One hippopotamus and eight blind analysts: a multivocal analysis of the 2012 political crisis in the divided Republic of Mali[*]

Baz Lecocq[a], Gregory Mann[b], Bruce Whitehouse[c], Dida Badi[d], Lotte Pelckmans[e], Nadia Belalimat[f], Bruce Hall[g] and Wolfram Lacher[h]

[a]*Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium;* [b]*Columbia University, New York, USA;* [c]*Lehigh University, Bethlehem, USA;* [d]*Centre Nationale des Recherches Préhistoriques, Anthropologiques et Historiques, Algiers, Algeria;* [e]*Leiden University, Leiden, the Netherlands;* [f]*Centre International de Recherche sur l'Environnement et le Développement, Nogent-sur-Marne, France;* [g]*Duke University, Durham, USA;* [h]*Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin, Germany*

This is an exercise in contemporary history that aims to give a comprehensive background and analysis to the current (2012) political crisis in Mali, generated by the start of a new Tuareg nationalist uprising against the state, complemented by a coordinated attack on the state by both international (AQIM) and local Jihadi–Salafi movements, leading to a *coup d'état* against the incumbent President Touré, and finallly a political stalemate of great concern to the international community. By pooling sources and analysis, a group of eight scholars tries to give a comprehensive overall picture.

Keywords: Mali; Azawad; Sahel; jihad; Tuareg; rebellion

[Un hippopotame et huit analystes aveugles : une analyse à plusieurs voix de la crise politique de 2012 dans la République du Mali divisée.] Cet exercice d'histoire contemporaine vise à fournir le contexte et une analyse complète de l'actuelle crise politique au Mali (2012). Initiée par l'amorce d'un nouveau soulèvement nationaliste touareg, la crise s'est aggravée suite à l'attaque coordonnée de mouvements salafistes jihadistes internationaux (Aqmi) et locaux contre l'Etat malien, conduisant à un coup d'Etat contre le président Touré en exercice, et, finalement, à une impasse politique inquiétante pour la communauté internationale. Mettant en commun sources et analyses, un groupe de huit chercheurs tente de fournir une étude complète de la situation.

Mots-clés : Mali ; Azawad ; Sahel ; djihad ; Touareg ; rébellion

Introduction

In 2012, the political landscape in the Republic of Mali transformed rapidly, drastically, and unpredictably. The formation of a new Tuareg political movement – the National Movement of Azawad – in October 2010 and the return to Mali of Tuareg with military

experience from the Libyan conflict in August 2011 – bringing along heavy weapons and logistical supplies – made speculation on renewed violence on the part of separatist Tuareg inevitable. Indeed, Tuareg separatists launched attacks on Malian garrisons in the Sahara in January 2012. Mali had experienced such rebellions before. What nobody foresaw was that this renewed conflict would lead to a *coup d'état* by disgruntled junior officers; the near total collapse of Mali's army and most of its democratic institutions; the seizure of all of northern Mali by Tuareg rebels and foreign and local *mujahideen*;[1] the precocious proclamation of an independent Azawad Republic; and the effective occupation of the north of the country by an alliance of Jihadi–Salafi movements who imposed their form of shari'a law on a suffering and largely recalcitrant population. Those events happened very quickly, and their effects will be felt for years. This article attempts to give an overview of the crisis in Mali as it unfolded through 2012, with particular attention to what was happening on the ground in Mali itself.

The Malian national mascot is the hippopotamus: a quiet but potentially dangerous mastodon whose name in the Bambara language is a homonym for the name of the country. At present, the Malian hippo is floating gravely wounded in murky and troubled waters. The current political situation in the country involves different political cultures, domains and systems, including Tuareg clan politics, a contested multi-party system based in Bamako, the international domains of Franco-African relations, the position of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the ideology and effective networks of global jihad. No single scholar can claim full understanding of all these domains. Understanding is further hampered by a lack of reliable information on what happens on the ground, coupled with a good deal of deliberate or accidental misinformation. This article represents an attempt by a group of eight scholars, each of whom has studied one or two of the aspects that together make up a hugely complex beast, to pool our sources and analysis. In analogy to an old parable, the eight of us are like the blind scholars who, touching different parts of an object, each come up with a different explanation of its nature. We hope that in the discussion of our findings below we will clarify at least partly what the nature of the beast is. Our inquiry will remain incomplete. First of all, despite the unusually large number of contributors to this article, our view is not panoramic, while our vision is imperfect. Second, the situation in the Sahel continues to change in unexpected ways. Between the time of our writing and the publication of this article, the situation has already changed dramatically, as it undoubtedly will do again. This then is an exercise in contemporary history, culminating with international diplomatic efforts to organise a military intervention to be led by ECOWAS, authorised by UN Security Council resolutions (July and October 2012), and materially supported by France. At the time of writing, we did not think that this intervention would be effectively organised and operational before the first months of 2013 at the earliest. Events proved us right, although not in the fashion that we had anticipated. In its published form this article may serve as a historical background to this intervention.[2]

A divided north

Any real understanding of the crisis in northern Mali requires a locally grounded historical perspective. Over the last two decades, deeply rooted social distinctions within the very diverse population of northern Mali have gained ever-weightier political significance. In addition to ethnic and linguistic diversity, northern Mali hosts essentially local ideas about racial difference which – grossly oversimplified – distinguish between 'white' Tuareg and Arabs, and 'black African' Songhay and other communities. After independence, competing racial nationalisms emerged from roots that went much further back in

time and which made exclusive claims. Tuareg nationalism expressed itself in two rebellions against the Malian state between 1963 and 1964, and again between 1990 and 1996. In the 1990s a form of Songhay nationalism emerged that explicitly countered its Tuareg ideological counterpart. Despite a 'Flame of Peace' ceremony in March 1996, which ended an earlier Tuareg rebellion and which was intended as a powerful symbolic purification of social relations in the region, in recent years, the relative absence of the state from the northern regions has sharpened old tensions between different northern communities, and especially those between Mali's north and south.

In short, the social divisions of the North have remained an open sore on the body of the Malian hippo. In the previous decade, that sore became infected by foreign, Salafi *mujahideen*, and by trans-continental networks of organised crime. From 2006 to 2009 Mali experienced renewed conflict with Tuareg dissident fighters. This renewed 'rebellion' was largely grounded in tensions internal to Tuareg society. A peace accord signed in Algiers in 2006 turned out to be merely a prelude to further protracted fighting between Tuareg separatist fighters, mostly from the Kidal region, under the leadership of Ibrahim Bahanga and units of the Malian army composed essentially of Tuareg military officers and enlisted men, most of whom were of so-called *imghad* social origins, under leadership of Colonel Elhaj Gamou.[3] The conflict ended in early 2009 with the retreat of Bahanga's men to Libya, a country to which many Tuareg, particularly those of the Kel Adagh federation, have deep ties. In 2011, Libyan rebels forced open Qadhafi's arsenals, which fell under the control of various militant groups, including Jihadi−Salafi organisations such as the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group. Between March and April 2011 AQIM (Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) organised convoys from its camps in northern Mali to stock up on arms in eastern Libya, establishing a de facto link with their Libyan Jihadi−Salafi counterparts (Moisseron and Belalimat 2013). At the same time, nationalist Tuareg networks centred around Ibrahim Bahanga also launched themselves in the race for Libyan arms, making use of their own contacts among Qadhafi's loyalist forces. Thus, two different armed movements with two different agendas were primed for action by the Libyan crisis, which sped up a process of remilitarisation in northern Mali after a period of relative peace. However, in all likelihood, political developments in Mali itself would have led to an outbreak of political violence in the Sahara, and sooner rather than later.

