusiness, farm wage employment, increase in non-farm wages, income transfers, slowing population growth, and improvement of infrastructure (roads, electricity and markets) (GOR 2012). Below, however, we will illustrate that accomplishments in terms of small-scale farmers’ participation in agricultural production, realisations in terms of employment creation for non-skilled labourers, and impacts of ‘infrastructure-improving policies’, are highly questionable from the perspectives of local rural people. In addition, we will shed light on achievements and challenges in terms of governance, private-sector involvement, human resource development, and regional integration.

**Objectives and achievements of Vision 2020**

The overall aim of Vision 2020 was to ‘transform Rwanda into a middle-income country by the year 2020’ (GOR 2000, p. 9). To achieve this objective, it was specified that gross domestic product (GDP) had to grow annually by 8% in order to halve the proportion of people living in poverty (from 64% to 30%). On this basis, Rwanda outlined its first Poverty
reduction strategy paper (PRSP) in 2001 (GOR 2002), which was implemented between 2002 and 2005. In early 2006, the Rwandan government started to elaborate a follow-up PRSP policy, which became known as the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS), finalised in 2007 and to be implemented between 2008 and 2012 (GOR 2007). The next sections provide an assessment of the major achievements and shortcomings of Rwanda’s development path over the past decade.

Good governance and a capable state (Pillar 1)

When evaluating governance, due account must be taken of two key components: technocratic governance, linked to public management and control of corruption; and political governance, related to the space for democratic dialogue and freedom of expression. In its Vision 2020 document, the Rwandan government clearly emphasises the technocratic governance aspect, focusing on the importance of a capable state that stimulates economic development. However, it also asserts that good governance, next to ‘accountability, transparency and efficiency in deploying scarce resources’, must entail ‘a State respectful of democratic structures and processes and committed to the rule of law and the protection of human rights in particular’ (GOR 2000, p. 12).

As indicated above, Rwanda has done well in the domain of technocratic governance. It ranked 67th out of 143 countries in the Doing business report for 2010 and was lauded as the world’s top reformer (World Bank 2010). The 2010 World Bank governance indicators (World Bank 2011) reflect a similar trend. Rwanda figures among the top 30% best-performing countries in terms of control of corruption, and more than 50% of all countries perform worse than Rwanda in terms of government effectiveness, which measures the competence of public service delivery and state bureaucracy. Both indicators have, moreover, shown considerable improvement since 2005. This is also the case for the rule-of-law indicator, an index for the efficiency and independence of police and justice, the quality of contract enforcement, and crime (in 2010, Rwanda’s performance in this field was on a par with China’s). The evolution in terms of regulatory quality – an indicator measuring the presence, absence and impact of market-unfriendly policies – has been more volatile, but has been improving steadily since 2007. However, whereas it may have become easier for large-scale investors to do business, small-scale actors operating in the informal sector often face multiple constraints (such as environmental rules, formal requirements, excessive taxation).
that prevent them from engaging in trade and off-farm business (Gökgür 2011, Ansoms and Murison 2011). It seems that the business-facilitating policies – inspired by Vision 2020 – are mostly oriented towards the operation of large-scale capital-intensive projects. In their attempt to formalise the informal sector, those same policies have often blocked or even counteracted local-level investment in small-scale initiatives (see below).

When considering political governance, several problems can be identified. It is clear that democratic freedom is far from achieved in Rwanda. In terms of voice and accountability – related to civic and political liberties – Rwanda figures among the 10% worst-performing countries, and there has been no marked improvement since 1996 (World Bank 2011). The 2003 national and parliamentary elections, the 2006 local elections, the 2008 parliamentary elections and the 2010 presidential elections were all marred by the discrediting and sabotaging of opposition candidates, the manipulation of electoral lists, and the intimidation of voters to ensure that the RPF’s control over the political system would be enhanced (Longman 2011). The previously cited 2007 UNDP report reflects on the difficult trade-offs with democracy in the long term, and short-term concerns of political stability and national unity. However, the tightening control of the RPF-led regime and the resulting lack of voice and accountability might also affect political stability in the medium or even short term. Hence, it seems doubtful that the World Bank’s political stability governance indicator improved between 2010 and 2011 after stagnating in 2008 and 2009.

A further cause for concern about future stability is the ambiguous outcome of the justice and reconciliation process. So-called Gacaca courts were put forward as an alternative to the conventional justice system, which failed to deal with the numerous genocide suspects. Gacaca are popular courts whose jurisdiction is based on a combination of customary approaches to conflict resolution and the conventional legal system. Overall, however, the Gacaca experiment has been found to have yielded ambiguous results (for some recent sources, see Ingelaere 2009, Rettig 2008). In addition, nationally and internationally, a taboo appears to rest on the consideration of RPF war crimes. This is illustrated by the government’s successful attempts to manipulate the international justice mechanism of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) so that it would turn a blind eye to alleged RPF atrocities (Peskin 2011). The RPF’s impunity has seriously hampered the reconciliation process. Moreover, initiatives to reinforce reconciliation, such as the ingando re-education camps for ex-prisoners (see Thomson 2011), the rituals for the ‘memorisation’ of the genocide (see Meierhenrich 2011), and the proscription of ethnicity in combination with the promotion of a meta-narrative reinforcing the idea of a collective identity (see Eltringham 2011, McLean Hilker 2011) have been used to tighten social control on public life. Instead of contributing meaningfully to national unity and reconciliation, they have repressed dissident voices, which holds a danger of radicalisation and the incitement of violence.

The Rwandan Patriotic Front scored overwhelming victories in the legislative elections of 2008 and the presidential elections of August 2010. In fact, there has not been an effective and legally registered political opposition in Rwanda for years (on oppositional party bans before 2010, see Niesen 2010). In the run-up to the 2010 elections, opposition parties were formed, but none were given permission to register and take part in the electoral process. Members of these parties were intimidated and in some cases attacked or arrested (Longman 2011). Since the elections, the attacks and pressure on opposition parties have continued, in spite of Paul Kagame’s re-election as head of state with 93% of the vote (Reyntjens 2011a). An often-used tool to silence dissident voices is to accuse them of ‘ethnic divisionism’ and ‘genocide ideology’, both of which are punishable under the 2003 revised constitution (Desrosiers and Thomson 2011, Waldorf 2011) and a 2008 law prescribing sentences of between 10 and 50 years (Waldorf 2011).
There is also very little room for dissent at the level of civil society. In fact, ‘the current regime’s preferred modus operandi for civil society remains service delivery and gap filling’ (Gready 2010, p. 641, see also Longman 2011). Consultation and participation of civil society in policy processes mostly takes the form of sharing information that should be passed on to local levels (Gready 2010). Moreover, the Rwandan government exerts extensive control over the management, finances and projects of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and it also uses co-opted umbrella structures to keep a handle on smaller organisations (Gready 2011). Although there can be some room for active involvement in policy processes, this is usually granted on an ad-hoc basis and through personalised networks (Gready 2010). There is however no channel for open and organised dissent against government policies. Organisations and individuals who step out of line are expelled or, in the case of international NGOs, immobilised. Domestic dissident voices are neutralised through co-optation or they are intimidated, imprisoned, forced into exile, and in some instances even eliminated (Longman 2011, Reyntjens 2011a). The exclusion of the political opposition from the country’s public life and the ruling party’s attempts to keep a grip on Rwandan society, in combination with a total lack of press freedom (Longman 2011, Reyntjens 2011a, Reyntjens 2011b), could lead to a further polarisation and radicalisation of a large section of that society, as ‘it prevents the public from expressing its interests through productive, peaceful political means’ (Longman 2011, p. 27). Such a scenario would undermine what are generally considered to have been encouraging achievements by Rwanda in the field of socio-economic development.

In fact, democracy and a democratic culture is narrowed down to ‘the active involvement of citizens at all levels of governance and in government initiatives’ (Desrosiers and Thomson 2011, p. 445). One of the key aspects in the domain of governance is therefore the decentralisation policy (2003) that the Rwandan government has been implementing in recent years. In 2006, it adopted a new and simplified administrative structure comprised of four provinces and Kigali City (rather than 12 provinces), 30 districts, 416 sectors, and 2148 cells. The Rwandan government sees a key role for authorities at decentralised levels (most importantly the district and sector-level authorities) in the implementation of its strategies. Overall, the decentralisation policy is presented as a way to ensure ‘participation at the grassroots level, whereby local communities will be empowered in the decision making process’ (GOR 2000, p. 12).

In practice, however, ‘the chain of accountability goes upwards towards higher authorities and not downwards towards the population’ (Ingelaere 2010b, pp. 288–289). Ingelaere shows how key local authorities are appointed rather than elected. Moreover, decentralised authorities are bound to reach targets specified in public performance contracts (imihi-go) that set the local-level objectives in line with national priorities. These contracts have to be rigidly implemented and function as de facto mechanisms to control the local level (Ingelaere 2010b, Ansoms 2009a). The achievements are closely monitored and evaluated by the Rwandan government at all administrative levels. Interestingly, this rigid and target-driven policy implementation is appreciated by international donors in their aid effectiveness assessments. However, performance targets may be unrealistic (Holvoet and Rombouts 2008); they may be totally unsuitable within a particular local context (Ansoms and Murison 2011);8 or policies may be enforced without giving consideration to local needs (Ansoms 2009a).

Vision 2020 is supposedly based on a strong decentralisation process. Ten years on, the institutions have indeed been decentralised, yet overall power lies even more with the central authorities. In reality, then, decentralisation has been mainly a top-down process and it has not allowed for a bottom-up translation of the local needs to the national level (Ingelaere 2010b).
A private-sector-led economy (Pillar 3)

Another pillar of Vision 2020 consists in private-sector-led development, more specifically through the emergence of a local business class. The principal aim is to strongly involve the private sector in the growth process and to assign it a key role in the poverty reduction policy framework. Between 2006 and 2011, private investment indeed grew to over 12% of GDP, a six-fold rise compared to a decade ago (IMF 2011a). However, a recent consultancy report concludes that there is a high economic concentration in the modern formal sector. First and foremost, a considerable part of the formal sector is dominated by an extensive portfolio of public enterprises in the hands of the Rwandan government. Moreover, that same government has indirect stakes in three big holding companies. Second, market concentration and highly imperfect capital markets result in a situation where ‘competition is effectively limited to larger firms and to new conglomerates already in operation and expanding’ (Goükür 2011, p. 8). Small players, on the other hand, are confronted with tax regulations that disproportionately favour their larger competitors, which impedes the former’s entry into the market (Goükür 2011).

With such a high degree of economic concentration, the extent to which private capital injection into the Rwandan economy has contributed to poverty reduction is debatable. Vision 2020 highlights the ‘pivotal role’ of the private sector in creating non-farm employment and it puts forward the goal of an additional 1.4 million jobs outside agriculture. Employment creation by formally registered companies was however limited to about 8810 jobs per year between 2006 and 2010, far less than the 120,000 to 125,000 jobs (World Bank estimates) needed to absorb a growing labour force (Goükür 2011). ‘This suggests that the bulk of the new entrants will most likely be absorbed into the informal sector – micro and non-farm household enterprises’ (Goükür 2011, p. 9).

There is indeed a highly fragmented and strongly competitive informal sector, with 115,279 informal microenterprises and 615,108 non-farm household enterprises. However, despite this sector’s capacity to absorb labour force, the aforementioned report points to the fact that its recent growth has been ‘far from poverty reducing’. Jobs created in this sector are often insecure and poorly paid. Moreover, government policies to respond to the challenges imposed upon this sector are largely absent (Goükür 2011). Worse still, there are several examples of regulation that impedes local actors’ ability to engage in small-scale informal activities. Sommers (2012), for example, illustrates how a prohibition on street vending, defined as ‘unorganised commerce’, impacts negatively on the livelihoods of youth in Kigali. He notes how ‘what has ensued is a kind of economic cat and mouse involving people trying to hawk goods without getting caught and government officials on the lookout for precisely this sort of economic behavior’ (Sommers 2012, p. 36). The recent prohibition on cycling on asphalted roads (reported by Syfia Grands Lacs in October 2011) is another example of how regulation can be detrimental to the ability of local-level traders to reach markets, and Ansoms and Murison (2012a) discuss the case of traditional brick and tile-firing to illustrate how government regulation banned one of the most important labour-absorbing off-farm income-generating activities in rural Rwanda. Goükür suggests that it is necessary to ‘change the mindset of the tax authorities’, given that ‘taxing [small-scale household enterprises] or forcing them to comply with government regulation would likely put them out of business with dire economic and social consequences for their employees and their proprietors including their families and even relatives’ (Goükür 2011, p. 27).

In the early years of the new millennium, ambitions for private capital investment were primarily directed at the service sector. The first Rwandan PRSP actually contended that there was a window of opportunity ‘to leap-frog the stage of industrialisation and transform [Rwanda’s] subsistence economy into a service-sector driven, high value-added
information and knowledge-based economy that can compete on the global market' (GOR 2002, p. 69). Indeed, currently over 93% of all formal businesses focus on commerce and are thus active in the service sector. Also in the informal sector, the bulk of micro- and household enterprises are active in trading and commerce (Gökgür 2011).

With time, however, policymakers have become increasingly aware of the small likelihood of a knowledge-based service sector absorbing a massive unskilled labour force previously employed in agriculture. Hence, the Rwandan government has upgraded the role of the primary sector and is increasingly focusing on the role that the private sector can play in a productive and market-oriented agriculture. Currently, less than 1% of all formal business is concentrated in farming, although this proportion is expected to grow. However, caution is called for in the implementation of policies aimed at facilitating large-scale private investors’ involvement in agricultural activities, given that the latter must inevitably compete over land with small-scale peasants (see below). Ansoms (2009b), for example, illustrates how a private-capital injection in the sugarcane business had a net negative impact on employment. Despite the fact that the investor cited ‘job creation’ as a major benefit of the project, the jobs in question were badly paid and highly insecure. Moreover, the concession on more than 3000 hectares of marshland dispossessed thousands of households and destroyed (part of) their income-generating strategies. The negative effect of the latter more than offset the positive impact of the project as a whole. On this basis, one could argue that, overall, much more attention needs to be paid to the social costs of private-capital initiatives and to whether or not they outweigh the benefits.

**Productive and market-oriented agriculture (Pillar 5)**

As such, the renewed attention of Rwandan policymakers to the agricultural sector is to be applauded. However, all depends on how the ambition of agriculture-led growth is put into practice. The Strategic Plan for the Transformation of Agriculture (SPAT) outlines an operational framework for agricultural sector development within the EDPRS. The document focuses on agricultural modernisation, intensification, professionalisation and enterprise development (GOR 2004a). The government has worked out policies for promoting monocropping and regional crop specialisation, land registration and the consolidation of plots (see also below), as well as market-orientation in all production activities. These policies are inspired by a concern for improving efficiency and realising economies of scale in food production, with the ultimate goal of contributing to poverty reduction.

However, problems arise at two levels. First of all, goals are set in the absence of any plans for a realistic transition. Farmers are thus expected to adapt overnight to new rules, new targets and new policy demands. In fieldwork (Ansoms and Murison 2011), one of the authors came across examples where farmers were obliged from one day to the next to adopt certain crop types, certain seeds, certain modes of organisation (particularly in swampland areas). But regardless of the transition challenge, this type of growth model in any case appears to be inherently flawed: the proposed modernisation does not match with the priorities and needs of smallholder farmers. Indeed, the SPAT strategies seem to be tailored to large private investors whose capital-intensive farm structure and risk-coping abilities allow them to invest in new high-potential production systems. However, the rural sector is predominantly populated by ‘small family farms (over 90% of all production units) ... with an average of less than one hectare in size, integrating polyculture – animal production systems’ (GOR 2004a, p. 10).

Access to such modernised and enhanced techniques is not self-evident for risk-averse small peasants (Ansoms 2010). Cropping techniques based on monoculture, for example,
pose significant risks to their fragile livelihoods. Moreover, cultivating one or just a few crops in a given region during a given season can hold a real danger of food insecurity. Furthermore, while farmers are obliged to concentrate on particular crops, their bargaining power on local markets – with a view to generating an adequate monetary income through trade – is generally restricted. Indeed, local markets are poorly integrated, which results in low prices for what is locally produced and high prices for crops that are relatively scarce. Joining forces in co-operatives does not necessarily offer a solution to smallholders, as the management structure of such organisations is very often out of their hands and instances of blatant corruption have been documented (Ansoms and Murison 2012b, Ansoms and Murison 2011). Moreover, smallholders are increasingly confronted with the insertion of large modern factories owned by national and international private investors (see below). Such installations are often presented as showcase projects of modern agriculture and they tend to receive considerable subsidies and governmental support. In comparison to the capital-rich and influential actors involved, smallholders have very little or no bargaining power in price negotiations (Ansoms and Murison 2012b).

The preference of policymakers for large-scale agriculture with a strong role for private investors is not self-evident, for two reasons. First, there is an overall inverse relationship between farm size and land productivity (Ansoms et al. 2008). While this should not be automatically interpreted as a reflection of small-scale farmers’ greater efficiency, it is indicative of the significance of land to small-scale actors, who strive to make the best possible use of every available acre. Second, it remains unclear why and to what extent the involvement of the private sector in agricultural growth should result in a massive trickle-down effect to the poorer strata of society. After all, the profits generated through such policies remain firmly in the hands of a limited group and do not translate directly into either agricultural or non-agricultural investment that massively absorbs a growing group of unskilled labourers (Ansoms 2008).

It is the aim of Vision 2020 to reduce the proportion of people whose livelihood depends on agriculture to 50% of the population by the year 2020. And, indeed, it seems likely that the current rural policies are pushing smallholders out of the agricultural sector. This will de facto decrease the number employed in farming. At the same time, however, it will create a group of unemployed and often unskilled workers who are unlikely to be absorbed by other sectors of the economy. In a country where the livelihood of over 80% of the population depends on agriculture and where land and natural resources are scarce, there is a strong need for unequivocal strategies to accompany the transition from agriculture to other economic activities. However, such an approach should be implemented in a realistic way, with a strong role for smallholder and labour-intensive agriculture on the one hand and investment in capacity building for labour-intensive non-farm sectors on the other. The development of training centres focusing on non-agricultural artisanal specialisations should be made a priority, in combination with a facilitation of local-level investment in small-scale industries by actors operating within the informal economy.

3.4. **Infrastructure development (Pillar 4)**

As outlined in the Vision 2020 document, ‘the rehabilitation and development of infrastructure is a crucial aspect in lowering the costs of doing business in Rwanda’ (GOR 2000, p. 15). Indeed, in the field of infrastructure development, the Rwandan government seems to have opted for projects offering a potential for attracting private entrepreneurs, though quite often at the expense of more deprived population groups.

One of the objectives put forward in Vision 2020 is the elaboration of a ‘modern land law providing security of tenure and freedom of exchange’. The land law, which was
adopted in 2005 after a lengthy process of drafting and negotiation, seeks to formalise land rights through official titling. Although customary land rights are recognised as a basis for acquiring official titles, registration of ownership has been made compulsory, and the law states that formal legal procedures are to be established for the acquisition and leasing of land (Article 26). It was the Rwandan government’s hope that the security of official land titles would encourage more investment in land conservation and quality improvements (GOR 2004b). However, in line with the new law, official titles can only be acquired through a formal procedure of registration with proof in the form of a certificate. People have to pay for a registration certificate for each of their parcels. In this sense, financially more privileged individuals clearly enjoy an advantage, as they are able to rely more readily on this additional tool for claiming land – particularly in the case of contested land rights. Moreover, Article 20 of the law prohibits the division of land parcels of one hectare or less. This rule, if implemented, is a major constraint for the majority of peasant households, given that average landholdings are only 0.71 hectares (2000 figures; Jayne et al. 2003). The law does not set maximum sizes for landholdings. The ceiling of 50 hectares, which had been included in an earlier draft of the new land law, was omitted from the approved version. Hence, the land law provides extensive opportunities for large-scale investors and enhances their bargaining power in the field of land acquisition.

In addition to introducing changes to the management of agricultural land, the Rwandan government also strives to control how farmers live. According to Rwandan tradition, people do not group together in clearly identifiable villages, but live scattered in the hills. Young men must traditionally ask their fathers for part of the family’s land in order to build their own homes, a crucial condition for marriage and the transition to adulthood (De Lame 2005). Subsequently, male heads may – in accordance with their needs and financial resources – expand and improve their homes as they see fit. However, this pattern of scattered living does not tie in with the government’s vision of the spatial organisation of a modern state. Its aim is to rehouse the rural population in delimited settlements by 2020 (GOR 2000). The EDPRS put forward the target of constructing an additional 5700 imidugudu sites (grouped settlements) by 2012 to complement the 5486 already in existence (GOR 2007).

This ‘villagisation’ approach was introduced in the aftermath of the war for the purpose of resettling refugee households. Subsequently – particularly in the eastern part of the country – it was used to forcefully rehouse people. Families were made to burn their houses and move, often to dwellings or shelters of an inferior quality. Several authors have analysed the perverse effect of this policy upon the livelihoods and social relations at the local level (Newbury 2011, Leegwater 2011, Human Rights Watch 2001, Van Hoyweghen 1999). The more recent version of the centralisation approach is less strict: only newly established households are required to settle at specified sites within centralised communities. However, land prices and construction costs at such sites are often prohibitively expensive for rural youth. As noted by Sommers and Uvin (2011, p. 3): ‘regulating the standard size of an umudugudu house helps make the quest toward completing a house virtually impossible for nearly all poor male youth in rural Rwanda’. Many young men have no choice but to live with their parents, so that they are effectively unable to make the transition to adulthood. This phenomenon is closely connected with the increasing incidence of unmarried young mothers, resulting in growing social exclusion and marginalisation (Ansoms and Murison 2011).

A similar evolution has unfolded in the capital city. The population of Kigali quadrupled to over 923,000 people between the early 1990s and 2006. After 1994, the city was confronted with a massive return of refugees who had lived in neighbouring countries for decades or even generations. Moreover, Kigali has attracted a considerable influx of rural migrants in search of a livelihood. These new residents often settle in small, poor-quality
houses or makeshift dwellings. In an attempt to get a grip on urban land-use practices, the Rwandan government has, over the years, implemented several urbanisation policies. In Vision 2020 it already expressed the ambition to improve its handling of the rapid and non-coordinated urbanisation trend. The 2006 EDPRS document goes into greater detail regarding the reorganisation of the urban living space: ‘These sites and zones selected will be surveyed, demarcated and sub-divided into building plots. These sites and zones will be provided with relevant infrastructural services. The process will involve the clearance and upgrading of unplanned urban areas. Partnerships between government and the Private Sector will be of essence’ (GOR 2007, p. 60). However, as demonstrated by Durant Lasserve, this policy has resulted in many urban dwellings being labelled ‘illegal’ for not meeting the prevailing building standards. In fact, the required standards for legal housing within the urban perimeter of Kigali are unattainable for 75% to 80% of all households (Durant-Lasserve 2006). Moreover, residents are also chased away to make room for public infrastructure projects or for large-scale developments by private investors. There are several neighbourhoods in Kigali where people have already been evicted (Nyarutarama), or are either in the process of being evicted (Gacuriro, Kiyovu – near Muhima, Rugando – Kimihurura) or about to enter that process (Muhima, Kagugu, Kmicanga) (Ansoms and Murison 2011).

**Human resources development and a knowledge-based economy (Pillar 2)**

Vision 2020 unequivocally puts forward the goal of investing in education and public health. The first PRSP likewise focused mainly on education and the health sector, and significant progress was indeed made. In the realm of public health, the infant mortality rate decreased from 106 to 59 infants per 1000 births between 2000 and 2010. The maternal mortality rate was halved from 1100 to 540 cases per 100,000 births between 2000 and 2008. In both instances, the figures attained surpassed the 2010 objectives formulated in Vision 2020. HIV/AIDS prevalence declined from 3.8% to 2.9% in 2007. Rwanda invested in malaria prevention, so that by 2008/09 some 56% of all children under five were sleeping under mosquito nets, compared to just 4% in 2000 (for the relevant data sources, see the Table 2 in Appendix 1). Rwandan policymakers also focused heavily on expanding the insurance system: for a fee of 1000 Rwandan francs (RWF), individuals could take out coverage against pregnancy or illness under the mutuelle system. More recently, however, the government has decided to increase the fee to RWF3000 per person for most people living in rural settings (Ansoms and Murison 2011). This will no doubt make it financially problematic for a large majority of the rural population to take out insurance.

The Rwandan government has also invested massively in education. With the introduction of free and compulsory primary education, the net enrolment rate increased from 75% (2001) to 96% (2008). On the other hand, the pupil-to-teacher ratio in primary schools rose concurrently from 54 to 68, with a possibly negative impact on the quality of education. Nonetheless, the primary completion rate rose from 22% in 2000 to 54% in 2008 and, according to the minister of education, it subsequently continued to rise to 78% by 2010. Gross enrolment rates in secondary education improved from 11% (2000) to 27% (2009); and gross tertiary enrolment increased from 1.4% (2000) to 4.8% (2008) (for data sources, see Table 2 in Appendix 1). It is however unclear to what extent the sudden switch from French (and Kinyarwanda) to English as a classroom language has impacted on quality. After all, many teachers barely speak English. Moreover, the government’s recent reform (October 2010) of the system of study loans to students in tertiary education has affected some 24,000 students, or 70% of beneficiaries (EurAc 2011, p. 4). Students are now categorised as well-off, quite well-off, quite poor, poor, or vulnerable.
Study loans are available only to students belonging to the latter category. In reality, this implies that a large proportion of students from middle-class and poor households who are not classified as vulnerable are pushed out of the tertiary education system, since the cost of education is beyond the disposable resources of these households. Hence, even more than in the past, tertiary education risks becoming a privilege of the elite. Equally importantly, it remains to be seen what progress can be made in improving the quality and accessibility of technical training. Access to vocational and training centres may offer a different window of opportunity to young people who would otherwise be restricted to daily searching for non-skilled work, primarily in the agricultural sector.

The reality of young unskilled and unemployed youth is most probably one of the most pressing challenges facing Rwanda in the near future. Sommers (2012) observes how the requirements for youth to make the transition to manhood (having access to an income, land and a house, and getting married) are becoming increasingly hard to meet for a growing group of young men. Faced with such self-perceived failure, many young males feel a need to move away from their familiar environment and to try their luck elsewhere. Moreover, ‘delayed adulthood for men means delayed adulthood for women. Marriage and giving birth to children are prerequisites of socially acceptable womanhood’ (Sommers and Uvin 2011, p. 3). Girls – unable to find a suitable ‘adult’ partner – may become pregnant without being married, with all the socially detrimental consequences that this entails. Uprooted youth who are ‘stuck’ (see the title of Sommers’s book 2012) in their childhood may feel increasingly frustrated by the contrast between their self-perceived personal failure and the government-fed image of Rwanda as a development success story.

**Regional and international economic integration (Pillar 6)**

In terms of economic integration, Rwanda focuses most intensely upon its immediate neighbours. Rwanda joined the East African Community (EAC) on 1 July 2007. Other member countries are Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Burundi. The EAC aims to ‘widen and deepen economic, political, social and cultural integration’ through ‘increased competitiveness, value added production, trade and investment’ (East African Community 2006). One of its strategies is to integrate all member states into a customs union. In this way, the EAC could provide Rwanda with access to the sea. At the same time, however, Rwanda’s relatively weak economic position in comparison to the other EAC members could have negative consequences: it remains to be seen whether the Rwandan economy is competitive enough for it to be able to compete with its neighbours.

Rwanda’s focus on the EAC seems to have dampened its interest in the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries (CEPGL). The CEPGL was originally founded in 1976 to promote economic integration between the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi. In 1994, the community collapsed in consequence of the continuous violence in the region. Rwanda’s active involvement in the regional wars (see Reyntjens 2009) and its role in causing human suffering in eastern DRC, as documented in a United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) report (2010) that is contested by the Rwandan government, was obviously not conducive to building constructive economic partnerships between the countries of the Great Lakes region. In 2008, the CEPGL was revived, but it has hitherto failed to yield truly concrete results. An economic rapprochement between the aforementioned countries could represent a concrete step towards more constructive relationships.

However, economic integration alone will not suffice to solve the problem of regional instability. The states concerned are involved in a highly complex regional process characterised by divisions and conflicts at the national level which nonetheless assume a cross-
Any sustainable solution must therefore be based on a transnational approach whereby political integration is attributed a vital role. In this respect, the creation of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR, established in 2003 under the auspices of the UN and encompassing 11 countries) has played a constructive role in forging regional relations.

One consequence of Rwanda’s improved diplomatic relations with its neighbour, the Democratic Republic of Congo, was its willingness to participate in joint military operations against the Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR) in eastern DRC, Kimya I and Kimya II. Although the rapprochement was extremely important and necessary under the Nairobi Joint Declaration of 9 November 2007, the military operations in question had a devastating humanitarian impact, with growing numbers of displaced people in eastern DRC, killings, looting and destruction, and a deplorable increase in the incidence of sexual violence against women (EurAc 2009). Such human rights violations are diametrically opposed to the notions of political dialogue and negotiation with FDLR groups, while they have done very little to restore peace. Furthermore, the renewed violence in eastern DRC (summer 2012) and Rwanda’s support to the M23 rebellion again threaten regional stability.

**Cross-cutting issues: gender equality**

Vision 2020 identifies three cross-cutting issues: (1) gender equality, (2) protection of the environment and sustainable natural resource management, and (3) science and technology, including information and communications technology (ICT). In what follows, the focus is on the gender aspect. Vision 2020 stresses the importance of integrating gender as a cross-cutting issue in all development policies and strategies. Indeed, the government of Rwanda has created a favourable environment for enhancing gender equality. An often-cited achievement is that Rwanda has the most gender-equal parliament in the world, with 56.3% female members (see Appendix).

The principles of gender equality are also embedded in laws, policies, and governance (Burnet 2008). The country has a gender-sensitive constitution (2003); women enjoy equal inheritance rights (see the 1998 amendments to the civil code governing marriage and the 2003 inheritance law); and there is a law on the prevention, protection and punishment of gender-based violence (2006) (Devlin and Elgie 2008). Furthermore, the Ministry of Gender and the Promotion of the Family enjoys sufficient legitimacy to ensure that the gender aspect is taken into account in the country’s development process and that the gender perspective is mainstreamed in all development policies. The government adopted a national gender policy in 2009 with the aim of clearly defining the process of integration of gender issues into the various development sectors (Holvoet and Ingberg 2010).

This seems to have paid off. Indeed, Rwanda performs relatively well in terms of the UNDP’s Gender Inequality Index (see UNDP 2011). The country exhibits a relatively low maternal mortality ratio (540 versus 619 per 100,000 births in sub-Saharan Africa in 2008); a low adolescent fertility rate (lower, in fact, than that of the United States in 2011); an extremely high percentage of pregnant women paying at least one visit to a prenatal care unit (96% in Rwanda versus 74% in sub-Saharan Africa in 2005–2009); and a relatively high number of births attended by skilled health personnel (52% versus 48% in sub-Saharan Africa in 2005–2009). Further achievements taken into account in this index are the high number of seats in national parliament held by women (highest worldwide; see above), and a high female labour-force participation (higher for women than men in the case of Rwanda in 2009). Rwanda performs less well in terms of its high overall fertility rate (5.3 children in comparison
to 4.8 in sub-Saharan Africa in 2011), and the percentage of women having received at least secondary education (7.4% compared to 22.2% in sub-Saharan Africa in 2010).

Yet there are other issues still to be tackled. Despite the recognition of female inheritance rights, formal rights that define access to land often clash with informal customary arrangements (Ansoms and Holvoet 2008). Moreover, the law ignores the rights of a sizeable and vulnerable group of wives in non-legal polygamous marriages. Another piece of legislation, the 2004 land law, does recognise women’s land rights. Women have the right to be mentioned by name on land ownership certificates, but, again, this is not necessarily the case for second and third wives in polygamous marriages. Furthermore, quite a recent issue with major gender implications is the observed increase in unwed mothers. When girls become pregnant outside of marriage, the fathers often fail to acknowledge their responsibilities (see above). The imidugudu policy prevents young men and women from making the transition to adulthood without the necessary resources for the acquisition of land and a home that meets the official quality standards (Sommers 2012).

Burnet (2008, 2011) highlights both sides of the coin, at both the micro and the macro levels. At the micro level, women have been obliged in the aftermath of the genocide to take up new roles within their private and public lives. This was often merely a survival strategy as, with deceased or imprisoned husbands, they could no longer rely on traditional types of protection. On the one hand, Burnet warns against excessively rosy interpretations of this societal shift, pointing to the vulnerability of women who must secure the livelihoods of themselves and their families. Moreover, the inclusion of women in local governance structures also adds to an already high workload. On the other hand, the new roles have at once allowed them to take up more active roles. At the macro level, increased female political participation has paved the way for a more active role of women in Rwandan society. In practice, however, their influence within an authoritarian state structure often remains limited, while their presence may be used to legitimise the RPF’s political agenda.

The Rwandan development model: maximal growth versus broad-based development

The recently reported spectacular decrease in poverty is surprising. Not least because many of Rwanda’s poverty and inequality issues are inherent in the growth model applied, and this model has been rigidly implemented between 2001 and 2006. With its focus on large-scale investment and disregard for the potential of local-level (and often informal) entrepreneurial activities, the Rwandan government aligns with a traditional neoliberal policy agenda that aims for maximum growth, while largely ignoring the question of how this growth should be redistributed. In practice, the concentration of strong economic growth in the hands of a small elite results in a highly skewed developmental path with limited trickle-down potential. The problems inherent in the neoliberal growth model are aggravated by the manner in which it is implemented on the ground. The rigid top-down implementation of imihigi (performance contracts) at all levels of the administration does not allow for bottom-up feedback on the appropriateness of policy measures and targeting.

For smallholder farmers – the majority of the population – this results in two main problems. First, they have to insert themselves in a stringent programme aimed at a modernisation of the agricultural sector (monocropping, regional crop specialisation, market orientation). In practice, this exposes them to excessive risks that do not align to their risk-minimising priorities. Second, farmers are confronted with a multitude of financial obligations (mutuelle de santé, costs to register landholdings, cost for young households to build houses in the
agglomeration) and fines (fines for not keeping cows in stables, fines for not reaching targets from local authorities, fines for not having decent roofing, etc.) (Ansoms and Murison 2011).

Furthermore, the concentration of power and wealth in the agricultural sector contributes to the expansion of a class of landless unskilled labourers in a context of limited employment opportunities; of poor youth without access to advanced education who feel increasingly ‘stuck’ and cut off from forms of upward social mobility. Moreover, the constant confrontation between the sense of failure among these groups and the narrative of national success only aggravates the underlying societal tensions. A comparison of the prevailing ‘sentiments’ in six rural villages during fieldwork by one of the authors in 2007 and 2011 revealed a worrying rise in feelings of frustration and anger. Such rising tensions risk destabilising the country. It seems only a matter of time before the currently unbalanced and skewed growth model will itself become ‘stuck’.

This gives rise to the question of an alternative. Rather than to focus on maximised growth, concentrated in the hands of just a few, perhaps one should work towards broad-based growth founded on small-scale agricultural activity. The Rwandan authorities should evaluate the productive and entrepreneurial potential of various socio-economic peasant categories, and analyse how this potential is best activated. International literature points to viable policy alternatives to the large-scale farmer-biased model and highlights the way in which such alternatives have been ‘sabotaged’ in the recent past. Akram-Lodhi (2008, p. 471), for example, denounces that smallholder agriculture is now declared unviable, after ‘smallholders [have been systematically undermined] by disinvesting and exposing them to ‘free’ market forces on an uneven playing field’. Cribb (2010) observes how a shift from public- to private-sector investment in agricultural innovation has stimulated the development of a technology that is tailor-made for a high-energy (large-scale) model of farming. He further notes how ‘science has largely neglected the equally promising but far less understood low-input systems [that characterise smallholder agriculture]’ (Cribb 2010, p. 133). Moyo (2008, p. 23) argues in the same vein that ‘the concentration of public resource allocations for agricultural technological progress as well as for market protection has been directed at [large-scale agrarian capitalist farming], particularly the export farmers’. He concludes that ‘this is at the expense of broad-based transformations of farming techniques and institutions’. Therefore, the choice for an agricultural model based on smallholder farming is not just a matter of short-term fixes, but also requires a profound investment in the restructuring of production relations and public institutions.

How to translate all this into practice? A first pro-peasant policy initiative might shift the focus of research and policies to techniques that lower the capital-to-labour ratio (for example by introducing new land/financial capital-saving techniques that allow smallholders to increase their productivity; by introducing labour-intensive crops where small-scale farmers enjoy a comparative advantage, etc.). Indeed, broad-based agricultural growth should be based on the acknowledgement of the low opportunity cost of labour and the high opportunity cost of capital that small-scale peasants face. Another possible way forward is to identify and remove the institutional constraints that prevent smallholders from accessing capital at a relatively low cost. Providing access, at the (most) local level, to credit and risk-insurance mechanisms could enhance peasants’ capacity for coping with risk and uncertainty related to new types of agriculture. The ambition of the Rwandan policymakers to strongly involve the private sector in local credit mechanisms may restrict accessibility to these resources for many small-scale peasants with an unfavourable risk profile (i.e. those unable to provide collateral as a guarantee). A third key strategy element is to facilitate smallholders’ access to markets and to improve their bargaining position. In this respect, co-operatives often function poorly and at times adopt coercive methods to oblige farmers to sell their crops collectively (Ansoms and Murison 2012b). Instead, smallholders should have ownership over the

A. Ansoms and D. Rostagno
collective mechanisms whereby they may profit from exchange opportunities in the market. Policy measures such as prohibiting bicycles on asphalted roads (reported by Syfia Grands Lacs in October 2011) impede farmers and make it physically more difficult for them to reach markets; instead, policies should promote all means that facilitate market access for smallholders. A fourth path to progress is to allow local small-scale entrepreneurs to invest accumulated surpluses from agricultural production in off-farm enterprises. Although often unfolding in the informal sector, such initiatives create employment and ensure that money is reinvested in the rural economy at the very local level. At this point, the heavy regulation and taxation procedures impede local actors to engage in small-scale informal activities.