After the fall of Qadhafi in summer 2011, thousands of Tuareg of Malian origins left Libya for Mali. Some had made careers in the Libyan army. Others had fought either as irregulars for Qadhafi or with the anti-Qadhafi rebels. Once back in Mali, these fighters joined various military organisations – including the Malian army – according to the factional logics of clan and class within Tuareg society. Former Libyan soldiers, led by future MNLA president Bilal ag Achérif and MNLA chief of staff Mohamed ag Najim, united with Tuareg separatists who had challenged Mali in 2006 and who fought for Qadhafi in 2011. In Mali, these men linked up with a group of young Tuareg from northern Mali who had founded a new political movement, the National Movement of Azawad (MNA) in October 2010, and with a number of experienced Tuareg politicians. Thus the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) was born in October 2011. In January 2012, the MNLA would launch its first attacks against Malian army garrisons, and its media savvy political branch would ensure that its nationalist narrative was heard while leaving the nature of the organisation's relationship with the more reticent Jihadi−Salafi movements in the region unclear.

Those movements had themselves multiplied. Although its roots are Algerian, AQIM had been present in the Malian Sahara for several years. In December 2011, a new organisation known as MUJAO (Movement for Divine Unity and Jihad in West Africa),

composed mostly of southern Saharans, emerged from within its ranks. Because its leader, Hamada Ould Mohamed Kheirou, is Mauritanian, MUJAO was generally seen as a 'foreign' organisation. However, in the interconnected societies of the Sahara and the Sahel, such terms may not have great meaning, and several of MUJAO's most prominent members were Malian nationals, of Songhay or Lamhar Tilemsi Arab origin, who were said to be deeply involved in the trans-Saharan drug trade (Lacher 2012).

Another even more locally rooted Jihadi–Salafi movement had developed under the leadership of Iyad ag Aghali, a key figure in the Tuareg rebellion of the 1990s. Iyad ag Aghali had long broken with the project of national independence favoured by most of the MNLA leadership in favour of the greater integration of Tuareg society into the global Muslim world via, at first, peaceful means. His Islamist political project put him at odds with other leaders of the 1990s rebellion, including Bilal ag Achérif, who had integrated the MNLA, and Colonel Elhaj ag Gamou, who commanded an important unit in Mali's army. At a meeting in November 2011, Iyad's proposal that the MNLA be reformed along shari'a lines was rejected, which led him to create Ansar Dine, a movement with a Jihadi–Salafi ideology akin to that of AQIM. Over the months to come, Ansar Dine would prove to be a loose alliance among formerly junior AQIM commanders, like Sanda ould Boumana, and Tuareg ex-separatist rebels from northern Mali, like Iyad ag Aghali, who supplemented their fighting forces on the basis of their own tribal affiliations and alliances. While Berabish Arabs from the Timbuktu area controlled the movement in that city, Kel Adagh Tuareg under Iyad ag Aghali's leadership controlled the Kidal Region. Collaboration between the two branches was probably somewhat loose and partly based on tribal affiliation. Rather than remaining one coherent, visible, and operative fighting unit controlling a particular zone, as Ansar Dine and MUJAO did, and as the MNLA attempted to do, AQIM *katibas* cooperated with Ansar Dine and MUJAO, leaving these organisations to be the public flag bearers of Jihad. Tensions between Ansar Dine and the MNLA would never be resolved, and a dynamic of fusion and scission, alliance and betrayal, would continue to characterise the relationship between anti-government forces in the months to come.

Mali's collapse

In January and February 2012 the Malian army suffered a series of stunning defeats in the North, notably at Aguelhok, where dozens of soldiers had their throats slit after surrendering. This made the conflict an acute drama. An angry public – particularly the families of soldiers – found two objects for its rage. In Bamako and the nearby garrison town of Kati, crowds attacked the homes and businesses of Tuareg and Arabs. The other object was President Amadou Toumani Touré, 'ATT' himself. Rumours of collusion between narco-traffickers and high-ranking government members quickly morphed. ATT was accused publicly of failing to equip his soldiers, even of siding with the rebels. When the wives of soldiers castigated him on national television, ATT's already weakened authority suffered a mortal wound. His government continued to stagger towards presidential elections scheduled to be held in late April, elections which would have offered him an honourable exit from a shameful situation.

On 21 and 22 March, a mutiny in Kati became an improvised *coup d'état*. In Bamako, the collapse of ATT's regime was spectacular. What outsiders had perceived as a stable, inclusive government with healthy republican institutions was revealed to be resting on a rotten foundation. When a few dozen soldiers challenged ATT's leadership his power evaporated virtually overnight. After the mutineers stormed the presidential palace and state

broadcasting centre that evening, Touré went into hiding. For two hours no one from Touré's inner circle even bothered to contact the mutineers to ask what they wanted. Only then did the soldiers decide to take power themselves. No sooner had they done so than the state security apparatus lined up behind them. The junta headed off any potential dissent by arresting senior military leaders, along with cabinet ministers loyal to Touré, within hours of taking over. For ordinary Malians, government officials and even key foreign governments, the question quickly became not how to restore the ousted president to office, but how to legitimise his departure in a constitutional manner.[4] By the time of the coup Touré had lost nearly all legitimacy in the eyes of everyday Malians. Touré's 'rule by consensus' had become a mere euphemism for absolute rule with checks and balances existing only on paper while journalists and others were afraid to challenge the president's agenda. Meanwhile, the perception in Bamako was widespread that Touré's aversion to conflict extended to all areas of politics, rendering him unwilling to enforce the rule of law or to punish venality among those close to him. He had kept a tenuous peace in the north by buying off northern leaders, but failed to deliver on promises to bring development. He took millions of dollars of US military assistance intended to help drive out AQIM, but never went after the group on Malian territory. The gangrene of corruption had long infected the army, where nepotism and profiteering ran amok. The outcome of elections was widely considered to be determined in advance, and voter turnout was consequently always low. Few Malians regretted ATT's departure, and the coup initially met with significant, although far from universal, support.

Days after the coup, the Malian army collapsed. With much of its general staff under arrest and key northern garrisons in mutiny, what remained of the army was chased from Kidal, Timbuktu, and Gao over the course of a weekend. Some two-thirds of the national territory fell into the hands of the MNLA and the *mujahideen*. On 6 April, an MNLA spokesperson in Paris prematurely declared the independence of the Azawad Republic. Two days later ATT formally resigned, leaving a *de jure* gap in the political structure in Bamako and a dangerous vacuum. In the immediate wake of the *coup d'état*, the junta attempted to overturn the core institutions of Mali's Third Republic, suspending Mali's 1992 constitution and calling for a sovereign national conference to chart a new course for the nation. Faced with stiff opposition from Mali's established political parties and from foreign governments – and notably the brief imposition of ECOWAS sanctions – the junta was forced to backpedal, reinstate the constitution and ultimately transfer power to a civilian government.

Mali's political class had steadily and with near unanimity refused to collaborate with the junta's newly created National Committee for the Rectification of Democracy and the Restauration of the State (CNRDRE). One group felt empowered by the coup: the members of the Malian anti-globalisation Left. To them, the reinstatement of constitutional rule was the worst of outcomes. For a brief moment, it looked as if the coup had not brought the revolution they hoped for, but a return to the corrupt civilian leadership they condemned. That leadership was personified by President of the National Assembly Dioncounda Traore, an ex-Minister of Finance and stalwart of the Alliance for Democracy in Mali (ADEMA) party that had dominated Malian political life in the 1990s. By virtue of his office, Traore became president when ATT resigned, and he was charged with forming a transitional government and organising elections. Within days, a mob assaulted the elderly Traore in the presidential palace with the clear connivance of the security forces. Beaten nearly to death, Traore was evacuated to Paris for treatment. He would linger there for weeks, while the political situation in Mali festered and Prime Minister Cheikh Modibo Diarra struggled to establish a viable government. Diarra had been imposed as prime

minister by ECOWAS negotiator President Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso, but Diarra was seen by many Malians as the rare rich man who had earned his money honestly, rather than at the expense of others. However, by the same token, Diarra was widely regarded as beholden to junta leader Captain Sanogo and to Compaoré. He proved to be politically tone deaf, quickly alienating much of Bamako's political class by excluding them from his government.

Months after the coup, military and civilian factions continued to struggle over what remained of the state. Having brutally extinguished a rebellion by disgruntled paratroopers affiliated with ATT in late April, junta leader Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo held the upper hand in a divided military that neither President Traore nor Prime Minister Diarra could control. This triangulated form of authority was inherently unstable, and real power lay in the garrison town of Kati. Until Traore returned and a new government of national unity was formed in August, the situation in Bamako stagnated and that in the north festered. By December, Diarra had squandered virtually all of the support and good will he might once have enjoyed, and frustration with him had reached a breaking point in Bamako, Kati, Paris and Washington. In mid December, Captain Sanogo's men arrested Diarra, and he was forced to resign. Django Cissoko, who had served in the governments of both ATT and President Moussa Traore (1968–1991), was named the new Prime Minister. The political system in Bamako was in disarray, and many northern politicians and displaced civilians accused both the junta and the civilian government of abandoning them. Meanwhile, the forces occupying the North – ranging from the MNLA to AQIM – were no more united than those squabbling in the South.

The rise of jihad in the Sahara

As has been argued, the Tuareg rebellion of 2012 was much more than a simple revival of previous insurgencies. It was different not only militarily – doped as it was by Libyan arms – but also ideologically. In the first months of 2012, divisions between the MNLA and the jihadist coalition of Ansar Dine and its allies had been temporarily subordinated to their shared desire to push the Malian army out of the North. Once that task was accomplished, with no small help – albeit unintended – from Mali's mutinous soldiers, rebels and *mujahideen* quickly fell to fighting one another. Within a few short months of the collapse of the Malian army, the MNLA lost control of virtually all of northern Mali to a militarily superior alliance of Ansar Dine, AQIM, and MUJAO. Rich in weapons and flush with cash from trafficking narcotics and seizing European hostages for ransom, these movements soon publicly discarded the MNLA's nationalist claims to the Azawad and competed politically and militarily with the MNLA on the ground.

The possible alliance between the MNLA and the different Jihadi–Salafi movements unravelled quickly, but it considerably clouded the analysis of both outside observers and regional actors. Several factors indicate that such an alliance existed, whether or not one actually obtained. Ironically, most important among those factors were the active media campaigns of the MNLA, which claimed attacks and victories in the north that were not theirs. Assaults on Aguelhok, Tessalit and Kidal were all carried out by an alliance of Jihadi–Salafi movements – Ansar Dine and various AQIM units – who did not directly claim their victories. MNLA participation in them remains unclear; the strongest evidence for it remains the statements of the MNLA itself. All witnesses concur, however, on the sizable presence of *mujahideen*, while AQIM elements circulated among the population to herald the arrival of jihad in the Azawad. The MNLA's own military fortunes were more mixed. For instance, the MNLA spent months in the Timbuktu area without being

able to take the city. Before the MNLA could launch its final assault, local Berabish Arab militia leaders essentially handed the city over to AQIM to prevent it from falling into the hands of the Tuareg separatists. Likewise, despite being active in the conquest of Gao – when rape was widespread and the pillaging of medical facilities systematic – the MNLA did not control the city centre, which fell into the hands of *mujahideen*. It now appears that the only battle the MNLA fought and won alone was in Ménaka. The confusion around the relation between the MNLA and the *mujahideen* was enhanced by the media strategy of Ansar Dine leader Iyad ag Aghali, who used the MNLA's media outreach as a curtain to hide his own politically toxic alliance with AQIM (by the same token, the MNLA declared AQIM its primary enemy, even though the Malian army was its first target). Only in March 2012 did Ansar Dine release a video on YouTube claiming their victories in Tessalit, Aguelhok and Kidal, and explaining their goals to the world.[5] Ansar Dine's military victories led to the defection of a core of experienced MNLA fighters from the Kidal Region to Ansar Dine, and the MNLA appeared ever weaker on the ground. MUJAO fighters chased the MNLA from its strongholds at the edge of the city of Gao in June 2012. An attempt to recapture Gao from the *mujahideen* in November 2012 failed dramatically, and defections continued. Throughout the second half of 2012, the MNLA was increasingly strapped for cash, but the movement still had a number of fighters – especially from Tuareg tribes from the area between Tin Zawaten and Ménaka – and some support among populations in the Kidal Region and parts of the Gao Region.