Last but not least, there should be sufficient room for bottom-up voices. The extensive control of the central level over local settings has resulted in ‘a far-reaching practice of self-censorship among the population with regard to elements that do not fit into the official public transcript’ (Ingelaere 2010a, pp. 52–53). However, despite the authoritarian repression of local-level dissent, people have developed hidden transcripts of what they perceive as disruptive policies. During one of our field trips, an individual noted the following:

In this country, people live in poverty but, in the name of modernisation, this is not acknowledged. You are not allowed to be poor in this country. People are asking themselves if this is how Vision 2020 is being achieved.

Without institutionally recognised channels, there is a danger of these voices becoming increasingly radicalised, which could in turn jeopardise all economic development. Indeed, pro-poor development starts with the acknowledgement of the population’s views on, and perceptions of, poverty.

Hence, in the current Rwanda, with policymakers focused on technocratic performance targets, there is a crucial role to be played by the international donor community. In fact several international donors, injecting major aid funds into the Rwandan state budget, are reinforcing the current tendency by adopting a ‘narrowly defined technocratic vision of monitoring and evaluation’ (Holvoet and Rombouts 2008, p. 577). At the same time, they have refrained from criticising the political governance aspects out of a historically rooted sense of guilt (see Desrosiers and Thomson 2011) that has been cleverly amplified through the current regime’s spin (Reyntjens 2011a). Instead, international donors should make more pressing demands for channels that allow silenced voices from below to be heard. Indeed, a genuine appreciation and political representation of smallholder peasants is a first step in turning Vision 2020 into more than a cosmetic strategy for the purpose of enhancing the negative reputation of a post-genocide country.

Acknowledgements

An earlier, shorter version of this article appeared in French in ‘L’Afrique des Grands Lacs: Annuaire 2010–2011’. The authors would like to thank the editors of the yearbook for the permission to use the original version as a basis for this article. Furthermore, the authors would like to thank Jude Murison and Filip Reyntjens for their inputs and comments on this article.

Notes on contributors

An Ansoms is assistant professor in Development Studies at the Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium. She holds a PhD in Economics and is involved in research on poverty and inequality in the Great Lakes Region. She pays is interested in the challenges of rural development and pro-poor growth in land-scarce (post-)conflict environments.

Donatella Rostagno is a human rights advocate and has developed an in-depth knowledge on development, gender and security issues. Since January 2007 she has been a political analyst for the European
Network for Central Africa (EurAc), where she has developed work on issues such as democratisation, security sector reform, and gender and security.

Notes
1. The conclusions of this report were later called into question when a new report was presented by judges Trévidic and Poux in January 2013. This new report largely contradicted the conclusions of the Bruguère report. According to this second report, the missiles that hit President Habyarimana’s plane were launched in the Kanombe camp held by Hutu (Le Monde 2012).
2. In 2004, the UK and Sweden suspended all aid to Rwanda in response to the country’s announcement that it was considering renewing its military intervention in DRC. In 2008, the Netherlands and Sweden suspended budget assistance as a reaction to a UN report uncovering Rwanda’s active support to the Nkunda militia (Zorbas 2011). However, there has been no coordinated donor reaction since 1994.
3. This index is used to capture inequality. It varies between 0 and 1 with higher levels representing greater inequality.
4. From the 1980s, inequality in the rural areas was reported to be rising and the rural–urban gap to be widening. No nationally representative data exists for the period of civil war from the early 1990s to the conclusion of the 1994 genocide. Nonetheless, Maton’s study of a more limited scope shows that, in 1982, the 10% richest accounted for 20% of the total rural revenue; this share rose to 41% by 1992, to 45% by 1993 and to approximately 51% at the beginning of 1994 (Maton 1994).
5. Interestingly, this phenomenon could not be attributed to a widening gap between the urban and rural settings alone, given that the rural Gini coefficient also rose significantly (GOR 2006).
6. It is clear that the Rwandan government is very sensitive to the issue of rising inequality. The 2007 UNDP report that commends Rwanda’s progress in terms of the Millennium Development Goals, also points to the problem of growing inequality. It states: ‘in order to operate a successful transition from recovery to long-term growth, Rwanda will have to tackle three major challenges (agriculture, population and income distribution) that could compromise the sustainability of its development’ (UNDP 2007, p. 85). Whereas the report was initially approved by Finance Minister Musoni, he subsequently retracted his support, accusing the Swedish editor of putting forward an unfounded and misleading interpretation of the figures (see also Ingelaere 2010a, Reyntjens 2011a). The incident is indicative of the Rwandan government’s sensitivity to criticism of its poverty and inequality-related policy performance.
7. There is an important paradox in banning ethnicity when referring to the present, while emphasising ethnicity in narratives explaining the genocide (Eltringham 2011). Waldorf points out how the replacement of the term ‘genocide’ with that of ‘genocide of the Tutsi’ in the 2003 constitution places the ‘emphasis on collective Tutsi victimization’ and ‘implicitly imposes collective guilt on Hutu’, which ‘consequently makes it more difficult to achieve sustainable coexistence in Rwanda’ (Waldorf 2011, p. 49).
8. During our fieldwork, we investigated how performance targets are set. Interviewees in different locations explained how district-level authorities communicate targets to sectors and imidugudu. Sector and imidigudu authorities subsequently ‘sensibilise’ local inhabitants. Local constituents play no role whatsoever in such target setting. As a result, the priorities often fail to correspond with or even go against local concerns.
9. Its full name is the Organic Law Determining the Use and Management of Land in Rwanda (No. 08/2005 of 14 July 2005). It was published on 15 September 2005 in the official gazette of the Republic of Rwanda.
10. The poorest may however be exempt from this obligation. Such decisions are left to the village committee. Logie et al. (2008) mention that only 10% of the population were exempt (in 2004), whereas 15% to 30% (in 2005) qualified as too poor to have to pay the fee.

References


Ansoms, A. and Murison, J., 2011, Field Notes, Rwanda, May 2011. Results from this research on rural livelihoods will be published in the near future.


Table 2. Progress in key indicators of the Rwandan Vision 2020.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators (bold indicates Vision 2020 figures)</th>
<th>Situation in 2000</th>
<th>Target in 2010</th>
<th>Achieved 2010</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
<th>Target in 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>GENERAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Rwandan population (people)</td>
<td>7,700,000</td>
<td>10,200,000</td>
<td>10,624,005</td>
<td>Population density has increased from 328 people/km² to 431 people/km²</td>
<td>13,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Population growth rate (%)</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>Growth rate is rising since 2004 but stabilised in 2010</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HEALTH</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Life expectancy (years)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Female fertility rate (children per woman)</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Infant mortality rate (per 1000 births)</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>59.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 births)</td>
<td>1070</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>540</td>
<td></td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Child malnutrition (definition not clear)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Bank definition: % of children with</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>malnutrition according to height for age indicator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. HIV/AIDS prevalence rate (%)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>Original estimates were far above real figures</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Bank definition: % between ages 15–49</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDUCATION</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Literacy level (% of adult population)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>Primary completion rate 22.3% (2000) increased to 54% (2008)* and 78% in 2010 (minister of education)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Net primary school enrolment (%)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>95.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Secondary school transitional rate (%)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Growth secondary school enrolment (%)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>Gross secondary enrolment* increased to 26.7% (2009)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Teacher qualifications (%)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>93.9</td>
<td>Pupil teacher ratio in primary</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Bank definition: % of trained teachers in primary education</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>93.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14. Professional and technical training centres
15. Tertiary education enrolment (%)
  14. Professional and technical training centres
  15. Tertiary education enrolment (%)

16. Gender equality in tertiary education (female to male ratio)

17. Gender equality in decision-making positions (% of females)

18. Gender equality in decision-making positions (% of females)

19. Gender equality in decision-making positions (% of females)

20. Gender equality in decision-making positions (% of females)

21. Gender equality in decision-making positions (% of females)

22. Gender equality in decision-making positions (% of females)

23. Laboratory technicians per 100,000 inhabitants

24. Poverty (%< USD1 per day)

25. Average GDP growth rate (%)

26. Growth rate of the agricultural sector (%)

27. Growth rate of the industrial sector (%)

28. Growth rate of the service sector (%)

29. Growth rate of the service sector (%)

30. Growth rate of the service sector (%)

31. Growth national savings (% of GDP)

32. Growth national savings (% of GDP)

33. Growth national savings (% of GDP)

34. Agricultural population (%)

35. Modernised agricultural land (%)

36. Use of fertilizers (Kg/ha/year)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators (bold indicates Vision 2020 figures)</th>
<th>Situation in 2000</th>
<th>Target in 2010</th>
<th>Achieved 2010</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
<th>Target in 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>37. Financial credits to the agricultural sector (%)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13.9 (2006)*</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government of Rwanda definition: % of household loans used for agriculture</td>
<td>13.2*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. Access to clear water (%)</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Bank definition: % with access to improved water source</td>
<td>67.0*</td>
<td></td>
<td>(2008)*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. Agricultural production (kcal/day/person)</td>
<td>1612</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td></td>
<td>2200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. Availability of proteins/person/day – % of needs)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. Land portion protected against soil erosion (%)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td></td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. Level of reforestation (ha)</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. Wood energy in the national energy consumption (%)</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>88.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government of Rwanda definition: Fuel use for cooking</td>
<td>90.4*</td>
<td></td>
<td>(2006)*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OFF-FARM OPPORTUNITIES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. Non-agricultural jobs</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. Urban population (%)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.8*</td>
<td></td>
<td>(2010)*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. Road network (km/km²)</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.53 (2004)*</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. Annual electricity consumption (Kwh/inhabitants)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48. Access to electric energy (% of population)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All figures in bold are those originally included in Vision 2020 (2000).
Sources: *World Bank (2011, as consulted on 12 December 2011); **World Bank (2011, as consulted on 6 September 2011. These data were deleted from the later version of its database); *IMF (2011); *Government of Rwanda (2006).
‘Why government should not collect taxes’: grand corruption in government and citizens’ views on taxation in Cameroon

Rogers Tabe Egbe Orock* and Oben Timothy Mbuagbo

Department of Anthropology, Archaeology and Linguistics, Aarhus University, Højbjerg, Denmark; Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Buea, Buea, Cameroon

This paper explores how Cameroonian view the payment of taxes to the Cameroonian state in the backdrop of the pervasive corruption and the dismal levels of social service provision characterising public governance in the country since the early 1990s. It does so by combining a review of secondary literature about the nature of state–society relations in Cameroon and public opinion surveys and citizens’ comments in the private press relating to these issues. It concludes that such perceptions about taxation illustrate the challenges confronting African states if they seek to expand their capacity for domestic resource mobilisation through taxation.

Keywords: Cameroon; corruption; public governance; taxation; trust

By way of introduction: quality of governance, trust, and taxation from a citizens’ perspective

Taxation, as a domain of political economy, is very important to understanding the nature of a state. Indeed, about two and a half decades ago, Theda Skocpol (1985, p. 17) argued about states everywhere that:

a state’s means of raising and deploying financial resources tell us more than could any single factor about its existing (and immediate potential) capacities to create or strengthen state organisations, to employ personnel, to co-opt political support, to subsidize economic enterprises, and to fund social programmes.

*Corresponding author. Email: etnorteo@hum.au.dk
Taxation, by its nature as an economic practice, appears always and everywhere to be a ‘contested concept’ and practice (Roitman 2005, Sabates and Schneider 2003). This idea of taxation as practice in political economy suggests that citizens are thinking and active subjects who engage with the regulatory authority of the state in shaping and defining the lines between ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, what is legitimate or illegitimate, what is legal but easily acceptable or not. Consequently, taxation is anchored in a strong moral economy involving citizens and their state, around the right and/or legitimacy of the regulatory authority of the state to tax them, and this moral predisposition of citizens regarding taxation has been shown to be tenuous ground that must be constantly negotiated between the two parties (Roitman 2005).

Sabates and Schneider (2003) contend that taxation is associated with the state in two respects. There is the link between taxation and state accountability on the one hand, and the relationship between taxation and state capacity on the other (Sabates and Schneider 2003, p. 4). Observing these relations, they wonder if citizens that are made to pay more taxes demand more services in return from the state. As they contend, these questions enable an uncovering of the relationship between taxation and accountability, given that they indicate the key issues of who actually gets taxed and to whom the state is accountable. With respect to state capacity, they argue that within the literature it is increasingly established that the nature of the tax (whether it is income tax, customs tax or property tax) generates a specific mode of state–society relations, hence our understanding of taxation can only be appropriate when fully grounded in the mode of politics within a state, whether it be authoritarian or democratic. Gloppen and Rakner (2002) also note the tense relationship between public revenue collection through taxation and demands from citizens for more democratically accountable government. But they distinguish between the internal accountability of a tax system – that which is focused on the taxation system itself (its reach and efficiency in terms of collection and transparency) – and external accountability which relates to the link between governments and the citizens in terms of democratic accountability.

Mick Moore’s recent contribution to the debate lies in his insightful observation that the taxation–governance nexus is couched within ‘two competing meta-narratives’. The first, which sees taxation as a catalyst for ‘revenue bargaining’ wherein tax revenues (for the state) are traded for institutionalised mechanisms for influence over public policy by citizens, as well as offering rights and channels to seek redress in cases of perceived abuses on the part of citizens (Moore 2007, see also Moore 2004a, 2004b, Luoga 2003). Indeed, Bird et al. (2008) found that these mechanisms are very important in giving citizens some sort of ‘voice’ over the way they perceive taxation, supporting a state’s quest for legitimacy among citizens over its taxation of them and increasing its tax effort (the amount collected in taxes as a proportion of the GDP). Moore’s second meta-narrative underscores the tax–governance relationship as framed by a ‘highly coercive’ state–citizen relationship, wherein citizens make subjective evaluations of the rate of taxes and the benefits or sanctions of tax evasion (Moore 2007, see also Fjeldstad 2004).

It seems clear that good quality government enlarges the scope of citizens’ trust in public institutions, as well as opens further the boundaries of their moral disposition to voluntarily comply with paying taxes, giving further legitimacy to a state’s taxation of them and their economic activities (for examples, see Murphy 2004, Braithwaite 2003a, Rawlings 2003). But if the result of a state’s internal politics and practices leads citizens to believe that its political elite desire accumulation of wealth by foul means at the expense of general benefits for all, citizens tend to perceive government’s efforts at taxing them as unjust or illegitimate or as a form of governmental nuisance (cf. Fjeldstad 2004, p. 17, 2002, p. 3, Braithwaite 2003a, 2003b, Bernstein and Lü 2000, p. 745).
Overall, however, due to the low levels of income, demographic, and other factors, African countries have very low levels of domestic resource mobilisation through taxation in comparison to countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development or Asian contexts (United Nations Conference for Trade and Development 2007, p. 6, Tanzi and Zee 2000), implying their predisposition to lesser degrees of accountability and transparency over taxation and the utilisation of revenues.

According to Valerie Braithwaite (2003b, pp. 17–19), among five possible ‘postures’ that citizens can potentially adopt towards the regulatory authority of the state over taxation, there are two attitudinal modes that indicate a positive orientation to pay taxes. The first is ‘commitment’, indicating a ‘desirability of the tax system’ as well as disposition to see the payment of taxes as ‘a moral obligation’, while the second, ‘capitulation’, underpins the unquestioned deference to the legitimacy and power of the regulatory authority of the state assigned with collecting taxes (Braithwaite 2003b, p. 18). However, under conditions of perceived bad governance of public revenue, citizens could adopt three other attitudinal modes that Braithwaite (2003b, pp. 17–19) characterises as ‘postures of defiance’. First, they could ‘resist’ the payment of taxes if they believe the tax system is highly illegitimate and uncooperative; second, they could ‘disengage’ completely from the system if they feel alienated; finally, they could choose to see the tax system as an amoral arena where no rules should be followed unless they further their individual interests, fuelling their propensity to evade taxation through various ‘game-playing’ strategies (Braithwaite 2003b, p. 19).

In recent times, taxation has been receiving serious attention from scholars of African politics and economics. For Brautigam (1996, p. 81), for example, taxation expresses the power of the state, as it is a crucial element of a state’s prospect in building and sustaining its capacities. But in sub-Saharan Africa, the patterns of state–society relations that taxation might engender are difficult to gauge, given the hazy context in which taxation is exercised, in addition to the often opaque financial transactions associated with the extractive industries. As Van de Walle (2001, p. 53) observes, taxes are either ‘not collected, exemptions [from taxes] are granted, tariffs are averted, licenses are bribed away, parking fines are pocketed’. In such a context, it becomes understandable that some Africanist observers note that African countries expose a very weak taxpaying culture (Fjeldstad 2003, Gloppen and Rakner 2002).

In this paper, we draw from anecdotal evidence to make an analytical commentary of citizens’ views on taxation in Cameroon, especially when considering that the country is widely known to be in the grip of corruption and embezzlement by public officials, and a dismal situation relates to public service delivery for the benefit of citizens. We argue that widespread awareness of the state as a safe haven for corrupt public officials fuels citizen distrust about government’s willingness to use revenue in any meaningful way and to their benefit, hence their tendency to perceive it as unjust, if not outright illegitimate. We do so by drawing on a review of secondary literature on the state of governance in postcolonial Cameroon, and material mainly from the private press, as the government newspaper, the Cameroon Tribune, hardly adopts a critical and objective editorial line, with its journalists tending to see themselves as part of the central administration (Nyamnjoh, Wete and Fachingong 1996, p. 49). But the press sources are no less credible in that they combine elements of surveys, face-to-face interviews, and opinion pieces by concerned citizens that sparked online comments by others, reducing their degree of mediation.

In 1990 after the popular struggles against the one-party regime of Paul Biya, the country returned to multiparty politics through the promulgation of Law No. 90/053 of December 1990 by Biya. This law granted freedom of expression and association, made
the formation of political parties legal, and provided some minimum protection for the media against vexatious lawsuits (Mbu 1993). Although this democratic opening has largely been foisted by electoral controversies (Nyamnjoh 2000, Takougang and Krieger 1998) and extensive human rights abuses, especially on political opponents and members of the private media, the modicum of political space it created lifted expectations about the levels of accountability and transparency in public governance, especially as corruption in the country had been on the rise since the early 1980s when Biya took office as president. Indeed, corruption and embezzlement of state funds by public officials have become so endemic that they have come to be seen by most Cameroonian as the major knot that ties together their problems with poverty, unemployment and insecurity. It is public knowledge of these pervasive phenomena that led Transparency International, the global non-governmental anticorruption watchdog, to characterise Cameroon as the world’s most corrupt country in three, almost successive, years – 1998, 1999, and 2002.

In this article, we begin by outlining how neopatrimonial practices characterise public governance in Cameroon, and then expose the politicisation of the government’s anticorruption efforts that has done more to undermine citizens’ trust in government than improve it. We then explore the anecdotal accounts of citizens’ views about taxation as highly tied to these negative perceptions of the impact of such neopatrimonial tendencies.

Patterns of neopatrimonial governance in Cameroon: an historical overview

In a GlobeScan (2005) survey of ‘public opinion in Africa’ contained in the Africa in the new century report, the 1009 Cameroonians aged 15 and above ranked corruption in government as the third ‘national problem after poverty and unemployment’ (GlobeScan 2005, p. 7). These opinion imply that citizens mostly distrust the government and its institutions. In fact, with regard to the specific concern with trust, this same survey found that only 44% had trust in the national government in Cameroon, as opposed to Ghana, for example, where the national government enjoyed the trust of 87% of citizens (GlobeScan 2005, p. 13). This deficit of trust in the government of Cameroon is a reflection of citizens’ experiences (long- and short-term) of excessive bad governance in Cameroon. Many, therefore, reasonably associate the state’s inability to provide them with basic services at reasonable cost with the impact of embezzlement in inducing budgetary constraints (Ndue 2005). But this perception of the state is rooted in a much longer history of postcolonial governance in Cameroon.

Indeed, soon after independence in 1960, Cameroon embarked on an ambitious economic programme aimed at enhancing infrastructural and general economic development. In a bid to consolidate their hold on power, political leaders and bureaucratic elites substantially captured the public administrative machinery and other state economic agencies, such as state-owned corporations, to facilitate their personal accumulation of economic resources (Jua 1991, Konings 1996). The first president of Cameroon, Ahmadou Ahidjo, promoted a cult of personality in which he was seen as ‘Father of the Nation’ (Schatzberg 1986). As a true pater familias, Ahidjo saw himself as the guide suprême (Schatzberg 2001) who would lead the new nation towards development. Consequently, presidentialism for Ahidjo meant the almost total concentration of power around the one person and one institution that he incarnated – la présidence (Prouzet 1974, pp. 151–186, Bayart 1985, pp. 141–159). This meant that ‘his style of government was entirely personal and non-bureaucratic’ (Gabriel 1999, p. 5).

Ahidjo’s hegemonic political programme was designed to use public institutions and state corporations as the basis for constructing a neopatrimonial, clientelist model of
governance that emphasised patronage. Managers of these state corporations and heads of various government departments, as political clients appointed by the head of state, owed total allegiance to Ahidjo, and non-allegiance was sanctioned with removal from office and, not too infrequently, with personal persecution (Konings 1996, p. 248). This system of governance has largely been accentuated by the current president, Paul Biya, since taking over from Ahidjo in 1982. A notable example of this style of governance was the ruinous plundering of the National Rural Development Fund (FONADER), an agricultural credit institution created with farmers’ cooperative surplus sales to provide credit facilities to farmers. The fund experienced a disastrous collapse in 1997 as a result of the continuous provision of ‘unsecured’ loans to non-agricultural political barons of the Ahidjo and Biya regimes (Awung and Atanga 2002).

The situation of patron–client networks was strengthened with the discovery of oil deposits along Cameroon’s coastline in the early 1970s. Almost immediately, revenue generated by the exploitation of these oil reserves became a private fund remitted to undisclosed offshore accounts for the president to draw on for his personal political machinations (Awung and Atanga 2002). The prevalence of these distortions of the rules of sound financial management of public finances by high-ranking public bureaucrats speaks of neopatrimonial patterns of governance as the norm, rather than being the exception in Cameroon. According to Bratton and Van de Walle (1997, pp. 63–68), such embezzlement is one of the features of neopatrimonialism which is defined as the ‘misuse of state resources for political legitimation’ (Von Soest 2007, pp. 62–79). However, rather than viewing this culture of governance in Cameroon as irredeemably irrational and dysfunctional, it makes sense to consider the arguments made by Chabal and Daloz (1999) and Bratton and Van de Walle (1997) that these apparently endemic practices are quite rational in the prism of neopatrimonial governance since they help maintain the incumbent regime and its supportive political elite in power (see also Van de Walle 2007). In this context of bureaucratic absolutism and civil service impunity, those in powerful positions are transformed into influential patrons in whose hands people now place their trust rather than trusting in the state institutions themselves (Daloz 2005).

**Accumulation by corruption: the suspension of bureaucratic morality since the 1990s in Cameroon**

In both the original Weberian notion and the reformulated new public management (NPM) models, public bureaucracies in ‘modern-administrative’ states (Riggs 1997) are associated with professionalism and efficiency as core values. In the context of Cameroon, however, such values are overturned to centre on appropriating the property or wealth of the state, even by dubious and illegal means. People generally imagine ‘the state’ and its public institutions merely as an entity to be courted, lured, and consumed (Geschiere 1982, Gupta 1995). In local discourse, people are inclined to ‘chopping’ the state (see Hasty 2005). Bayart (1993) extrapolates this Cameroonian reality into his argument that African political life is grounded in the logic of the ‘politics of the belly’. Given these and other observations of corruption and misuse of public office in Cameroon, it is not excessive to advance, as Fonchingong (2004, pp. 50–51) does, that ‘the swindling of public funds by top government officials is prevalent, and interventionism, clientelism, and nepotism have become the principles of governance’. Paradoxically, it is in the decades following the return to multi-party politics or political liberalisation that political figures and public officials in Cameroon have indulged in the most extensive display of acts of patrimonial accumulation, suspending any iota of bureaucratic rationality and morality left. This crisis of morality in public
governance had risen to such alarming proportions that it took no less than Paul Biya, the
leader of the prebendal bazaar that is the treasury of Cameroon, to surprisingly lament on its
impact on the country. In the past, though, when opposition politicians accused his govern-
ment of massive corruption he offered the now popular rebuttal, ‘Où sont les preuves’? ['Where is the proof?'] On 31 December 2006, during his customary end-of-year televised
address to the nation, however, he adopted a different line as he complained that:

There is something more serious. I am referring to corruption which I have often denounced but
which is still rife. There is a clear mismatch between our effort to alleviate poverty and the scan-
dalous enrichment of a few individuals. Public funds are embezzled, it should be recalled, at the
expense of the nation. I want to say very solemnly today: this must stop. The National Agency
for Financial Investigation was set up for that purpose. I expect it to perform its duty without
complacency. Such a drain on national wealth is intolerable especially as parts of our popu-
lation, particularly the unemployed, are still suffering hardships. (Post 2006)

This complaint did not register much with the political elite who head public institutions
and corporations as ministers and managers appointed by the president. This is partly
because they are all members of the ruling Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement
(CPDM) of President Biya and have come to understand that the president usually over-
looks such corrupt activities so long as they stay loyal to him and raise funds for the
party. For instance, when it was reported in 1996 that the forces of law and order had
found several billion CFA francs stashed in cartons in the home of Edouard Akame
Mfoumou (who had just been replaced as minister for finance) in Yaoundé, no action
was taken against him. However, when Edzoa Titus was alleged to have embezzled two
billion CFA francs, he was immediately charged with a criminal offence, tried and sen-
tenced to a 15-year term in 1997. However, many believe his conviction was motivated
by his decision to resign from his post as secretary-general at the presidency of Cameroon
and announcement of his intention to challenge President Biya at the 1997 presidential elec-
tions. Thus, for these politically appointed heads of various public institutions in
the country, loyalty to the president is crucial. This explains the recent rush by most of the pol-
itical elite to prove their allegiance to Biya with slogans such as ‘The People’s Call’ issued
through ‘motions of support’, literally supplicating Paul Biya to run for yet another seven-
year presidential mandate in the October 2011 presidential elections, which he did and won,
even after 29 years of rule.

The crisis of morality in Cameroon’s public bureaucracy has become as extensive as it is
corrosive, inviting the ire of many leaders of mainstream churches such as the Roman
Catholic Church in Cameroon (RCC) and the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC).
Both churches have made critical remarks in sermons about the state of governance and
issued pastoral letters on corruption to both the government and their followers (see
Mbuagbo and Fru 2003, p. 143). Although attracting donor and media attention and embar-
rassing the Biya government, these efforts from church leaders did not achieve much, as
high-level corruption continued unabated. As part of its own share of the efforts to bring
the problem into the national political agenda, the private media has been quite vocal. A
private newspaper, Le Front, published a long list of public officials both in active
service and retired, who had enriched themselves excessively (to the tune of billions of
CFA francs) while holding public office jobs. According to Le Front (2006, p. 3), the
names and total foreign account holdings of these public officials were released by an
American financial network that tracks economic crime. On this occasion the editorial
also boasted, partly in mockery of the president with regard to the proof of the veracity
of these names and holdings, ‘Nous les avons. Le Sommet de l’État en a les mêmes’
[We have them and they are also available to the highest authorities in the state]. Since the emergence of these critical voices over the government’s unwillingness or inability to engage seriously with the problem of corruption in the country, the government has launched what amounts to a semblance of an anticorruption campaign, but which has not done much to inspire citizens’ trust either in the campaign itself or the government, as we outline below.

The accumulative politics of grand corruption and the government’s anticorruption efforts in Cameroon

Such endemic corruption by public officials bears widespread economic and social consequences for the lives of ordinary people and businesses beyond the realm of the public bureaucracy. Corruption has been found to have negative effects on economic growth, investment and government expenditure (Tomaszewksa and Shah 2000, Mehrez and Kaufmann 1999, Campos et al. 1999, Mauro 1995). In doing so, it widens social inequalities and class differences by damaging the government’s capacity to undertake the delivery of public services effectively and confront poverty and income inequality (Kaufmann and Shang 1999, Gupta et al. 1998, Tanzi and Davoodi 1998, Gray and Kaufmann 1998). It also creates difficulties for and adds to the costs of doing business (Kaufmann and Shang 1999), especially in developing countries where regulatory environments are weaker.

For instance, as a measure of the prevailing weight of corruption on the business sector in Cameroon resulting from distortions of rules by public officials, the comparative World Bank and International Finance Corporation Global Enterprise Survey 2006 (World Bank 2006) reports that 77% of firms expect to ‘make informal payments to public officials to get things done’, while as many as 50.81% expect to ‘give gifts in meetings with tax officials’. Another 85.23% of firms surveyed expect to ‘give gifts to secure a government contract’. The full impact of this almost institutionalised corruption is that 52.05% of the firms surveyed identified corruption as a major constraint to doing business in Cameroon and 63% of these companies estimated that about 10% of their turnover went to ‘facilitation of payments’ for public contracts executed or services provided to the government (World Bank 2006). Such critical evaluations by the businesses, in addition to the criticisms from the churches and private media, spurred the government to launch an anticorruption effort in 2004 which is ongoing, but which is itself marred by its inescapable tendency to politicise everything it seeks to do.

Anticorruption as a political tool: ‘Operation Sparrowhawk’ as the hallmark of paradoxes in the anticorruption efforts of the government of Cameroon

In 2004, through the office of the vice prime minister and minister for justice, Ahmadou Ali, and under pressure from international donors to fight corruption as a condition for reaching the completion of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC), the government of Cameroon launched ‘Operation Sparrowhawk’. This operation focused on the arrest and trial of a number of highly powerful former and serving public officials suspected of embezzling colossal sums of money during their time in office. In 2006 the government also created a National Good Governance Programme and a National Agency for Financial Investigations, aimed at probing economic crimes. It equally created a National Anti-Corruption Committee (NACC) as a replacement of the previous National Anti-Corruption Observatory that it had dismantled in 1997. In a highly publicised show of its activities,
Operation Sparrowhawk swung into action in early 2006, making its first arrests of prominent public officials: a minister, Siyam Siwé, who served in government until a few days prior to his arrest, and three general managers of public corporations and their suspected accomplices (Gilles-Roger Belinga of the state housing corporation [SIC], Emmanuel Edou of the Crédit Foncier du Cameroun [CFC] and Emmanuel Gérard Ondo Ndong of the Special Fund for Investment and Economic Support of the Municipal Councils, known by the French acronym FEICOM). This string of arrests drew a great deal of public attention, but no more than that. It did not spur any meaningful return of trust in the state on the part of citizens.

In 2008, after a cabinet reshuffle in 2007 in which a number of allegedly corrupt ministers were dropped, paving the way for their eventual detention, Operation Sparrowhawk saw a second wave of arrests, including Polycarpe Abah Abah (finance minister and former director general of taxation), Jean-Marie Atangana Mebara (minister of foreign affairs and former secretary-general of the presidency) and Urbain Olanguena Awono (minister of health), all charged with the embezzlement of state funds. Abah Abah was accused along with accomplices of embezzling 4.9 billion CFA francs (€7.4 million) collected by the tax directorate for the CFC. Atangana Mebara is suspected of having embezzled funds for the 2003 purchase of the Albatross presidential plane. Olanguena Awono, along with six others, was charged with embezzling over 750 million CFA francs (€1.1 million) from AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis programmes (see the report on Cameroon by the International Crisis Group 2010, p. 24). In May 2008, it was the turn of the director general of the Chantier Naval et Industriel du Cameroun, Zacchaeus Mungwe Forjindam, previously highly praised by the head of state in his 2006 end-of-year address, and political baron of the CPDM regime in his native north-west region of Cameroon and who initiated the debate over the annulment of the constitutional provision on presidential term limits in November 2007. He was accused of embezzling 232 million CFA francs (some €1.47 million) and arrested in the presence of TV and press media while he came out of an extraordinary board meeting during which he had just been sacked (International Crisis Group 2010, p. 24). The most recent wave of the operation in early 2010 saw the arrest and incarceration of the former minister of primary education, Haman Adama, the former minister of the budget, Henri Engoulou the former minister of secondary education, Catherine Abena, and nearly 30 others.

The trials of Atangana Mebara, Abah Abah and Olanguena Awono began in early 2010 and are ongoing at the Mfoundi High Court in Yaoundé, meaning they have spent two years in incarceration before their trials began. During the trials it became evident that the prosecution, led by Justice Pascal Magnaguéma, lacked sufficient evidence and needed that time to build cases against the accused, heightening the suspicion that the evidence being admitted into the courts may be merely fabricated by the regime. This situation is echoed for most of the others arrested, totalling almost 100 by May 2010 (International Crisis Group 2010, p. 24), all of whom are members of the ruling CPDM and continue to write ‘motions of support’ to Biya, even from their prison cells (as Siyam Siwé did in 2006). This has led many to see the efforts of Operation Sparrowhawk as nothing more than a smokescreen, a politicisation of the anticorruption efforts, just as in 1997 against Edzoa Titus. People see in such efforts the political victimisation of these (probably corrupt although not sufficiently proven) suspects, because the regime harbours suspicions of them using their ill-gotten wealth to effect political plans to capture power through an alleged group within the ruling CPDM party known as ‘Generation 11’ or ‘G11’ (International Crisis Group 2010, p. 4).
Overall, then, these anticorruption and anti-embezzlement campaigns and institutions, while drawing media attention, have failed to either improve citizens’ perceptions of public institutions and public officials, or to instil a sense of public confidence in the state’s capacity to genuinely engage in the crusade of moralisation of public institutions, as they are perceived to be initiated for the wrong reasons (Transparency International 2007, p. 15). Unsurprisingly, a 2008 public survey by Cameroonian newspaper *Le Messager* of 1200 Cameroonians residing in the major urban centres had found that 60% of those surveyed were ‘not satisfied’ with the actions of the Cameroon government, and as many as 42% of Cameroonians believe that such anticorruption initiatives are only cosmetic attempts by the government to placate both them and the international donor community over its commitment to engaging in good governance practices (*Le Messager* 2008). Ultimately, as many as 88% of Cameroonians polled thought that the government could start to prove its commitment by being transparent and accountable over its asset-recovery efforts aimed at returning to the national treasury the stolen wealth stashed in foreign bank accounts (*Le Messager* 2008, see also Eden Newspaper 2008). On this basis, it is fair to say that the anticorruption efforts of the government of Cameroon so far can largely be seen as ‘enforcement swamping or campaign-style enforcement’, marked by ‘periodic’ crusades against corruption (Cheung 2007, p. 57) that may only yield periodic deterrence without a sustainable overhaul of high-level corruption, hence their failure to convince many citizens of their potentially fruitful outcome.

It is no surprise, then, that in the midst of all these anticorruption campaigns, several major towns including Douala, Yaoundé and Bafoussam saw social unrest and riots related to the rise of basic food necessities such as sugar and oil, and fuel between 13 and 25 February 2008. These riots, largely involving youth, were put down by the government’s security forces, who brutally assailed the youth with live ammunition and tear gas, resulting in several casualties. But it is important to point out that these February 2008 riots were also partly motivated by anger over the successful manipulation by the ruling CPDM party of a constitutional provision that limited presidential mandates to two terms, allowing Biya to seek a third term in the forthcoming election (Integrated Regional Information Networks 2008).

For many, the constitution had been the product of popular struggle and the civil disobedience movements of the early 1990s that marked a return to democratic politics, and overturning parts of the constitution was a clear rolling back of these achievements. But unlike the civil disobedience campaigns that played out for months in the 1990s, the February 2008 riots did not succeed in galvanising much support beyond the youth, and were quickly dissipated as a result of the shootings and targeted arrests of the leaders by the government security forces. Many Cameroonians have become disillusioned with their capacity to achieve any meaningful change by resorting to mass protest for fear of such brutal reprisals by the regime, and they have also become distrustful of the opposition leaders that led civil disobedience campaigns in the 1990s, such as John Fru Ndi of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) and Adamou Ndam Njoya of the Cameroon Democratic Union (CDU). Many believe these leaders have turned out to be equally autocratic figures that discourage any meaningful debate and change in leadership within their own parties. Therefore, they are reluctant to risk life and property as they did in the early 1990s, only to end up with another corrupt and authoritarian figure like Biya. They would rather stay the course until the retirement or death of the current autocrat.

In the end, then, the trajectories of such high-level bureaucratic corruption and embezzlement and the government’s anticorruption efforts have constituted a clear strategy for the
personal appropriation of national wealth by many among the governing elite since the
1990s (cf. Szeftel 2000). But such a mode of accumulation, patronage and corruption is
clearly consistent with the pattern of neopatrimonial governance that has historically
been characteristic of postcolonial governance since Cameroon attained independence in
1960, underpinning the peculiar mode or trajectory of exercising state power in Cameroon
(Geschiere and Konings 1993). Indeed, the subversion and abuse of the public office by
both high-ranking public officials and low-level bureaucrats constitutes a politics of corrup-
tion, accumulation and domination by the more powerful elites in the country, qualifying
the country for what Rose-Ackerman (1997, p. 33) characterises as membership of the
club of ‘kleptocratic or ‘vampire’ states’ (see also Szeftel 2000). As Michael Johnston
argues in the same volume:

Thus, most corruption will tend to benefit the haves at the political, material expense of the
have-nots. The latter may obtain petty benefits – shopkeepers might evade official inspections,
and citizens might pay to obtain a license, with small bribes or ‘speed money’ – or partake of
small patronage distributed in the course of someone else’s quest for power. But these benefits
come at a cost: corruption bypasses due process and weakens civil rights, blocking off legiti-
mate channels of political access and accountability while opening up (and concealing) illicit
new ones. Patronage or avoidance of official harassment often comes at the cost of lost political
choices and inferior public services. Many people pay the cost of corruption again and again.
(Johnston 1997, p. 63)

In other words, through the neopatrimonial logic of patronage politics and the grand
corruption it fuels among the governing elite in sub-Saharan African states such as Camer-
on, the wealth and power that are accumulated and concentrated in the hands of these few
men and women further strengthens their grip over the state and its institutions, policies and
programmes, denoting these political and bureaucratic elites as a class with special political
and economic interests to safeguard (Amundsen 1999). In Cameroon, these elites do so
through a mixture of influence-peddling (nepotism and tribalism) and white-collar crime
that entails various forms of corruption such as embezzlement, misappropriation and extor-
tion or illegal levies for contracts, generally known in the local context as the ‘Gombo’
phenomenon (Blundo and de Sardan 2006). In Cameroon, then, the logic of kleptocracy
(rule by thieving elites working for their own interests) prevails over that of a democracy
(rule by the elite in the interests of the majority), a situation that is clearly not supportive
to building a ‘sustainable democracy’ (Johnston 1997, p. 67). The anticorruption efforts
have so far failed to be seen as such because of their politicisation. Moreover, it is
widely established that the public perceives the effectiveness of such anticorruption
measures when these efforts establish corruption as a ‘high-risk, low-reward’ activity
(Huther and Shah 2000, pp. 3–5). But in Cameroon the fact that these efforts have not
been accompanied by substantial recovery of the illegally accumulated wealth does not
make the cost of being indicted or convicted for corruption very high, as many of the per-
petrators may have lost their reputations and freedom, but retained the illegally accumulated
wealth. In other words, measured by scale (billions of CFA francs) and the long history of
such embezzlement and grand corruption (since independence in the 1960s), these consti-
tute, in effect, strategies of accumulation that are consonant with Mbembe’s (2000) view of
‘private indirect government’.