While Tuareg nationalism has been a force in Saharan politics for decades, the rise of political Islam with a Salafist orientation is much more recent. Major factors of political–religious transformation include the arrival in the late 1990s of the South Asian Islamist movement Tablighi Jama'at – which strongly condemns recourse to jihad in a Muslim society in the absence of certain necessary legal conditions, the emergence of AQIM's ancestor, the Algeria-based Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) in 2003, and reaction to the launching of US counter-terrorism programmes focused on military training in the region. Over the last decade or more, long-standing practices of international smuggling and migration have become more intense, complex, and profitable, while the technological infrastructure has been transformed. All these factors complement the previous experience of many Malian Arab and Tuareg as migrants in the Maghreb, Libya and West Africa. The subsequent socio-political changes have reshaped their perception of their political situation according to the new global position of their homeland. The Tuareg organised in Ansar Dine were convinced that only their Salafi ideology could unify the various Tuareg clans, the different ethnic groups in the region, and even the whole of Mali. These political convictions proposed an alternative to both the Malian nation state, riddled with corruption and nepotism, and the political ideal of Tuareg independence, which has been unable to overcome the divisive clan structures within Tuareg society. Iyad ag Aghali, the leader and founder of Ansar Dine, has personal experience with these political realities. His initial adherence to the Tablighi Jama'at can be partly explained by his disappointment in the failure of nationalist political projects and armed rebellion in the 1980s and 1990s. Nevertheless, many Ansar Dine members may have fought not so much for shari'a but due to their personal or tribal loyalty, and Iyad himself has a history of pragmatic adaptation to political developments.

The Saharan conflict of 2012 differed from earlier episodes of rebellion in the sheer scale of resources available to the *mujahideen*, quite apart from the Libyan factor. With money won over the last decade by holding European hostages for ransom, as well as by 'taxing' or offering 'protection' to smugglers of narcotics and other commodities, the *mujahideen* were able to procure and maintain firepower and mobility superior to both the

Malian army and the MNLA. AQIM in particular has received millions of euros in ransoms over the last decade, and while its relation to smuggling and narco-trafficking is not clear – some analysts insist it is not at all involved – MUJAO in particular is thought to be deeply implicated in the latter. Both groups could readily afford the expensive illegally trafficked supplies needed to sustain their effort. Early in the conflict the *mujahideen* offered high salaries to new recruits, thus attracting both inexperienced youths from all the Northern ethnic groups and experienced fighters from the MNLA. The *mujahideen*'s superior equipment partly explains their initial victories on the battlefield, and the ease with which they routed the MNLA in June and July 2012. The *mujahideen* also used their cash reserves to pay for food relief aid, fuel and medicines to run local hospitals and power stations, thereby creating some goodwill among the local population. Early in their occupation of northern towns and cities, they increased their popularity still further by compensating merchants for their losses when they were forbidden to sell cigarettes or alcohol, by financing marriage ceremonies for young couples too poor to wed, and by offering high bride prices to marry local women, at least some of whom accepted the offer, thereby embedding the organisation deeper in the local community. The focus on AQIM and its allied movements the MUJAO and Ansar Dine has long been on their involvement in criminal activities in the Sahara. The question of what the Jihadi–Salafi movements needed the criminally obtained money for is now answered: to occupy a large territory in West Africa and to rule it according to their concept of shari'a.

Frontiers and frontlines

With over 400,000 refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs), the humanitarian crisis of 2012 far surpassed any generated by previous conflicts in the region. All communities of the north were concerned. In the first half of the year, the inhabitants of the affected zones in the Mopti and Gao Regions – Songhay, Peul, Tuareg, Bozo, Dogon alike – fled en masse to Niger, Burkina Faso, and southern Mali. Many of the inhabitants of the Timbuktu Region departed for Mauritania, where their constant influx created food insecurities in the UNHCR-run camps. While those who fled to most neighbouring countries had an internationally recognised status as refugees that triggered UNHCR involvement, those who crossed the Algerian border from the Kidal region received aid from the Algerian Red Crescent. The conflict also provoked an exodus of internally displaced persons, as many town dwellers sought refuge with nomad relatives in the bush, while others fled to live with relatives in Bamako and other cities under government control.

A clear indicator of the acute threat the current crisis posed to the territorial integrity of the Malian state was the fact that the area around Douentza, in the central Mopti Region, became the frontline in the conflict early on. While previous conflicts had been largely limited to the north bank of the Niger, with only short incursions into the Niger Bend, this time Douentza was continuously occupied by various insurgent forces. MNLA rebels, the majority of whom were local Tuareg, occupied the town in mid May.[6] However, Douentza's role as 'the border of the Azawad Republic' only lasted a few weeks. When fighting erupted between MUJAO and the MNLA in late June, the latter were forced to retreat to Ménaka. MUJAO's occupation of Douentza in August was facilitated by the Malian army's failure to claim the city when the MNLA abandoned it. In addition to demonstrating the army's inability to defend its territory against insurgent forces, the episode also cast doubt on the limited territorial claims of the MNLA, while supporting the Jihadi–Salafis' claim that their jihad is not limited to northern Mali. When the Malian army retreated as far south as Konna, 120 km southwest of Douentza, it was widely

feared that the *mujahideen* would continue to advance in the direction of Mopti-Sevaré. This is, indeed, what came to pass in January 2013.

Life under shari'a rule

Soon after the collapse of the Malian army, the remaining civilian population of the north was submitted to Jihadi shari'a rule. Sedentary and urban communities were especially affected by the absence of the state and its health, education and security infrastructures, as well as by the disruption of economic life. Pastoral nomad communities, always more removed from the state, were less immediately affected. Although outbreaks of cholera were reported, and although the region was far from enjoying food security, the large-scale famine that many had predicted did not materialise. First of all, contrary to all predictions, the 2012 rainy season was a good one, breaking the drought of previous years. Especially in the pastoral zones the sanitary and alimentary situation was not as bad as it was expected to be. Pastures were abundant, making the pastoral economy perhaps the only viable economic alternative to the emerging war economy. While harvests in the south were good, crops in the north were far below average, making for a precarious alimentary situation outside the pastoral bush. Legal commerce was considerably disrupted as the main source of imports and exports in the north, Algeria, formally closed its borders. However, the long-standing commercial and kin relations with communities in neighbouring countries, together with the retreat of the Malian customs services, facilitated the supply of basic foodstuffs in the north, albeit at staggering prices. In the Niger Bend, less dependent on Algerian imports, the price of a sack of millet was double that of 2011.

MNLA and *mujahideen* systematically dismantled the state bureaucracy and destroyed the archives of the civil administration in what seems to have been a premeditated *tabula rasa*. *Mujahideen* particularly targeted symbols of secular francophone administration. In Douentza, schools, prisons, medical centres and banks were closed from March to July 2012, when the MNLA left the town. The administrative void had disastrous effects. Tensions between different populations – Fulbe, Dogon, Songhay, and Tuareg – became more lethal as small arms were traded in high quantities, and as official mediation was absent. Songhay in Timbuktu blamed both the MNLA and local Tuareg who lived on the outskirts of town for much of the looting in the immediate wake of the conquest of the north. Similar dynamics have been reported for other northern towns such as Diré and Gao. The MNLA also robbed fleeing civilians at makeshift roadblocks, creating further animosity for the movement and its fighters. The *mujahideen* replaced the already fragile economy of the north and what little prospect of salaried employment existed with a war economy. Various accounts concur on the forced recruitment of child soldiers and youths of Tuareg and Songhay origins around Timbuktu, Tessalit and Gao. The military barracks at Amachach in the Kidal Region became a training ground for youngsters. In Douentza, relations between inhabitants and *mujahideen* were precarious.

The situation of women in the north was particularly dramatic. Many were forced into seclusion or exile, having had to abandon their economic, political and other activities. In those zones under the direct control of Ansar Dine and its ally AQIM (Timbuktu and Kidal), men and women alike were flogged for violating the *mujahideen*'s rules on socialising, smoking, or listening to music. Women in particular were subject to strict rules of modesty and veiling. In the most drastic of a series of *huddud* punishments, a couple of pastoralist parents who were not legally married were stoned to death for adultery in Aguelhok. In Timbuktu, Gao, Kidal and Wabaria, women, sometimes joined by young men, protested against the rules of the *mujahideen*, who repressed these demonstrations

with beatings, whippings or by firing in the air. When Ansar Dine fighters broke up a women's demonstration in Kidal on 6 June they provoked a second public protest by women, men and children in In Khalil the following day. Led by female MNLA leaders who had been imprisoned in Bamako for their support of the movement, an association of 'women of the Azawad' had organised the marches in Kidal and In Khalil to denounce the *mujahideen*'s application of the shari'a and their suppression of Tuareg culture. This cultural resistance was further manifest in the composition of very critical poems that women (and men) would exchange via social networks and cellular phones, denouncing both the imposition of Salafi–Jihadi rule and the manipulation and financing of the *mujahideen* by foreign powers.

Local opposition

Even if, for most of 2012, the momentum seemed to be with the *mujahideen*, they had to contend with local counterparts who held greater legitimacy and social leverage in northern societies. Within Tuareg society, the MNLA represented the most obvious counterweight to the Salafi–Jihadi coalition, as it appeared to be the only force capable of raising effective armed opposition to the *mujahideen* (barring the Malian army units commanded by Tuareg officers like Alhajj ag Gamou, who remained sidelined for many long months). Moreover, the MNLA enjoyed some historical legitimacy based in previous rebellions in Tuareg society, and it had considerable support among women and younger men. The traditional chieftaincy, especially that of the Ifoghas, represented another important counterweight, as did local religious authorities representing a quietist Sunni and Sufi approach to Islam. The most reputed representatives of these chieftaincy and the *ulema* took active positions against the *mujahideen*. Local Muslim authorities have condemned the Salafi recourse to jihad and violence in the application of shari'a. Intallah ag Attaher, the supreme chief of the Kel Adagh, supported their declarations. Clearly alluding to AQIM, Intallah called on more than one occasion for armed movements from outside the Azawad to leave the region. These calls were formalised in written declarations after meetings held respectively in Gao in April, in Kidal in June, and in Anefis in September, but their very repetition underscores their lack of effect.

Iyad ag Aghali's rejection of the traditional authorities' open call to distance himself from AQIM, as well as the different attempts to unite Ansar Dine and MNLA formally, further added to the ambiguity of his political position. By far one of the most experienced political figures in Mali's political quagmire, Iyad has pursued exactly this kind of ambiguity to place himself in the centre of every possible outcome of the conflict. The attempts to reconcile Ansar Dine and MNLA can be partly explained by Iyad's attempts to destroy the MNLA from within and to clear the last secular obstacle withholding him from reshaping Tuareg politics in an Islamist mould. Some observers hold that his relations with other Jihadi–Salafi movements have been dictated by the same policy and goals: to hollow out the legitimacy and position of these movements leaving Ansar Dine as the sole viable alternative. However, although the presence for much of 2012 of Alghabbas ag Intallah – Intallah ag Attaher's son and 'Executive Chief' of the Ifoghas tribe – in Ansar Dine's leadership might seem to reflect a division within the Ifoghas tribe over the movement, it is far more likely to reflect an old strategy of the Ifoghas chiefly family to 'join and influence' to their own advantage and goals, a strategy in which they have excelled since the early colonial occupation of the Sahara. In short, and paradoxically, Alghabbas' presence might have been intended to curb ag Aghali's ambitions.

As for the other communities of the north: in Bamako, a largely Songhay organisation called the Collective of Northern 'Natives' (COREN), which includes a number of prominent northern politicians, has organised demonstrations and played an active role in keeping the issue of the occupation of northern Mali in the public eye. They attempted to put pressure on the government in Bamako to act to retake the north and to accept the intervention of ECOWAS military forces. They have also encouraged the initial stages of the training of Songhay civilian militias such as the Ganda Koy and Ganda Izo by the Malian army. Born of COREN's frustration with the Malian state's failure to act to retake the north, the deployment of militias as a vanguard for reconquering lost territory seemed unlikely to be very effective militarily, while risking enormous problems in terms of ethnic conflict.

Similar developments could be noted for Douentza, where people elaborated new forms of self-governance in order to address the governmental void.

Just as one ethnically based political movement often begets another, opposing movement, attempts by the *mujahideen* to frame their movement as an Islamic one provoked opposition from Muslim leaders and scholars across Mali. The characterisation of Malian Islam as tolerant, moderate, or mystical fails to capture the universal terms in which many in northern Mali (Songhay, Tuareg, Arab and Fulbe) view their religious culture. Many resent claims by the *mujahideen* and other Salafists to be bringing 'true Islam', as if it needed to be introduced for the first time. But at the same time, many are able to engage Islamists on their own terms, with expertise and knowledge that the Islamists are bound to respect since it often surpasses their own religious training. This does not mean that the Islamist vision of Islam is fully acceptable to the majority of people in northern Mali, whatever their ethnic identity. To the contrary. But it does help to explain the relative peace of the region in the latter half of 2012, once the *mujahideen* expelled the MNLA. The *mujahideen*'s claims to be engaged in the establishment of an Islamic state in Mali that enforces shari'a law is not premised on the exclusion of any ethnic or racial group from the north. The MNLA, to the contrary, is generally seen as a Tuareg dominated movement that seeks a Tuareg controlled independence of the Azawad. That is unacceptable to the majority of the potential 'Azawadi' population. Thus, contrary to the MNLA, the Jihadi–Salafists offer potential grounds for discussion to local Muslim intellectuals. Mahmoud Dicko, who heads Mali's influential Islamic High Council, attempted to engage in a dialogue with the *mujahideen* but later expressed his frustration with their abortive dialogue. In Timbuktu, known for its sophisticated and well-developed Islamic intellectual culture, the possibility existed of engaging with the Jihadi–Salafist movements on religious grounds that many people feel quite comfortable with. However, actual attempts at dialogue seem to have been frustrated, and by the end of 2012, prominent Muslim leaders in Bamako received death threats from the Jihadi–Salafists.