The implication has been that, in a general sense, citizens have come to think that gov-
ernment works against rather than for them, and that public revenues collected from taxes
are not generally directed to serving public needs because these are embezzled or misapprop-
riated for the private ends of the governing elite. Given this contextual background on the
generalised political impact of corruption and kleptocratic governance in Cameroon, we now turn to explore Cameroonian notions of government taxation under such conditions of governance.

Towards a more socially responsive use of tax revenue in Cameroon

In the early years of political liberalisation in the 1990s, the tumultuous nature of political activities, epitomised by the ‘Operation Ghost Town’ civil disobedience campaign launched by a coalition of opposition parties, set in motion what can be seen as economic strategies aimed at shaming the state. In addition to the customary social movements’ strategies of work boycotts and industrial strikes during this period, there was also a strong element of fiscal disobedience which had as its objective to (and it did) effectively undermine the fiscal or revenue base of the regime in order to force it to grant some political reforms. The fiscal disobedience was characterised by questioning the logic of the state’s claims to tax citizens, a situation which Roitman describes by the phrase ‘intelligibility of its exercise’ (Roitman 2005, p. 5), as the government of Cameroon constructed its narrative around the notion of civility, describing these boycotts and industrial strikes as ‘incivisme fiscale’ because they fostered tax evasion and smuggling. Opposing this narrative, citizens articulated their perceptions and actions in a reverse narrative of rights-based citizenship, trivialising the government’s concern with ‘civility’ given the absence of economic benefits (in the form of the provision of social amenities) for taxes they pay (see Roitman 2005, p. 5). Indicatively, a journalist with a private newspaper – what the government often characterises as ‘subversive’ media – noted that:

when government officials embezzle state funds and splash our faces with their ill-gotten wealth it is all of us who pay the price. When salary increases are frozen for decades running, it is not only the civil servants who feel the grind. When government puts an embargo on employment for upwards of two decades, it is the whole society that pays the price. (Ntui 2005, p. 11)

It is this concern with the conditions of their everyday lives that is crucial to the way citizens view the government’s claims to taxation, and as we explore below, these conditions appear to be quite dismal.

Taxation and the social conditions of everyday life in Cameroon

With an average life expectancy of 51 years in 2010 and a literacy rate of 71% of the total population of almost 20 million people, Cameroonian notions of government taxation appear to be quite dismal.
contribution from oil-related earnings, we find that these figures reduce substantially to 10.3% and 10.6% respectively (Africa Economic Outlook 2011, p. 9). Such low contributions of tax revenues to the country’s GDP may be a partial explanation for the government’s disregard for taxpaying citizens.

In this context, for those paying taxes of any sort, the World Bank (2011b, p. 7) points out that ‘the tax rates being already high’, the government of Cameroon’s tax reforms with the ‘introduction of a single declaration for taxpayers paying value added tax (VAT), income tax, and patents (above a certain level) is a welcome step’, in addition to the abolition of the export tax on basic cash crops in 1998. Prior to these reforms introduced in the late 1990s, the government relied mainly on a complex tax system of direct and indirect taxation in which direct taxation consisted mainly of income tax and indirect taxation consisted of import taxes, export taxes, sales taxes on domestic goods and services, and specific taxes, such as that on the consumption of oil products, and most of these forms of indirect taxes were plagued by administrative discretions (Fambon 2006, pp. 2–3). In fact, prior to the reforms the cumbersome tax system placed undue burden on most people, especially on those with low incomes and small-business owners. For example, a certain Mrs Helen Letsendem (Cameroon Tribune 1990), a retail trader, explained that she felt disappointed with the way business licences are levied… and I am expected to pay a ‘mixed’ Business licence known as ‘Commerce General’. Yet after all these, I am forced to pay taxes on different items in the store, from a tax on drinks to a tax on the sale of cooking gas. They have now added the tax on the Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV) [state media], whether you have a radio or TV set or not.

Since these fiscal reforms, however, the types of taxes paid have been simplified considerably and reduced in number (see Table 1). The introduction of VAT, though increasing the cost of living, is not a controversial addition considering that it merely replaced what was formerly known as the ‘sales tax’ in the previous system.

It may be true that these tax reforms have made the tax system less complicated and in more general terms contributing to the reduction of income inequalities in Cameroon (Atemnkeng, Akwi and Anzah 2006, pp. 17–19, Atemnkeng 2003). It is, however, not entirely clear whether such reforms have had a significant impact in reducing poverty for the majority of people, especially for those in the isolated rural communities, as the government (although improving now) does very poorly when it comes to the provision of infrastructure, with as much as 37.9% of its surface roads still in a ‘poor or mediocre’ condition (Africa Economic Outlook 2011, p. 13). Such poor road infrastructure prevents not only access to basic services such as health centres, but also leaves several communities outside the government’s poverty reduction efforts, more so for the rural ones than their urban counterparts. Additionally, the World Bank report cited above also observes the dismal failure of the government to ensure the provision of, and access to, basic public services in these terms: ‘indicators for service delivery in Cameroon tend to trail behind the standards of countries at similar income levels. For indicators such as primary school completion or child mortality, Cameroon does even worse than the average for sub-Saharan Africa’ (2011b, p. 9). Moreover, while most homes in the urban areas and fewer in rural communities have access to electricity and piped water (Africa Economic Outlook 2011), in the years following the privatisation of the Société Nationale des Eaux du Cameroun (SNEC) and Société Nationale d’Electricité du Cameroun (SONEL), access has been significantly reduced. Communities experience frequent electric power cuts and taps run
Table 1. The types of taxes currently paid in Cameroon.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Tax</th>
<th>Rates</th>
<th>Nature of taxation</th>
<th>How payment is made</th>
<th>Who pays</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal income tax</td>
<td>The tax varies between 10% (FCFA 0–2,000,000) and 35% (above FCFA 5,000,000).</td>
<td>Wage-based/salaried income (progressive).</td>
<td>Employees have their taxes deducted directly from their wages.</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital gains</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>Income from the derived from the sale of shares or disposal of fixed corporate assets.</td>
<td>Paid annually from income from such transactions.</td>
<td>Individuals and companies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporation tax</td>
<td>Currently levied at the rate of 35%. In addition, a local surcharge of 10% of company tax is payable, which brings the effective rate to 38.5% of taxable profits.</td>
<td>A tax on profits made by companies and other corporate bodies based on their declared profits, determined after deducting allowable expenses and charges.</td>
<td>Paid annually by companies from declared profits.</td>
<td>Companies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value added tax (VAT)</td>
<td>Introduced 1 January 1999 and assessed at the rate of 19.25%. Late payment of VAT attracts interest at the rate of 1.5% per month up to a maximum of 50% of the principal VAT liability.</td>
<td>It is levied on all commercial transactions and activities except those that are specifically exempted. All exports of taxable products and similar transactions are assessed at 0%. Eligible for deductibility on corporate tax.</td>
<td>Paid by the business and transferred to the individual buyers of goods/services.</td>
<td>Individual customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business licence tax</td>
<td>There are seven categories with turnovers ranging from FCFA5 million to FCFA15 million in Category 7 and turnover of over FCFA2 billion in Category 1. The tax payable is calculated by applying the stipulated rate applicable to each category. The actual rate is fixed by the local authorities in the area where the business is established and must fall within a range stipulated by the General Tax Code.</td>
<td>Business enterprises must pay an annual business licence tax, calculated according to a scale based on the annual turnover of each business.</td>
<td>Paid annually by the business owner directly to the council revenue authority where the business is located.</td>
<td>Companies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stamp duty</td>
<td>Rates range from 1% to 15%.</td>
<td>Various stamp duties apply to contractual obligations and transfers or leases of property as well as being levied on motor vehicle licences, advertising materials, passports, visas and bills of lading. Eligible for deductibility on corporate tax.</td>
<td>Fixed stamp duties are purchased at the service point in which each service is being sought.</td>
<td>Individuals and corporations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: compiled from the government of Cameroon’s (2011) *Code général des impôts.*
dry, sometimes lasting for days or even weeks at a time, even in residential areas in Yaoundé, the capital city.

An examination of the 2010 budgetary allocation of the government with regard to the relative allocations for industry promotion or social sector spending against spending allocations to either the presidency and its related services or the military, suggests interesting insights into its pattern of public spending. While the presidency is allocated 57.34 billion CFA francs, services attached to it receive 6.67 billion and the Economic and Social Council attached to the presidency, which has not convened for more than a decade and a half, receives another 23.62 billion CFA francs, a combined allocation of 87.63 billion CFA francs. This compares to 5.40 billion and 4.34 billion CFA francs for the ministries of trade and tourism respectively, which could help boost job creation given significant budgetary allocations. In the same way, the allocation of 175.35 billion of CFA francs for defence spending far outstrips the allocation of 43.71 billion and 123.70 billion CFA francs for higher education and public health respectively (Cameroon Tribune 2010) But beyond such lopsided and misguided budgetary allocations as a partial explanation for the deficit in social service delivery to Cameroonians, we must remember the role that pervasive corruption plays in distorting the impact of these already politically driven resource allocations.

It is evident that the problem lies not so much in whether the tax system is progressive or favourable towards reducing income inequalities. Rather it stems from the way government uses public revenues, or more precisely fails to do so effectively, in a way that is responsive to the social and infrastructural needs of most citizens (Atemnkeng et al. 2006, pp. 18–19, Ndue 2005), and this failure is in turn strongly tied to the grand corruption that prevails within the state of Cameroon. It is therefore this discrepancy between the payment of taxes and the perceived insufficient responsiveness of these tax revenues to social needs that colours citizens’ perceptions of taxation in Cameroon, as elaborated on below.

**Perceptions of taxation in Cameroon**

Increasingly, citizens view the high tax burden identified by the World Bank report above as being matched by a near absence (if not outright absence) of social amenities and other public services. The perception of the injustice of being taxed by the government while it fails to reciprocate with services is so strong that they overtly condemn government’s continuous taxation. And they are increasingly expressing such frustrations through the private press, especially those newspapers which offer interactive space for discussion on their Internet sites. An illustrative case can be seen in the online comments by Cameroonians, both abroad and within Cameroon, that followed the online publication of a press article by two concerned residents of a local community, entitled ‘Why government should not collect taxes in Kumbo’ (a small town in the north-west region of Cameroon). The article and some responses to it were so striking that we have reproduced it here in full. The article and the discussion surrounding it highlight crucial links with various conceptual insights reviewed in the introduction.

Clearly, the authors of the article, reflecting the prevalent views among citizens in communities in Cameroon, express deep frustration with the payment of taxes without a demonstrated concern for infrastructural and social development in their Kumbo community. What emerges is an articulation of their desire to ‘exchange’ their taxes for better roads and schools from the government (Sabates and Schneider 2003, p. 4). Most notable, however, is the clear articulation by the authors of the relationship between accountability and taxation by the state. Demands for social and infrastructural development of the Kumbo community in exchange for the taxes they pay correspond broadly to demands for ‘external accountability’
in terms of how the state uses tax revenues (Gloppen and Rakner 2002). However, what is also clear is that this absence of development and the deep tone of anguish embedded in similar lamentations in Cameroon expose the visible absence of any room for ‘revenue bargaining’ between communities and the state (Moore 2007). This leaves taxpayers disillusioned and despairing of any chance for redistributive justice from the state. If social justice requires people to fulfill their civic duties, like paying taxes, distributive justice imposes on the government the obligation to distribute in proportion the resources of the nation to the needs, capabilities and merits of the people. This includes roads, and especially in Kumbo.

Selected Comments:

Comment 1:
How can we expect a government run by thieves for thieves to care about the basic needs of ordinary Cameroonians? The corrupt ethnico-fascist cabal in Yaoundé only cares about one thing – stealing enough money to last several lifetimes. The absence of good roads in Kumbo is a direct consequence of the mismanagement and thievery carried out by Ondo Ndong formerly of FEICOM and currently at Kodengui. Hope he rots in there and also in hell if that is not hell enough. Posted by: Vally

Comment 2:
All of a sudden, the people of Kumbo are seeing what they should have seen years ago. A tax revolt looks ideal. Pay your taxes, but don’t remit them to Yaoundé. Repair your roads with the proceeds. Paul’s gendarmes will go away the moment their pay packages are no longer coming in. The whole nation should stop paying taxes and see if the entire population can be jailed. Posted by: Che Sunday (DC)

Figure 1. An extract of citizens’ views on taxation (Foleng and Bam 2006).
corruption is effectively part of the problem, since, as shown by the results of a survey conducted in the city of Douala, many citizens seek to evade taxes because they do not want to continue enriching those who have already illegally appropriated enough of the national wealth (Esso 1996). Such perceptions could then justify the second online commentator’s calls for resistance through a ‘tax revolt’, employing the ‘rhetoric for calling on taxpayers to be watchful, to fight for their rights’ (Braithwaite 2003b, p. 18).

Framed in such rights-based discourse, perceptions on the part of citizens hinge on the unjust claim to taxation by the state, highlighting the fact that left to themselves citizens’ voluntary compliance would be low, if not supported by a great degree of the threat of coercion against those who might contemplate tax evasion. Occasionally, such citizens’ perceptions have been accompanied by effective confrontational action against state authorities. For instance, there was an upheaval in the small ‘Fiango’ market of a medium-sized urban centre in the city of Kumba, a town in the south-west region of the country, as a protest against ‘high taxes’ was staged by traders in 2007. During this protest, the Kumba Traders’ Welfare Association (KTWA) promised to stage a peaceful protest march to the offices of the taxation department, the Kumba urban council, and the senior divisional office. Prompted to take action against what they found no longer tolerable, they complained and threatened that:

We must seize our rights if it is not given to us. We shall sacrifice and let government know what we want and if our request is not granted, we shall swing into action. Traders have been turned into paupers and the government wants us dead. (Post 2007)

Aware of the potential chaos that generally follows collective actions in this particularly alert and often violent city, and frightened of these planned protest marches to their offices, the local director of taxation tried to explain his delicate situation to the traders, telling them that he merely ‘follows instructions from the hierarchy’. In a similar manner, the assistant divisional officer for Kumba Subdivision summoned the union’s president to his office for a dialogue. In a letter to the traders, he called on them to remain calm while ‘their grievances [are] looked into by a competent authority’ (Post 2007). From this letter, it is evident that the government is not only aware of the yoke citizens bear in the name of taxation, but is also aware that citizens feel they do not derive benefits from such taxation. More important is the implicit suggestion that ‘competent authorities’ could do something about it, but have long neglected to do so and waited for manifestations of discontent before any remedial action was envisaged. The implication of these various ‘postures of defiance’ as regards taxation in Cameroon is a crisis in the perception of taxation that conveys a deep-seated frustration with the state. But it also harbours a high potential for revolt over the exercise of the state’s rights to tax its citizens, and in that sense amounts to a critique of the governing elite as well as a citizenship struggle to redefine the national question in terms of the redistributive justice of life chances (see Chouala 2009, p. 21).

Indeed, it appears that the inadequate provision of social and infrastructural services in Cameroon as well as the pervasive nature of grand corruption in the country combine to fuel anguish and frustration among the more precarious social groups such as youth and women in the urban centres. This is the case for students, for those working within the informal sector (market women and small traders), and even housewives, who are all confronted on a daily basis with the rising costs of living and/or corruption in Cameroon. In the absence of strong and organised working classes in the country, since the 2000s youth and student protests around university towns have been more common than strikes from organised labour groups. Thus, in addition to occasional generalised protests undertaken by youths such as that of February 2008 discussed above, between 2005 and 2010 there have been several serious student
protests within state universities across the country, including at the University of Buea (2005 and 2006) and at the University of Yaoundé (2005 and 2007). In April 2005, as a student at this university, one of the authors participated in a prolonged protest against the high cost of living and the increasing levels of insecurity resulting from banditry attacks on student neighbourhoods. During the protest two students were shot dead by law-enforcement agents, without any consequences (see International Crisis Group 2010, p. 14). Shortly afterwards, in November 2006 another student protest ensued. This second protest erupted at the University of Buea when it transpired that the authorities at the ministry of higher education had corruptly modified the final admission list published by the vice-chancellor of the University of Buea following an entrance examination into the newly created medical school at the university. A further two student casualties ensued from their confrontations with the security forces (see Orock and Ngeve 2012).

Conclusion
This paper has explored the crucial problem of how citizens in Cameroon, a country plagued by bad governance, perceive the fact of the state taxing them. It has done so by exploring the relationship between the social and political conditions of state governance in Cameroon, tracing the complex processes shaping the institutional incapacities of the state in providing citizens’ needs – mainly perceived as associated with the problem of corruption among public officials. It has also shown how these same processes shape citizens’ assessments and relations to these institutions. It is evident that neopatrimonial governance, expressed by widespread bureaucratic corruption and dismal levels in public service delivery, on the one hand, and citizens’ distrust of these public institutions, on the other, lead citizens to adopt negative perceptions and sometimes defiant postures towards the state’s legitimacy to tax them.

Oluwu (2002, p. 2) has argued that (public) governance implies ‘the fundamental rules governing the relationships between the rulers and the ruled’. Yet, as this paper has shown in the case of Cameroon, more than anything else corruption and administrative unaccountability surround the derailment of these bureaucratic rules that have been crucial in shaping citizens’ distrust of public institutions and the public officials in them. This distrust is perceptible in their attitudes toward taxation. As some degree of democratisation has yielded some measure of deliberative space, the church and the private media, as segments of civil society, have taken the opportunity to bring the problem to the fore of the national political agenda. This has forced the government to initiate anticorruption campaigns that have so far failed to overturn these negative views of public institutions, as a result of the perceived politicisation of these clean-up efforts themselves. The Cameroonian case clearly illustrates the challenges confronting African states if they seek to expand their capacity for domestic mobilisation of resources through taxation.

Acknowledgements
Parts of this article are drawn from some chapters of Rogers Tabe E. Orock’s master’s thesis in public administration from the University of Vaasa in Finland (2009) entitled ‘Trust in public finance and service delivery: citizens’ views towards the payment of taxes and public administrative accountability in Cameroon’, for which Rogers would like to thank Professor Amr Sabet who acted as supervisor.

Notes on contributors
Rogers Tabe Egbe Orock is currently a PhD Fellow at the Department of Anthropology, Archaeology and Linguistics of Aarhus University in Denmark. He holds a combined BSc (Honours) degree in
sociology and anthropology from the University of Buea in Cameroon, a Master of Administrative Science degree in public administration from the University of Vaasa and a MSocSc degree in social and cultural anthropology from the University of Helsinki, both in Finland. This paper was written while he was a student in the master’s programme in public administration at Vaasa. He can be contacted by email at etnoreto@hum.au.dk.

Oben Timothy Mbuagbo holds a PhD in social anthropology from the University of Basel in Switzerland and a MSc in sociology from the University of Ibadan in Nigeria. He is currently a senior lecturer in sociology at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of the University of Buea in Cameroon. He has published extensively in areas spanning the sociology of governance (civil society and democracy, decentralisation and local power dynamics in the Cameroon’s city administrations) as well as the politics of ethnicity in Cameroon. He can be contacted by email at mbuagbo@yahoo.com.

References


Doubly dispossessed by accumulation: Egyptian fishing communities between enclosed lakes and a rising sea

Andreas Malm and Shora Esmailian

Human Ecology Division, Department of Human Geography, Lund University, Sweden; Independent writer, Sweden

In a corner of the Egyptian revolutionary drama, the fisherfolk of the northern Nile Delta have begun to organise. They suffer an indicative predicament. The two great lagoons of Borullus and Manzala have largely been enclosed by fish farms as the Mubarak regime sought to expand Egypt's aquaculture industry. On the other hand, the sea is threatening to submerge the ground on which the very same fishing communities are based. How can we understand the pinch in which they find themselves? This article questions the sustainability of the Egyptian aquaculture miracle, examines the likely impacts of sea level rise on the communities north of Borullus and Manzala, and seeks to conceptualise the dialectic between the two processes. While the fisherfolk prepare to fight against the encroaching farms, however, there is little on the horizon in the way of struggle against the other, perhaps even more dangerous side of the squeeze.

Keywords: Egypt; fishing communities; sea level rise; aquaculture; accumulation by dispossession; revolution

Introduction

In the spring of 2011, the people of Egypt blazed a trail towards a future different from the past, in a show of courage, discipline and determination that impressed an entire world.
Tahrir Square was a defining moment. Inspiring people from Chile to Uganda, India to the United States, it appeared to inaugurate a new era of popular struggle (see e.g. Davis 2011, Mason 2012), and there can ultimately be only one explanation for this: the ailments of Mubarak’s Egypt had something in common with the broader state of the world. Neoliberalism remains a neat shorthand for that state. Despite anxieties over its manifold meanings and sometimes sloppy usage, the term is indispensable for capturing the global trend of extending the institution of private property into all realms of human life, set in train in the early 1970s (Ferguson 2008, Brenner et al. 2010, Castree 2010a). Precisely that trend formed the immediate backdrop to the Egyptian revolution (see Joya 2011).

Human life, however – like neoliberalism – is nothing without biophysical resources. Neoliberalism, as Noel Castree has recently argued with force, is constituted through its engagement with the extra-human environment, and unthinkable outside of it (Castree 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2011). A hallmark of its advance throughout the world is the transformation of biophysical resources – be they land or water, plants or minerals – into commodities, to be owned privately, purchased and sold on ‘free’ markets. Parts of the natural world hitherto owned by nobody, by the state or the local community are enclosed and reserved for the disposal of private proprietors. This does not, however, mean that the state abdicates and vanishes from sight, as a popular misunderstanding of neoliberalism would have it. On the contrary, the state is often absolutely instrumental in establishing the rule of private property – particularly if resistance is encountered – and enforcing the rules of the market (Castree 2010a, pp. 20, 29, Brenner et al. 2010, p. 330, cf. e.g. Radice 2008, Wacquant 2012).

Such, indeed, was the mission pursued by the Egyptian state in the time of Hosni Mubarak. Having surrendered to the diktats of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in the early 1990s, the regime embarked on increasingly aggressive campaigns for transferring the human and biophysical resources of Egypt – including labour, land and, as we shall see, the water of its lakes – to capital (see e.g. Mitchell 2002, Bush 2002, Farah 2009, El-Mahdi and Marfleet 2009, Kandil 2011, Joya 2011). This entailed a considerable exertion of violence. To expand the sway of private property, the state mustered its arms of physical force: the apparatus of the National Democratic Party, the police branches, the baltagiya – a generic term for plainclothes henchmen on the payroll of the regime – and their various mutations were sent to impose free-market solutions whenever required. Moreover, the entrepreneurs appropriating the resources freed up by the state were often indistinguishable from the representatives of that very state: corruption, murky affairs, illicit handovers of assets were not occasional temptations in the liaison between state and capital, but the very modus operandi. The Egyptian state under Mubarak offered a particularly stark synthesis of authoritarian state power and unbridled private property.

Now, if Egypt in 2011 placed itself at the forefront of global resistance against the onslaughts of neoliberalism, the country is also at the frontline of another phenomenon defining the present era. It is one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change. The Nile Delta figures frequently in research on sea level rise, as an extremely flat and dense home of population, agriculture, industry and cultural heritage on the verge of inundation (see e.g. Parry et al. 2007, Bohannon 2010, Dasgupta et al. 2011, El-Raey 2010, Tolba and Saab 2009). According to one survey of the impacts of sea level rise on the developing world, Egypt stands to lose more than any other country in terms of agricultural land should global sea levels rise by one metre. It ranks second in terms of population exposed, third in terms of share of GDP under threat, and fifth in terms of urban areas at risk. In the projections of this particular study, 25% of the Delta would be submerged by a one-metre sea level rise (Dasgupta et al. 2009a).
There is currently little reason to hope that these scenarios will be avoided. Rather than decreasing under the immense pressure of climate science, emissions of greenhouse gases are accelerating dramatically. In the 1990s, average annual growth of global CO2 emissions was 1%; in the first seven years of the new millennium it was 3.6% – well above a tripling of the rate – while in 2010 it reached the all-time high of 5.9% (Raupach et al. 2007, Canadell et al. 2007, Peters et al. 2012). The year of the Arab revolutions was accompanied by a projected growth of more than 3%; a new ‘business as usual’ (Peters et al. 2012). But this should perhaps come as no surprise. A second distinctive feature of the neoliberal engagement with biophysical resources is, according to Castree, ‘unprecedented levels of commodity production, transportation, consumption and disposal’ (Castree 2010c, p. 1744). Not only are resources turned into commodities; they are consumed and dissipated in larger quantities, over shorter timescales. For the Nile Delta, this might spell disaster.

The archetypal Delta inhabitant is a farmer, tilling the famously fertile soil with the lavish water of the Nile: both resources are at risk of disappearing. Far less attention has been paid to the fisherfolk of the Delta. Their predicament is no less precarious, and deserves study for its own sake. The fisherfolk of the northernmost Nile Delta inhabit some of the areas most exposed to sea level rise, but they also suffer the consequences of one of the Mubarak regime’s most high-profile experiments in neoliberal development: the rise of the Egyptian aquaculture industry. One factor strikes them from the front, the other from the back. Thus their predicament offers a starting point for inquiring into a nexus largely overlooked by climate change research as well as revolutionary activists in Egypt and elsewhere: the relationship between neoliberalism and vulnerability to climate change.

In this article, we shall offer a brief introduction to the difficulties faced by fishing communities in the north-eastern Nile Delta, between the shores of Lake Borullus and the Mediterranean Sea and, to a lesser extent, between Lake Manzala and the sea. We draw upon fieldwork in the area in May and June 2011, as well as newspaper reports and previous research on sea level rise and aquaculture in Egypt. Towards the end, we try to outline a conceptual framework for understanding the pinch these communities find themselves in: trapped between the forces of neoliberalism and climate change, they are in a fight for their survival. One part of the threat emanates from the policies of the Mubarak regime, inviting the conclusion that the Egyptian revolution provides at least the opportunity for some kind of redemption. But that may be an overly optimistic prognosis. Even more Herculean efforts than those invested in the toppling of Mubarak might be required if the age-old lands and waters of the northern Delta fisherfolk are to be saved.

The overstrained kidneys of Egypt

While farming has been the predominant activity throughout the Nile Delta’s history, a significant attractor of human settlers immediately after its formation some 6000–8000 years ago was the richness of the great coastal wetlands. Their teeming fish stocks have underpinned northern Delta civilisation ever since. Forming a string of shallow lagoons, ‘the four sisters’ run from Lake Mariut on the outskirts of Alexandria in the west, via Lake Idu to the large Lake Borullus and, largest of all, Lake Manzala to the east of Damietta. Historically, they constitute a quarter of all Mediterranean wetlands, delicately balancing inflowing seawater with freshwater from the Nile in highly biodiverse and productive ecosystems. Narrow marine bars separate the lagoons from the sea and support a string of communities, traditionally alternating between the fishing grounds of the lakes and the sea (Stanley and Warne 1993, Shaltout and Khalil 2005, Dumont and El-Shabrawy 2007, Agrawala et al. 2004).
With the construction of the Aswan High Dam in the 1960s, nutrient-rich sediments were blocked from reaching the mouths of the Nile. Catches near the coast decreased, and the boats of the fishing communities turned inwards, to the four sisters. But the dam likewise obstructed the flow of nutrients into the lakes, a poor substitution for which was the rising tide of effluents from industry and intensified agriculture. Wetlands are sometimes described as the kidneys of landscapes, since they tend to receive wastewater, filter it and pass it on to the sea; in the case of Egypt, the kidneys have become severely overstrained.

The sewage, drainage water and soup of chemical substances from the Delta industries streaming unobstructed into the lakes have, particularly since the mid 1990s, tainted their waters, sped up eutrophication and, in general, turned the lagoons into sinks for pollutants (Bush and Sabri 2000, Shaltout and Khalil 2005, Hamza 2009, Dumont and El-Shabrawy 2007, Oczkowski and Nixon 2008, Chen et al. 2010). While a heavier load of nitrogen and phosphorous can in fact increase the yield of fish in the short term, beyond a threshold the stocks begin to collapse. This has already happened in the most polluted of the four lakes, Mariut, the all-but-destroyed kidney of Alexandria; the three others appear to be on their way to the same tipping point (Integrated Regional Information Networks [IRIN] 2008, Oczkowski and Nixon 2008). Indeed, in February 2010, Al-Ahram Weekly reported that production in Manzala had already begun to drop, primarily for one reason:

The lake is used as a dumping ground by nearby factories, and receives large quantities of agricultural run-off, including pesticides. ‘We have sent official complaints to the concerned authorities. All that happens is that officials come, make empty promises, and then leave’, says

Figure 1. The Nile Delta.
As for Lake Borullus, a 2010 inventory identified two major sources of pollution: petro-refineries and fertiliser factories in the area. Toxic heavy metals are a particular cause for concern (Chen et al. 2010).

The pollution and the eutrophication, together with urbanisation, road construction and ‘land reclamation’, contribute to a steady reduction of the surface area of the four sisters. Between the 1950s and the 1990s, Mariut lost 54% of its area, Idku 27%, Borullus 39%, and Manzala 49%; since then, the losses have accelerated, particularly for Mariut (Hamza 2009). Much like the rest of the Delta, the great lakes appear to have entered a phase of environmental destruction prior to the advent of tangible climate change (cf. Stanley and Warne 1998).

Nearly a third of the Nile Delta is either less than one metre above or below sea level. The four sisters are all located in the lowest-lying areas, where the flat land almost imperceptibly merges with the sea through the transitional ecosystems of the lagoons (see e.g. Stanley 1996, Stanley and Warne 1998). Since the Aswan dams terminated the northward transport of sediments, the Delta is sinking. The rates of subsidence vary between 1 and 9mm per year, with the highest figures registered in the east, around Lake Manzala (see e.g. Stanley 1990, Agrawala et al. 2004, El-Raey 2010).

Since the 1990s, global sea level rise has been accelerating rapidly, reaching a mean rate of 3.3mm per year between 1993 and 2009, with significant local variations. The melting of glaciers and sea ice is now the dominant driver of the process (see e.g. Nicholls and Cazenave 2010). In the Mediterranean, rates of sea level rise fluctuate widely from one year to another and between different parts of the sea; in the 1990s, annual rises of 1–3cm were registered in the Levantine sector, lapping the shores of the Nile Delta (Criado-Aldeanueva et al. 2008). That might very well be a harbinger of the future. It does not bode well for the communities north of Borullus and Manzala.

**A town hanging by a thread**

Lake Borullus is a typical specimen of the Nile Delta lagoon system. Some 40 to 200cm deep, it is the second largest of the four lakes, the only one to be a Ramsar site – protected, that is, under the 1971 Convention on Wetlands of International Importance – and the traditional basis for a vibrant community of fisherfolk (Shaltout and Khalil 2005, Dumont and El-Shabrawy 2007). Borullus provides the livelihood for some 50,000–60,000 artisanal fishermen, dependent on the open waters of the lake (IRIN 2009, Interview, Ghoneim).

The central fishing town in the area, Burg El-Borullus, straddles the marine bar separating the sea from the lake, right at the inlet where the two meet. The ground under Burg El-Borullus has already been chipped away by erosion, largely caused by the Aswan dams, and parts of the village have been surrendered to the sea. Accelerating sea level rise joins forces with the process (Fanos et al. 1995, El-Raey et al. 1999, El Banna 2004, Dumont and El-Shabrawy 2007). The marine bar along the lagoon, 500m at its narrowest, is shrinking perilously fast (Frihy et al. 2010). According to a projection from 2007, at the current speed ‘it would be a matter of a decade for sections of the northern shore of Borullus to collapse’, or, in other words, ‘it is only a matter of time before’ the life cycle of Lake Borullus ‘will be terminated by reintegration into the Mediterranean as a coastal bay’ (Dumont and El-Shabrawy 2007, pp. 681–682). A particularly severe storm in December 2010 caused a further surge of erosion on the north-eastern shore of the lake.
‘Hussein’ is a fisherman living in Burg El-Borullus. Sitting in his home in a densely packed neighbourhood, he describes a town hanging by a thread:

After the last storm there was a lot of water, some houses were inundated and some protection blocks overflown. We are afraid that Burg might disappear. There is not sufficient protection here. If you were driving from Alexandria to Burg El-Borullus maybe a decade ago, you wouldn’t have seen the sea, but now you can see it everywhere: the water has risen.

The village itself used to be full of sand mountains, we used to play on them when we were children. Some of them were 70–80 meters high and we climbed them and rolled down. Now the sea has taken them, the land has been eroded. Old Burg is now under water, the buildings are 500 meters out in the sea. When we go fishing and the water is clear we can see the walls of the buildings.

We fishermen can feel that the sea level is rising, and so people here have begun building their houses higher. But if you, for example, build a stair with seven or eight steps above the sea level, after many years you cannot find those steps.

The storm in December 2010 caused an unprecedented surge of water, inundating up to 3km of the Delta coast. Researchers at the Coastal Research Institute (CORI), a body under the Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation responsible for monitoring and protecting the environmental conditions of Egypt’s coasts, classify the storm as a once-in-a-hundred-year event. But CORI is discerning a trend. The duration of storms, their average wave height and ‘significant’ wave height are all on the rise. Between 1998 and 2010, total duration rose from 1.6 to 3.5 days per year, and average wave height from 0.5 to 0.76m (Interviews, CORI researchers). Few parts of the Delta are so vulnerable as the flat, thin marine bars between the lakes and the sea, and the towns and villages they buttress.

The Egyptian trends of longer and more intense storms, with the December 2010 event the most spectacular so far, mirror global developments (Dasgupta et al. 2011). Even a small sea level rise would ‘significantly magnify the impact of storm surges’ (Dasgupta et al. 2009a, p. 381). A sea level rise of one metre is, according to one study, expected to intensify storms across developing countries and increase the share of their total coastal territory exposed to surges, from today’s 7.82% to 13.36%, doubling the population at risk (Dasgupta et al. 2011). The region singled out for the greatest increase in population exposed to once-in-a-hundred-year storm events under a one-metre sea level rise is the Middle East and North Africa. In that region, Egypt comes out on top: the country’s ‘surge zone’ would expand by 83.6% under a one-metre scenario (Dasgupta et al. 2009b).

A fisherman in his sixties, ‘Suleiman’ remembers when he used to walk on land in Burg El-Borullus that is now totally submerged. These days, he claims, storms become ever more intrusive, reaching into houses at night. Protection systems are wholly lacking or deficient, while erosion and the removal of sand dunes for construction purposes invite the seawater further inland. For Suleiman and other fishermen in Burg El-Borullus, however, there is another, at least as pressing problem coming from the other side of the town. The lake is being enclosed by fish farms.

**A lake off-limits**

Aquaculture is the farming of fish in closed net-pens. Egypt is the cradle of the practice: tomb friezes dating back to 2500 BC record harvests of tilapia from ponds on the Nile (Sapkota et al. 2008). On the four sisters, however, the predominant traditional practice has been fishing on the open lagoons, commons to which all fisherfolk have had inherited rights under a customary management system. Run with small boats or rafts, navigated with
poles in the shallow waters, that system has sustained the fishing communities around the lakes for millennia (Bush and Sabri 2000, Zwirn 2002, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations [FAO] 2011).

The Nasser regime built its first commercial fish farm in 1961, and over the coming decades, a very slow growth took place under the auspices of the state. It was not until the late 1990s that the take-off in Egyptian fish farming occurred. Spurred on by the World Bank, which established large-scale model farms and provided credit for the proliferation of hundreds of replicas, and the United States Agency for International Development, which recommended fish farming for feeding the poor, the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation launched a concerted campaign for the expansion of the industry (World Bank 2000, Bush and Sabri 2000, Zwirn 2002, FAO 2011, World Food Programme [WFP] 2011). The drive went hand in hand with the repeal of Nasser’s land reform and the complete re-institution of private property on Egypt’s farms. For the first time since the 1950s, tenants could be evicted, rents were regulated by the market, and landowners regained full rights to amass large holdings (see Bush 2002). One purpose of that counter-reform was to stimulate agribusiness in Egypt, and the same objective drove the expansion of aquaculture.

Traditionally, aquaculture in Egypt and elsewhere has been practised for subsistence needs, in small farms, with low stock density and minimal extra inputs. Industrial aquaculture is of another character entirely. To maximise profit, thousands of fish must be raised on the feedlots, with all sorts of inputs to ratchet up productivity (Brummet and Williams 2000, Clausen and Clark 2005, Sapkota et al. 2008). In the twenty-first century, this is the engine of a virtual explosion of global growth: industrial aquaculture is now considered the fastest growing sector of agriculture and animal food production in the world, and the expansion is only expected to continue (Clausen and Clark 2005, Sapkota et al. 2008).