On the local level in the north, the *mujahideen* found themselves religiously opposed by Sufi Muslims whose holy shrines they desecrated and destroyed in Timbuktu and Douentza; by the Tablighi Jama'at who denied them the right to wage jihad; and by local Malian Muslim organisations, Islamist or other, who engaged the *mujahideen* in their own terms. These organisations were further supported within Mali by a host of Muslim organisations. Political opposition centred around the traditional chieftaincy, which denied the validity of authority based on shari'a; diasporic political communities of refugees; and the MNLA, whose political project centred around secular nationalist notions of statehood. To varying degrees, those positions were supported by the local populations of different ethnic groups, but not without many ambiguities. Just as the Tuareg and Arab communities were divided over support for separatists or autonomists or for the Malian state, support for the *mujahideen* was also uneven (bearing in mind that many leading figures of MUJAO were Lamhar or Tilemsi Arabs, and Ansar Dine was largely composed of and led by Tuareg). The other communities of the north

felt strong resentment toward the MNLA and its separatist project, as well as the violence and looting surrounding their 'conquest' of the north. This led in some instances to a benign vision of the Salafi tenets of the *mujahideen*, but that vision proved hard to reconcile with the violent *huddud* punishments and petty harassments they inflicted on ordinary citizens, the overwhelming majority of whom were themselves Muslim. The open resistance of women, and Tuareg women in particular, is perhaps the best indication of the degree of discontent with the pretentions of the *mujahideen*.

Outside intervention

Combined with direct threats against neighbouring states – notably Algeria and Mauritania, but also Nigeria – and against France (long one of AQIM's avowed targets), public floggings, amputations and especially the stonings in Timbuktu, Gao, Ansongo and Aguelhok provoked revulsion across Mali and around the world. Spurred on by France in particular, and being immediately threatened by the Islamist groups controlling the Sahara, Mali's neighbours in ECOWAS as well as Mauritania and Algeria experienced great pressure to take military action themselves. Throughout 2012, the political conjuncture in Bamako, as well as complex regional relations, stymied an intervention that might otherwise have appeared inevitable. However, ECOWAS's maladroit talk of intervention as early as March and April 2012 provoked intense anger from a small but vocal – and even dangerous – political minority within Mali towards ECOWAS, its Chairman Ivoirian President Alassane Dramane Ouattara and its designated mediator, Burkinabe President Blaise Compaoré. Allied with a military jealous of its prerogatives, those activists made the possible deployment of ECOWAS troops to Mali – and particularly to Bamako, where they would protect the civilian government – an extremely sensitive political issue.

The failure of the regional security apparatus precedes the recent crisis and was one of the factors that allowed a local rebellion to become a regional and trans-continental crisis. The absence of effective military and security cooperation among the states of the region played a major role in the deterioration of politics and security in Mali since 2010. Regional efforts to address the growing jihadi presence in the Sahara, such as the Algerian-led CEMOC (Joint Military Operations Centre) in Tamanrasset, stalled completely, largely because of long-standing rivalries between Algeria and Morocco, as well as between Algeria and Libya. The most significant obstacle, however, was the inaction of the Malian leadership vis-à-vis AQIM and criminal networks, causing tensions with Mauritania and Algeria. Further afield, European governments contributed to regional tensions by not only paying millions of euros in ransom money, but also pressuring the Malian and Mauritanian governments into releasing convicted AQIM members in exchange for the liberation of hostages.

West African regional relations also complicated efforts to address the current conflict in northern Mali. Immediately after the March coup, ECOWAS and the Burkinabe President Blaise Compaoré took the lead on regional attempts at mediation and plans for intervention in the conflict, while the African Union (AU) was paralysed by an internal power struggle over leadership. However, Algeria and Mauritania – the two most influential states in northern Mali – opposed ECOWAS plans for military intervention and disapproved Compaoré's mediation efforts in the conflict. At the same time, Algeria refrained from taking a leading regional role on northern Mali and merely insisted on a negotiated solution. Finally, ECOWAS member Niger found itself in a double position. President Mamadou Issoufou publicly supported the idea of a UN-sanctioned international intervention. However, in case of active Nigerien support for such a mission, Nigerien Tuareg might threaten to take up arms in support of their Malian brethren. Thus, President Issoufou had to walk a

tightrope between foreign and domestic threats. By September, however, as the situation on the ground deteriorated and the *mujadhideen* took the upper hand from the MNLA, he emerged as an active supporter of foreign intervention in Mali.

Throughout 2012, as the involvement of external actors increased, their distinct agendas became ever more apparent. In addition to holding talks with armed groups, Burkinabe President Compaoré was also involved in negotiations over the release of hostages. Moreover, in September 2012, media reports claimed that the MUJAO had received arms shipments via Burkina Faso. Wounded MNLA fighters had already sought care in the country, and Ouagadougou hosted an important group of MNLA in refuge. In September 2012 Algeria initiated its own mediation efforts with Ansar Dine, in direct competition with Burkinabe efforts. Tensions north of the Sahara rose as well. Algerian media printed accusations that Morocco was manipulating the MUJAO to target Algeria and gain a foothold in the conflict. Qatar, which many believe provided material support to the mujahideen, sought to claim a mediating role in September 2012. The absence of a serious, disinterested interlocutor was felt all the more keenly when UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon named former Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi as his special envoy to the Sahel. Many observers agreed that the motivations behind his appointment appear to have had more to do with the politics of Brussels and the United Nations, than with his capacity to effect change in the Sahel. A rather naive October report by the Secretary General and two irresolute Security Council resolutions in October and December only deepened the sense that the UN could or would do little to resolve the crisis.

In sum, despite cries of alarm from Malians themselves, as well as from their neighbours with the most at stake – figures like President Issoufou of Niger and President Macky Sall of Senegal – foreign powers left the Malian crisis to stagnate for over nine months until it became well and truly an international emergency. This must be recognised for what it is: a failure of diplomacy for which many international actors bear responsibility, including notably ECOWAS, the AU, and the UN. In 2013, efforts by Mali's neighbours and other foreign actors to pull the hippo safely on to dry land risk wounding it further, especially since – at the time of writing – those efforts privilege armed intervention over coherent concertation on its political goals.