One critical factor behind this trend is, of course, the depletion of fish stocks in the world’s oceans. For actors such as the World Bank and FAO, aquaculture now promises a ‘blue revolution’ in analogy with the green one, offering a way out of the fish crisis as well as a basis for food security in the developing world (Clausen and Clark 2005). Egypt is the African spearhead. Accounting for four out of every five fish farmed on the continent and 65% of all fish consumed in Egypt, almost quadrupling output between 1999 and 2011, the aquaculture sector is perceived to be a model (Brummet and Williams 2000, Zwirn 2002, McGrath 2009, 2010, Viney 2011, FAO 2011). The bright lessons from Egypt are to be exported to other African nations grooping for food security. Indeed, the Mubarak regime itself sought to improve the strained relations with one of its key African neighbours, Ethiopia, by exporting aquaculture know-how and establishing cooperation between the two countries’ private fish sectors (see e.g. Salem 2010).

One of the most enthusiastic champions of Egyptian aquaculture is the FAO. Estimating that ‘over 99 percent’ of output comes from ‘privately owned farms’, it goes on to state that the industry has expanded ‘as a result of the high returns on investment’ – profit, in other words – and is now undergoing a complete overhaul:

Aquaculture is developing rapidly from a traditional family-run business into a modern industry. As a result, the number of traditional family farms is declining and replaced by semi-intensive and intensive farming operations. ... The high rate of return on investment in aquaculture has attracted a large number of small to middle level investors who tend to have a more scientific background than the traditional farmers (FAO 2011), stimulating the emergence of fish feed manufacturing companies and ‘the application of modern technologies’ in all stages of production, including mechanical fish harvesting.
‘Human resources’, the FAO observes, are divided into two main categories: owners of lands and farms, and hired ‘people working in fish hatcheries, cage farms and intensive pond aquaculture’ (FAO 2011). In other words, a rather familiar form of class formation has occurred.

The vast majority of fish farms are ‘clustered in the areas surrounding’ the four sisters in the Delta (FAO 2011). In Borullus, they enclose their pens with dykes of mud and reed, occupying more and more of the lake’s area (Shaltout and Khalil 2005, Frihy et al. 2010). Magda Ghoneim, a lecturer in rural sociology at Ain-Shams University, Cairo, has been working together with fishermen’s associations in the Borullus region. She offers this assessment:

You have people in the lake who say ‘this land is mine’, without having contracts, and the big families, the powerful fishermen say ‘this area is for my family’ and use reeds to surround their areas and expand them more and more. And then the free area of the lake dramatically decreased . . . 130 farms on the southern section of the lake have legal contracts for 3000 feddan, but now they actually have 18,000 feddan, and they continue to expand, spreading the reeds to hide their illegal business. They produce three times more fish than all the small fishermen in Lake Borullus together. What they do is very harmful for the whole lake, but they don’t care. They throw the waste from their farms into the lake, and this is of course forbidden. They are using small fish as fodder in their farms, and it is a big business: people go and get small fishes, dry them in the sun and then make powder from them to use as fodder. It is more profitable than heroin.

These are major businesses, but the big problem is all the corruption behind them. You could not get a fish farm without contacts in the police and in the NDP [the National Democratic Party of the Mubarak regime, now dissolved]. It is so unfair. (Interview, Magda Ghoneim)

In 2006, Magda Ghoneim and her associates launched a project to clear parts of Lake Borullus of reeds. Close to some of the farms, ‘people with guns started shooting at our workers and took photos . . . . The army closed its eyes, and the police only caught small fishermen and said their nets were illegal.’ Some reeds were indeed removed, but the problem persists. According to ‘Hussein’, the farms are strangling Burg El-Borullus:

There is poverty here because of what happened with the lake, the baltagiya are taking over it. For 20 years they have been bribing policemen and shore guards to allow them to make their own fish farms. They take the small fish from the lake, and the water coming out from the farms is bad, full of hormones . . . . If we don’t demolish those farms, then our fishermen won’t be able to live, because they won’t find a place to fish.

‘Suleiman’s’ judgement is equally harsh:

Nothing destroyed the lake more than the fish farms. They totally destroyed especially the small fish . . . . The owners are big tycoons and nobody could prevent them from doing anything. Big names in the country supported them, and the police was corrupt when they began their business.

In 2009, IRIN, the news agency of the United Nation’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, sounded the alarm over the seizure of Lake Borullus. Citing the reduction of open waters, the smuggling of immature fish and the discharge of waste from the farms, it warned of a looming disaster for the fishing communities (IRIN 2009). In the same year, the case of Lake Borullus gained brief national attention when 34 fishermen from the region were captured by Somali pirates. ‘Traditionally they plied the waters of Lake Borollos, rather than the high seas’, Al-Ahram Weekly noted, but ‘incompetent
management practices’ and ‘unlicensed fish farms’ on the lake pushed them away (El-Bey 2009).

The fisherfolk of Burg El-Borullus are being squeezed between a rising sea and an enclosed lake. Both threaten the material bases of their livelihoods, in different but inevitably connected ways.

‘We would become like refugees’

The pinch is even tighter a stone’s throw to the west of Burg El-Borullus, in the hamlet of Bar El-Bahri, on a section of the marine bar that almost has the appearance of a sandy surf-board placed between the sea and the lagoon. During the storm of December 2010, high waves from both directions converged on the hamlet and put it under water. ‘Naguib’, a fisherman entirely dependent on catches from the lake, lives in Bar El-Bahri with his family. He describes their situation thus:

We are affected by the weather, but we are also affected by the fish farms... The sea is rising. There is no protection along the coast here, we need it urgently. Since three or four years the storms have become stronger, and in the winter the foundations of the buildings are weakened by the water. During the storm last year, many had to leave their houses in the middle of the night – our house is a little higher than the others, so we let our neighbours stay here. For 20 days the water covered Bar El-Bahri. We were very badly affected, there was no electricity, the only things that made us survive were the food we had stored and the help we gave each other...

There used to be sand dunes giving good protection and stopping the waves, but now the waves reach all the way here. We must have protection on the shores, both on the sea and on the lake – we are completely surrounded by water. The protection should be three and a half meters high at the sea and one and a half at the lake to stop the waves.

Contemplating the high costs of such a protection systems, and fearing that the Egyptian government might not have the requisite resources, Naguib turns from the sea to the lake:

Our catches are diminishing and some fish species are now extinct. It’s because of the bad administration of the lake, all the fish farms built without restrictions. Those who established farms were members of the NDP and had contacts in the government and money to bribe the police. And now the character of the water is altered and the fish stocks have shrunk.

A similar predicament afflicts another fishing centre, Izbet El-Burg, close to the tip of the Damietta promontory. No fewer than three watercourses surround the town: the Mediterranean Sea to the north, Lake Manzala to the east, and the river Nile to the south/southeast. Much like Burg El-Borullus, Izbet El-Burg rests on a sandy barrier, a tongue of land 500m at its narrowest and subject to erosion (El Banna and Frihy 2009, Frihy et al. 2010). But again, that is just one of the angles from which the fishing communities of the town are under attack.

Guarded by armed men and dogs, fish farms have sealed off ever larger parts of Lake Manzala from boats (Bush and Sabri 2000). In 2003, Mohamed Bayoumi, an expert on the Delta working with the United Nations Development Programme, told Al-Ahram Weekly:

The owners of the fish farms in this area are squatters on state-owned land and do not have titles for the lands, although they are selling it to each other. You might also have been informed that the fish farming business in this area is run by people who are not living in this area or even in this...
governorate and are backed by influential people who never appear in the picture but share in the incredible profits of the business. Moreover, the fish farms in this area are fed from the drain and are unfortunately producing polluted fish, a business that should be halted. (Quoted in Farag 2003)

As already noted, Lake Manzala suffers extreme pollution from the industrial districts of the eastern Delta, as well as sewage originating in Cairo; by 2010, the open area of the lagoon had shrunk to a staggering 15% of its original size (Leila 2010). The combined pressures have driven the fishermen of Izbet El-Burg towards the Mediterranean, where the customary management of the commons is replaced by free competition in which high-tech motorised boats prevail (Bush and Sabri 2000). But the sea is anything but a safe haven. ‘Mohammed’ is the leader of an association of 8000 fishermen working on the Mediterranean from the harbour of Izbet El-Burg:

We can see that the climate is changing. The seasons have shifted and the fishermen no longer know when to fish or not. This year the winter was not cold, and now that we are in May it should be warmer. This affects the fish stocks and the composition of species. . . . Formerly, the fishermen knew there would be four to five storms every year and did not venture out on the seas during storm season. Now no one knows when a storm will hit, and some fishermen have drowned. . . .

Fishermen are intelligent, they travel to Greece and other places and see the changes clearly, so they build their houses higher to protect them from being submerged. But I fear for the survival of Izbet El-Burg. If someone asks me for advice on whether to build a house here or not, I advise him not to, for we will probably drown. We have water on three sides. I can see it coming.

The option of migration appears to have seeped into the minds of fishermen in the area. Asked about what he and his family would do if the sea level continues to rise, ‘Naguib’ responds: ‘We would have to leave the village. It would feel bad, but we wouldn’t have any other choice. We would become like refugees.’

Catching fish in the net of private property

The fishing communities north of the twin sisters Borullus and Manzala are clearly in dire straits. Their many woes begin with the progressive degradation of the lagoon environments. The source of pollution eliciting the most intense complaints from the fisherfolk, however, is aquaculture: fitting a global pattern, the Egyptian industry can expand only by adding more artificial inputs into its farms. Penned up in cages, under conditions of poor hygiene and stress, aquacultural fish must be fed with antibiotics to prevent bacterial infections. As a result, antibiotic resistance and residues threaten the health of fish and people in the vicinity (Clausen and Clark 2005, Sapkota et al. 2008). Together with North Korea, Egypt is the only country in the world without statistics on antibiotics use in its aquaculture industry – hardly a proof of absence (Sapkota et al. 2008). Moreover, 90% of the water used to fuel Egypt’s farms is recycled from agricultural drainage, containing chemicals and organic matter detrimental to fish – high heavy-metal concentrations have been detected in the farms – which necessitate, in turn, ever more antibiotics to keep yields up (Viney 2011, Chen et al. 2010).

Hormones are employed to bolster the growth of the fish, in Egypt and elsewhere. Waste products are used as fodder – mostly from poultry, in Egypt’s case – and the substances that are put into the ponds are bound to leak into the surrounding waters. In Borullus and Manzala, moreover, the ponds curtail water circulation, worsen oxygen deficiency and let off impoverished water into adjacent farmlands (El Banna and Frihy 2009, Elewa...
and El Nahry 2009, Oczkowski and Nixon 2008, IRIN 2009). Needless to say, intensification by means of artificial inputs becomes increasingly necessary as the degradation of the natural environment of the lakes proceeds unchecked. The spiral is vicious indeed.

The Egyptian aquaculture boom has been touted as a marvel of economic growth and food security alike, one of the Mubarak regime’s greatest developmental successes. Amongst other feats, it is said to have created employment opportunities, boosted exports, offered cheap protein to the poor and doubled per-capita fish consumption between 1995 and 2009 (Zwirn 2002, McGrath 2009, FAO 2011). But the supposed blessing is not unmixed, even for consumers. In 2010, a nationwide fish scare broke out, following reports that fish farmed in Lake Manzala was dangerously contaminated (Leila 2010). However, the most direct impacts fall on the artisanal fisherfolk communities. The farms displace them from their traditional fishing grounds, first by enclosing the lakes, and then by further poisoning what remains of the open water.

Meanwhile, from the northern side of the marine bars, a rising sea encroaches on the very same communities. How are we to conceptualise this squeeze? Aquaculture in Borulus and Manzala is, to begin with, a perfect fit for David Harvey’s concept of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey 2003, cf. e.g. Glassman 2006, Bonefeld 2011). Providing analytical depth to the hallmark processes of neoliberalism studied by Castree and others, the concept has, of course, been immensely influential. In outlining it, Harvey lists some basic elements, starting with the ‘commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations’ – exactly what took place in Egypt’s countryside in the 1990s. Second, there is ‘the conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusive private property rights’, and third, ‘the suppression of rights to the commons’ (Harvey 2003, p. 145).

The closest Harvey comes to a formal definition of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ is this: ‘What accumulation by dispossession does is to release a set of assets (including labour power) at very low (and in some instances zero) cost.’ Capital can then ‘seize hold of such assets and immediately turn them to profitable use’ (Harvey 2003, p. 149). Resources that have hitherto been lying fallow and dormant from the viewpoint of capital – they might have been used by people for subsistence needs, but that is immaterial – are appropriated and thrown into circulation. Only then can they breathe ‘new life into capital accumulation’ (Harvey 2003, p. 151).

Fish is a resource with a natural tendency to elude private property: moving freely in water, unlike plants and cattle behind fences, it ignores demarcations of ownership (Sneddon 2007). ‘The sea’s lack of natural boundaries’, wrote Edward Carr in a remarkable article in *The Economist* in 1998, frustrates ‘the task of designing institutions to manage the marine environment’. Only a drastic solution can open this element to private property:

> To enhance its uses, the water must become ever more like the land, with owners, laws and limits. Fishermen must behave more like ranchers than hunters. . . . Mankind may have to treat the coastal waters like prime agricultural land. (Carr 1998, p. 4)

This is the formula of industrial aquaculture. When laid down in lakes already in use by fishing communities, as in the case of Egypt, it presupposes a moment of active dispossession: cutting off the customary users, with physical violence when needed.

As in so many other forms of accumulation by dispossession – including the eviction of Egypt’s tenant farmers in the late 1990s – the task of executing active dispossession fell on the state. Through its extrajudicial police forces, its networks of *baltagiya*, its venal webs of businessmen and NDP bureaucrats, the Egyptian state erected or protected the barriers of
private property inside the lagoons, whose shallow waters were amenable to the purpose (cf. Sneddon 2007, El-Mahdi and Marfleet 2009, Farah 2009). Large capital continues to be attracted to the farms (cf. IRIN 2009).

Aquaculture lends itself to analysis with several concepts from the armoury of critical political economy. It might be said to represent a form of real subsumption of nature, in which capital assumes control of the entire life cycle of organisms, regulating and manipulating their reproduction for maximum profit (Boyd et al. 2001). Or, when the world’s oceans descend ever deeper into a metabolic rift, tearing apart the flows of nutrients and fish and depleting biomass, that rift is transferred to fish farms, where it merely expands in new forms (Clausen and Clark 2005, Foster, Clark and York 2010). Or, aquaculture is yet another instance of a spatial fix, by which capital displaces its contradictions into pristine territories (Harvey 1999). Here, we shall stick with the concept of accumulation by dispossession, for it better reflects some essential aspects of the opposite side of the squeeze.

**In the nutcracker of capital**

Climate change is a form of dispossession. As its various effects hit communities, it deprives them of resources, be they the land submerged, houses damaged or flushed away, seasonal cycles ripped apart, fruit trees or vegetables catching unfamiliar diseases, species of fish or game dislodged from their habitats, or rivers drying up. At its root, climate change is the fallout from two centuries of fossil-fuel-based capital accumulation, or ‘business as usual’. People such as the fisherfolk of the northern Nile Delta were never party to the creation of that business. The accumulation of capital wedged to the combustion of fossil fuels was decidedly not of their making (see Malm 2012a).

From 1750 to 2005, about 0.2% of total cumulative emissions of greenhouse gases in the world – including from land-use change – can be attributed to Egypt. By comparison, the United States accounts for 20–25% (Höhne et al. 2011). In 2008, an average American emitted seven times more CO2 from fossil fuel combustion than an average Egyptian – and that is an average Egyptian, not an artisanal fisher in the northern Nile Delta (and the figure is based on national production, not consumption statistics) (Boden et al. 2011, cf. Roberts and Parks 2007). In the dry words of an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report, ‘the contribution of Egypt to the overall emissions of greenhouse gases is considered minute compared to the high potential impacts on all sectors’ (Agrawala et al. 2004, p. 19). In the more animated words of ‘Mohammed’, the fishermen’s leader in Izbet El-Burg:

> The advanced countries are responsible for everything happening here. Technology is a double-edged sword, it might have facilitated some scientific advances but it has also affected poor places and countries. Perhaps it wasn’t the intention, but we are truly suffering from it.

Awareness of climate change is high and rising in the northern Nile Delta (cf. Ghoneim 2010). Far from all, however, lay the blame on the advanced countries; as in many other parts of the world, religious discourse frequently seeps into conversations on climate change, with varying theological twists (cf. Collectif Argos 2010). ‘Suleiman’ makes a clear distinction between the two types of woes: ‘Borullus will be destroyed if we don’t stop the fish farms in the lake. But it’s all in God’s hands if the sea level rises.’ Sometimes the two sides of the coin are blurred into a perception of one undifferentiated process of resource loss – and that is, indeed, an accurate perception.
The two forms of dispossession reinforce one another. At the very moment when the oceans become more unpredictable, the enclosure of the lakes pushes the traditional fisherfolk towards the sea. Had the lagoons been left unpolluted and unappropriated, the communities would clearly have been better off, endowed with greater buffers of resources to cope with the adverse impacts of climate change; now those buffers are centralised in the hands of capital. Vulnerability to climate change has been produced by the neoliberal policies of the Mubarak regime – and the former exacerbates the consequences of the latter. We are dealing with a brutal feedback loop.

If industrial aquaculture in the northern Nile Delta is a case of accumulation by dispossession, climate change arrives in the area as dispossession by or from accumulation. If the former appropriates resources to accumulate capital, the other destroys resources as a result of having already done so. The processes have different temporalities and spatialities – one is local and immediate, the other global and backloaded; one unites cause and effect, the other has them widely dispersed – but their root cause, we contend, is the same.

As it has evolved in actual history, accumulation of capital presupposes private property and fossil fuels (see e.g. Malm 2012a, Clark and York 2005, Huber 2009). Moreover, since 1973, the year in which the neoliberal era was born according to David Harvey as well as general consensus, capital has unleashed a relentless march of accumulation by dispossession across the globe in lockstep with the most extreme acceleration of fossil fuel combustion the world has ever witnessed (see e.g. Friedlingstein and Solomon 2005, Canadell et al. 2007). When ‘business as usual’ broke existing records after 2000, and again in 2010, the fishing communities of the northern Delta were still not a party to it: on the contrary, their impoverishment due to the encroachment of the fish farms proceeded in tandem with the global bonfire of fossil fuels. Both produced misery – current and future.

This is not the place to undertake a closer examination of the historical interlacement of the extension of private property and the consumption of fossil fuels, only to specify the predicament of the fishing communities of Borullus and Manzala. Accumulation of capital has created a nutcracker squeezing them from two sides, the one form of resource loss being related to the other as in a social teleconnection. The two types of neoliberal engagement with biophysical resources – privatisation and dissipation – have descended upon them, from different directions and consignors, as a double whammy. In other words, the communities are doubly dispossessed by accumulation.

Our case study is utterly local, providing little basis for generalisation. It visually illustrates the logic – the sea on the one side, the lake on the other – but that logic may very well be found in other places, in Egypt, in Africa, and in other peripheries of the world system. Accumulation by dispossession, a core process of neoliberal development, withdraws resources from communities at the very same time as climate change threatens to do so. Inferring from our case, we may hypothesise that the former tends to produce vulnerability to the latter. In so far as accumulation by dispossession pushes people towards the margins of their resource bases, and in so far as these same bases are endangered by the impacts of climate change, the two processes link up in time and space and catch communities from two sides. Further research should be able to identify more such cases.

The revolution: openings and limits

The Egyptian revolution, it follows, offers an opportunity to redress some of the grievances of the fishing communities of Borullus and Manzala. With the Mubarak regime swept away,
there is at least a unique potential to reverse the demise of the northern Delta lagoons, first of all by undertaking some urgently needed protection and rehabilitation measures. Up to now, pleas for cleaning up the lakes, redirecting and treating waste and, perhaps most importantly, implementing integrated plans for development in the Delta have fallen on the deaf ears of a detached state. The destruction of the region has thrived on corruption and institutional chaos (cf. Zetter and Hassan 2002). Were a truly democratic Egypt to emerge, with accountable and decently managed institutions, officials should no longer be able to ‘come, make empty promises, and then leave’. They would have to do something for the people of the lakes. What policies the country’s likely new Islamist rulers will in fact implement remains, of course, to be seen.

Furthermore, if post-Mubarak Egypt were to truly break out of neoliberalism and embark on a different path of development, the aquaculture industry should not be allowed to maintain its grip on the lagoons. Radical intervention against the festering farms is exigent – the very opposite of what international donors and financial institutions have been advocating. Egypt’s aquaculture should clearly not be seen as a paragon of development for African nations struggling to attain food security. While ‘the blue revolution’ may, much like its green predecessor, generate yield spikes over the short term, it does not provide a sustainable source of protein. The intensification of fish farming seems bound to let loose novel chemical and biological agents in the food and general environment of poor people (Clausen and Clark 2005, Sapkota et al. 2008, Brummet and Williams 2000).

Moreover, the Egyptian case suggests that industrial aquaculture disrupts subsistence fishing communities, and to the extent that it is established in coastal areas, it will likely impinge on the very same resource bases that are under threat from climate change. By their definition, coastal communities are on the frontline of sea level rise; aquaculture in their area risks increasing vulnerability further. Post-Mubarak Egypt should not necessarily eradicate aquaculture: smallholder farms might deserve support. But a minimum first step should be to clear away the farms built illegally in Borullus and Manzala. No baltagiye should, it is to be hoped, stand in the way this time.

The key to any such change lies, of course, in the self-organisation of fisherfolk. In the rush to form independent trade unions after the fall of Mubarak, fishermen were among the most avid novices: in April 2011, a first Independent Union of Fishermen was formed. One activist, Kamal Hassan, explained to Al-Masry Al-Youm:

We’ve never had a union for fishermen before, so we are trying to raise awareness regarding the role of trade unions in protecting the rights of their members. Most fishermen aren’t aware that unions serve to safeguard their constituents’ interests, and to improve their working conditions. We expect that many more will join us when they see the benefits of unionization. (Charbel 2011)

On the shores of Borullus, in the new climate of political freedom, the fisherfolk launched a new offensive to rid their lake of illicit farms (cf. Gresh 2011). Radical leftist groups have come out in support of such campaigns, notably the Democratic Workers Party, the seventeenth point of whose declaration of principles reads:

The Workers Party supports the struggle of poor Egyptian fishermen against the leviathans of capital controlling their lakes and against these leviathans’ destruction of the abundance of fish. The party struggles with the fishermen to set up independent associations for each fishing region and an independent general Egyptian fishermen’s union. (Democratic Workers Party 2011)
The fishers of the Nile Delta seem poised to confront the southern face of their problems. How about the sea rising from the north? Communities along the Delta coast are crying out for protection from storm surges and erosion; so far, most breakwaters and seawalls have been built for exclusive resorts rather than villages and towns (see Malm 2012b). That priority could change. CORI is very optimistic – indeed, hyper-optimistic – about what protection technologies can achieve for the Delta, suggesting that most of it will be safe even under ‘business as usual’. In its most recent update of the impacts of twenty-first-century sea level rise on Egypt, CORI uses the scenarios of the fourth assessment report (AR4) of the Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change, famously predicting a 59cm sea level rise by the year 2100 in the very worst case. Since AR4 was published in 2007, the scientific community has discarded that projection, and more realistic scenarios now suggest a rise of up to 200cm in the present century (see e.g. Rahmstorf 2010, Nicholls et al. 2011). Nonetheless, CORI chooses to retain the 2007 outlook; puts faith in the protective capabilities of breakwaters, seawalls and other similar structures; assumes continued ‘business as usual’; and reaches the conclusion that in the very worst case, a fragment of the Delta – a mere 3% – will be affected by sea level rise in the year 2100 (Interview, CORI director Ibrahim El-Shinnawy; see further Malm 2012b).

CORI’s hyper-optimism could be challenged on several grounds. What is interesting in this context, however, is that even these most sanguine scenarios for the future of the Delta count on the disappearance of the fishing communities of Borullus and Manzala. Among the 3% of the Delta that will be submerged under the sea in CORI’s rosy worst-case projection is the part of the Borullus marine bar on which Burg is located, as well as large sections of the barrier between Manzala and the sea (Interview, El-Shinnawy). As for Manzala, CORI researchers expect the ‘the loss of the entire lagoon area’ under a one-metre sea level rise, giving Egypt a new northern shoreline where the sea will lap the heart of the Delta (Frihy et al. 2010, p. 271). As for Burg El-Borullus, CORI seems to have given up on the town, again in spite of its general and very explicit optimism:

Erosion is affecting built structures in some places – yes. There are villages like Burg El-Borullus, but the problem there is not the sea itself: it is the wrong place to put a village! There should be a buffering zone. There has been a planning mistake. (Interview, CORI researcher Muhammed Borhan)

The characterisation of Burg El-Borullus as a ‘planning mistake’ might seem rather odd – inhabitants proudly display Roman artefacts they have found while building their houses – but it is an admission of sorts. The town is in ‘the wrong place’ and therefore cannot be protected, unlike, as CORI believes, most of the Delta. Ibrahim El-Shinnawy, the institute’s director, even suggests that the lagoons should be artificially extended to absorb wave action through the excavation of adjacent ground: ‘this is land where fishermen live now’ (Interview, El-Shinnawy).

The upshot of CORI’s scenarios seems to be that the fisherfolk will eventually have to pack up and move. Their crucial assumption, however, is continued ‘business as usual’ – something no revolution inside Egypt can change. What about a revolution on a global scale? Could it be summoned to vanquish the forces of fossil capital? Were anything of the kind to succeed, would it be able to slow down sea level rise before it is too late?

These are, to say the least, daunting questions that must be dealt with elsewhere. Here, we shall merely conclude that whereas the Egyptian revolution offers an opportunity for reversing accumulation by dispossession in the northern Nile Delta, it has no tools for – and, it seems, no thoughts about – confronting the other flank of the pincer movement.
The sources of climate change are located beyond the borders of Egypt, and beyond the limits of its political discourse. Even an ideal outcome of the revolutionary process, leading to dramatically reduced pollution in the Delta, clean and open lakes, and the best available seawall structures along the coastline, would leave the communities north of Bor-ullus and Manzala exposed to the forces of ‘business as usual’. They are hardly alone in that predicament.

Acknowledgements
We wish to extend our deepest gratitude to Mahienour El-Massry for wonderful cooperation during fieldwork. Many thanks to Stefan Anderberg and two anonymous reviewers for very useful comments on an early draft.

Notes on contributors
Andreas Malm is a PhD student in human ecology at Lund University, Sweden. His research focuses on the political economy of fossil fuel combustion; the topic of his dissertation is the transition to steam power in the cotton industry and imperial navy of early nineteenth-century Britain.

Shora Esmailian is a freelance journalist and writer based in Stockholm, Sweden. She edits Re:public, a magazine of documentary photography and reportage, and will shortly publish a book in Swedish on climate change and migration, based on extensive fieldwork in Kenya, Pakistan and Egypt.

References


Beyond the siege state – tracing hybridity during a recent visit to Eritrea

Tanja R. Müller

School of Environment and Development, Institute for Development Policy and Management and Humanitarian & Conflict Response Institute, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

This article offers an alternative reading of the current situation in Eritrea that goes beyond the narrative of dictatorship and oppression. Based on recent fieldwork in Eritrea and among Eritrean refugees in Tel Aviv, it offers a hybrid interpretation of developments within Eritrea. The article argues that a transition process instigated by the current leadership is still possible. At the same time rising inequalities and other dynamics may ultimately jeopardise any such transition. More generally important sections of the population have become suspicious of grand political projects, but rather focus on the microcosms of potentially intangible transformations from within.

Keywords: Eritrea; siege state; hybridity

Background

When looking at the academic literature on Eritrea from the liberation war to the present, this is dominated by an all too often uncritical admiration of the ‘exceptional’ happenings within the Eritrean revolution, followed by disappointment that developments have not turned out along the lines of ‘dynamic, egalitarian growth’ and a ‘commitment to political pluralism’ (Connell 2011). In consequence, contemporary literature on Eritrea has largely made up its mind and declared Eritrea a dictatorship since about 2001 (if not before), without much of an attempt to try to understand potential transitions within this transition since (among the few exceptions is Reid 2009). Such a perspective has always been ahistorical and not only ignorant of the fact that other liberation movements within their own
historical conditions were similarly ‘exceptional’, while post-liberation consolidation has more often than not resulted in autocratic politics (Dorman 2006). It also pays scant attention to the fact that even within its own core support base among the population, the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) never had quite the amount of uncritical support it claimed to have attained (Mahrt 2009).

This representation of Eritrea has been aided by the fact that due to government restrictions over the last decade, it has become increasingly difficult to conduct research in Eritrea itself. Research that has been carried out relies in various ways on informal arrangements (see Hirt 2010, Müller 2008, Reid 2009). This difficulty is compounded by an Eritrean studies scholarly community, prominent members of which regard anybody still willing to visit Eritrea or who has in fact been given a visa as a ‘traitor’, as somebody who must in some way do the government’s bidding. Eritrea panels at African Studies conferences have thus become unduly politicised and often devoid of serious scholarship. Generalisations are being made about happenings inside Eritrea by observers who have not set foot in the country for many years, enforcing common stereotypes of ‘African dictatorship’. In an almost tragic way this state of affairs mirrors the intolerance of parts of the Eritrean political leadership itself.

I wish to argue here for a more nuanced understanding of what is happening in contemporary Eritrea, an understanding from which a picture emerges that focuses on the hybrid dimensions of the current situation. I borrow the concept of ‘hybridity’ from Mac Ginty (2010) who uses it to analyse resistance and other forms of agency in peacebuilding. ‘Hybridity’ on the one hand focuses on the counterforces to any hegemonic project. It includes what Scott (1985) has termed the ‘weapons of the weak’, everyday resistance to exploitation and coercion. On the other hand ‘hybridity’ also entails the dynamics that over time transform the hegemonic project from within, and thus goes beyond simply stating that every political project is by nature ambiguous. A number of studies have engaged with patterns of subversive disengagement in everyday practices in Eritrea. Those include the disappearance of youth to remote rural areas to evade national service; prison guards and army troops facilitating escapes of those imprisoned; the use of jokes or other tropes to reclaim an alternative narrative of history and future vision; or the pursuit of a protest lifestyle in urban Asmara – all with varying degrees of success (for concrete examples see Poole 2009, Treiber 2009, Wrong 2005). Even more pronounced is the ‘silent resistance’ (Reid 2009) of youth fleeing the country in order to escape national service or other obligations. While all the above provide valuable insights into aspects of life in contemporary Eritrea, two important dimensions of ‘hybridity’ are missing: insights into the lives of those who actively decided to stay, and, more importantly for this paper, an understanding of potentially intangible transformations from within. The only article I am aware of that has engaged with such an agenda was Reid’s (2009) piece in ROAPE. Interestingly, Reid himself has meanwhile given some credence to the view that Eritrea is on the trajectory towards being a failed state (International Crisis Group 2010). Reid’s report for the International Crisis Group (ICG) defines Eritrea as ‘the siege state’, based on the observation that its government is suspicious not only of its neighbours and the wider world, but equally its own population. This is indeed an important part of the mindset among the Eritrean leadership, and in particular of the president who is at the apex of the various power structures in Eritrea (ICG 2010). And while it is equally true that the dynamics of present-day politics in Eritrea have their roots in patterns of rebel governance combined with the violent patterns of history in the Horn as a whole (ICG 2010, Pool 2001), this does not imply that no ‘hybrid’ dimension exists and transitions from within, including from within parts of the current leadership, are not possible.
This paper attempts to provide an alternative reading of the current situation in Eritrea. It argues that while time may be running out, a transition process instigated by the current leadership is still possible, and small openings have indeed occurred in the recent past that may transform the Eritrean polity. My observations were largely made during a two-week visit to Eritrea in October 2011, my first visit since November 2006, combined with six weeks of intensive fieldwork among Eritrean refugees in Tel Aviv between June 2010 and April 2011. In addition, between 1996 and 2006 I visited Eritrea regularly for at least four weeks each year. I also spent one year at the University of Asmara in 2000/2001. This was the academic year during which students were forcefully sent to the Danakil desert because they defied government orders (see Müller 2008). It was thus a time when state securitisation policies had very concrete implications for the lives of a cohort of the population that before was largely outside the political sphere. This was soon to be followed by the Warsay-Yekealo national service campaign (WYDC) for which no official definition exists in terms of lengths and objectives. In reality the WYDC has become the indefinite supplier of cheap labour to enterprises owned by the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), the sole ruling party (see Healy 2007, Hughes 2004, Mehreteab 2007). It is this campaign that is perceived to have caused the mass exodus of youth (Hirt 2010). I thus decided to conduct fieldwork among Eritrean refugees in Tel Aviv in order to get a better understanding of what made them leave. Findings from this fieldwork motivated me to embark on my visit to Eritrea in October 2011 in an effort to touch base again with developments inside the country. What I found among those I interviewed in Tel Aviv thus serves as a starting point for the wider observations I wish to make here.2

Eritrean refugees in Tel Aviv

Eritrea has in recent years become one of the largest producers of refugees in relation to its population size, with those fleeing being predominately young men (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2010). Since 2007 a growing number of Eritrean asylum seekers has made their way to Israel. By the end of 2009, asylum seekers from Eritrea had reached 11,952 and an estimated 1000 Eritrean refugees entered the country every month in 2010, making Israel the third largest recipient of Eritrean refugees worldwide (UNHCR 2010). The majority of Eritreans in Israel live in Tel Aviv.

When asked what made them leave Eritrea, interviewees usually refer to the aspiration of ‘being free’; as could have been expected. When probed, ‘being free’ means ‘be able to work and earn a salary, not work for nothing’ (I1), the latter referring to the stipulations of the WYDC. Most Eritreans work either on construction sites, as street cleaners, or as kitchen helpers in Tel Aviv restaurants. Very few secured qualified employment or a university place, or had the means to open a small business. The latter group has transformed a number of streets around the central bus station in southern Tel Aviv into ‘little Asmara’, dominated by Eritrean cafés, bars, shops, and hairdressing salons. Those who work in restaurants in the evenings spend their days sitting in one of those cafés watching the broadcast of the state television channel ERI-TV with its usual mix of patriotic music, videos of heroic fighters in Eritrea’s past wars, Eritrean soap operas and the occasional speech by the president or other high-ranking officials.

What for me at first glance seemed rather ironic – to find this group of Eritrean youth spending their days in Tel Aviv watching the propaganda of a state they have escaped from – for those Eritreans made perfect sense. Even though in official government rhetoric they are labelled as ‘traitors’ – as are all those who leave the country and are regarded as not
fulfilling their rightful obligations – this is not how they see themselves. In contrast, the Eritrean youth I encountered in Tel Aviv are deeply loyal to the Eritrean state consolidation project and committed to contributing their share to its success. What they reject are government policies, exemplified in the PFDJ securitisation agenda, the militarisation of society and the demands that spring from it. In particular they object to there being no time limits on service obligations ‘once in they never let you free from the military’ (I2), combined with a complete disregard for their own aspirations. The general thrust that runs through the narratives of all research participants in Tel Aviv centres on being denied the ability to live their identities as Eritreans in any meaningful sense: ‘We are leaving in order to upgrade and develop our country’ (I3) as one informant put it. He recalls that ‘when in 1994 national service was declared, everybody accepted it, it was to make Eritrea a well-developed country, but then the face of national service changed, it became a slavery system’ (I3). He himself did national service for four years and ultimately could not take it any longer, not just because his ‘salary’ did not allow him to properly care for his wife and two children, but equally because ‘there was no right to speak or say what you think, ever’ (I3).

This is in line with findings from a study by Hirt inside Eritrea, where she argues that government demands contradict not only personal aspirations but equally traditional norms and values in such a way that a ‘normal’ life is impossible in present-day Eritrea (Hirt 2010). At the same time very few among those I spoke to had any ambition to become politically active, not because they feared repercussions but because they simply wanted a ‘normal’ life and were not interested in politics of any kind. The majority passed through Shimelba refugee camp in Ethiopia on their way to Israel where ‘you were constantly targeted by different so-called opposition groups’ and ‘it became almost dangerous not to join one’ (I4). This state of affairs was one reason why many felt they had to move on from Ethiopia, because a desire to engage in opposition politics was not why they left Eritrea.

Meanwhile, many reflect critically on their decision to embark on this journey, as they have come to realise that securing their ambitions for a decent job or education is not much easier to achieve outside Eritrea. A number of Eritreans in Tel Aviv did experience personal abuse, violence, imprisonment or torture at the hands of Eritrean security forces, but most did not. They either left while in Sawa for their last year of education, because from Sawa it is fairly easy to make it across the border, or even before they were due to go to Sawa and be exposed to its demands. The remark of one interviewee who was in grade six when leaving is rather typical here: ‘I imagined people would go to a good place when I heard they were leaving, so I decided to join’ (I5).

In fact those who arrive in Tel Aviv are getting younger, and can be said to belong to the generation of youth from the global South who, in Ferguson’s (2006) words, aspire for connection and are trying to create a viable future for themselves in a globalised world that has raised expectations only to seemingly close a door in their faces. The ‘refugee existence’ thus offers the promise of the realisation of modern aspirations in a global world and has rightly been described as part of a rite of passage for other populations of African refugee/migrants (see for example Jackson 2008, McKenzie and Triulzi, forthcoming). In fact, the majority of stories I have heard from Eritreans in Tel Aviv are not dissimilar to the narratives of other African populations who embark on such journeys and with whom Eritreans often arrive in Israel as part of bigger groups, pointing to the fact that the one-dimensional understanding of Eritreans fleeing dictatorship misses important dimensions of what is going on. In the Eritrean case there is the added dimension that one quarter of the Eritrean population live in diaspora settings and thus potentially
provide valuable long-distance networks for those who wish to flee. Thus, while leaving the country is part of what Reid (2009, p. 212) has called ‘another manifestation of the politics of silence’, it is equally part of wider global dynamics among African youth and, as I have shown elsewhere in looking at old and new diasporas, does not necessarily imply disloyalty to the wider Eritrean state consolidation project (Müller 2012).

**Tracing hybridity – observations from a recent visit**

This hybrid understanding among Eritrean refugees in Tel Aviv of their own existence and its connection to Eritrea, real and imagined, made me embark on a trip to Eritrea in October 2011, in order to see for myself whether I could trace intangible transformations. A number of caveats are in order here. While I have been in regular contact with a number of key informants in Eritrea since my last previous visit in 2006, and thus had some degree of understanding of what was going on from the inside, a visit of two weeks could only allow me to scratch the surface of any putative change. In addition, due to travel restrictions and the lack of an official research permit, the following is based on conversations and informal interviews with Eritreans from different strands of society, some known to me for many years, others contacted specifically during the course of this visit. They include ministry officials, ex-fighters, party officials, teachers, students, and WYDC recruits, all of whom must remain anonymous. I did not tape-record any interviews but kept an extensive fieldwork diary. The majority of conversations and observations took place in Asmara and its environment, including the college at Mai Nefhi, supplemented by short visits to Keren, Ghinda and Massawa. In spite of those caveats, some interesting dynamics became apparent in the course of my visit.

In 2006, as had been the case from late 2001 onwards, what Connell (2011) writes about his own experiences in 2002 was still prevalent: the feeling (and likely reality) of always being monitored, combined with a reluctance by many Eritreans to speak openly and without constantly looking over their shoulders to see who might be listening in. This was combined with a general mistrust of any ‘foreigner’, transporting the siege-state mentality into everyday life practices. The first observation that struck me was, therefore, how different things were this time: long-term acquaintances and strangers alike were welcoming and discussed things openly and without holding back, in public and private settings.

One of the first things I did upon my arrival was to visit the college at Mai Nefhi near Asmara, one of the colleges created to replace the University of Asmara after its enforced closure from 2002 onwards. The last time I was at Mai Nefhi in 2006 it was run like a military camp, students were not allowed to leave for Asmara or anywhere else and subject to punishment if they did so, and various kinds of disciplinary regimes determined students’ everyday life. With the departure of Colonel Ezra, then de facto in charge of Mai Nefhi, to Sawa some time ago, dynamics at Mai Nefhi have been transformed. Now students come and go as they please, and the only sanctions they face is that their course credits might not be recognised if they miss too many classes – very much like in any ‘normal’ educational establishment (I7, I12). It has become the norm for many students to leave on Thursday to spend the weekend in Asmara, not least because on Friday local minibuses charge double prices (I8-9). The library, empty when I last visited, is now stocked in a manner not considerably worse than the old library at the University of Asmara, and was full of students studying; and the Internet in Mai Nefhi is faster and more reliable than in downtown Asmara. Students are aware that ‘we are privileged to be here, so we try to make the most of it’ (I11, I16) and, in contrast to 2006, students are visibly eager to study.
Many come from families dispersed all over the world as has been the norm for many Eritrean families for decades, long before the current leadership came into power. A typical example is one of my informants who grew up in Assab, completed her matriculation and service in Sawa and is now studying at Mai Nefhi. She has two older siblings, one of whom graduated and completed national service and now works in Juba. A third is in the Democratic Republic of Congo, while her fourth sibling studies at the agricultural college near Keren. Thinking about her own future she is aware she will be given a job as a teacher, and ‘for a few years I would be happy to do this, then we will have to see’ (I10).

This pragmatic attitude, prevalent among many students at Mai Nefhi, is not fundamentally different from attitudes among previous generations of students when the University of Asmara still existed: students always needed to find a way to navigate between government demands on their future and their own ambitions, and have done so in different ways (see Müller 2005). Currently, students who graduate from Mai Nefhi are often assigned to Sawa as grade - 12 teachers. Many volunteer for this assignment, partly because from Sawa it is easy to get into Sudan if one plans to leave the country. Over the last three years roughly 30% of teachers assigned to Sawa used this opportunity to escape, and teachers are usually well prepared and hardly ever caught (I6). Escaping from Sawa also makes it easier for one’s family, as when one is asked about the whereabouts of a family member one can always say they are in Sawa, and often one avoids having to pay the 50,000 Eritrean nakfa (ERN) ‘fine’ that relatives of escapees usually have to pay. Another reason to volunteer for a few years’ service in Sawa is the fact that the school year is short, as part of the year is taken up by military training, thus one can enjoy long periods of time without work in Asmara each year (I6).

At the same time, students are being sent abroad again on scholarships for master’s or PhD degrees, a programme that had all but stopped in the last decade. Main destinations are China, Dubai and South Africa, but it is also becoming possible again to arrange to study in a Western country or find a scholarship of one’s own (I6, I14). This represents a considerable advance compared with 2006, and can almost be described as a return to the time before the 1998–2000 war with Ethiopia, in the aftermath of which the siege mentality took hold.

Taken together, at least among those in higher education opportunities exist to lead a ‘normal’ life and at least partly fulfil important aspirations, even if a majority might eventually join those who have decided to leave the country. In a conversation with one of my former students at the University of Asmara, the student told me how she recently watched the video of her graduation again ‘and all those with me there are not here now, I am the only one still in the country’ (I14). She has secured a fulfilling job, is married and has two children, and thus lives in many ways a satisfying life, according to her own judgement. Most of her former classmates who are now abroad – many of whom I know and am still in contact with – have left legally and after the completion of various national service demands that made them eligible to secure an exit visa.

It is those who fail the matriculation examination for whom this option of normality does not seem to exist. Only around a maximum of 20% of those who complete their final year of secondary schooling in Sawa actually pass the matriculation examination – roughly the same percentage as when the University of Asmara was still in existence. Apart from those 20%, plus another 3000 students (out of yearly cohorts of between 20,000 and 25,000) who can continue their education at one of the country’s technical schools, all other Sawa recruits are assigned straight to the military within the confines of the WYDC (I6). It is predominately these people who try to flee the country, as the only future they can see is one of indefinite service, whether in military or civilian tasks.
This poses the question of what this rather large population of youth would do otherwise. While a percentage might return to their villages and work the land as suggested by some (see Hirt 2010), for many no viable economic alternatives exist. Government officials acknowledge that a major grievance of the country’s youth is this lack of a future perspective combined with the low standard of living that the national service ‘wage’ – in reality no more than a small handout – condemns them to. Indeed, some ministries have increased payments for those on national service salaries, even though this new ‘wage’ is still inadequate to sustain a normal standard of living (I6, I15, I17). But there exists a widespread belief among government officials that the main reason behind discontent is ‘the economic situation’ (I17), and that this will be substantially improved from 2012 onwards, when the government expects considerable revenues from the now operational mine in Bisha, around 150 kilometres to the west of Asmara, where the Canadian firm Nevsun Resources began commercial gold production in February 2011, to be followed by high-grade copper and zinc (I17, I19, see also Connell 2011, and www.nevsun.com). There is an expectation that ‘then we can pay people adequate salaries and the situation will change’ (I17), an expectation that is in line with the more general observation made a few years after independence, that the ‘promise of development’ has to become the ‘legitimising strategy for the state’ (Makki 1996, p. 491).

Looking at the projected wealth from Bisha and the other mining project about to commence in its wake, a number of scenarios are possible. The Eritrean leadership may indeed use this new-found wealth to fulfill some of the promises of development, as it started to do in the first years of the post-independence decade, an agenda that in the official narrative was brought to a halt through the 1998–2000 war with Ethiopia. Or it can go the way of other African countries that experienced new mineral wealth and which subsequently saw mineral incomes disappear into often-corrupt government, party or military networks. The Eritrea of 2011 still shows similarities with the Eritrea of 1991, but it is also, in important ways, different. Among the similarities is a population that in spite of different levels of dissatisfaction still shows a considerable degree of loyalty towards the state consolidation project, if not the PFDJ that has monopolised state ownership. In addition, a substantial group of government officials have internalised the progressive ethos of what the EPLF originally set out to do and are genuinely committed to work for the good of the country (I13, I17, I19).

But there are also important differences. The style of political leadership focused on the figure of the ‘omnipotent president’, that has been described in detail elsewhere, has not only led to different centres of power within the military, the PFDJ and other organs of the state competing with and being played off against each other (see Connell 2011, Reid 2009). It has also allowed certain sectors of the population to take advantage of this political set-up and secure privileges that undermine the very ethos of a state consolidation project most visible in the WYDC to which everybody in theory is obliged to contribute their share (see examples in Hirt 2010).

More generally, it has resulted in making Eritrea a more unequal place, and a sharp increase in inequality can be observed at different levels. There are the inequalities between those who qualify for higher education and those who do not (discussed above). More visibly, there is a significant group of young people in the streets of Asmara, who are well heeled and spending money freely and in no apparent danger of being sent to Sawa. Their income derives from diaspora remittances and smuggling activities. In fact it is quite common when walking the streets of Asmara after dark to be approached with offers of various goods that are not easily available otherwise. Others are rumoured to be part of the networks that engage in facilitating escape to Sudan or Ethiopia, networks
that are certain to include members of the Eritrean military (I6, I17, see also ICG 2010). This population group usually has some nominal national service obligations that can be combined with a normal urban lifestyle, often partly secured with some form of bribe. When I discussed this issue with a ministry official he said he had often wondered himself ‘where those young people get their resources from and how they can simply live like that’ (I17). Their existence is a visible sign of how certain shadowy networks dominated either by the PFDJ, the military, or a combination of both, demarcate spheres of political and social life.

In sharp contrast to this group, only a few streets from the main road in the poorer neighbourhoods of Asmara, people are too busy trying to survive in small trade, metal processing, repair workshops or other activities to have much interest in politics. When they are called up for national service it can also easily make the economic survival of their families precarious. And even those like my former student, who earns what is by Eritrean standards a decent salary, can only just make ends meet: ‘my children have never seen the sea as it is hard to afford to go to Massawa’, she says (I14).

In addition, there are also those who returned from the diaspora for at least part of the year and were enticed by a cash-strapped government to buy plots of land where they have built what are by local standards luxury houses on the fringes of Asmara and Massawa, and live quite removed from the worries of the majority of their compatriots (I23). In the past, the political leadership might have been trusted to spend the mineral wealth in a way that ameliorates these inequalities and benefits the wider population, but in the present it is this leadership, and the PFDJ in particular, that is behind the dynamics that created many of them. It thus remains open to question whether PFDJ trusteeship of mineral exploitation is going to result in inclusive development (I22). Much will depend on whether and how some of the openings and intangible and/or visible transformations described above will actually lead to a wider recognition of past mistakes by the government and party leadership, and a change of course in order to rectify them. Equally important is how future relations develop with the outside world, where in official rhetoric Eritrea is increasingly seen as a pariah for supporting movements like al-Shabaab in Somalia, and which has resulted in sanctions by the United Nations Security Council in 2009 and a reinforcement of the sanctions on 5 December 2011. The risk that the new mineral wealth might give Eritrea the means to pursue an even more aggressive foreign policy is one of the concerns expressed in the Security Council document, even though concrete sanctions on mineral exports have not been imposed. More generally, as will be discussed in the following section, Eritrea’s relationship with the outside world is more complex than is suggested by this stance of parts of the international community.

Eritrea and the outside world

Eritrea’s relationship with the outside world can be interpreted from two different perspectives. On the one hand there is the reading of Eritrea as an aggressor towards its neighbours, while at the same time being stubborn and uncompromising towards Western powers. What such a reading neglects is not only the historic reality that Eritrea has been ‘betrayed’ too often by outside powers, as argued convincingly in Wrong’s (2005) book on the subject, combined with the fact that Eritrean foreign policy is a reflection of the region’s century-old violent political environment characterised by mutual interference and proxy wars (Cliffe 1999, ICG 2010). In addition, much of Eritrea’s politics of destabilisation in the region has its very concrete origins in the 1998–2000 war with Ethiopia and the dynamics of its aftermath, not least Ethiopia’s refusal to abide by the verdict of the boundary
commission, which has not provoked any negative response from the outside world. More generally, there is ample evidence that Ethiopia is regarded as an important ally in the war on terror by the Western powers in particular and the international community more generally, leaving Eritrea little room to get a fair hearing of its grievances on the international stage. As one informant said to me when discussing these issues, ‘it does not matter what we do, whether we are friendly or close the door into their faces, the West will always side with Ethiopia, so we need to look after ourselves’ (I17).

In spite of these dynamics, Eritrean foreign policy has a pragmatic component that has led to Eritrea actively trying to break its international isolation. Attempts have been made at behind-the-scenes rapprochement with the United States, thus far largely futile as both sides have shown little willingness to engage properly (I19). Talks have until recently been more constructive with delegations from the European Union (EU), and have resulted in a number of new EU-financed development initiatives. Things were ‘dormant for many years, [but] since about a year a lot of movement has happened’ (I19, I20, I21). Those initiatives were put on hold when the Eritrean government decided in November 2011 to terminate all ongoing programmes with the EU. Renewed engagement is only expected after a thorough internal review of the country’s future National Development Plan.

These developments are, on the face of it, closely associated with the closure of a number of Western non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that were still in the country at the end of 2011. This followed a government directive that the UN and other aid organisations should in the future only engage in the three sectors relating to water, sanitation and health, and all other development arenas would be covered by the government (I17). Foreign NGOs were thus called for a meeting, thanked for their work and told to either reapply to operate in the country in those three sectors or leave. Connell (2011) in his recent article relates those restrictions to the expected mineral wealth and a government agenda that wishes little external oversight on how this income will be spent. This seems a rather ahistoric reading of the dynamics. When newly independent Eritrea took a similar stance towards foreign NGOs and the wider aid industry in the early 1990s it was congratulated within foreign aid circles for setting its own agenda and insisting on pursuing its own priorities. Even organisations such as the World Bank were full of praise (Fengler 2001). It remains to be seen if development activities in Eritrea will suffer from this new government policy, whether they will be financed by mineral revenues in the future, or whether organisations from other countries such as China will gain a more prominent role.

The recent restrictions on the work of certain foreign NGOs should also not distract from the fact that Eritrea is making an effort to present itself as a hospitable country that welcomes engagement with the outside world. Asmara is full of new hand-painted posters that describe life throughout the country in cheerful celebration or propaganda, depending on one’s point of view. Eritrea successfully hosted the African Continental Cycling Championship in November 2011 at relatively short notice after Côte d’Ivoire withdrew for political reasons. The Eritrean national football team started to participate in the African Cup of Nations qualifying matches again – all away matches had been suspended after the whole team asked for political asylum in Kenya in 2009 and moved to Australia. I had a chance to meet the very young new team before they were due to travel to a qualifying match in Rwanda (which they lost). The whole team returned to Eritrea this time – which of course does not guarantee they will do so in the future.

Finally, Eritrea is often mentioned together with North Korea as a closed enclave whose people live in perpetual ignorance. But this is far from the truth. Even in poor neighbourhoods of Asmara satellite dishes are widespread and broadcast news from all over the world into Eritrean households. The government might first have ignored the Arab spring and then
presented it as being driven by foreign NGOs and other interference (I18). But al-Jazeera beamed pictures and news of the Arab spring into many households and people are very aware of the associated political upheavals (I13, I14, I15, I17). Whether the Arab spring is a future many Eritreans aspire to is a different matter and open to question.

What for the future?

It would certainly be foolish to make any predictions about the future of Eritrea based on these limited observations. My objective here was mainly to provide insights into everyday life practices in Eritrea based on in-country fieldwork and with this offer a more hybrid reading of developments in Eritrea than is usually the case – a reading that does not predominantly focus on the current government’s human rights abuses documented in detail elsewhere (see for example Human Rights Watch 2009), nor on the equally widely analysed dynamics of structural violence, but on the more complex reality of shifting allegiances and tentative transformations on the ground seen through the eyes of some of those living through them. In doing so I also raise questions about Connell’s (2011, p. 425) dictum that in Eritrea the calm on the surface belies ‘the country’s structural fragility’. The state I found is stronger than appears at first sight, a point I have made in detail elsewhere (Müller 2012). In addition, what Reid (2009, p. 219) wrote in 2009, that the ‘overriding popular desire is for relative peace and some form of economic development’ still holds largely true for the people I met on my trip to Eritrea, those mentioned in detail here and others I spoke to in informal daily encounters. Prospects for the latter have improved with unexpectedly good late rainfall and a subsequently good harvest in 2011 (Food and Agriculture Organisation [FAO] 2012), as well as the potential windfall from mining revenues.9 At the same time, in various ways openings have occurred in the sphere of everyday lives. Those in higher education are allowed more freedom and have the prospect of postgraduate study again. Service obligations have been loosened, in particular for women, round-ups are less frequent, and more people are said to be able to obtain exit visas (I14, I19). Whether those are temporary developments or part of a broader strategy that may result in demobilisation and limited service requirements as in the pre-1998 years – a strategy that has become possible in the eyes of the leadership due to expected mineral revenues – remains to be seen. In addition, many of those who have fled abroad have realised that the life they aspired to is much harder to achieve than envisaged. From my research among Eritreans in Tel Aviv and an informant’s perception among Eritrean refugees in Switzerland it can be hypothesised that many of those who fled would return given a fair chance to do so (I22). An amnesty for those who have fled the country would go a long way here, combined with assurances that returnees could pursue paid labour instead of unpaid service. For the time being, those who left Eritrea illegally and need consular services abroad are forced not only to pay a lump sum of back-dated diaspora tax at 2%,10 but also have to sign a ‘confession’ that they have betrayed the country with their leaving and would accept any government punishment should they ever return.

The contentious issue for many of those who flee is not a rejection of government demands per se, but of demands that have become too inhibiting and leave no room for any form of life perceived as desirable (Hirt 2010). This general state of affairs is summarised well in the following joke that does the rounds in Asmara:

A group of people tries to escape from Eritrea and is caught at the border by soldiers. The soldiers ask them, ‘Why do you want to leave?’ They answer, ‘We have been giving one hundred percent to this country and this has not been recognised, those already outside the country just
give two per cent and this is being recognised, they can come and go, they can buy houses, they can do everything — so we want to join those who give only two percent’.

What people mainly aspire to is a life characterised by ‘normality’, having a job, looking after one’s family, being able to visit those who live in the diaspora, getting on with one’s life.

The day I left Eritrea happened to be 20 October 2011, the day Muammar Qaddafi was killed. I heard the news during a telephone call with a friend who is based outside Asmara. ‘You know’, he said. ‘Gaddafi should have gone when he was still popular and not waited too long, as most autocratic leaders do’. This seems in many ways the real lesson from Eritrea, a lesson that equally applies to many revolutionary movements of the past. Those who have the skills to mastermind a successful revolutionary struggle rarely, if ever, have the skills to be successful leaders in peacetime. At the same time they are loath to step down and let others take ‘their’ revolution forward. It is indeed hard to image Issayas Afewerki going any time soon out of his own conviction. But while recent interpretations of the Eritrean polity are fixated on how present politics are simply a continuation of the way Issayas led the EPLF during the liberation struggle, implying that he has always been a rather ruthless dictator (Kibreab 2009), such an analysis ignores the fact that it was precisely those characteristics that ultimately made that struggle successful. Whether Eritrea can avoid divisions and power struggles once Issayas has left the stage in whatever way is hard to predict at this point. The fact remains that Eritrea has no tradition of democratic politics, nor do other countries in the region. It thus should come as no surprise that the Eritrean people seem to have no stomach for something along the lines of the Arab spring. Those spoken to in the course of this research quite realistically have become suspicious of grand political projects, be they wrapped in the language of democracy or otherwise, but focus instead on the microcosms of potentially intangible transformations from within.

Acknowledgements
I wish to thank all Eritrean research participants, many of whom have given me their time generously over many years. I also wish to thank the reviewers for their encouraging and insightful comments.

Note on contributor
Tanja R. Müller is a senior lecturer in international development at the School of Environment and Development at the University of Manchester. She became a founding member of the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute (HCRI) at the University of Manchester in 2009 and is currently director of research at HCRI. She has written on African politics in general and Eritrea in particular since the 1990s.

Notes
1. The last time I presented research in an Eritrean Studies panel was in London in 2006, where I was attacked personally by a fellow academic with no analytical argument, causing the panel convener to intervene to put the debate back on an academic footing. I have since decided to present my work in thematic rather than geography-based panels, a decision that has been vindicated by subsequent Eritrean panels I attended as an observer. Since I dedicated one of my books to an Eritrean friend who is among the officials who disappeared into incommunicado detention in 2001, obtaining a visa was always in doubt. Before my visit in 2011 the embassy made it very clear that I was only being given a tourist visa and would not be allowed to do any work. Once in Eritrea, however, I did not face any restrictions apart from
having to follow general rules on the movement of foreign tourists which determine that only certain specified cities outside Asmara can be visited (Keren, Massawa, Dekemhare and Mendefera).

2. I spent 10 days with the Eritrean community in Tel Aviv in June 2010 and 4 weeks in March/April 2011. In the course of those visits I conducted 20 in-depth life history interviews, 12 informal interviews, six key-informant interviews and spent social time with different groups of Eritrean refugees. Due to their vulnerable status within Israel, interviewees need to remain anonymous.

3. Sawa is the military training camp for compulsory national service. Since the academic year 2002/2003, students need to transfer to Sawa for the last grade of secondary schooling, and part of the academic year consists of military training. Countrywide matriculation examinations are also held in Sawa.

4. One person known to me had recently commenced a government-sponsored PhD at Khartoum University, a second was about to go to Cape Town, South Africa. Others were in the process of applying for scholarships with outside bodies and had been given assurances they would be allowed to leave if successful.

5. This implies that those on ERN145 per month will be paid ERN800, and those on ERN500 will be paid ERN900 (ERN900 is currently around GBP40 at the official exchange rate).


7. Measures include an arms embargo on Eritrea, travel bans, and the freezing of assets of senior political and military officials. In relation to revenues from the mining sector the council urged vigilance by those involved in the sector to ensure income would not be used for political destabilisation of the region (Security Council SC/10471, adopted 5 December 2011).


9. It is notoriously difficult to get a comprehensive picture of agricultural production. Maps showing rainfall levels are kept as government secrets (I19), and reports by the international media are often based on speculation (see for example Plaut 2011). I have seen full markets everywhere I travelled and former drought-affected areas around Keren were fertile. FAO (2012) has – based on satellite monitoring – reported good rainfall in the northern Red Sea region, one of the regions most vulnerable to drought. That markets are full does of course not imply that everybody has access to food, and in particular in rural areas where entitlements to subsidised food do not exist, hunger might prevail. A 2011 FAO assessment thus records vulnerability to food insecurity due to economic constraints, and high international food and fuel prices for Eritrea. Overall, however, the food situation has certainly been very different from dynamics reported by Hirt (2010) for previous years.

10. Eritreans residing overseas are generally ‘obliged’ to pay 2% of their income to their nearest Eritrean embassy. This payment entitles them to consular services but also to property and other rights within Eritrea, rights that are commonly denied to those who refuse to pay this levy.

**List of interviewees**

11. Male, 27 years old, former WYDC soldier, from Asmara, 06 June 2010, Tel Aviv.
12. Male, 26 years old, former WYDC soldier and teacher, from Adi Abeto, 11 June 2010, Tel Aviv.
13. Male, 33 years old, former university student at University of Asmara, from Mendefera, 1 April 2011, Tel Aviv.
14. Male, 30 years old, former university student at University of Asmara, from Mendefera, 31 March 2011, Tel Aviv.
15. Female, 22 years old, from Gash-Barka, former secondary school student in grade six, 17 April 2011, Tel Aviv.
17. Male, c.45 years old, teacher, October 2011, Asmara. Known to me since 2000.
I8. Female, 22 years old, student, October 2011, Mai Nefhi.
I9. Male, 23 years old, student, October 2011, Mai Nefhi.
I10. Female, 24 years old, student, October 2011, Mai Nefhi.
I11. Male, 22 years old, student, October 2011, Mai Nefhi.
I14. Female, c.30 years old, University of Asmara graduate, teacher, October 2011, Asmara. Known to me since 2000.
I15. Male, c.50 years old, University of Addis Ababa graduate, returned to Eritrea in the early 1990s, teacher, October 2011, Asmara. Known to me since 1996.
I16. Female, c.30 years old, higher education student in Asmara, October 2011, Asmara.
I17. Male, c.60 years old, former EPLF fighter, now ministry official, October 2011, Asmara. Known to me since 1996.
I18. Female, c.35 years old, worked for foreign NGO, October 2011, Asmara. Known to me since 2000.
I20. Male, c.30 years old, government official, October 2011, Keren.
I23. Male, c.60 years old, former EPLF activist overseas, October 2011, Asmara.

References


BRIEFING

Will Africa’s Green Revolution squeeze African family farmers to death? Lessons from small-scale high-cost rice production in the Senegal River Valley

Jeanne Koopman*  
African Studies Center, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts, United States

This briefing will appear in two parts. The first reviews the tortured history of high-cost irrigated rice production in the Senegal River Valley, focusing on the severe economic risks that African peasants have faced since their flood-recession farming system was destroyed in the 1980s. I argue that the input packages of the Gates Foundation’s Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) carry similar economic risks. The briefing then examines the profound effects on land tenure of the US Millennium Challenge Corporation’s (MCC) projects in Mali and Senegal in order to demonstrate the risks inherent in land privatisation. The topics are closely related in the real world: in 2008 MCC and AGRA signed a formal memorandum of understanding to coordinate their ‘policy dialog’ with African governments (MCC-AGRA 2008).

The second part of the briefing (to be published in ROAPE’s next issue) focuses on the perplexing question of why so many African governments are promoting what they call foreign investment, but rural communities call land grabs. It then zeroes in on the twists and turns of one village’s determined struggle to resist a state-allied foreign investor and how civil society allies were able to help. The concluding discussion briefly pulls together initial evidence on the new Macky Sall government’s agricultural and land reform policies and describes how African peasants and pastoralists are organising against policies they see as making them dependent on foreign-controlled inputs, worsening the risk of losing their land, turning their sons and daughters into miserably paid farm workers, and destroying both the environment and rural communities (Via Campesina 2012).

Introduction

In 2006, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation joined with the Rockefeller Foundation to make a major foray into African agriculture. Calling their programme an Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), Gates and Rockefeller focus on breeding and marketing hybrid seeds (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation 2006, 2008). By 2012, AGRA had trained nearly 15,000 village-based agro-dealers to sell seeds, fertilisers and pesticides, most of which are imported (AGRA-Alliance 2012a). AGRA is also training African crop scientists at master’s and PhD levels as part of an effort to improve local seeds by breeding what they claim are ‘locally adapted’ hybrid seeds. (Hybrids must be purchased each year.)

*Email: jkoopman@bu.edu

ISSN 0305-6244 print/ISSN 1740-1720 online
© 2012 ROAPE Publications Ltd
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2012.711076
http://www.tandfonline.com
In several countries, including Kenya, Nigeria and Ghana, AGRA has convinced governments to do research on the genetically modified seeds that Bill Gates enthusiastically espouses for Africa (Aarhus 2012, AGRA-Alliance 2012b, Barnett 2012).

Since its inception, AGRA has supported a range of African rural-focused non-governmental organisations (NGOs), but its work with African collaborators has not changed its focus on hybrid seeds, chemical inputs, and credit schemes that help farmers purchase seeds and fertilisers. This focus may be related to the fact that at the upper level, AGRA has extremely close personnel sharing ties with Monsanto and Syngenta, the world’s largest producers of hybrid and genetically modified seeds, pesticides, and herbicides (Aarhus 2012, AGRA Watch n.d., Dan˜o 2007).

AGRA’s most prominent critics are African peasant farmers and pastoralist organisations such as the Network of West African Peasant Organisations and Producers (ROPPA), NGOs that work with peasant farmers to develop safe and sustainable agriculture, like Enda-Pronat in Senegal, advocacy groups like the Kenyan African Biodiversity Network that lobby against genetically modified seeds, and international NGOs such as the Pesticide Action Network. African peasant and pastoralist groups pointedly criticise AGRA’s focus on expensive, foreign-controlled seeds, fertilisers, and pesticides as both economically unviable and ecologically dangerous (Fisher 2012, CNOP/Via Campesina 2011, Mittal and Moore 2009).

The critics argue that peasant family farming can only be sustained if there is a transition from petroleum-based chemical inputs to agro-ecological inputs, such as organic soil enrichment, natural pesticides, and seeds that can be bred, stored, and controlled locally (Hobbs and Powell 2011). For AGRA’s critics, the starting point for sustainable agriculture must be local farmers’ own analysis of problems and their joint development with scientists of potential solutions (Sow et al. 2010).

This briefing’s analysis of the economic impact on family farmers of a multi-decade, AGRA-like investment in irrigated rice production in the Senegal River Valley contends that it provides a potent example of the economic risks of high-tech ‘green revolutions’ for the great majority of African farmers. The fundamental problem with the AGRA model of agricultural modernisation is the cost of inputs. When a large part of the harvest must be sold to pay for inputs, farmers need credit. But the risks of taking large amounts of credit can be very high: if disaster strikes (drought, locust attacks, family illness), as it so often does in Africa, peasant farmers run the risk of losing everything – their land, their livelihoods, and the communities that have helped them survive disasters for millennia.

Previewing AGRA’s risks: the agricultural transformation of the Senegal River Valley

A high-tech green revolution to ‘conquer drought’ in the Senegal River Valley began after the devastating Sahelian droughts of the 1970s badly affected traditional farming and pastoralism. The next two decades saw a total structural change in the agricultural system. The massive investments in dams and irrigation to ‘conquer drought’ destroyed what had been a highly productive farming system in which the annual flooding of the valley deeply watered and fertilised the soil, allowing farmers to enjoy an abundant second harvest of food crops during the dry season. Two massive and very expensive dams constructed in the 1980s (the Manantali located in Mali 700 miles from the mouth of the Senegal River and the Diama located near the mouth) enabled hydrologists to keep the river level constant throughout the year. This allowed pumps to bring water to irrigation schemes in which
rice could technically be planted in both rainy and dry seasons. The only problem was (and is) that it is not economic to plant rice in the dry season unless huge subsidies are available.

After the dams came on line in the mid 1980s, it was essential that every household have access to the pump-dependent irrigation schemes in order to replace the food supplies traditionally produced in flood-recession fields. But after more than 25 years of trying, the government has still not been able to build enough irrigation schemes to provide all families in the Senegal River Valley with an irrigated plot. The basic reason is that international funding for agriculture essentially dried up in the early 1980s, falling from a high of 19% of overseas development assistance in 1980 to a mere 3% in 2003 (Diouf 2011). Here then is a fundamental risk: an agricultural system that depends on foreign financing is unlikely to be locally sustainable.

The stages of structural adjustment and the crisis of liberalised agriculture in Senegal

The history of peasant irrigated rice production in Senegal from the 1980s to the present shows what can happen when peasant farmers’ choices (what to plant and how to grow it) are determined by government and international lenders with little, if any, input from farmers. To better understand how this works, it is important to recall the historical context. For nearly a century, a great many colonial and independent governments in Africa used export crop agencies to control the prices of both agricultural inputs and outputs with the dual objective of maximising returns to the state and keeping urban food prices low. Peasant incomes have been so tightly squeezed that farmers have rarely been able to finance even moderate agricultural investments on their own. And today, even though Senegalese rice farmers manage their own village irrigation schemes, the economics of their enterprise is highly dependent on government policy, which is itself highly influenced by international lenders and international prices.

Since the very beginning of rice production in the Senegal River Valley in the 1970s, the government’s rice promotion agency, Société d’aménagement et d’exploitation des terres du delta et de la vallée du fleuve Sénégal (SAED), has had a critical role in assisting rice farmers both technically and economically. In the 1970s and 1980s, it provided seeds, fertiliser, and fuel for the irrigation pumps on credit. It then purchased a quarter of the rice harvest to permit farmers to pay off their debts. For nearly two decades, inputs were subsidised. But even with subsidies, farmers had to sell a third of their harvest in order to pay their debts (Seck 1991).

In the mid 1980s, the World Bank began imposing its infamous structural adjustment policies, policies that progressively undermined the farm-level economic viability of irrigated rice production. In 1986, the bank abruptly abandoned its policy of encouraging African governments to use input subsidies to promote ‘modern’ agriculture and began to prohibit subsidies. Without subsidies, farmers had to sell a third of their rice harvest to pay their debt to SAED (ibid). What was left could only feed the typical 10-person family for about six months. Farmers had to scramble to purchase more food from non-farm earnings. Some migrated to the city during the dry season. Some sent their sons to seek work in Europe (Koopman 2007, Dahou 2008).

Why did farmers not abandon rice production and return to traditional flood-recession agriculture which, when rains were adequate, offered excellent yields and free fertiliser in the form of silt from the river? The answer is simple. They couldn’t. Even though the rains were returning, the traditional flood-recession system had been all but destroyed when
the dams came online in the mid 1980s. Technically, the upstream dam managers could have created an artificial flood by releasing large amounts of water from the dam’s reservoir during the natural flood period. This would have allowed farmers to engage in both irrigated and flood-recession agriculture. But an artificial flood was never produced. Instead the three governments that control the dams (Senegal, Mali and Mauritania) have prioritised the maximisation of hydroelectricity output at all times (Koopman 2007).

A major goal of structural adjustment was to cut back government spending. In Senegal, a primary target was the government rice parastatal, SAED. By the late-1980s, the agency was forced to fire its extension agents and the mechanics who serviced the village irrigation pumps. Rice production declined. Then in the early 1990s, in what was perhaps the most devastating move for poor farmers, the agency had to stop providing inputs on credit. A new agricultural bank was created with World Bank assistance, but its profit orientation made it all but inaccessible to peasant farmers. So if rice farmers were to be able to pay for seeds, fertiliser, and fuel, they had to send their sons out of the village to seek cash incomes. The economic shock was magnified in 1994 when France made a unilateral decision to devalue the West African franc. Prices of imported inputs immediately doubled. This was too big a blow for most family farmers; huge numbers were forced to abandon their irrigation schemes. By 1995, of the 72,000 hectares of irrigated land in the valley, less than 30,000 were cultivated (Adams 2000). Incredibly there was even worse to come.

In 1995, when global rice prices were falling, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) pressured the Senegalese government to adopt a policy of ‘total liberalization’ of the rice sector (Tardif-Douglin, Metzel and Randolph 1998). The government rice agency had to stop buying rice so that private traders could take over. Predictably, private rice traders did not take over. Making a profit when village roads were often impassable was too difficult. Better to just import rice, especially when world prices were low. In 2003 I saw hundreds of bags of unsold rice stored in village sheds. This was the ultimate disaster: rice farmers could not purchase inputs for the next season because they could not sell their harvest. That year only 15,000 hectares of the 80,000 hectares of irrigation schemes constructed since the 1970s were cultivated – less than 20% (Sambe 2007). Production languished for the next five years.2

**Government’s about-face – the return to producer subsidies**

After the near collapse of rice production and the food price riots (in Senegal and elsewhere) that followed a massive spike in the international rice price in 2007, former President Wade, like many other African leaders, defied the international lenders by reinstating producer subsidies. Since 2008, subsidies have been high – 50% for fertiliser and even higher for seeds. Farmers responded by increasing planting from the low of 15,000 hectares in 2003 to a record high of 72,000 hectares in 2011 (Agence de Presse Sénégalaise 2012a). Rice production reached a record 630,000 tons of paddy (unhulled rice) by the 2010–2011 harvest (Mboj 2011). But the boom was not to last.

Soon after the massive subsidies were in place, corruption and smuggling problems began (Faye 2010, Mbengue 2010, Ndiaye and Ngom 2010a, 2010b). To deal with this problem, President Wade decided to transfer input distribution to Japando, a ‘union’ of peasants and pastoralist organisations he had personally created in 2009 in order to counter the growing power of the legitimate peasant movement, which is highly developed in Senegal.3 By late 2011, rising international fertiliser
prices, Japando’s incompetence, and continued smuggling resulted in the near total disappearance of subsidised inputs. The price of a bag of fertiliser more than doubled (Kane 2011). Rice farmers had to cut back drastically. The 2011–2012 rice harvest fell by half (Gueye 2011).

The economic risks of foreign-controlled inputs

The Gates-Rockefeller Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa does not acknowledge that a ‘green revolution’ with high priced hybrid seeds, oil-based chemical fertilisers and pesticides places heavy economic risks on peasant farmers. But these risks are many and severe. Among them:

- The risk that the prices of seeds, fertilisers, and pesticides produced by multinational corporations will increase steadily over time, while the prices of the crops farmers sell will move in an unpredictable seesaw. The patenting of seeds by powerful multinational corporations means that their prices almost always trend upward, whereas the prices of crops themselves can vary enormously depending on factors that range from weather to financial speculation in global food markets. In the past few years, global price volatility has become such an important risk factor in food markets that the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation dedicated the 2011 World Hunger Report to the topic (Food and Agriculture Organisation 2011). In this globally determined price context, African peasants are highly vulnerable to losses that can dramatically reduce or even wipe out their incomes.
- The risk that African governments will not be able to sustain an efficient and equitable system of subsidies needed to make high-cost food production systems viable for peasant family farmers. In Senegal, the fertiliser subsidy alone accounts for 35% of the agriculture ministry’s budget; total agricultural subsidies account for 70% (Ndaw 2012). Of course, government input subsidies to farmers also allow multinational seed and fertiliser producers to keep their prices high.
- The risk that North American and European trade partners will continue to subsidise their farmers, threatening African peasants with the loss of their local markets (EuropAfrica 2006). This threat affects both male farmers, who control grain production, and women farmers, who grow vegetables on their own account. In 2003, women onion farmers in the Senegal River Valley told me that they knew exactly when imports of cheap onions from Holland hit the national market because local onion prices immediately dropped.
- The risk that if African farmers are pressured to adopt hybrid or genetically modified seeds on a wide scale, traditional seed stocks will decline or disappear, reducing the genetic diversity African farmers currently use to cope with climate change, and drastically increasing their dependence on foreign-controlled seeds.
- The risk that AGRA or one of its multinational partners will patent seeds developed by African scientists or will limit Africans whose PhDs are supported by grants from the Gates Foundation to working primarily with seeds already patented. As far as I know, AGRA has thus far kept the terms of its grants and contracts with African institutions and individual scientists secret – a practice that I have been told AGRA’s partner, Monsanto, requires of the PhD candidates it supports.
The risk that the AGRA model of modernisation based on foreign-produced and foreign-priced inputs will cause the economic collapse of Africa’s small family farms. When caught in the squeeze periodically generated by seesawing world food prices and steadily increasing input costs, African farmers often have to default on input credit. If high cost inputs are not economically viable for peasant farmers, they may eventually be forced into bankruptcy and have to give up their land.