Conclusion

Throughout most of 2012, the Malian hippo floated helplessly in waters that grew murkier by the day. Blind as we are, we have groped at it and attempted to identify it and its ailments. Any conclusion would be provisional, but two points emerge. First, for all its international and Saharan dimensions, the roots of the crisis were first and foremost Malian. It is true that, via actions they took or refused to take, Mali's neighbours and other foreign powers made the crisis a regional one. But the wounds of the North, re-opened in the 1990s, had long remained unhealed on the Malian body politic. In recent years, that sore had been further infected by passive or active participation in the drug trade by high-ranking military officers and political figures, by Bamako's laissez-faire attitude to those in the North it considered its political proxies, and by its failure to counter the presence of foreign *mujahideen* and their local recruits. While the problems plaguing the north have been relatively visible for several years, outside observers failed to diagnose the hippo's internal ailments, especially the degree of corruption pervading a political system in which many of them were deeply invested. The fall of the Touré government in just a few days in March – an event welcomed by many Malians – can only be explained by mounting dissatisfaction during Touré's second term in office, combined with a real lack

of faith in the democratic process represented by the cancelled April elections. The current patch on Mali's wounded democracy – in the form of an interim government led by Cissoko and presided over by a barely constitutional President Traore – is scarcely adequate as a bandage, let alone capable of allowing the wound to heal. Our second point is this: any real understanding of this complex crisis must look simultaneously out from the Sahara and up from Bamako. That is to say, it must be concurrently attentive to regional and international factors at work in the Sahara and aware of the deeply local, even personal nature of the political crisis there, and in Kidal and Timbuktu in particular. Understanding the Sahara as an 'extraverted' political space, in the terms of Jean-François Bayart, should not preclude adopting a highly localised, even granular analysis of the political forces at work, notably amongst the Kel Adagh Tuareg and among the Arab tribes from the region (Bayart 2000). The same could be said for Bamako, where myopia afflicts both an inward-looking 'political class' – a widely used term itself indicative of the rent-seeking that characterised political life under ATT – and an equally self-absorbed army, which in the months after it took power engaged in murderous internal struggles while failing to protect civilians in the North. A comprehensive view of the Malian crisis must be binocular, while remaining attentive to the inevitable blind spots in analyses too often bifurcated into 'northern' and 'southern' perspectives. The first step in helping the hippo to heal has to be an objective and synthetic diagnosis of what ails it.

Notes on contributors

Baz Lecocq lectures in African History at Ghent University, Belgium; Gregory Mann lectures in African History at Columbia University, USA; Bruce Whitehouse lectures in Anthropology at Lehigh University, USA; Dida Badi is Maître de Recherche at the Centre National de Recherches Préhistoriques, Anthropologiques et Historiques, Algeria; Lotte Pelckmans is Postdoctoral Researcher at the Leiden University Institute for History, the Netherlands; Nadia Belalimat is Ingénieur d'études at the International Research Centre on Environment and Development, France; Bruce Hall lectures in African History at Duke University, USA; Wolfram Lacher is Researcher at the Stiftung Wissenschaft un Politik, Germany.

Notes

1. As this article will make clear, several groups fought against the Malian government and sometimes against each other. They fall into two broad categories. The first, the Tuareg separatists known as the MNLA, are in rebellion against their own government; we refer to them as 'rebels.' Those in the second category are engaged in a violent jihad with ideological roots in Salafism. They see themselves as fighting for Islam, although the vast majority of their victims are Muslims who do not recognize their religion in the actions of these fighters. We refer to this second category as the *mujahideen*; some of them are in rebellion against their own government, but many are citizens of foreign countries. They are not therefore 'rebels'. As we argue, individual fighters and commanders have shifted back and forth across the permeable boundary between these two categories, but we maintain it for analytical purposes.
2. Except where notes to particular sources are given, all information comes from research conducted by telephone or over the Internet, and in some cases through recent fieldwork in the region.
3. We have no space to develop this fully, but it is important to note that social tensions within Tuareg and Arab societies between on the one hand 'noble tribes' (such as the Tuareg Ifoghas and Arab Berabish) and 'tribeless lower classes' (such as the Tuareg *imghad* and the so called Lamhar or 'Tilemsi Arabs') on the other, are an important part of the conflict's dynamics.
4. As early as 21 March, French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé called for a return to constitutional rule, but did not insist on that ATT be returned to power.
5. See: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tr6C49Zvhlc&list=FLmv9mp53nsWTTdzv5Qo9caw& index=21&feature=plpp_video. Last accessed 09/11/12.

6. Parts of this section draw on reports by Boukary Sangaré who visited the Douentza region several times during both MNLA and MUJAO occupation. With the help of Prof. M. de Bruijn, he published some reports online. See, e.g., http://www.ascleiden.nl/?q=news/la-situation-actuelle-au-nord-du-mali-article-et-photos. Last accessed 11/02/13.

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The rise and fall of trade unionism in Zimbabwe, Part II: 1995–2000

Paris Yeros*

Federal University of ABC, São Paulo, Brazil

This article is the second of a two-part study on the evolution of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) in the 1990s. This second part covers the period 1995–2000, when the labour centre adopted a 'social democratic' ideology and a strategy of negotiation. This lasted until 1997, when the labour centre resolved to challenge the ruling party's hold on power. The article argues that the labour centre increasingly narrowed its democratisation critique to 'regime change', through which it gained a broad array of new allies, but which also terminally weakened its organic basis in the working class.

Keywords: Africa; Zimbabwe; labour relations; trade unionism; democratisation; development

[L'ascension et la chute du syndicalisme au Zimbabwe, 2e partie: 1995–2000]. Cet article est le second d'une étude en deux parties sur l'évolution du Congrès des syndicats du Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, ZCTU) dans les années 90. Cette seconde partie couvre la période 1995–2000, durant laquelle le syndicat adopta une idéologie 'social démocrate' et une stratégie de négociation. Cela dura jusqu'en 1997, lorsqu'il décida de défier la mainmise du parti en place sur le pouvoir. Cet article soutient que le syndicat a peu à peu restreint sa critique de la démocratisation au 'changement de régime', évolution qui lui a rapporté tout un éventail de nouveaux alliés, mais qui a aussi, au final, affaibli sa base dans la classe ouvrière.

Mots-clés : Afrique ; Zimbabwe ; relations de travail ; syndicalisme ; démocratisation ; développement

Introduction

The structural weaknesses of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) in the early 1990s, especially its dependence on US and European donors and its exclusive focus on building organisational structures among formal workers, at a time of increasing unemployment, were to take their toll on the labour centre. In the second half of the 1990s, the ZCTU underwent a qualitative transformation in political perspective and strategy, even as it succeeded in incorporating public sector unions, built alliances with other civic organisations, and stepped up strike action, to unprecedented levels. This is the irony that has so deeply marked the labour centre, and goes a long way to explain its downfall.

The diagnosis by no means underestimates the coercive strategies of the state and the intransigence of capital in the course of liberalisation. But these are the givens that any

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*Email: parisyeros@gmail.com

labour centre must be prepared to confront; what must concern us is precisely the ability of trade unionism, in the specific context of peripheral capitalism, to gain ideological and strategic autonomy from the state, capital, and donors. This is the real challenge, and it is on this that trade unionism must be judged.

At the turn of the century, Brian Raftopoulos (2001, 24) noted that:

> ... surveying the last twenty years of labour history it is clear that the labour movement in Zimbabwe has made remarkable progress. Moving from a patronised wing of the ruling party, it has provided the catalyst and the organisational framework for the growth of a powerful political opposition now challenging for state power.

He continues: 'unions elsewhere in Africa have proved to have the greatest capacity to provide national structures capable of nurturing an enduring oppositional voice, and capable of combining struggles over production with broader issues of democratisation.' And concludes: 'finding an emancipatory economic project beyond structural adjustment programmes has, however, proved more intractable. The labour movement in Zimbabwe, and its political creation, the MDC [Movement for Democratic Change], will find it no less difficult.'