The spectre that family farmers will be put under pressure to seek titles for their land in order to use it as loan collateral, raising the risk of widespread peasant dispossession. Once farmers mortgage their land, the risks of bad weather, loss of harvests to bird or locust attacks, family illness, or even negative price changes on international markets can force them to default. If significant numbers of farmers default, whole communities can lose their land and the emergency help that village life tends to provide.

The risk that land privatisation will lead to massive dispossession of women farmers. Raj Shah, the USAID director, asserted in an interview on PBS on 18 May 2012 that African women farmers need a title to land so that they can get a loan. Nothing could be more risky for women. Almost all must work on family fields controlled by their husbands before tending their own crops. Furthermore, women must devote much of their harvest to feeding their children. All this, as women farmers have told me directly over many years, makes credit ‘too risky’. In Africa, the gender and land issue is far more complex than the head of USAID implies. With privatisation, it is likely to be mainly men who get titles to land (Faye 2008). If a male family head then mortgages household land and defaults on the loan, the land that women and younger men farm can be lost. Furthermore, research in the Sahel has found that some household heads invoke patriarchal privilege to sell their land without even consulting the rest of the family (Hilhorst, Nelen and Traoré 2011).

The risk that women farmers will lose income if their community’s common land is being privatised. When communities cede common lands – wetlands, forests, pastures – to outside investors (as in the MCA-Senegal case discussed below), critical parts of women’s own-account farming and food processing, like shea butter production in West Africa, are often lost (Oakland Institute 2011). When common lands are privatised, pastoralist women often lose access to their cattle, the source of their small, but critical, earnings from milk and milk products.

The risk that the output of medium-sized commercial farms (15–50 hectares) will not have a positive impact on rural food security. Commercial farmers may take villagers’ land without adding anything to the national food supply. A study of national agricultural investors in Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger found that domestic investors have not had either better yields or much larger harvests than peasant farmers (Hilhorst, Nelen and Traoré 2011). Furthermore, in Senegal successful commercial farmers usually export most of the food they produce.

The risk that land privatisation will lead the way to more land grabs by agribusiness or other investors who cannot provide enough jobs to absorb the dispossessed population.
This risk of massive unemployment caused by land grabs is extremely high in Africa where the urban formal sector is not producing jobs, and an already overcrowded informal sector cannot be counted on to assure the survival of rural families forced to leave their villages (Li 2011). The implications of this scenario for the intensification of hunger in the majority of African countries where well over half the national labour force makes a living in agriculture are chilling.

In the next section I explore these risks in the context of the land tenure privatisation undertaken in Mali and Senegal by the US Millennium Challenge Account.

The AGRA-MCC alliance: paving the way for peasant-pastoralist dispossession?

The US Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) offers selected countries huge grants (often more than US$500 million dollars) for projects that have been negotiated with the government. The focus of MCC projects in West Africa has been on building agricultural infrastructure (irrigation schemes and roads) and on land privatisation. The MCC typically begins by seeking government permission to set up special zones where MCC is granted the right to develop a privatised land holding system (Grain 2010). It then invests in irrigation or other land improvements that allow it to reconfigure the land into standardised plots, the smaller of which are given or sold to the customary landholders of the area. Plots of 30–50 hectares are also reserved for national investors, such as government elites and wealthy businessmen, while much larger areas are reserved for foreign agribusiness. I want to look at two cases: Mali and Senegal, both of which are at early stages, but which clearly reveal the problems of the MCC approach to land ‘securitisation’ which is, in these cases, privatisation.

Mali: taking pastoralist land for irrigated rice cultivation

The land the Malian government allocated to the MCC is located in an as yet un-irrigated area near the massive Markala dam on the Niger River. The dam, built in the 1980s, expanded the irrigation potential in the area to 700,000 hectares, but since foreign lenders stopped providing funds in the late 1980s, the government has only been able to construct 90,000 hectares of irrigated plots for local farmers (Oakland Institute 2011). Unsurprisingly, there is a huge land grab going on.

MCA-Mali4 has been allocated 22,000 hectares of land currently used by Fulani pastoralists who move their herds seasonally between their villages in the Niger River Valley and upland pastures. The irrigation project will divide the entire area into irrigated plots, eliminating the possibility of keeping large herds in this area during the crucial dry season. The deal MCA-Mali is proposing to the pastoralists is to allocate five hectare plots to each household. The catch is that the household will have to take a 20-year mortgage to purchase three of the five hectares. The two hectare plots ‘given’ to local households will be used as loan collateral for the purchase of the other three (Grain 2010). The pastoralists are expected to pay US$5775 to US$7700 per hectare (Oakland Institute 2011, p. 21). To put this breathtaking price in perspective, one must realise that farm workers’ wages in this area can be as low as US$1.00 to US$1.50 per day (Oakland Institute 2011, p. 31). The pastoralists will also be required to buy packets of seeds and other inputs provided by AGRA in order to cultivate the land (Grain 2010).

Accepting this ‘deal’ requires that the local pastoralists give up their traditional livelihoods and become high-tech farmers using expensive inputs while facing volatile
or government-controlled output prices – the scenario that has wreaked such havoc among the rice farmers of the Senegal River Valley. It seems very clear to me that the risks discussed above as well as the extraordinary price of the irrigated plots the pastoralists are expected to purchase, make this deal totally untenable. Indeed, Mamadou Goı¨ta, a prominent leader of the West African Peasants’ Federation, predicts that 90% of the Malian pastoralists who take loans to buy their plots will lose them (Diouf 2010). When they are gone, there will be more land available for the MCC-Mali’s second phase which consists of selling irrigated plots of 10 to 30 hectares to Malian commercial farmers and far larger irrigated areas to foreign investors.

**MCA-Sénégal’s bargain in Senegal: give up land to get irrigation**

In September 2009, the MCC signed an agreement with the Senegalese government that provided a US$500 million grant to construct 35,000 hectares of irrigation infrastructure and to rehabilitate 80 miles of the only national highway in the Senegal River Valley. The agreement also gave the MCA-Sénégal permission to develop a land security project, whose objective is to ‘formalize the occupation of irrigated parcels in conformity with modern law’ (MCA-Sénégal n.d.). The MCC’s rationale for its land reform is that ‘raising the value of land through irrigation raises the specter of conflicts between the local population and outside investors’ (ibid.).

In December 2011, MCA-Sénégal hosted a workshop on ‘The securing of land and land grabs: current situation, challenges, and proposals for solutions’ (Agence de Presse Sénégalaise 2011a). During the workshop, people within the MCA zone were invited to express their opinions on land issues. They did. Some suggested that the community-developed plan of land occupation and allocation (POAS), which was completed in 2006, be given legal standing. The POAS process of community-based land-use planning has been very popular in the Senegal River Valley because it builds on traditional patterns of land use and land sharing between farmers and pastoralists that have been successfully used for centuries. Giving these plans legal standing would help to consolidate both farmers and pastoralists’ rights over their customarily recognised land areas. The MCA-Sénégal land director’s response to the idea of using the already established land use plan as a basis for local land security was vague. According to the press report, rather than addressing the issue directly, he simply said that MCA-Senegal would ‘take account of these opinions during the next five years’ (ibid).

Then just before the conference ended, the director announced that MCA-Sénégal had reached an agreement with several communities in the area of the Senegal River Delta that the MCC is developing. The agreement stipulated that once the community’s irrigation infrastructures were completed, ‘60 percent of the land would revert to the community, while 40 percent would be for persons from outside the community’ (Agence de Presse Sénégalaise 2011b). Even though this was something I should have anticipated, I was stunned. The fundamental issue around land use had been decided well before MCA-Sénégal’s ‘participatory workshop’ on land grabs. In order to get their degraded or abandoned irrigation schemes rehabilitated, local farmers have had to agree to give up 40% of their customarily owned land to ‘persons from outside the community’, including foreign investors.

**The Gates-Rockefeller response to the land issue?**

In an unpublished document dated July 2008, the Gates Foundation suggested that the ‘poorest’ farmers will eventually leave agriculture (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation 2008). But with the many risks facing all peasant family farmers using
high-tech farming methods, I would contend that it is unlikely that only a small number of poor peasants will be pushed off the land. An AGRA-type green revolution will surely lead to the dispossessment of substantial numbers of farmers and pastoralists. And when it does, where will AGRA sell its high-tech seeds and input packages? The answer is obvious. With their deep pockets and guaranteed foreign or multinational food corporation markets, the agro-investors who are currently grabbing millions of hectares of African land will be very good customers for the seed packages that AGRA-trained scientists are breeding specifically for African environments.6

**What is the US government response to the land issue?**

The US government has long promoted ‘reforms’ in African land laws to privatise land. As the cases in Mali and Senegal suggest, when the MCC conditions its expensive infrastructure investments on agreements allowing it to develop a system that permits ‘legal’ land transfers, it is setting up the conditions for land sales by the majority of African peasants who are likely to go bankrupt under high-cost intensive agricultural systems. By setting aside land in its irrigation projects for national investors, MCC is reducing elite-based opposition to large-scale land transfers by making sure that there will be medium-sized parcels of irrigated land reserved for ‘commercial farmers’, i.e. political, military and religious leaders, civil servants, businessmen.

Like the Gates and Rockefeller foundations, the US government surely realises that many, many African peasant farmers cannot survive in the world of globalised high-tech agriculture. Indeed, by setting up systems that force peasant farmers to go into debt in order to farm, the US government is risking the bankruptcy of a large number of peasant farmers and pastoralists. Why do they pursue this course?

The best analysis I have seen thus far is by David Andrews who suggests that one way to understand official US thinking on agricultural modernisation is to consider how heavily influenced US government agricultural agencies are by multinational corporations engaged in seed and input production, food production, food processing and food marketing. At the 2001 World Economic Forum in Davos, for example, the US State Department officially named 17 corporations as its ‘partners in development’, among them Cargill, DuPont, Yara International, Syngenta and Monsanto (Andrews 2011). These, of course, are the very corporations that benefit mightily from AGRA’s promotion of their patented seeds, pesticides and herbicides and from MCC projects that open up their access to African land. Their power was recently enhanced when they were officially recognised as the ‘private sector partners’ in the Group of Eight’s New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition unveiled on 18 May 2012 by President Obama.

**Note on contributor**

Jeanne Koopman is an economist specialising in the political economy of African agriculture, and a visiting researcher at Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts. She has lived in Togo, Cameroon, Tanzania, and Senegal and has taught at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts, and at the Institut des Sciences de l’Environnement, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar, Senegal.

**Notes**

2. One of Senegal’s biggest rice importers has recently asserted that the ‘total liberalization of the rice sector since 1995 has been
extremely dangerous for Senegal’ because, to keep prices to urban consumers affordable, the state has often had to subsidise imported rice, imperilling not only the state’s finances, but the entire economy (Agence de Presse Sénégalaise 2012b).

3. The CNCR, Conseil national de concertation et de coopération des ruraux (the National Council for Rural Peoples’ Collaboration and Cooperation) is Senegal’s largest peasants’ federation (2.5 million members). CNCR makes biannual tours of all Senegal’s agricultural regions to consult with members.

4. The term Millennium Challenge Corporation is the name of the central US grant-making agency; the national branches are called Millennium Challenge Accounts, i.e. MCA-Sénégal.

5. I cannot help but wonder why the current, very poor land users, pastoralists with customary land rights in the area, are being required to purchase land that has been allocated to the MCA-Mali without respect for their customary land rights, when the MCC is supposedly making a grant to the Malian government to develop this land.


References


Crousse, B., Mathieu, P., and Seck, S.M., 1991. La vallée du fleuve Sénégal: Évaluations et per-


Mbojd, A., 2011. 630,000 tonnes de riz produites cette année. Le Soleil, 2 August.


MCC-AGRA, 2008. Memorandum of understanding regarding cooperation between


BRIEFING

*Plusieurs chemins*: how different stakeholders at different scales in Malian society are fragmenting the state

Franklin Charles Graham IV∗

Independent scholar

Introduction

The Republic of Mali, at the start of 2002, held much promise and hope in Africa as well as the international community. The country showed recovery from famines that displaced many families (particularly in the north) in the 1970s and 1980s and a revolt in the 1990s that started over regional disparity but shifted into ethnic violence between neighbouring groups (Claudot-Hawad 1995, Châtaigner and Magro 2007). To heal the country, a new constitution, efforts at decentralising some federal powers, the integration of ex-rebels into the police and the military, and popular elections with presidential term limits were introduced (Baque´ 1995, Drisdelle 1997). Malians in 2002 witnessed the first voluntary step down of a national leader after decades of military power and dictatorship. Alpha Konaré, Mali’s first democratically elected president, served two terms before passing the office on to Amadou Toumani Touré, or ATT, an advocate of many of the 1990s reforms (Poulton and Youssouf 1998).

Ten years later, however, Mali is dividing. ATT, who won a second term in 2007, assured Malians and the international community that he would step down this year (Integrated Regional Information Networks [IRIN] 2012a, Keating 2012). Nevertheless, in March 2012 (a month before the presidential election), he was deposed in a bloodless coup. The group responsible for the coup, the Comité national pour le redressement de la démocratie et la restauration de l’état (CNRDRE) led by Amadou Sanogo, hastened ATT’s departure because of his handling of a new revolt in the north (IRIN 2012a). Reasons for the revolt are complex but a recent food crisis in October 2011 and the intervention in Libya provided catalysts in which many young men decided to keep their arms from Libya and begin attacking Malian military posts in January (African Research Bulletin (ARB) 2012a, IRIN 2012b). The CNRDRE claims their seizure of power is temporary, a move to restore order in the north before resuming presidential elections in Mali (Melly 2012).

Sanogo and the CNRDRE’s actions may have done more harm than good, however, in the effort to keep Mali intact. The Malian national army either abandons posts or fights in the north with inadequate support against the rebels, many of whom are returning from Libya where they gained combat experience and munitions (Ndjebela 2012, Nossiter 2012). The rebel fighters are Tuareg and Arabs who have for centuries seen themselves as culturally different from African groups to the south of them, but who also experienced alienation in Malian society and witnessed...
disparities of wealth and development the southern and northern regions for decades (Boilley 1999, Sangaré 2005, Lecocq 2010). Hospitals, schools, roads and markets are more advanced in the southern part of the country, particularly in and around the capital of Bamako.

The problem of Malian fragmentation does not stop at a simple disparity between north and south, either. In the north, the new authorities are divided in objectives. One fraction called le mouvement national pour la libération d’azaouad, or MNLA, consists mostly of Tuareg. In April some MNLA leaders declared the northern half of Mali the new state of Azaouad although others have hinted towards a rapprochement with Bamako to gain more autonomy for the north (ARB 2012b, Callimachi 2012, IRIN 2012b). The MNLA despite their own heterogeneity came to a consensus in May with another rebel fraction, the Ansar al-Din (a fundamentalist Islamist group) to declare Azaouad a state that practises sharia law (Diarra 2012, Melly 2012). This move, however, appears more an act of survival than one of harmony between the rebel factions who have failed to receive recognition from the international community (Diarra 2012, Meddeb 2012, Melly 2012). The majority of inhabitants in the north, the Songhaï and Peulh, do not, however, like the idea of a Tuareg-dominated government or Islamist state. Some had already left because of the drought and violence but now many protest in the streets of Timbuktu and Gao regarding the enactment of sharia law with many students leaving for southern Mali where sharia law is not practised in the schools (IRIN 2012c, McGregor 2012).

Southern Mali, too, is experiencing trouble. Aside from the challenges of managing the latest food crisis and the civil unrest in the north, the military junta are under scrutiny from human rights groups and the international community for the ransacking of civilians’ homes and arrest of politicians (Lerougetel 2012, Melly 2012). With all these various actors in the north and south surfacing and threatening Mali’s future, the question remains as to whether foreign powers, Mali’s national leaders, and local groups are able and willing to reconcile and keep Mali as one state, or whether they will allow it to fragment. For far too long different stakeholders, in pursuing and defending their own interests, pulled apart the ties that united communities to the republic of Mali, from north to south. It will take more than promises and ‘proposed actions’ to reunify the Malian state.

**Foreign powers and Mali**

Foreign influence in the modern state of Mali certainly predates recent events. Even as a French colony, then called Soudan Français, it witnessed the partition of a southern part which became the colony Haute Volta (what is today Burkina Faso) and a large concession of western territory going to Mauritania in the 1930s (Jus 2003). After independence from France in 1960, Malian leadership invited Soviet advisers and aid into the country as part of Keita’s ‘rural socialism,’ although Soviet commitments to Mali were miniscule compared to other parts of the world (Kort 2010, Igho Natufe 2011). Criticism of the central government and Keita’s path of development, particularly among military officers, led to a coup d’état in 1968. This brought both a regime change and a shift of new foreign investors.

Starting in the 1970s, the Malian government welcomed in the international lending agencies the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. Loans and projects started at this point and still continue today (Corker et al. 2007, Sangaré 2011). Success is, however, limited to a handful of projects at best. Throughout the four decades, mismanagement, corruption, the impracticality of the projects to the Malian environment, and
loan rates that are difficult to pay back have kept Mali locked into IMF/World Bank tutelage (Togola and Gerber 2007, Cabello et al. 2008). Mali’s urban populations are aware of this and have protested against IMF/World Bank policies from time to time. Living conditions, the devaluation of Mali’s currency, the high costs of education, health, and utilities have brought interest groups into the streets with grievances against the central government’s relationship with international lenders (Smith 1997). Decisions on development and resource allocation in Mali, at least on the national level, have been influenced by IMF and World Bank policymakers and regulations for the past 40 years.

The IMF and World Bank are not, however, the only foreign actors on the Malian stage. In the past 10 years the European Union (EU), China, and the United States (US) government have also gained greater importance. Before the EU, France kept close ties with Mali (Martin 1995, Hugon 2006). As a key player in the EU, however, France has brokered larger investment in Malian infrastructure, opened Malian markets to more European exports, and, what is contributing to hostilities in the north, secured substantial exploratory rights for European mining corporations (Renou 2002, Hugon 2006, Traoré and Arnal 2008). What minerals exist in northern Mali are either isolated on small tracts of land or are unknown. Given the presence of iron ore in Mauritania, petroleum in Algeria and uranium in Niger, however, Mali is seen as a lucrative frontier for mining interests (Simanowitz 2009, Drackenburg 2010).

China is a recent competitor with other foreign powers in Africa (Alden, Khalfa and Park 2010, Dent 2011). Before the turn of the millennium, the Chinese were certainly dropping their inexpensive manufactured wares onto African markets (Suzuki 2011, Wissenbach 2011), but competition over energy as well as other precious minerals compels China to take a more active role in African development. For instance, they seek larger shares of Niger’s uranium reserves, a commodity that has been dominated by the large French multinational Areva for 40 years (Martin 1989, Alden and Alves 2010). To African states, their aid practices are often more lucrative as there are few or no conditions attached to grant and loan money and aid is delivered faster (Guérin 2008). In Mali’s case, Chinese-owned enterprises have appeared in Bamako and Chinese businesses supplied management, engineers and labour for the construction of roads and bridges throughout Mali (Bourdarias 2009). Their presence, in the cities and in the government bureaus of Bamako, is evidence of China’s drive to secure a fair share of Mali’s natural resources.

Since 9/11 the US government concerns itself less with promoting US products sold on Sahelian markets and exploiting the region’s natural resources than with their commitment on the Global War on Terror (GWOT). The EU and its relations with the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO) are also part of this fight, but the US government is the forerunner and largest contributor to the GWOT (Glickman 2003, Keenan 2009). Since 2003 US foreign policymakers have kept a watchful eye on an extremist Islamic group calling themselves al-Qaeda Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) whose origins likely come from the 1990s Algerian Civil War or possibly the intrigues of the Algerian Ministry of Interior (Ousmane 2004, Keenan 2012). In either case, AQIM, over the past nine years, have their share of successes, although their popularity among local populations in North and West Africa is contested (Lecocq and Schrijver 2007, Graham IV 2011, Cunningham 2012). AQIM raided military installations around West Africa to gain arms and munitions, they kidnapped or obtained hostages from other groups, received ransoms, and killed
hostages. AQIM videotaped their execution of one man, a British cook named Edwin Dyer; claimed to have killed another, Michel Germaneau (a French aid worker), in retaliation for a failed rescue attempt by French–Mauritanian forces; and were possibly responsible for the death of an American, Christopher Leggett, during an attempted kidnapping in Nouakchott, Mauritania (Christiani and Fabiani 2010, Göita 2011).

The US government provided substantial military training and aid to Mali to secure its borders and fight terrorist organisations such as AQIM (Gutelius 2007, Thurst 2010). The recent political instability in northern Mali, however, has undone the US efforts at the GWOT. Since the fighting broke out between rebels and the Malian army, AQIM claims to have kidnapped more tourists and aid workers (ARB 2012a, South African Press Agency 2012). The MNLA denies ties with AQIM but the presence and successes of the Ansar al-Din has the US State Department concerned over the possible participation of extremists in the insurgency (Cunningham 2012, Oris and Arenas-Garcia 2012). If AQIM is gaining recruits and influence in northern Mali it is likely at some point the US government will be pushed to support Amadou Sanogo and the CNRDRE, overtly or covertly, to restore Bamako’s jurisdiction over the north (Washington Post Editorial Board 2012).

As influential as foreign stakeholders can be in Mali regarding foreign aid, economic cooperation and sharing in Malian development, they are still dependent on another stakeholder, the Malian national government, to let them into local communities for labour, clients or raw goods. This is a practice that began in colonial times and was handed down to postcolonial regimes that throughout different periods of rule assert their role as gatekeeper to Malian society and its natural resources. The Malian national government too has a hand in fracturing Malian society.

Malian national politics
Mali’s borders are, at least for its northern half, arbitrary: a delineation of the French colonial administration was finalised by the 1930s. The northern borders do not represent any natural break in physical geography or break between different ethnic groups. The northern half of Mali is home to Songhaï, Peulh, Tuareg, Arab and Moor peoples. Representation of these groups in the colonial service was, however, poor at best. Instead the French recruited mostly from the Bambara (an ethnic group living in and around the Bamako region) but also other southern groups like the Malinké and Sarakolé. Most in the south, however, remained in their own region, coerced to grow groundnuts, cotton and rice while French authorities developed the infrastructure necessary to transport these goods to France and other European markets (Roberts 1997, Coulibaly and Bélières 2004). When independence came in 1960, Malian leadership faced the difficult task of preserving a vast territory diverse in population and with different levels of development. The ideologies of Malian leaders along with geopolitical trends that they adopted shaped the heterogeneity that is pulling Mali apart.

Modibo Keita and his administration (1960–1968) mismanaged the Malian economy through pursuing development projects that were frequently impractical, but also through increasing the size of government (Harsch 1993, Igbo Natufe 2011). The latter fuelled a conflict between some Tuareg clans in the north, and Bamako, especially over the management of natural resources (Bourgeot 1989, Diallo 1996). The revolt, called Alfellagha, more resembled a sporadic guerrilla fight than conventional warfare, and started in 1963 and lasted until 1964 (Bourgeot 1989, Bernus 1992). The rebels were well organised and clear in their goal of separating from Bamako but lacked the numbers,
munitions and outside support needed to achieve their desired break from Mali. The Malian army, reflective of previous French favouritism in terms of recruiting individuals from the south, consisted of southern Malian officers and soldiers who conducted a ‘scorched earth’ policy in northern Mali and later extended this into southern Algeria in order to defeat the rebels. They destroyed livestock and property, poisoned wells, tortured and killed those suspected of links with the rebels (Boilley 1999, Lecocq 2010). The atrocities committed in this era remained in the memories of many Tuareg and certainly played in to the motivation for later revolts.

Moussa Traoré (1968–1991), a junior military officer from the south, successfully deposed Keita’s rule in 1968. Traoré’s heritage did not mean favouritism, however, to southern groups. He changed the direction of foreign influence in Mali from east to west by approaching the IMF and World Bank (Harsh 1993, Gunther, Marouani and Raffinot 2006), but the size of the state remained unchanged and repression increased. Protests in the south over price hikes in basic commodities, salary reductions to civil service workers and the displacement of people and/or the destruction of their livelihoods because of large-scale development projects were met with severe force (Smith 1997, Siméant 2011). Human rights abuses were common against anyone critical of his regime (Drisdelle 1997, Poulton and Youssouf 1998). It took the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s, the famines that followed the droughts, the return of violence in the north, a large student protest, and a new generation of young military officers to push Traoré out of power in 1991.

Despite the difficulties and challenges, opportunity came. Alpha Konaré (1992–2002), also a southerner like Keita and Traoré, was politically savvy enough to address the grievances of Malians, both north and south. He used the collective bargaining table to diffuse various crises (Baqué 1995, Cissoko and Touré 2005). The revolt in the north, now called Aljebha, was by far the largest crisis because as soon as one or a few rebel groups agreed to peace, new ones or splinter groups continued to fight (Seely 2001, Simanowitz 2009). A generic explanation for this can be found in Tuareg society itself. The Tuareg are a loose confederation that allow clans, families and even individuals to take a different course even if many agree to a specific course of action (Bourgeot 1989, Bernus 1992). The transition to peace was further complicated by southern populations protesting against the longevity of the revolt. Protests, although diverse and reflective of different interest groups in the 1990s, at times were organised against the government’s rapprochement with the northern rebels. Crowds wanted the government to take stronger action against rebels and not to squander limited government revenues to pay off rebel leaders for peace (Smith 1997, Siméant 2011). Impatience and animosities towards the rebels also led to the Songhā and Peulh organising local militias called the Ganda Köy. At first this was done to protect themselves but it later shifted to the offensive in attacking anyone resembling Tuareg or Arab (Claudot-Hawad 1995, Châtaigner and Magro 2007). Konaré integrated ex-rebels from the north into the police and military, promised decentralisation programmes, new projects and revenues to both northern and southern communities, and offered amnesty to all those who stopped fighting to bring peace back to Mali in 1996 (Cissoko and Touré 2005, Demante 2005).

Amadou Toumani Touré and his presidency (2002–2012) represented the era in which Konaré’s agreements could be implemented. ATT himself, unlike his predecessors, is from the central Malian town of Mopti – his father was a Songhā, his mother a Peulh. His experience in the Konaré administration brought him into contact with various Tuareg leaders,
which was later significant in quelling another uprising in the Kidal region in 2005 (Abdalla 2009, European Parliament 2010). To his disadvantage, however, he came to power in a country that was heavily in debt, dependent on foreign aid, prone to corruption at all levels of government, and with a central government that was difficult to restructure in order to implement the decentralisation reforms and new projects from the 1990s (Harsch 1993, Nielsen et al. 2011). During his tenure, criticism grew regarding ATT’s inability to regulate Mali’s borders and clandestine trade in the north, and his handling of Tuareg rebel leaders when new uprisings occurred (Abdalla 2009). These obstacles undermined ATT’s efforts to keep Mali together.

ATT approached international assistance much like his predecessors in order to keep Mali together. He welcomed Chinese and European Union leaders and assistance (Suzuki 2011, Wissenbach 2011). He actively sought GWOT assistance from the US government, including antiterrorism training from the US military, procuring military aid, and sending Malian officers to the United States for training (Keenan 2009, Thurston 2010). Amadou Sanogo was one of the officers sent to the United States in 2006–2007 (Keating 2012). His relationship with Muammar Qaddafi of Libya, not a harmonious one but certainly effective, aided in deflating Tuareg grievances as Qaddafi provided financial incentives to bring peace (Simanowitz 2009). The global recession of 2008, however, undermined ATT’s gains. New and old channels of aid and development were reduced or cut off. Protests re-emerged in urban areas while the remote north witnessed another insurgency (Abdalla 2009, Siméant 2011). In regards to the civil unrest in the north, ATT refused this time to negotiate with the rebels. He used GWOT assistance his government received in previous years to crush the uprising (Keenan 2009). Mali remained, however, vulnerable. The calamities of poor rains, failing harvests, forced migration, and disenchanted young Tuareg men fighting in Libya and returning to Mali with their arms after the Qaddafi regime fell meant only a rekindling of the grievances the Tuareg had with Bamako from previous years.

Amadou Sanogo (2012– ) justified the coup d’état against ATT by pointing to the protests that occurred in Bamako over ATT’s handling of the latest revolt in the north. Western media, however, questions whether Sanogo will step down if the north is brought back to Bamako’s jurisdiction, comparing his manoeuvres to Moussa Dadis Camara in Guinea during 2008 in a move to take power for an indefinite period of time (Lerougetel 2012, Melly 2012). Although it is difficult to judge whether he will consolidate his power or abdicate when the goals of the CNRDRE are met, he has made one point clear: no negotiations with rebel factions from the north, a stand that must win appeal from many of the protesters in Bamako months earlier (BBC News 2012, County and Peterson 2012). He has not, however, convinced Western powers to assist him in regaining the north. France has cut off all aid and assistance, the US suspended its assistance and even Mali’s West African neighbours have ceased trade and closed their borders (Bowie 2012, Leroutege 2012). Sanogo, however, is playing upon the fear of northern Mali becoming both a rogue and radical Islamist state by calling the rebels friends of AQIM and drug traffickers (IRIN 2012a, Keating 2012). This is a tactic that Mohammadou Tandia used in order to attract GWOT assistance for his government’s fight against le mouvement des nigériens pour la justice and le front des forces de redressement (MNJ and FFR respectively) in northern Niger during 2007–2009 (Alzouma 2009, Graham IV 2010). Western powers, however, without strong evidence of growing terrorist activity in northern Mali,
are currently reluctant to commit arms and munitions to Bamako given how support to anti-Qadaffi forces in Libya generated the current problems in Mali (Ndjebela 2012). Niger and Chad, who are also affected by the latest drought and food crisis, also have deep divisions among ethnic groups in their northern and southern regions. To drop more arms and munitions into the region may spark more unrest throughout the Sahel.

While international stakeholders may hold the purse strings and the Malian national government guards the entrance to Mali’s resources, it is local stakeholders who have expressed, sometimes passively, sometimes overtly, dissatisfaction with development practices in Mali during the past 50 years. The exclusion of these groups in development have resulted from time to time in violence, whether it is university students in the streets of Bamako rioting or Tuareg men attacking military posts with arms from Libya. The actions of these actors too are unravelling the fabric of Malian society.

Ethnic rivalries within Mali

First, some clarity must be made between racial and ethnic differences in Mali. The media, and some academics, mistakenly generalise the Tuaregs and Arabs in the current crisis of 2012, as well as during Aljebha, and the insurgencies of 2005 and 2008, as ‘lighter-skinned’ than the southern ‘black’ African groups like the Bambara, Malinké or Sarakolé (Tarhule 2003, Abdalla 2009, ARB 2012a). It is true that some Malian Tuareg and Arabs are different in appearance, having physical features that are more North African than sub-Saharan, particularly among the spokesmen for the MNLA and Ansar al-Din (Callimachi 2012, IRIN 2012b). This effort at racial distinction, however, is misleading and omits the complexities of Tuareg and Arab history in the Sahara and Sahel. For centuries these two groups absorbed black Africans into their societies through slave raiding, the adoption of vassals and inter-marriage (Boyer 2005, Simanowitz 2009). Among the MNLA and Ansar al-Din are numerous officers and soldiers who resemble black Africans to the south of them but speak Kel Tamacheq or Arabic and identify with either Tuareg or Arab society. Thus, the divisions between northern and southern Malians are more geographical and ethnic than racial.

A point must also be made regarding the importance of northern Mali to Tuareg groups, living both inside and outside of Mali. The Tuareg live in other North and West African states: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, and Niger. Northern Mali, however, is considered a sacred place to the Tuareg for two major reasons. One is the large number of religious and social leaders who reside in the Kidal region (Boilley 1999, Lecocq 2010). The other involves a pasture region known as the Tamesna (which Niger also shares a part of). The Tamesna is where, during years of good rains, many Tuareg families converge to allow their camels to graze. During these months the Tuareg subsist on their animals’ milk and wild foods (Bernus 1992, Bourgeot 2000). The Tamesna is, for Malian and non-Malian Tuareg alike, the heart of ‘Azaouad’.

Although unseen at the start of European colonialism, the French set in motion the rivalries that exist between northern and southern peoples in Mali. To begin, the French concentrated more on the southern part of the colony for revenue and resource extraction. This created an unevenness in development throughout the colony (Roberts 1997, Coulibaly and Bélières 2004). This said, the French still needed to collect taxes and maintain communications and security for the northern regions of Kidal, Timbuktu and Gao. This brought a handful of French officers and even more clerks and soldiers who were once again recruited from the Bambara, Malinké and Sarakolé southern societies (Massing 1996, Van Den Avenne 2005).
These individuals, earning steady incomes through colonial service, started in or moved their families to the north. The dietary preferences of these new Saharan inhabitants along with the limits of Saharan agriculture created a demand for produce from the south, also bringing merchants and transporters to the drier regions (Grégoire and Labazée 1993). The demographic change was gradual, but very apparent to Tuareg, Arab, Songhaï and Peulh communities who had lived here for centuries.

Despite the intrusions of French and southern Soudan Français society into places such as Aguelhoc, Méniaka and Taoudénni, the pastures remained in the jurisdiction of the Tuareg, Arabs, and Peulh. The pastoral commons was reduced during French rule, first in the 1890s and again after the Tuareg revolts of World War I, but the pastoral Tuareg and Arabs were able to maintain their flocks for several decades (Poulton and Youssouf 1998, Sangaré 2005). Furthermore, illicit trade through the Sahara expanded during this time. The French concern over the illegal trafficking of animals, animal products, textiles and Mausers seems minuscule compared to the present-day commodities of cigarettes, petrol, narcotics, people and Kalashnikovs (Meagher 2003, Walther 2009). It is crucial to acknowledge, however, that the constant effort at enclosing the commons through border controls, concessions to mining interests and the GWOT has pushed Tuareg and Arabs to seek out other income activities when drought, disease, or other catastrophes destroy their flocks (Arditi, Janin and Marie 2011, Graham IV 2011). Taken from this perspective, southern groups in Mali can certainly relate as many of them turn to economic opportunities in Malian cities or overseas when crops are destroyed through drought, flooding or pests (Herry 1999, Apprill and Van Den Avenne 2001).

The end of French colonialism did not stop southerners migrating to northern Mali to work and live. In fact, more came through replacing French officers and from the growth of the central state. These new authorities and their meddling in flock management and the collection of fuel wood were not appreciated in the Kidal Region. As mentioned earlier, these actions incited Alfellagha although many Tuareg did not participate in the fighting. It did not matter, however, to a Malian army whose ranks were Bambara or other southern ethnicities who knew little of Tuareg society. All Tuaregs were seen as combatants and the atrocities committed against both combatants and non-combatants generated a large diaspora with families fleeing to other countries but also Mali’s southern cities.

Northern peoples continued to migrate southward during the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s. Unlike their counterparts who migrated to the north during colonial and postcolonial times, there were very few employment opportunities lined up. In fact, they had to compete with other migrants affected by the droughts for jobs and other opportunities (Claudot-Hawad 1995, Kohl 2010). They were often discriminated against and, as the environment shifted from displacement in the 1970s and 1980s to violence in the north during Aljebha, the Tuareg and Arabs living in Bamako and other southern cities were intermittently attacked or suffered damage to their businesses and homes (Claudot-Hawad 1995, Kohl 2010). Such occurrences were more frequent and organized in the north, where the Ganda Koy shifted from defensive to offensive tactics in their fight against rebel groups (Cormier-Salem et al. 2005, Châtaigner and Magro 2007).

The amnesty, repatriation and integration of ex-rebels into the Malian police and military forces in the 1990s was seen as a major step to promoting coexistence between north and south. As practised before, southern recruits to the police and military served in the north but now Tuareg and Arabs served posts in southern
Mali. This effort at integration, however, has led to more misunderstandings between cultural groups than acceptance (Demante 2005, Châtaigner and Magro 2007, Arditi, Janin and Marie 2011). For instance, Tuareg and Arab communities in the north complain of the poor representation of Tuareg and Arab among the police and soldiers in their own communities (Florquin and Pézard 2005, Felber, Müller and Djiré 2006). Two droughts affecting northern Mali (2005 and 2011), the limited success of the MNJ/FFR in northern Niger, and the stockpiles of arms and munitions left behind by the Qaddafi regime in Libya gave Malian Tuareg and Arabs the means to express their long-standing animosities with Bamako starting in January 2012.

Conclusion
Military action could be taken, by the United States, France or NATO, to oust the military junta from Bamako and regain the northern cities from the MNLA and Ansar al-Din (Washington Post Editorial Board 2012). A popular election and the restoration of Mali’s constitution could also be imposed, but the damage is done. Mali, for too long, was dependent on foreign investment and aid to keep the country afloat. Its vulnerability to global markets showed months before the recession hit Western countries, as evidenced by the protests of new university graduates over the poor job market in 2008 (Simeant 2011). National leaders have focused more on pleasing international donors than their own constituents, a practice that led to the instability and difficulty in ending the violence in the 1990s. Development in Mali has been weak and slow for all, but regionally it is concentrated in urban zones and the south and scant in the north and rural areas. Finally, ethnic rivalries are a chronic problem in Mali. Violence has been expressed between southern groups (Bambara, Malinké, Sarakolé and others) versus northern groups (Tuareg and Arabs); between neighbouring northern groups (Tuareg/Arabs attacking Songhai/Peulh and vice versa) and even between Tuareg and Arabs themselves (Seely 2001, Florquin and Pézard 2005). Although the Tuaregs and Arabs are minorities in northern Mali, very few have accepted Bamako as the legitimate authority for their region. Many continue to procure arms and fight for greater autonomy, if not independence. They are not isolated in their struggle either. The presence of the Ansar al-Din and AQIM’s possible role call into question what clout international terrorist organisations have with the rebels. The collective actions of all these different actors at different scales are currently fracturing the republic of Mali.

If Mali is to reunite in the future it will take the participation and patience of the international community, the Malian national government and local actors from both southern and northern Mali. The IMF/World Bank, EU, and US government could play a more reciprocal role than exploitative one by lowering loan rates, focusing investment on social goods in Mali (more so than focusing solely on the GWOT), insisting on regional equity in development projects, and, in regards to China’s role as a new foreign aid provider, insisting on greater participatory roles of local actors in development. Mali’s national government can act as an intermediary brokering not only with international donors but also its southern and northern constituents in the development process. At the same time, the Malian government must continue the long task of diversifying its ranks with both southern and northern groups represented at the local level. Certainly not of least importance, southern groups should end any violence in street protests, and northern groups should put down their weapons to participate in this peace/development process. It is likely too that the MNLA and Ansar al-Din will have to distance themselves from extremist Islam in order to appease US and EU
governments. Mali faced such difficulties before in the 1990s and still managed to broker a peace. This time it takes more, however, than promises to bring Mali back together. This time it takes action.

Note on contributor
Franklin Charles Graham IV conducted research in the Gao, Kidal and Menaka regions of Mali in 2006–2008. Since the outbreak of violence in January 2012, several of his northern Malian contacts have fled to Burkina Faso or Niger. Most, including the majority of people interviewed, are, however, internally displaced and/or facing food insecurity, health risks and violence.

References


Estados sobre Conflictos y Acción Humanitaria.


BRIEFING

Somalia: oil and (in)security

Michael Walls\textsuperscript{a*} and Steve Kibble\textsuperscript{b}

\textsuperscript{a}Development Planning Unit, University College London, London, UK; \textsuperscript{b}Progressio, London, UK

East Africa is being hailed as the last great unexplored oilfield (although the Arctic and Antarctic zones may one day trump that claim). The finds, alleged and actual, stretch from Madagascar, through Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, into Somalia (particularly Puntland), Somaliland and through to Ethiopia. Estimates suggest that Somalia’s offshore oil and gas fields could contain 110 billion barrels – more than Kuwait’s fields, potentially making the area the fifth largest global producer. Optimism over the extent of deposits is not universal though: some commentators have questioned whether oil deposits are in fact significant at all (for example, Brower 2009). In addition, some technical questions remain unanswered, including the type of oil – light oil with low density and low sulphur being the industry preference, as it costs less to transport and refine – while major political, security and environmental issues also persist.

Recent hydrocarbon discoveries both on- and offshore add a further twist to an already complex situation – one that is frequently misunderstood by outsiders. Piracy, terrorism, militant political Islamism, state collapse, warlordism, assassination of journalists and human rights activists, patriarchal practices, and continuing humanitarian, refugee and internal displacement (IDP) crises are all commonly taken to characterise Somalia. As it is, the area has been described as one of the worst places in which to be a child, while many commentators note severe deficiencies in human rights, unbalanced economic development and, historically, an excess of external political and social interference (Human Rights Watch 2012). There are fears that oil, conflicts over its revenues, and the insecurity and instability that exploitation could bring, will exacerbate this situation.

These fears extend to the corruption associated with the resource curse or ‘Dutch disease’. This model suggests that increasing exploitation of natural resources pushes prices higher within the sector, raising both the cost of living and the cost of doing non-oil business. Consequently, rapid fiscal expansion associated with natural resource exploitation leads to a decline in manufacturing and other sectors. The original case for this pattern was observed in the Netherlands, where rapidly increasing natural resource revenues strengthened the currency, pushing prices for the nation’s other exports to uncompetitive levels, thus reducing profitability and discouraging investment outside the extractive sector. Generally speaking, while the problem mostly refers to natural resource extraction, it can refer to any development leading to a large inflow of foreign currency, including a sharp surge in natural resource prices, foreign assistance, and highly targeted foreign direct investment. In essence a

\textsuperscript{*}Corresponding author. Email: m.walls@ucl.ac.uk

ISSN 0305-6244 print/ISSN 1740-1720 online
© 2012 ROAPE Publications Ltd
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2012.711079
http://www.tandfonline.com
rentier political class lives off the proceeds within clientelist networks, with production declining and higher costs being transmitted to the population as a whole – the latter remaining underdeveloped with the benefits going to transnational companies and a comprador elite. Nigeria and Angola offer vivid illustration of that principle, though they might also be contrasted with more positive examples, including Norway, Ghana, and, to some extent, Venezuela.

There are, of course, far more shades to this picture than are allowed by many commentators. The Somali situation itself needs to be viewed using a more nuanced understanding of reality. While widespread assumptions typically embrace the view presented above, the situation in fact differs markedly through the region. Somaliland, and to a lesser extent, Puntland have enjoyed extended periods of relative stability. While governance throughout the region remains weak, there are viable governments in place in those territories, with Somaliland in particular making progress in building genuine state capacity. Indeed, some parts of the typical Somali stereotype are untrue even in the south. Many aspects of the business environment have survived, even thrived, in a situation in which state control is minimal. And, while infrastructure throughout the Somali Horn of Africa is woefully inadequate – as much in Somaliland as elsewhere – and educational and health services are insufficient to meet the most minimal requirements, the picture of endless chaos and humanitarian disaster is incorrect.

The global situation is also pertinent in any analysis of oil extraction. There has been substantial diversification on both the supply and demand sides in the extractive industries. The rising economies of China and India and other so-called BRICS economies are boosting global energy demand, while diminishing reserves in many long-established fields, and accompanying rising prices are forcing a shift in focus to extraction from less stable areas in which political tensions are higher and state capacity lower than has traditionally been the case. Extractive industries in many areas have consequently seen a marked increase in both the privatisation and militarisation of energy security. In the Somali case, this trend is apparent, with private-sector firms such as the United Kingdom (UK)-based Sterling Corporate Services (SCS, previously called Saracen International), who are particularly active in Puntland, providing security for exploration and many other functions that would normally be the preserve of the state. It is noteworthy that SCS were originally brought in to run an antipiracy programme, before their contract was unilaterally cancelled by Somalia’s Transitional Federal Government (TFG) speaker, Sharif Hassan Sheikh Aden, who preferred other international, private-sector security firms (Pelton 2012). Indeed, the increasing number of private security firms operating in Somalia belie statements such as that of Puntland Petroleum Director, Issa Mohamud Farah ‘Dhollowa’, who claimed Puntland ‘would not accept [foreign] security in our country’ (MJ and Omar 2012).

Small, speculative exploration companies play an important role in the changing Somali situation. Australian, South African and Canadian companies are currently involved in exploration for Somali hydrocarbons, with Turkish interest also evident. In the medium to long term, it is probable that the major companies – ConocoPhillips, Amoco, Chevron – will start to invest in the Somali fields, probably through buyouts of the smaller companies who have pioneered recent exploration in the region.

Internationally, much of the debate around ‘big oil’ has assumed a technical and environmental focus, asking whether we are now past the point known as ‘peak oil’, and faced with declining production. Arguments on this vary, driven by differing
estimates as to how much oil can profitably be extracted. Some suggest that the point of ‘peak production’ was reached in 2008. Others suggest that improving extractive technologies and the discovery of new fields pushes that date back by up to 20 years. It is clear, though, that new discoveries alone will not achieve dramatic extensions to peak estimates. Oil companies and others are consequently very aware that they can no longer rely on traditional low-cost energy sources. In the long term, and in the best case, this would bring a sustained but steady rise in prices. It is quite likely, though, that energy markets will instead see considerable price volatility, albeit still following a general upward trajectory.

The debate is also joined by those who argue that a substantial reduction in oil consumption must precede peak oil in an effort to avoid ‘climate chaos’. A parallel trend has seen the burgeoning of conspiracy-based rhetoric that holds the reductionist view that ‘everything is an oil war’. In the early part of last decade it was thought that United States (US) wars for oil were at least in part intended to retain the dollar hegemony in the oil trade (transactions have long been denominated in dollars). A number of oil-producing and exporting countries announced a shift to the euro as the currency of oil exchange (for example, Saddam’s Iraq and Venezuela), while others threatened to do so (for example, Iran). This denominational consensus was described by William Clark when he noted that the ‘recycling of petro-dollars is the price the US has extracted from oil-producing countries for US tolerance of the oil-exporting cartel since 1973’ (Clark 2004).

John Bellamy Foster suggested four reasons for the strategic energy initiatives launched in the United States from 1998:

- the ‘disappearance’ of spare world oil production capacity;
- the increasing importance of the Persian Gulf; and
- calculations that oil production was past its peak (Foster 2008).

Subsequently, broad and increasing trade competition with China sharpened US desire to extend control over world oil reserves, adding political urgency to wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and rapid expansion of US interests in the Gulf of Guinea.

In line with environmental arguments, it is certainly true that production has peaked in UK and Norwegian oil and gas fields, but these are minor reserves by world standards (Stigset 2011). It was predictions that Saudi oil would soon reach peak production that were far more worrying from US and European strategic perspectives. An associated concern was the relative decline in the share of the extractive market controlled by the multinational oil companies as a result of the rise of ‘resource nationalist’ oil companies and governments such as those in power in Iran and Venezuela. By some estimates, the share of extraction directly controlled by the major companies dropped as low as 10% of the total. Some argued that this decline in direct commercial control of oilfields was contributing to underinvestment in extractive technologies, thus threatening long-term efficiency. Moves to reassert commercial control centred on the Gulf where two-thirds of the world’s known oil reserves lie. This does not of course preclude searching for alternatives in hostile environments and through alternate forms of extraction such as shale and oil sand, liquefied natural gas or corn-based ethanol. However, large oil-consuming countries increasingly appear to be looking to Africa (initially to existing fields in West Africa) as an increasingly important supplier. A number of commentators saw a link between this strategy and the US creation of Africom in 2008 as a single Pentagon command over the continent (for
example, Juhasz 2008). Oil discoveries in Kenya and Uganda, as well as those in Somalia, underline the degree to which areas once considered peripheral, indeed in donor terms, even sometimes ‘ungoverned’, are now significant in global calculations on securing access to oil.

Within the Horn of Africa, Sally Healy has identified a number of key underlying variables which are pertinent to current extractive interests. She notes the importance of identity politics overlaid by ethnicity and clan as factors in processes of state formation and disintegration that characterise much of the region, including Ethiopia, Eritrea, and the Sudans as well as the Somali lands (Healy 2008). In addition, religious fault lines have been exacerbated by ethnic and now antiterrorist allegiances. Few countries in the region have enviable governance records and their culture of militarisation means ready recourse to military solutions at all levels. Much conflict occurs over centre–periphery relations where there is a marked tendency towards economic and political marginalisation. Healy further notes that one country’s periphery is another’s backyard, leading to high levels of security interdependence – ‘mutual interference’ in plain English, or what postmodernists might term a regional security complex. The strongest regional states see threat very much in traditional military terms, whereas weaker political entities rely more heavily on ‘societal security’. Much of this is a zero-sum game where destabilisation of neighbours is perceived to be a strategy furthering self-interest more effectively than mutual co-operation. Where strong regional institutions should be vital in building regional stability, they are instead paradoxically undermined by the resulting regional insecurity. Consequently, the regional body Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), boasts a much worse record in sustaining regional stability than other regional counterparts such as the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS) or the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

This pattern of systemic volatility extends beyond the immediate neighbourhood, with conflicted zones in recent years reaching from Chad through to northern Uganda. A number of approaches to peacebuilding have been applied in the region. In general, outside-brokered ones have not worked (indeed, they have often had the opposite outcome to that intended), whereas internally driven negotiations that are grounded in cultural and well-understood patterns have tended to enjoy greater success. This has particularly been the case in Somaliland (Walls and Kibble 2010b, 2011).

Healy’s comment is that security within and between states ‘has no common language’. Key questions such as who determines the ‘self’ (as in ‘self-determination’) thereby remain unresolved, as do questions on the legitimacy of borders even where relevant and apparently valid agreements exist. There is a long history of administrations in the region viewing formal treaties and agreements as less important than the ebbs and flows of day-to-day political convenience/necessity. Arguably, this pattern lies behind ongoing tensions between Puntland and Somaliland, between Ethiopia and Eritrea, within Kenya, between Kenya and Somalia, replicating, of course, decades of colonial duplicity.¹

It is instructive at this stage to consider the ways in which similar situations in different regions have played out in the past. We will briefly consider Mozambique and Timor-Leste.

Mozambique has had large known coal deposits for some considerable time, but fairly recent exploration has also identified large offshore natural gas deposits. In a recent public speech at Chatham House, President Guebuza of Mozambique talked of the need for transparent systems and regulations such as the 2001 Law on Petroleum that dealt with safety,
environmental concerns, and public transparency in the tendering process (Guebuza 2012). Much of what he said concerned the need for consultations on the best legal framework following international best practice. He also noted the urgency of measures to train as many Mozambicans as possible in skills relevant to the extractive sector through capacity building and private-sector schemes. Coupled with this has been expansion of universities, with new courses aimed at producing more geoscientists. The bulk of the capital investment required is expected to come from the private sector. He also noted the importance of decentralisation, with local government expected to play an expanded role in public procurement and regulation of private corporations in terms of corporate social responsibility. There would, he hoped, be opportunities for young Mozambicans and those returning from the diaspora to set up outsourcing companies to service the natural gas industry and in development of by-products such as fertilisers.

He was aware of a number of balancing acts that would be required. Taxes on gas extraction enterprises and their employees would need to be sufficiently high to fund state capacity to promote development and diversification, but not so high as to prevent outside investment. Natural gas exports would provide foreign exchange, but energy sources would also need to be available domestically at cheap enough prices to provide for national and household needs and thereby to promote indigenous growth, diversification and, most importantly, industrialisation. He acknowledged that these benefits would not accrue immediately, and neither would gas reserves alone solve all the problems of poverty and the inheritance of the civil war. Nor should they divert attention from the more traditional sectors. He talked of extending social protection measures, such as those targeted at Mozambique’s elderly, but he rather skated over the problems experienced by those resettled to make way for mega-projects – including, for instance, the development of a new deepwater port on the Zambezi River.

Asked specifically by one of the authors on what lessons he would pass on to countries such as Somalia and Somaliland, he magnanimously invited other East African nations to join with Mozambique in learning through comparative experience about best practice. However, pressed on more specific problems, he strongly rejected the ‘resource curse’ hypothesis, preferring the glib observation that no one would voluntarily choose poverty over riches.

In comparison to Mozambique, Timor-Leste has had longer experience with an economy reliant on the extraction of hydrocarbons. In fact, Timor-Leste is rated the second most oil-dependent country after South Sudan. They have been lauded by many for overcoming the resource curse, and a recent government statement talked of the US$10 billion invested in their New York-based Independent Petroleum Fund. The same statement spoke of ‘fast-tracking the establishment of best practice institutions, systems and mechanisms to manage the petroleum sector’. The Dili government has increased revenues from oil and gas through wise diversification of investment strategies, while comprehensive tax audits on resource companies along with the work of an independent regulator have assisted in promoting effective resource management (Agio 2012). The statement goes on to cite success in reducing poverty by 9%, building infrastructure and including local communities in state building. There have also been formal safety net programmes.

However, local non-governmental organisation La’o Hamutuk believes this is only part of the story and that in truth the resource curse is already affecting Timor-Leste. From 2004 they warned that Timor-Leste needed to guard against following the experience of countries rich in
natural resources but poor in other aspects of economic and social development, pointing out that nearly all petroleum-revenue dependent countries experienced artificially high prices, substitution of imports for locally produced items, and neglect of non-oil sectors. Their assessment seven years on, in an input to the Parliamentary Commission monitoring the national budget for 2012, was that the resource curse was now manifesting itself in increased inflation, hitting the poor, ‘extreme import dependency, neglect of non-oil sectors and revenue sources, ineffective public expenditure, credible rumours of corruption and failure to plan for the long-term’ (La’o Hamutuk 2011). They point out that such factors can be overcome with long-term planning instead of ‘short-term political or personal priorities’. However issues of capacity, not just of individuals, but of absorption of revenues, failure to create domestic productivity, combined with inflationary pressures that increase the amount of money in circulation and thereby raise prices. Inflation everywhere hits the poor hardest, disproportionately reducing their purchasing power. It also reduces opportunity for investors since labour costs rise.

With finite Timorese resources, La’o Hamutuk estimates that sustainable sectors like agriculture, tourism and small business are the key to diversifying and developing, rather than the Dili emphasis on capital-intensive physical infrastructure and electricity provision, which benefit the urban elite while doing little to reduce dependence on petroleum and imports. They note that the non-oil trade deficit is around a billion dollars (ibid.). They complain that petroleum income goes entirely to the state and does not provide in itself jobs or money for people. ‘A realistic development policy would focus on food sovereignty, import substitution, eco-tourism, agriculture, value-added to farming and fishing and light industry for local production’ (ibid.). La’o Hamutuk makes the more general point that ‘in many developing countries, such mega-projects have boosted economic growth statistics while severely damaging the environment, destroying peasants’ and fisherfolk’s livelihoods, leading to social and cultural deprivation and increasing suffering among poor, displaced and marginalised people’. Timor government plans to make the country an upper-middle-income country are undermined by the deterioration in social spending, meaning achieving many of the Millennium Development Goal targets is unlikely on current trends.²

Although Timor-Leste has been praised for its independently managed petroleum fund, spending against oil revenues each year since 2008 has amounted to 7.2%; well above the 3% guideline provided by the sustainable income calculation. La’o Hamutuk was also concerned that parliamentary scrutiny is undermined by unmonitored development projects, with many approved on the basis of an informal agreement or else they bypass parliament altogether. Much of the credit raised by the state involves lengthy, and sometimes vague, repayment terms, creating the likelihood that future generations will have to repay loans after oil revenues have run out and when the population is significantly larger. Overall, La’o Hamutuk estimates that oil wealth alone cannot meet Timor-Leste’s needs. Declining state revenues mean that, on current trends, Dili is likely to be unable to finance its budget in only nine years’ time.

It is clear that there are lessons to be learned from Mozambique and from Timor-Leste, and equally, Somali culture introduces its own set of contextual particularities. Somalis themselves are noted for the fierceness of their pride in their common culture, language and religion, but paradoxically equally renowned for the divisions within their clan-based social structure. As has already been noted, a long history of outside intervention is just as notable for having misinterpreted those
social particularities, helping to deepen divisions while failing to recognise the available bases for supporting a stable and more unified political arrangement.

We have written elsewhere of the practical dangers inherent in viewing Somali society as a series of superficially concocted polarities (Walls and Kibble 2010a). Somali culture and history is in fact extremely complex and outside interventions have repeatedly shown their ability to fatally undermine the success of efforts to promote state- and nation-building (Walls and Kibble 2010b). It is reasonable to suggest that Somali societies are still coming to grips with the collision between a decentralised, male, pastoral democracy and the centralising requirements of the nation state (Bradbury 2008). There is therefore an urgent need to understand the problematic nature of the Somali state and its relation with its citizens, the latter of which is seen by many as requiring the protection of societal security against state predation. The conception of a Somali state that is developmental in nature is consequently seen by many Somalis as oxymoronic.

However, this does not give rise to the state of anarchy that is so often the shorthand term employed by writers on Somali society. Mary Harper shows in a recent book that, while the Somali state underwent collapse, other forms of organisation have to some extent counterbalanced this, supporting both technological and economic development (Harper 2012). The societal forms that have enabled this involve strong, local cultural patterns suitable for a ‘rough neighbourhood’ where international conflicts shape and are shaped by regional and local divisions – clan, religion, state and gender.

This has profound implications if the discovery of significant hydrocarbon deposits is to benefit Somali society in broad terms. Some form of centralised state will be necessary if Somalis are to negotiate successfully with increasingly powerful oil companies. That state or states will also need to act with great determination and integrity if they are to insist that the benefits of extraction be distributed somewhat equitably amongst Somalis.

The importance of a state-led ability to negotiate on behalf of citizens is underlined by recent assertions that oil drives much of Western diplomacy. The Guardian suggested that just such a motivation lay behind the London Conference on Somalia in February and a surprise visit by British Foreign Secretary, William Hague, to Mogadishu (Townsend and Abdinasir 2012). There was talk then of joint UK–Somali collaboration in the oilfields as well as against al-Shabaab. After meeting Hillary Clinton and David Cameron at the London Conference, TFG Prime Minister Abdiweli Mohamed Ali noted specifically that a share of natural resources were on offer in return for help with reconstruction (Townsend and McVeigh 2012). Opinions vary as to how much oil formed a major focus of discussion. The Puntland minister of international cooperation was asked directly if oil was discussed in London and he stated unequivocally that the Guardian had got it wrong: the subject was not broached as part of official talks. The UK minister for international development, Andrew Mitchell, offered a similar denial. However, others claim that oil has been on the agenda in UK–TFG intergovernmental meetings (Fiqi 2012a, 2012b).

An indicator of the lack of local negotiating weight lies in the fact that the Republic of Somalia’s National Oil Law of 2007 was allegedly written by Canadian lawyers and the state of Kuwait (Abdillahi 2012). By all accounts, that law vastly underestimates the reserves and allots some of the smallest royalties on shared profits in the petroleum world. How far that fits with the need for a legal framework domestically and with recognised international agreements including environmental and long-term developmental considerations is moot.
We interviewed a Puntland activist on the lack of transparency in the negotiations between the Puntland government and the oil companies and of worries over the privatisation of security – not just in oil enclaves – but throughout the country. His comment was that it is difficult to understand the long-term implication of a growing extraction industry unless there is transparency over contracts. At this stage, he fears precisely that state capacity to negotiate favourable terms is lacking, while long-term stability is also questionable. He also holds the view that the privatisation of security has reduced transparency, resulting in SCS/Saracen establishing themselves as ‘the strongest army in Puntland now’ (Interview A 2012). There are reports, too, of British Special Air Service (SAS) members guarding oil rigs (James 2012).

The securitisation of conflict and the use of private mercenaries has a potentially destabilising effect, risking alienation of local communities. Private security firms are also extending their participation into non-oil areas in which they are functioning in a capacity that would elsewhere be considered the preserve of national defence forces, including the provision of security for state occasions, and involvement in antipiracy activities. The alienation arising from this approach is apparent in the perception that ‘for the first time in my life, I have seen people from Puntland who are frightened of the government … saying that we don’t want to talk … and [they say that] it’s all due to this new Saracen security operation’ (ibid.). He went on to acknowledge that there is little hard evidence to test the veracity of these opinions, but whether true or not, they are indicative of a growing degree of distrust engendered directly by the privatisation and internationalisation of state security provision.

This is of course reflective of the lack of both public and state faith in Puntland’s own police and army. Nor does it seem that there is the capacity or willingness within Puntland to advocate for transparency on these issues or to undertake comparative work on other similarly placed countries. As an activist put it, ‘I have not seen any other Somali, either politician or civil society talking about this. I have seen some parliamentarians raising some voices in Mogadishu about specific security issues but not in relation to oil.’ It remains the case that most Puntlanders still welcome the oil companies given investment, jobs, and the appreciation of the Somali shilling against the dollar. But there is awareness that there is, as yet, no legal framework which establishes how revenues are collected and divided between Garowe and Mogadishu. Additionally there is great suspicion of corruption within the TFG in Mogadishu, with many fearing the possibility that TFG members will be tempted to raid revenues before the TFG mandate expires in August 2012.

Keith Hill, president and CEO of Africa Oil, said the following in January 2011 in relation to his company’s production sharing agreement with the Puntland government to explore the Dharoor and Nugaal valley areas: ‘we look forward to the upcoming wells in the rift basins of Puntland which we believe could hold similar potential to the geologically related basins in Yemen which contain more than 6 billion barrels of discovered reserves’ (Africa Oil 2011). A similar comparison has been made by other industry insiders (Petroleum Africa 2012). Some reckon that total reserves in that area alone could amount to 10 billion barrels.

The Somaliland government has separate prospecting agreements with a number of oil companies, including Australian company Jacka Resources, UK-based Ophir Energy, the Norwegian Asante Oil and UK-based Prime Resources (Morgan 2011, Petroleum Africa 2012). Prime Resources and Jacka have signed their own agreement to work together in partnership with locally based Petrosoma (Baldauf...
The Somaliland authorities have also been trying to establish a UK-linked corporation to act as an entry point for investors concerned about the implications of the lack of international recognition. There are few consistent estimates of reserves in Somaliland, with most simply repeating the comparisons noted previously between Somali and Yemeni fields.

Worryingly, a good half of the Nugaal basin, referred to by Africa Oil’s Keith Hill, lies in territory that falls inside the colonial borders of the British Somaliland Protectorate and is now claimed by both Puntland and Somaliland. This situation points to what, in the opinion of some, is the most significant threat to regional security in the future. It is easy to imagine that conflicting resource agreements will lead to significant conflict in the future, and on that level one might wonder if Puntland, as the politically weaker of the two Somali territories, might not fare the worst.

Another security-related concern lies with al-Shabaab. There seem to be two distinct possibilities: extraction installations may become attractive targets for attacks from Shabaab, or it is possible that the security provided to those installations instead creates islands of stability. Volatility could also increase if pirates find ways of preying on oil installations, but similarly it could decline as youth see other opportunities to break from piracy and Islamist militancy made more dangerous by heightened, privatised and internationalised security operations.

There is some precedent for increasing stability from Armo in Puntland, where drilling in the Shabeek Wells was covered by a successful inter-clan agreement providing a safe environment for exploration. Al-Shabaab as a force are widely acknowledged to be as weak as they have been for many years, so perhaps that, too, supports a more optimistic line on security. Piracy has also declined in the past year or so, as countermeasures have become more effective (Arnsdorf 2012).

However, the possibility that either or both might find ways of reorienting their operations to take advantage of the opportunities offered by burgeoning extractive industries cannot be ruled out. Al-Shabaab’s relocation to the Puntland/Somaliland Galgaala mountains certainly places them closer to extractive activities. The potential for this to add further complexity to a complicated situation is already evidenced by disagreements over whether the periodic fighting that has broken out in that area since 2010 is in fact between al-Shabaab and Puntland authorities or local militia, and whether the root cause is unwelcome Shabaabi militants or oil. Perhaps it is not too much of a stretch to suggest that the fighting and even the presence of al-Shabaab members might be seen as an effort by local clans, and particularly the Warsangeli, to secure potential oilfields for future exploitation (Brower 2009, Beerdhige 2012).

Conclusion

Events in Somalia show there is a long way to go even after the supposed success of the London conference. There is general agreement that a broad-based government needs to replace the TFG when their mandate expires in August. However, the shape of the government will not be clear until after August. Any increase in oil-related investment will occur against the background of drought and environmental fragility, suicide and other bombings, and the continued presence of Ethiopian forces plus the African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia (AMISOM) which has been expanded to include ‘re-hatted’ Kenyan troops.

It seems unlikely that even with knowledge of the difficulties in working in ‘borderland’ countries, major oil companies will be much interested in dealing with a complex history, a regional culture of militarism, or the problematic and contested nature of the Somali state. Nor is it likely that they will be much aware of the ways in which global agendas on terrorism and
security have tended to accentuate Somali division and state failure in the past, rather than supporting reconciliation or stability. At present, Somali administrations and the nascent civil societies in Puntland, Somaliland and Somalia are ill-equipped to push for transparency, equitable production-sharing agreements, support for local community schemes, robust environmental impact assessment, indigenisation, or capacity-building and training agreements.

It remains an open question as to the form of state that would best equip Somalis to negotiate and implement favourable production and extraction agreements with international corporations or Western governments. The fact that Norway is offered time and again as the key model for that task is in itself instructive. Is it necessary for a society to already be wealthy, educated and politically aware if it is to avoid the twin perils of the resource curse and the imposition of an increasingly kleptocratic public–private partnership of the most predatory type? If that is the case, then it does little to engender a sense of optimism in the Somali case.

Acknowledgements
This article was prepared with insights from a number of individuals who agreed to be interviewed, in particular Mohammed Yusef, CEO, Invicta Capital; Hussein Dualeh, Somaliland Minister for Natural Resources and Energy; and Scott Pegg, Indiana University. The authors would like to thank them and others who provided comments.

Notes on contributors
Michael Walls’s research, consultancy and teaching interests lie in the related areas of development management and governance. He is Director of Research at the Development Planning Unit, University College London, and his doctoral research was in political governance in Somaliland. He is Chair of the Anglo-Somali Society, Somaliland Focus (UK) and Kayd Somali Arts and Culture Ltd.

Steve Kibble works on issues on issues concerning Southern Africa and the Horn for Progressio (formerly the Catholic Institute for International Relations), an international development agency working for justice and the eradication of poverty. He has observed several Somaliland elections as a member of Progressio as well as of Somaliland Focus (UK), of which he was a co-founder. He holds a doctorate on African politics from the University of Leeds. Walls and Kibble were joint coordinators of international presidential election observation in Somaliland in June 2010, reprising a similar role in 2005.

Notes
1. Italian colonial relations with Ethiopia and Somalia alone provide rich evidence of this disregard for formalities, with UK–Somali colonial relations little better.
2. The United Nations Development Programme itself admitted this (UNDP 2011, p. 6).

References


EDITORIAL

The revolution in permanence

As we go to press it has become clear that the Egyptian revolution of 25 January 2011 may not have gone according to plan – if indeed there ever was a coherent plan. Commentators from across the political spectrum, both inside and outside Egypt, have noted that June’s presidential election may simply confirm a soft military coup rather than a major achievement in democratic liberalisation. Egypt’s military, with its powerful corporate hold over more than 40% of the economy, was not to be deleted so easily. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) seems to have pulled the strings behind the election, shaping an outcome where the Egyptian armed forces rule without electoral support, and where a rhetoric of democratic electoral politics masks the persistence of a ‘deep state’ of entrenched military economic interests and likely continued crony capitalism. But before jumping to the conclusion that the revolution has been halted – which might also be the case elsewhere in North Africa (where imperialist intervention in Libya has led to chaos, and intense discord and Salafist meddling begins to undermine the gains in Tunisia) – let us look briefly at just what has unfolded in Egypt and what outcomes may emerge. Put bluntly, is the cup of achievement for political liberalisation and democratic deepening half full or half empty?

Cup half empty

There has been considerable pessimism in the assessment of Egypt’s transition to a civilian president (Abul-Magd 2012, Hossein-Zadeh 2012, Fisk 2012). Egyptians have been to the polls five times since January 2011, for a constitutional referendum and then for parliamentary and presidential elections. The revolutionary youth coalition and labour movements that broke free from the state monopoly of labour representation urged caution about moving quickly to polling after Mubarak’s ouster. The youth and those most active in Tahrir Square and throughout other mostly urban centres in Alexandria and Port Said, insisted on a gradual transition to democratic politics, understanding very well the hold of a 30-year dictatorship. They knew that only continued social mobilisation and political organising could prevent the ancien régime from using its party machine to reinstate cronies and security apparatchiks. A valiant attempt to negotiate the emergence of a post-Mubarak political system was lost early however.

The SCAF insisted on a speedy move towards parliamentary elections and refused to countenance a transitional committee of independent experts to manage constitutional reform and formulate a more considered and lengthy political transition and rebuilding. This was the first battle lost after the fall of Mubarak and it was to be followed by a series of despicable manoeuvrings by the SCAF that revealed how adept the octogenarian generals were in defending the military’s corporate holdings and the structure of the internal security apparatus. Their strategy had been evident throughout the Mubarak period – to engineer public agreement that authoritarianism and the generals were essential to protect the territorial integrity of Egypt and to deal with manufactured internal security
threats. The SCAF fomented internal violence to justify their strong-arm tactics of summarily beating and imprisoning protesters who wanted to rid the country of military rule and to expand democratic representation. In 2011, as many as 12,000 Egyptians, including hundreds of political activists, faced military courts without basic human rights and due process, and (as in July 2012) 2165 civilians remained in prison after undergoing military trials. On 9 October 2011, at least 27 demonstrators were killed and hundreds injured in violence outside State TV at Maspero after being attacked by security forces and thugs allegedly hired by internal security. Many, though not all, were Copts calling for justice for the torching down of a church in Aswan. Forty-one people were killed and more than a thousand were injured when security forces attacked protestors in nationwide clashes that were called the ‘Mohamed Mahmoud Street battles’. These took place between 19 and 24 November 2011. As authorities attacked an anti-SCAF sit-in outside the Cabinet buildings in the week of 16 December 2011, at least 19 were killed and 750 injured. Due to clear and possibly deliberate negligence by police, 74 Ultras Ahlawy soccer fans were killed and 1000 injured in a match in Port Said stadium on 1 February 2012. The Ultras, hardcore supporters from Cairo, had been very influential in orchestrating the defence of the revolution in Tahrir Square during the 18-day uprising and had much experience in resisting and protesting against police brutality. The failure to properly police the match at Port Said and to keep rival fans apart (let alone prevent armed individuals from entering the stadium) is said to have been an intentional scheme by security officials to take revenge against their enemies among the Ultras. The security police were said by one perpetrator to have hired 600 thugs and offered them each EGP150. One of Egypt’s footballing legends, Mohamed Abu Treika, declared that he ‘refused to meet Field Marshal [Hussein] Tantawi, because I believe the military council to be an accessory to this crime. I do not understand why they are still so unable to make any decisions to secure the country against thugs’ (Egypt Independent 2012).

Alongside the climate of fear and violence the SCAF has orchestrated an electoral politics that has led to ‘pact-making’ politics (Stacher 2012). Linkages between the military and many political figures intent on challenging for high office has sucked out from national debate most radical formulations of what a new Egyptian political economy might look like in an era of contested democratic dispensation. Even as the votes were being counted for the presidential election, the SCAF declared a constitutional amendment on 17 June. In effect they wrote an interim constitution (Bery 2012), which gave the generals more power and tied the hands of the incoming president before he took office. The generals dissolved parliament, whilst the ‘political isolation’ law that had prevented former New Democratic Party politicians (of Mubarak’s party) standing for office was voided. In addition, the military police were given powers to arrest civilians — though the courts have since rescinded this decision. The SCAF gave itself powers to legislate, control state budgets and have a veto over a future president’s ability to declare war (Teti and Gervasio 2012). It seems the deep state had consolidated its powerful position just as many Egyptians packed Tahrir Square to celebrate the election of a new president. And this achievement in itself also illustrated a cup half empty.

The two presidential candidates who contested the run-off election in June were simply unrepresentative of the political sentiments expressed by voters in the first round of polling. The run-off candidates received only half the number of eligible votes on a low 51% turnout. Ahmed Shafiq, the political ‘remnant’ or feloul from the old regime, was Hosni Mubarak’s last prime minister. He received 12.3 million votes. These were mostly from Cairenes nervous of an Islamist victory and from voters mobilised by the old and now banned National Democratic Party machine in the Nile Delta and the coastal and tourist
peripheries. After the declaration of the result, Shafiq departed for the Gulf with his family. This was ostensibly for a vacation, though many believe it was to escape prosecution for allegations of corruption while he was minister for aviation and oversaw the development of Cairo airport. In contrast Mohammed Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood candidate (not the organisation’s first choice, who was barred from standing) won with 52% of the vote, 13.2 million votes. The outcome of the election led Ahdaf Soueif to declare, ‘Down with the president: the Egyptian people didn’t want either of them’ (*Guardian* 2012). And it is easy to see why. In the first round of the presidential election, almost 40% of voters supported nationalist or leftist candidates that were neither representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood nor the old regime.

An absence of real choice for the presidency, poor voter turnout and persistent intervention by the SCAF led the former Islamist presidential candidate, Abdel-Moneim Abul-Fotouh, to say the new president will be largely symbolic, a ‘ghost without the will or authority of a real president’ (*Al Ahram Online* 2012). The fruits of Egypt’s revolution have been tainted by military skulduggery and class power of the *ancien régime*.

**Cup half full**

Teti and Gervasio have argued convincingly that the presidential run-off elections were not a contest between democracy and authoritarianism. Instead, the electoral process was about what the ‘junta is willing and capable of doing to avoid becoming increasingly isolated’ (Teti and Gervasio 2012). This suggests that military power may be contested, and that the military may not be immune from the need to exercise power hegemonically – combining the glove with the fist. It also questions whether the SCAF – or military leadership more broadly defined – is homogenous or if there are fractions within it that might be encouraged to relinquish the military’s economic hold and subject themselves to parliamentary oversight. There were certainly some among the military, albeit at the lower end of the command structure, who clearly sympathised more openly with the revolution even though they paid heavily for that solidarity. But this does not suggest that the scorecard, after a tumultuous 18 months, has many positives, given the track record of the military and their ability to poison electoral debate with xenophobia, sexism, misogyny and promotion of sectarianism. But the revolution is a process that cannot be reduced to struggles around electoral politics. The slogans of 25 January continue with calls for ‘bread, freedom and justice’, and these are underlined with continued strikes and *fellahin* (peasant) occupations.

Much has been made of the ambivalent political positioning of President Morsi. On 25 June his clearly populist visit to Tahrir Square as president-elect, where he effectively swore himself into office before the people, stressed the demands of social justice, reverence for the martyrs of the revolution and the need to focus on national unity. And the following day, in his inaugural speech after he had been officially sworn in – not in the dissolved parliament but by the Supreme Constitutional Court – he said, ‘Today the Egyptian people have established a new life with real freedom and real democracy.’ But later, in a speech at Cairo University, he thanked the Armed Forces and the SCAF for guarding the country’s interests since Mubarak had been thrown from office, pouring cold water on the aspirations revolutionaries may have harboured. Activistsprotesting against the SCAF were shouted down with the now hollow slogan ‘the people and the military are one hand’. Later in the day, while visiting the Hikestep military training headquarters on the edge of Cairo, Morsi reiterated his thanks for the military’s key role in the revolution: ‘You were up to the expectations of the people of Egypt.’ But then, directing his comments to Field Marshall Tantawi, Morsi also insisted, ‘I’m now responsible for you – the armed forces – as I am for all Egyptians’.
Morsi may not be such a pushover for the military, although he will need a strong and vibrant social constituency to monitor him. This may also depend upon how much he can assert even a relative independence from the Guidance Bureau of the Muslim Brotherhood party, Freedom and Justice, and the economic and political clout of its financiers like Khairat el-Shater. Morsi has continued his calls for unity, and there was briefly talk that a Copt and a woman might be appointed as vice-presidents, but the broad-based cabinet did not appear when it was announced in August. Old security personnel remained in post, Field Marshal Tantawi remained Minister of Defense, and there were only two women and one Copt in an enlarged cabinet of 35 ministers, compared with 29 in the erstwhile El-Ganzouri government. New Prime Minister Hisham Qandil’s government is broadly technocratic, with little prospect of change in economic strategy and with an Islamist as Minister of Information – an appointment that has already sent a shock wave through the TV and Radio Union. There remain well-founded fears of Morsi’s Islamism and, more specifically, a deal with the Salafists that a new constitution (when it gets written) may draw more explicitly from sharia law.

Regionally Israel has finally congratulated Morsi, having implored the United States (US) and the European Union during the revolution to save their friend Mubarak. The 1979 peace treaty with Tel Aviv does not look under threat, although Egypt’s restriction in Sinai is now anachronistic. However, Morsi will be under considerable pressure to speak out against illegal Israeli occupations of Palestinian territory and repeated human rights violations. One of the factors that repeatedly angered Egyptians during Mubarak’s regime was the failure to concretely support the Palestinians. The US now seems irritated that Morsi did not take the opportunity of his inaugural to reiterate the importance of Washington’s relationship with Cairo. Yet many are aware that the US$1.3 billion per annum US military assistance to Egypt constitutes significant leverage. It may keep SCAF in line, but also limit foreign policy posturing or challenges to US geostrategic reach in the region. Morsi is under heavy pressure from SCAF to reserve the powerful ministries of defense, foreign affairs and internal security to military personnel.

There is additional international pressure on Morsi. The World Bank has reaffirmed support for Egypt during its ‘historic transition’ (World Bank 2012). Apparently the World Bank spent ‘the last year listening to a wide range of voices’ in Egypt and elsewhere in the region, and the result is the claimed alignment of Bank activities with ‘the aspirations expressed during the revolution . . . to help Egypt face the dual challenge of implementing much-needed government reforms while meeting the urgent need for more economic opportunities’ (World Bank 2012). This translates into the World Bank wanting to help Egypt, ‘restore a sound and healthy macroeconomic framework . . . [and] in defining and launching reforms to enhance the transparency of all government economic operations’. The World Bank does pay lip service to the need to ‘foster inclusion’, reduce regional disparities and create jobs through investment in labour-intensive projects – though this strategy is to be funded only by a meagre US$200 million. The World Bank ignores the lessons to be learnt from the macroeconomic strategy of the high growth Mubarak years, when Egyptian wealth grew but the majority of Egyptians remained desperately poor – and which created the conditions for the 25 January revolution. Egypt under Mubarak had some stunning economic growth figures. Real GDP growth since 2004 had always been above 4% and often above 6%. Average real per capita GDP increased from US$879 in 1980 to US$1614 in 2004 – equivalent to 3% per capita – a figure all developing countries would be happy with. Yet the benefits of growth were distributed very unevenly and poverty in Egypt worsened, especially after the more aggressive neoliberal reforms associated with
Ahmed Nazif’s 2004 government. And there is little indication that World Bank orthodoxy and meddling will diminish Egypt’s economic dependency.

The Egyptian economy remains far too dependent upon rent from the Suez Canal, labour migrancy – in decline since the war in Libya and Iraq – and oil and gas. However, the region’s most populous country, with 81 million people, also offers the possibility of enormous effective demand, if only the workers and farmers who produce the country’s wealth could afford to purchase. Morsi’s biggest challenge, or rather the biggest challenge for Egyptians who want to promote a revolutionary agenda of equality with democratic control, is to develop an economic strategy of social justice. That can only be constructed on asset redistribution, increased use of local savings (and therefore the need to block capital flight) and expansion of regional economic links. Land reform will also need an urgent agenda for action, with a reversal of the process of privatisation that Mubarak accelerated with Law 96 of 1992 that removed farmers’ rights to land in perpetuity. These policies will need distance from the World Bank, not closer proximity to its destructive and discredited neoliberal policy of trickle-down economics. Arguably one of the reasons why the SCAF were prepared to abandon Mubarak was because the partial (and crony) economic liberalisation driven by his son Gamal threatened their corporate-military hold on Egypt’s economy. US connivance in Gamal’s succession would have opened up the Egyptian economy to international competition, and sat uneasily with the generals who were already concerned at the impact of increased incorporation into global capital.

Morsi has made a limited start. He announced in early July that there would be moderate public sector wage increases, but the big battles, declared off limits by the SCAF, would involve breaking up the concentration of wealth in the military-led economy and shaping investment in a private sector that is not based on accumulation by dispossession. The military’s economic hold and their exploitation of conscript labour will be resisted, though the challenge may come from workers and farmers. Just five days into the revolution on 30 January, the workers who formed the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions proclaimed that, ‘The Factories and the Square are One’ (Charbel 2012) and worker protests for improved labour rights have continued to the present. Labour was previously organised by the corporate state, but now the pressure is on for the full recognition of independent trade unions and an end to the criminalisation of strikes and protests. Conversely it is likely that the broader public will be encouraged by security to be intolerant of persistent ‘disruptive’ behaviour. And the pressure for liberalising will continue as unemployment remains high, losses of tourist revenue pile up and there is now at least a US$22.5 billion deficit. Europe’s capitalist crisis does not help as it is market for 36% cent of Egypt’s exports, though Egypt’s foreign debt remains relatively low at US$20 billion.

Egypt’s revolution has not ground to a halt. The 20 years of struggle to topple Mubarak has not suddenly evaporated (El-Mahdi 2011, Joya 2011) and perhaps the electoral farce that has led to an Islamist parliament, disbanded by the SCAF, and Morsi’s success just confirms Žižek’s dictum that ‘the first choice has to be the wrong choice’. In other words, ‘the wrong choice creates conditions for the right choice’ (Réé 2012). The irony of Islamists defending the offices of state for the SCAF is not lost on Egyptians. And it is a paradox that the Muslim Brotherhood has been the most successful in social mobilisation at the local level around the mosque and in communities. Notable rifts are opening up between youth and elders amongst the Islamists, with the elders often now weary of political mobilisation that may backfire on leaders who are economically conservative. The Muslim Brotherhood began courting international businessmen in the summer of 2011 and its economic programme called al Nahda (The Renaissance) promotes pragmatism and economic growth, including the need for close
negotiations with the International Monetary Fund. One of its financiers, Khairat al-Shater, has insisted that ‘the Egyptian economy must rely to a very, very large degree on the private sector. The priority is for Egyptian investors, then Arab then foreign’ (quoted in Reuters 2012). It is likely Morsi will be happy to deal with the agents of private and international capital, but this may not always be sustainable politically. The greatest strength of the revolution was its grounding in years of industrial unrest, widespread and successful new trade union struggles and mobilisations. These will not go away and they provide a tremendous opportunity for a new politics, one which was then foregrounded in the post-2000 increased militancy in Cairo and elsewhere to topple authoritarianism. As Karl Marx wrote so famously in his 1850 address to the Central Committee to the Communist League:

While the democratic petty bourgeoisie wish to bring the revolution to a conclusion as quickly as possible … it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent, until all more or less possessing classes have been forced out of their position of dominance, until the proletariat has conquered state power. . . . Their battle cry must be: ‘The Revolution in Permanence’. (Marx 1850/Marx and Engels 1973, pp. 323–324)\

The papers in this issue of ROAPE cover countries (Egypt, Eritrea, Cameroon, Mauritius, Rwanda) that tend to receive less attention in specialist anglophone African Studies journals. Taken together, they remind us of the value of long-term, engaged and in-depth social science research that goes beyond dominant narratives and forces us to interrogate the grounding of African political economies.

Andreas Malm leads us to pay attention to some of the conditions which lay behind the Egyptian revolution. He provides a less familiar take on accumulation by dispossession, showing how family farms are threatened as they are squeezed between rising sea levels and an increasingly privatised fishing industry on Lake Manzala. He argues that climate change and industrial aquaculture in the northern Nile Delta produce a double whammy of dispossession for local fishing communities.

Rwanda is currently celebrated as a model for post-conflict economic reconstruction. An Ansoms and Donatella Rostagno provide a critique of celebratory accounts of the country’s progress towards Vision 2020, the national plan to become a middle-income country by 2020. Rather they show that overall economic growth is not translating into poverty reduction, and that Rwanda’s economic model is unlikely to generate poverty reduction because growth is concentrated among a small elite group.

Tanja Müller provides a rare set of insights into daily life in Eritrea that pay attention to the ways in which people are quietly making plans for a peaceful future in the context of the country’s post-transition political economy. In an attempt to think outside the straitjacket that liberation struggle politics provides for analysing the country’s present and predicting its future, Müller finds more convivial possibilities in the everyday lives of young people, such as options for further study and the relaxation of government service requirements.

In contrast, Ryan Saylor’s contribution looks to the colonial past for an explanation for the Mauritian state’s relative success. Often treated as exceptional in the African context, Saylor demonstrates how the familiar processes of state-sponsored coerced labour, infrastructure provision, and agricultural research and development, though limited, nevertheless contributed to the building of the modern state’s capacity.

Finally, Rogers Tabe Egbe Orock and Oben Timothy Mbuagbo consider contemporary taxation in Cameroon through the lens of ‘accumulation by corruption’, showing how the country’s political elite benefits through various ‘corrupt’ practices without attracting
opprobrium from the ruling elite. They show how, in response, the country’s citizens have become disillusioned with the possibilities for change through street protest. Protest is instead more likely to be registered via demands for taxpayers’ rights in the popular press.

Ray Bush
School of Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds
Leeds, UK
r.c.bush@leeds.ac.uk

Claire Mercer
Department of Geography and Environment, London School of Economics
London, UK
c.c.mercer@lse.ac.uk

Note
1. An earlier version of this article appeared on website Jadaliyya.com on 22 July 2012.

References
BOOK REVIEW


The story of the Niger Delta has in recent times been told and retold over and over again in scholarly, civil and uncivil advocacy and public policy domains. The story has always been about the hopes, betrayals, dispossessions and attendant contradictions of the politics of oil exploration and exploitation in the region, in all its ramifications, including the vexed issues of environmental insecurity, general underdevelopment, revenue allocation, resource control, and accountability and transparency in the governance of the crude economy. Also included are contradictions in state and corporate responses to the problem, what one commentator describes as ‘placebo as medicine’, and the resultant militarisation of the struggles for environmental justice, arguably an inevitable outcome of the perceived ‘deafness’ and irresponsiveness of state and corporate actors to peaceful agitations that characterised the early stages of the struggles.

Given the huge body of literature on the Niger Delta one might be tempted to ask if there are new and refreshing ways of addressing this subject. Cyril Obi and Siri Rustad’s Oil and insurgency in the Niger Delta adds much of value to the debate. The primary objective of the book is to ‘explore the various aspects of the complex causes and dimensions of petrol violence and insecurity in the Niger Delta’ and to reflect ‘the various perspectives on the oil-conflict nexus, and the prospects for sustainable peace’ (p. 10). The book delivers on its promise with coherently structured themes organised in three parts. The first, consisting of contributions from notable names in the field such as Ukoha Ukiwo, Rhuks Ako, Ibaba S. Ibaba and Charles Ukeje, among others, explores the underlying causes of conflicts in the region. All of these authors stress, in varying degrees and dimensions, the culpability of the Nigerian state as well as the forces beneath its weaknesses. The second part, which also draws contributions from reputable scholars on the Niger Delta, most notably Augustine Ikelegbe, devotes attention to analysis of the various actors in the complex politics of petrol violence in the Niger Delta. While the analyses of militant insurgent groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), and attendant security ramifications including criminal violence and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, are engaging, the focus on the gender dimension of the struggle by Oluwatoyin Oluwaniyi is especially commendable. This is a welcome advance, as most recent collections on the subject have, overtly or covertly, been gender blind. Yet, perhaps there might be more refreshing ways of exploring the gender dimension of the Niger Delta struggle, beyond merely looking at women’s protest. This approach only portrays women as victims of violence and as peacebuilders, which they truly are, but as recent studies have shown there is also a sense in which women contribute to the problems, lubricating the wheel of militancy, criminality and violence in the region.
The third part explores the roles and responses of multinational corporations (MNCs) to the Niger Delta question. Again, this also features respectable scholars on the subject, particularly Uwafiokun Idemudia. The two authors here both decry the complicity of the MNCs which, rather than devoting adequate attention to their corporate responsibilities that could help mediate the undesirable consequences of their actions and/or inactions, make profit maximisation and repatriation their ultimate priority. The concluding chapter by the editors is well crafted. Rather than following the conventional pattern of recapitulating the central concerns and message of the collection, Obi and Rustad choose to address one of the most recent efforts at peacebuilding in the region, the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme. After an overview of previous peacebuilding initiatives, and a preliminary assessment of the post-amnesty regime, Obi and Rustad come to the conclusion that the amnesty deal was like ‘a half-open, half-closed window’ (p. 207) for sustainable peacebuilding in the region. The amnesty fails to address the roots of violent conflicts and insurgency, which carries huge costs. There is little or no regard for fundamental issues of accountability, democracy and justice, all of which have been central to the Niger Delta question and are inevitably important for any sustainable peacebuilding efforts in the region. Thus the concluding chapter captures the central message of the various contributions.

Oil and insurgency in the Niger Delta is an outstanding addition to the literature on the Niger Delta. The book offers one of the most up-to-date, comprehensive, empirically rich and historically deep explorations of the Niger Delta question from a multidisciplinary perspective, drawing on history, law, political science, development and environmental studies and peacebuilding. My main worry with the book, however, was the failure of the editors to set out, from the beginning, the theoretical and conceptual insights that inform and frame the book’s penetrating analyses of critical issues in the Niger Delta problem. Nevertheless the book provides a balanced and nuanced but radical interpretation of events, elaborated with simple prose and clarity of expression. The book is highly recommended to students, academics, civil society, donors and decision-makers interested not only in finding a lasting solution to insurgency in the Niger Delta, but also in broader questions of energy security in the Gulf of Guinea, as well as stability of the global oil price regime.

J. Shola Omotola
Redeemer’s University, Nigeria
Email: sholaomotola@yahoo.com
© 2012, J. Shola Omotola
BOOK REVIEW


When Nigeria’s government attempted to eliminate fuel subsidies in January 2012 it unwittingly ignited unprecedented protests among workers and youth, culminating in a week-long, nationwide general strike. After months tracking revolt in North Africa, media pundits invariably looked south in search of a sequel. Were we witnessing a ‘Nigerian Spring’? Might there be a new wave of revolutions, this time south of the Sahara?

In making this comparison, few seemed to realise they were issuing an implicit challenge to much received wisdom. The conventional narrative of the Arab Spring accords primacy to a technology-savvy middle class pursuing liberal virtues – not trade unionists defying market reforms. Indeed, structural adjustment and globalisation were supposed to underwrite a golden era of comparative stability in sub-Saharan Africa, unleashing the entrepreneurial spirits of a burgeoning middle class and enriching millions. The very possibility of a ‘Nigerian Spring’ seems to call into question prevailing assumptions about the geographical boundaries and social dynamics of African revolt. This underlines the importance of African awakening, a spirited collection of essays originally published in Pambazuka News during the first six months of 2011, when the Arab Spring was at high tide. Pambazuka News, ‘a platform for progressive Pan-African perspectives’ is an online weekly which justly boasts of providing probably the most comprehensive coverage of African struggles for ‘dignity, self-determination and emancipation’ (p. 17). By bringing a selection of this coverage to a broader audience, African awakening issues a trenchant and timely challenge to the widespread assumption that the Arab Spring can be understood in isolation from the rest of Africa.

In the two introductory chapters, editors Firoze Manji and Sokari Ekine sketch a bold portrait of a continent gripped by revolutionary ferment. Events in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and the Middle East dominated headlines last year, but the tide of revolt extended far beyond the Arab-speaking world. Demonstrations, strikes and other expressions of mass discontent shook ruling classes in every corner of the African continent, from Malawi to Madagascar, South Africa to Sudan. The movements animating these protests are hardly homogeneous. Yet each is responding to a common experience of social, economic, and political dispossession engendered by three decades of neoliberalism in the Global South, and further exacerbated by the current capitalist crisis. If their basic demands for justice and popular self-determination are to be fulfilled, nothing less than a thorough ‘social transformation’ is required (p. 13). What we are witnessing, the editors conclude, is not an Arab Spring but an African Awakening: emerging revolutions on a continental and even world scale, whose fate will be determined in years and decades to come.

Unfortunately the rest of the volume never quite succeeds in bringing this pan-
African picture into clear focus. After debating whether to group the essays thematically or geographically, the editors ultimately decided that a chronological presentation would ‘give a sense of the growing excitement of catching history on its wings’ (p. 16). This perhaps makes a virtue out of necessity. Most of the essays in *African awakening* are in fact extended news reports, blog posts, and eyewitness accounts – the type of journalistic pieces which undoubtedly made for exciting reading in an online weekly journal, but which lose pertinence many months after the event.

Taken together, the short, journalistic essays nevertheless do cast a welcome light on social struggles that have otherwise received lamentably little attention, ranging across Côte d’Ivoire, Gabon, Cameroon, Uganda, Burkina Faso, Swaziland, Morocco and Algeria. Yet overall coverage remains surprisingly uneven for a book devoted to Africa’s ‘emerging revolutions’. South Africa is discussed in only four pages, Nigeria and Kenya are missed out altogether, while the struggles in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya between them form the focus of 18 of the 32 chapters. The more substantive analytical and comparative pieces are mostly situated at the end of the book – and each, without exception, is devoted to North Africa. These critical reassessments of the Arab Spring provide some of the strongest analysis in the collection, written by some of the keenest observers of African political economy. Adam Hanieh, Patrick Bond and Samir Amin uncover the class dynamics behind the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia. Mass protests targeted not just the idiosyncratic abuses of Mubarak and Ben-Ali, but the brutal social logic of neoliberal capitalism – which Washington and dominant classes now seek to maintain under the rubric of ‘orderly transition’. Mahmood Mamdani, Charles Abugre and Yash Tandon extend this critical gaze to Libya, exposing the hypocrisy, cynicism and outright lies underlying the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation’s ‘humanitarian’ intervention. In their telling, the Western powers sought regime change from the start. Whether this was done to test a new generation of weapons (as Mamdani suggests offhandedly) or to secure oil and other economic resources (as Tandon and Abugre more convincingly claim), all three authors agree that the intervention illustrates inherent dangers in the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ doctrine.

Without similarly detailed analyses of uprisings south of the Sahara, *African awakening* cannot fully deliver on the promise of its title. Yet this collection deserves to be read, if not for the breadth of its coverage then for the novelty of its perspective. By encouraging reassessment of social movements across the continent in terms of their common political–economic dynamics, the book offers a sound and necessary framework for future inquiry. Certainly, any ‘Nigerian Spring’ will not be intelligible without it.

Gary Blank  
*London School of Economics, UK*  
Email: G.S.Blank@lse.ac.uk  
© 2012, Gary Blank
BOOK REVIEW

Ethiopia: the last two frontiers, by John Markakis, Woodbridge, James Currey, 2011, xvi + 382 pp., £40.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781847010339

Drawing on the experience of Western Europe, Charles Tilly theorised, ‘war made the state, and the state made war’ (1975, p. 42). In another book, Coercion, capital and European states: AD 990–1992 (1992) Tilly further observed that the single most important driver of state formation in western European history was the activity of war-making. This activity invariably entailed destruction and construction. The historical formation of the Ethiopian state has been forged through unremitting war and destruction. Markakis examines the history of the Ethiopian state from its inception and generalises that Ethiopia has never been at peace with itself or its neighbours. Drawing some useful insights from the notion that the state makes war and is made by war and on his own intimate knowledge of the region’s political history, Markakis undertakes a deep foray into the history of the Ethiopian state.

Since the task of building a nation state was considered paramount by the Abyssinian ‘empire’ builders, this goal superseded everything else and consequently justified any means, including the use of gruesome violence. Markakis states that the assumption that ‘force is the midwife in the birth of a state’ is validated by the Ethiopian experience, and furthermore: ‘Warfare is the crimson red that runs uninterruptedly throughout its long history’ (p. 3). He argues that the employment of violence in the process of ‘national state building’ is by no means unique to Ethiopia as this was the norm in the construction of national states in western Europe and elsewhere in the world, but he justifiably questions the extent to which ‘violence is the most effective means to this end in the 21st century’. One of the reasons violent conflict has been blighting the Horn is that the states in the region, unlike in the rest of the continent, have failed to embrace the colonial boundaries. ‘Why did the colonial dispensation not survive in this corner of Africa?’ (p. 6). In his view, ‘part of the answer lies with Ethiopia, a country involved directly or indirectly in nearly all the conflicts in the region during the post-colonial era’ (p. 6; emphasis added).

Ethiopia: The last two frontiers is a culmination of more than 40 years of scholarship. Markakis has developed an intimate knowledge and understanding of the multiplicity of the interwoven factors that have been blighting the lives and wrecking long-standing livelihoods of millions of peoples inhabiting the drought-prone, fragile and poverty-stricken peripheries of the Horn under different guises. The most ill-famed of these has been the elusive and hard-to-achieve goal of building a centralised nation state inhabited by a homogenous people on the ruins of the pre-existing mosaic of indigenous states, cultures and contrasting ways of life.

Ethiopia for some reason has always been entralling and consequently never failed to attract the attention of many political historians. However, unlike Markakis and a few others, what seems to captivate many is the mythology that surrounds the historiography of the so-called ancient
Abyssinian/Christian civilisation anchored at the centre. Whilst most Ethiopianists have been trying to understand and explain Ethiopia from the central perspective, Markakis’s point of departure is, and has always been, the interface between the centre and the subjugated peripheries inhabited by millions of pastoralists and agro-pastoralists whose relationship with the centre has been based on conquest, destruction, exploitation, cultural denigration and exclusion from power of decision-making.

The principal organising concepts of the book are what Markakis refers to as centre–periphery. Not only does the ‘centre’ monopolise power, but it also occupies a hegemonic position in the structure of the state. In contrast, the ‘periphery’ occupies a marginal position and is excluded from state power. The corollary is that the periphery is denied access to state resources, and its own resources are appropriated by the state and transferred to the ‘centre’ (p. 7).

The single most important preoccupation that has been shaping and defining the relationship between the centre and the periphery since the mid-nineteenth century to the present has been what Markakis refers to as the Abyssinians’ obsession with the ‘elusive’ goal of forging a ‘nation state’. The incessant struggle to establish a ‘nation state’ which was first initiated by Emperor Theodros in the mid-nineteenth century, continued by Emperor Yohannes and intensified by Emperor Menelik as well as Emperor Haile Selassie, remains far from being accomplished and the quest continues unabated. The fierce resistance to expansion has been haunting every ruler in the country, including the Derg and the incumbents, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). Markakis states that at the heart of the violent conflicts in the Horn of Africa lies ‘Ethiopia’s pursuit of the nation-state in the teeth of manifold opposition’ (p. 6). The opportunity cost of this pursuit has been astronomical and as a result every other effort, including the tasks of economic and social development, as well as poverty reduction have been either overlooked or stifled. The employment of violence as an instrument of building a nation state was not unique to the Ethiopian experience. What seems to be unique is rather the inability of the centre to construct a centralised nation state in spite of more than a century of uninterrupted carnage.

Markakis insightfully observes that although the means they used and the end they sought were identical with those of European colonial powers, notwithstanding the fact that the ‘empire builders’ called Ethiopia an ‘empire’ they did not see expansion as a conquest but rather as a means of recovering territories lost in the past (p. 6). The same argument was used to incorporate Eritrea into the ‘Ethiopian Empire’. In fact, Markakis states that Ethiopia gained access to the sea after the United Nations federated Eritrea into Ethiopia in 1952 for the first time in its history. This historical fact notwithstanding, the common argument among Ethiopian nationalists and those who have not yet reconciled with the idea of Eritrean independence is they will not rest peacefully until they have recovered Ethiopia’s historical right of access to ‘its’ sea.

Markakis states that the process of territorial expansion was facilitated by the centre’s possession of superior weaponry, successful creation of auxiliary or subordinate elites in the conquered territories who faithfully implemented the decisions of the elite at the centre and more importantly resettlement of large numbers of immigrants from the land-hungry centre to the highland periphery. Markakis sees the highland immigrants that accompanied the expansionist military expeditions as privileged by virtue of sharing the Abyssinian identity (p. 8). Although the imperial regime more or less succeeded in integrating the highland periphery (first frontier) into the centre, the cost of integrating the
lowlands inhabited by pastoralists proved far beyond the financial means of the imperial regime. In comparison to the temperate climate in the centre, the weather conditions in the lowlands were severe and discouraged the highlanders from colonising them. In addition, the lowlands were also infested with malaria. All these factors discouraged the colonialists from moving farther into the lowlands. As a result, the lowlands were neglected and abject poverty and incessant conflicts over resources prevailed. The failure of the centre to incorporate the lowlands was an indication of the failure of nation state construction project.

Markakis outlines three critical phases in the process of state building in Ethiopia beginning, as seen earlier from the last quarter of the nineteenth century marked by large-scale southward migration of Abyssinians from the land-hungry centre. The second phase refers to the military regime (1974–1991) and the third phase to the incumbent regime which took over power in 1991 and introduced federalism. The military regime introduced socialism and as a result, the project of Absynniaisation of the populations in the conquered territories was formally abandoned and Ethiopian unity was said to be achieved on the basis of social class rather than ethnicity. Inasmuch as Emperor Menelik and Emperor Haile Selassie needed auxiliary elites to rule the highland and lowland peripheries, the military regime also needed peripheral elite in the form of socialist cadres from the peripheries who implemented decisions and policies of the ruling elite in the centre. However, in spite of the rhetoric, the locus of power still remained in the centre: ‘The socialist state brought the lowland periphery under greater direct control from the centre than it had been under the previous regime’ (p. 226). Although the nationalisation of land brought to an end the process of unmitigated land grabbing by investors and migrants from the land-hungry parts of the country, the military junta ruled the country with an iron fist for 17 years. However, over that period the wars in Eritrea, Tigray, the areas inhabited by the Oromos, Somalis, Afar and others, as well as the demise of the Soviet Union and its satellite states brought the Derg to its knees and the regime ‘crumbled like a house of cards’ in May 1991.

The Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) established the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) by bringing together former prisoners of war in Eritrea and Tigray, as well as other small organisations opposed to the Derg. The single most important question that confronted the leaders of the EPRDF was how to hold the war-torn and conflict-ridden country together. They realised that force alone would not do the trick as this had proved disastrous before. Instead, ethnic federalism was adopted which gave the different nationalities the right to administer themselves within their own defined territories. Markakis argues that the decision taken at the Democratic and Peaceful Transition Conference of July 1991 concerning the introduction of federalism was made in haste without properly realising the ‘gravity of the issue’ (p. 232). Every objection raised against the proposed system was ‘brusquely overruled by the chair’ and stood no chance of being heard. This was exacerbated by the fact that the sponsors, the EPRDF and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) were the majority (p. 233).

The establishment of a federal arrangement on the basis of ethnic identity implies that the different ethnic groups live in geographically distinct areas, which was not the case in Ethiopia. As we saw earlier, hundreds of thousands of people had moved southwards and settled in the highland peripheries inhabited by other culture groups. The immigrants, including the Neftegna (Abyssinian landlords) in the conquered territories, did not settle in spatially segregated places. They joined pre-existing settlements.
The mixed settlement patterns and the social and economic interactions that took place over a century meant that there was a substantial degree of fluidity and integration. Undeterred by the mixed settlement pattern and driven by ideological dogma and deeply embedded self-interest, the leaders of the TPLF under the guise of the EPRDF pushed forward to undo the pre-existing tenuous unity of the different cultural groups. I was a student at Haile Selassie University in the end of the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s. With the exception of the Eritreans, all other students identified themselves as nothing else but as Ethiopians and nearly all, including many of those who were from Tigray, communicated with each other in Amharic. The extent to which the destruction of the unitary state is justifiable by the newly acquired right of the different ethnic groups to administer their own affairs is a moot point. Nevertheless, rhetoric notwithstanding, the locus of power still remains in the centre with the balance of power tipping in favour of the Tigreans at the expense of the traditional Amhara hegemony.

Notwithstanding the formal rejection of the unitary model of the state, however, there are studies to show that the federalist state is highly centralised (Gudina 2003, Fiseha 2006). This critical observation is even born out by Markakis’s findings, as he states:

as commonly perceived, federalism is a system that facilitates diversity in government. That is far from obvious in the case of Ethiopia, where a rigidly uniform system is imposed that does not allow the slightest departure from the prototype designed in Addis Ababa. In fact, attempts to do so are regarded as subversive. (p. 242)

He further points out that ‘in fundamental ways, the prototype was based on the experience of the TPLF during the long years of civil war, and reflected that party’s unwavering conviction that its own formula made for success. As was the case with the military regime, strict uniformity applies in all fields of state activity and all parts of the country’ (p. 242; emphasis added).

Markakis is scathing with regard to the EPRDF’s bleak record of intolerance of alternative political points of view and this, inter alia, stems from their strong sense of ‘infallibility.’ Like its predecessors, the EPRDF uses brute force to suppress its opponents and to stay in power. In regard to this, Markakis observes, ‘In practice, the EPRDF’s contempt for its political opponents translates into denying them the space needed to function effectively.’ He further comments that ‘the ruling front makes full use of the state machinery and resources, including its monopoly of mass media and instruments of repression to relentlessly and ruthlessly harass them’ (p. 250). The EPRDF government’s records on civil society organisations is equally dismal. This is reflected in the systematic dismantling of organisations that had an impeccable track record, such as the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions (CETU) and the Ethiopian Teachers’ Association (ETA). The same fate also befell other civil society organisations such as the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO), the Human Rights League and the Ogaden Human Rights Committee (p. 252). There was also crackdown on the private press whose works were stifled by various means, including imprisonment of journalists (p. 253). The government’s anti-civil society stance finally culminated in the policy introduced in 2009 which ‘barred foreign organisations from involvement in the fields of human rights and conflict’ (p. 254). The term ‘foreign’ referred to non-governmental organisations that received more than 10% of their funds from abroad or who lacked Ethiopian citizens on their boards of directors.

Land constitutes the single most important resource on which the livelihoods of over 85% of the Ethiopian population
depend. In the highland and lowland peripheries, the dependence on land and other resources associated with it represent the only means of survival. For pastoralists and indigenous peoples in the lowlands, land is not only a source of livelihood but also a source of identity. In these areas loss of access to land means loss of way of life. Although formally the constitution entrusted the administration of land to the kilil (regions), the right to allocate land to investors – including to foreigners – reverted to the federal government. Those at the helm of power in the federal government are sedentarists who consider pastoralism an obsolete mode of production that uses land prodigally and creates and perpetuates poverty and above all stands in the way of the state’s need to allocate land to an economic activity where return is highest. Historically, the elite in the centre always considered the pastoral lands as ‘no man’s land’ readily available for alternative use. There is no evidence to suggest that the dominant perception of the EPRDF is any different from the sedentarist perspective. The federal government is engaged in large-scale dam construction and leasing of extensive tracts of land to foreign investors to grow cash crops rather than food crops in the context of complete absence of land-use policy. Markakis argues that in the past, the centre was content with exercising a token measure of power in the lowland periphery. The centre has now realised that the lowlands are endowed with enormous resources, such as minerals, irrigable land for cash crop production and production of hydroelectric power. The development of such economic activities also provides an indispensable source of employment for immigrants from the centre.

_Ethiopia: the last two frontiers_ makes depressing reading regarding the future of the peripheries. Markakis predicts the likely scenario that there will come a time when it will be imperative to ‘open the highland periphery to land-starved Abyssinian peasants from the north. Then the modicum of self-administration allowed to the periphery at present will be revoked, and the centre/periphery relationship will revert to its historical form’ (p. 356; emphasis added. An important question which Markakis deals with at great length but does not answer in an unambiguous manner is whether the centre’s quest to forge a nation state is ever achievable. Even though Markakis shows that at the heart of the endless bloodshed and conflicts that have been afflicting Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa lies ‘Ethiopia’s pursuit of the nation-state in the teeth of manifold oppression’ at the expense of other competing tasks, the elusive project of constructing a viable nation state still remains far-fetched. The question is whether the project is ever achievable or whether it should be forsaken as being utopian. _Ethiopia: the last two frontiers_ is a great work and a must-read for all people interested in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa’s past, present and future.

References

Gaim Kibreab
London South Bank University, UK
Email: kibreag@lsbu.ac.uk
© 2012, Gaim Kibreab
BOOK REVIEW


Between Nyerere, the first president and founding father of Tanzania, and Mkapa, its first president under multiparty democracy, there was a major shift in policy, from socialism as political rhetoric and socio-economic reconfiguration, to the embrace of neoliberalism and the international financial institutions (IFIs). This shift began before Mkapa took office and continued after he handed over to Kikwete in 2010, so he alone cannot be associated with this phase in Tanzania’s ‘transition’ as the title of this book implies. Nor do the editors want to claim neoliberalism itself as a progressive ‘transformational outcome’ of ‘transition’. Rather they reach for a broader definition of ‘transition’ which includes ‘genuine participation of citizens’ and the ‘creation of space for human agency’. They are equivocal as to whether any such ‘transition’ has taken place, and do not identify Mkapa as its champion. The title thus sets up an incoherent subject, and operates more as a research question than as a statement.

The chapters that follow focus on various aspects of Tanzania’s changing political economy – its reliance on foreign aid, corruption, agrarian transformations and the implementation of multiparty democracy. Disappointingly, the book has no analysis of Tanzania’s attempts to industrialise. In a rather uneven collection, and marred by poor editing, it contains some very useful overviews of development in the political economy as well as delivering a strong dose of realism about Tanzania’s limited progress towards limiting poverty or extending political participation. It is very useful to be reminded of the contradiction between Tanzania’s socialist call for ‘self-reliance’ and its heavy and continuing dependence on foreign aid, amounting at times to half the budget of the state. Simensen’s telling account illustrates the extent to which ‘socialism’ was funded by external backers, especially from Scandinavia, who in a period of economic collapse in the late 1970s were then able to put pressure on Tanzania to accept International Monetary Fund terms of neoliberal economic reform as the condition for continuing aid.

Bryceson, Skarstein and other authors look at the chequered career of agrarian socialism as the cornerstone of Nyerere’s policies. On the one hand, agrarian livelihoods are still foundational and ‘agriculture provides a vital subsistence fallback for the poor and a common cultural frame of reference’. But collective production long ago fell by the wayside and the buffeting of world markets and withdrawal of state subsidies have forced peasants to look for non-agricultural incomes and wage labour to supplement farming. And land has become a commodity, albeit largely outside the formal system of registration. Additionally, gold mining (with its ‘exploitative labour practices’, in Bryceson’s terms) now contributes more to exports than Tanzania’s traditional cash crops. Bryceson offers some rich ethnography drawn from two villages, whilst Skarstein, in an excellent and informative piece, concludes
that economic liberalisation has had a negative impact on food grain production and productivity and that real returns to peasant producers have declined. Deriding the promise of economic liberalisation, he calls for the reinstatement of an "accountable and determined developmental state" willing to intervene in the agricultural sector. Isinika and Mutabazi’s chapter on land conflicts brings a welcome gender dimension, showing that women have begun to assert rights allocated to them both under customary law (which retains a strong place in the Tanzanian legal system) and statutory law (which has extended additional rights to women over time). Sadly, many women are unaware of their rights at the same time as population growth has rendered land scarcity and resultant conflicts more common. A few more detailed case histories of court proceedings would have added more depth to these conclusions. A bleak picture is painted of the forestry sector by Monela and Abdallah, with degradation of the forest reserves and limited success of sustainable management initiatives. However commercial and especially illegal logging barely figured in this account, which was unexpected – as well as a bid for yet more donor aid to make forestry successful. Wangwe’s chapter, though heavy on the acronyms, concludes with a significant point: deepening aid dependence is not sustainable for Tanzania and ‘an exit strategy should be part of the dialogue between development partners and government’. How this might be achieved is left vague, however, given the ‘rent-seeking’ tendencies of corrupt state officials. Cooksey provides a schematic account of grand and petty corruption which shows that this tendency has not been stemmed by Mkapa’s claim to end corruption. Several authors note the lack of judicial proceedings brought against perpetrators. Finally, in a careful and comprehensive account, Ewald looks at the interaction between economic policies and the democratisation process, noting the limited level of political participation belied by a rhetoric of citizenship. ‘Poverty’ is still pervasive, despite a plethora of poverty eradication strategies and initiatives. It is worth noting that relative poverty is integral to capitalist development (which requires exploitation of the many to extract a surplus for the few) – and Ewald notes the political questions raised: ‘how long can the majority of the people endure a situation of little economic progress and poverty?’ They endure because the majority are still content with small advances in their conditions of life and unwilling to vote out the party – the Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM, the Revolutionary Party) – which has at least delivered peace and stability to Tanzania, resting on Nyerere’s inspirational legacy. No other party has been able effectively to challenge CCM, which is of course in a position to muzzle or interrupt challenging voices.

This book is a useful antidote to uncritical claims that Tanzania, with its currently high growth rates and adherence to programmes of structural reform sponsored by the IFIs, has become a model for other developing countries to emulate. It sets out candidly the gap between this model and the kind of society that Nyerere had in mind – independent, relatively egalitarian and non-exploitative – but it also allows for analysis of the very real barriers that lay in the way of achieving such a ‘transformational outcome’.

This review is also appearing in *Tanzanian Affairs*.

Janet Bujra  
*University of Bradford, UK*  
*Email: j.m.bujra@bradford.ac.uk*  
© 2012, Janet Bujra