It will be argued here that the above assessment overstates the success of trade unionism to devise strategies congruent with the realities of a semi-proletarianised worforce, as well as the deep qualitative changes that the ZCTU underwent. By the end of the decade, the 'oppositional voice' of the labour centre was no longer targeted on production, while its notion of 'democratisation' became stuck in the rut of 'regime change'. As new social forces emerged in the countryside to reclaim a radical national liberation project, and as the ruling party itself entered a period of ideological reorientation, the labour centre proved incapable of re-evaluating and adjusting to the new realities. This laid the basis for an enduring polarisation between radical nationalism and neoliberalism, the latter being adopted by the MDC. In the process, the labour centre was emptied out and practically demobilised.[1]

Appealing for national dialogue, 1995–1997

By 1995, the ZCTU's political unionism was bearing fruit. Aside from its recruitment strategies, the status of the ZCTU in national life was benefiting from the growing discontent with the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). The ZCTU managed to harness the popular tide and organise, articulate, and lead the resistance to the state, capital, and ESAP. Despite its low level of unionisation, the centre enjoyed widespread legitimacy in national life as the leader and mouthpiece of opposition. In early 1995, in the midst of retrenchments, price rises, and an impeding Drought Levy, the ZCTU issued an ultimatum to the government to withdraw the Levy or face nationwide industrial action. This resistance, compounded with the fear on the part of government that the labour movement was on its way to forming a political party, succeeded in bringing President Mugabe and the labour leaders into dialogue in March 1995 for the first time in the decade. The meeting signalled a thawing of relations, culminating in an invitation to President Mugabe to be the guest of honour at the May Day 1995 celebrations and to open the ZCTU Congress in Mutare in August, as well as to Labour Minister Nathan Shamuyarira to adjourn the Congress.

But 1995 was also the year in which the ZCTU changed strategy, with the objective now being dialogue with the state and the international financial institutions (IFIs). Whereas the May Day theme in 1991 had been 'Liberalisation or Liberation', by 1995 it had become 'Progress through Co-operation, Participation, Involvement'. In the same spirit, the 1995 Congress

in Mutare was billed as the 'Beyond ESAP' Congress, where the *Beyond ESAP* (1996) draft document was adopted and its call for national dialogue issued. 'This theme', said ZCTU President Gibson Sibanda to his May Day audience (*The Worker/TW* 24: May 1995):

> ... reflects our belief that for us to be effective in representing our constituencies, we have to be involved through participatory democracy in decision-making ... Rather than resort to ad hoc consultations that have characterised our relationship with government, we need a more permanent institutional framework through which issues of development should be discussed by government and representatives of civil society.

In its turn, government reciprocated the call for reconciliation by chastising employers for exploiting workers under ESAP. Minister Shamuyarira condemned the state of labour relations, characterised by retrenchments and dismissals upon striking, and expressed his own wish for a reinvigoration of the tripartite spirit (*TW* 25: June 19). The conciliatory mood extended into 1996 when *Beyond ESAP* was launched and presented at a national seminar in Kadoma, attended by business, government, and civic organisations. This further culminated in a tripartite study visit to South Africa in October 1996, aiming to examine the South African concept of a National Economic, Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC). Thereafter, a tripartite technical team was established to draw up the framework of such a consultative forum for Zimbabwe, to be called ZEDLAC. In the meantime, in April 1996, for the first time the government invited the labour movement to join in the negotiations with South Africa on a new trade agreement.

Yet, the rapprochement was less profound than it appeared. Industrial conflict persisted into the period of dialogue. The government passed the Economic Processing Zones (EPZ) Act in 1995, thereby suspending the application of the Labour Relations Act (LRA) in EPZs, and dealing a blow to the labour movement. This action was reinforced in 1996 when the government announced special regulations to govern the terms and conditions of employment in EPZs. The regulations allowed for long working hours, as well as work on Sundays, holidays, and at night at normal pay rates; allowed employers to fire workers at will and deny them legal representation in case of dispute; and prohibited strikes (*TW* 70: July 1999).

Conflict persisted in the public sector as well. In fact, the biggest post-independence strike occurred in this period. On 19 August 1996, a walkout by nurses in Chinhoyi triggered a nationwide civil servants' strike. Festering grievances over low pay and authoritarian industrial relations erupted when the public sector was awarded a 6% cost of living adjustment as compared to the wage increments above the 22% inflation rate that had been secured in the private sector during collective bargaining. At the height of the strike, the Public Service Association (PSA) formally affiliated to the ZCTU. The civil servants resumed work on 5 September, but without the dispute having been resolved. Subsequently, temperatures rose again over lack of progress and distrust of the intentions of government. In late October, nurses and doctors renewed the job action, this time staying away for several weeks. The temperature rose further in mid November, when the ZCTU, which until then had been playing an advisory and mediating role, called for a General Strike, the first in the post-independence period, in an attempt to put pressure on the government to resolve the dispute. In the event, the strike call was not heeded by workers, however, and this in turn caused controversy within the ZCTU. As it emerged, there had been insufficient consultation between the centre and its affiliates, as well as between affiliates and their memberships. The leadership of the ZCTU was taken to task for failing to ensure consultation, and the movement as a whole had once again come face to face with its weaknesses (*TW* 42: Dec/Jan 1997; see also *Behind the Strike* 1996).

In October of the same year, a new labour centre was formed, the Zimbabwe Federation of Trade Union (ZFTU), with the tacit endorsement of the ruling party – though it was not actually registered by the government until July 1998. While it was proving at the time to be a 'passing nuisance', as Tsvangirai put it, it is noteworthy that the means by which the alternative centre sought to legitimate itself entailed an accusation of the ZCTU as 'donor driven'. A statement (*TW* 41: November 1996) issued by the ZFTU claimed that the ZCTU:

> . . . has been operating under funding donors, particularly the Americans who by and large have an influence over the activities of the centre. The ZCTU programmes and actions have clearly been donor driven instead of worker initiated. This has resulted in the ZCTU becoming an ivory tower, neglecting the aspirations of the workers in Zimbabwe.

In a reversal of the direction of public criticism, the ZCTU was now the recipient of 'foreign stooge' accusations, the same accusation that the centre had meted out to government at the launch of ESAP. Thus, the Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) – ZANU(PF), in its ZFTU guise, was striking at the heart of the organisational predicament haunting the ZCTU's legitimacy. The accusation warranted a prompt response. Tsvangirai (*TW* 41: November 1996) retorted that:

> . . . we, as the ZCTU, have enjoyed solidarity from our international trade union fraternity. We will not apologise for this. After all, it allowed us to build our capacity. We have come to accept that this solidarity will not be extended in perpetuity, and thus, we have been working towards self-reliance since 1990. Although we receive this support, we have never been influenced in designing our policies and programmes and in executing our activities.

Over the following three years, the 'foreign stooge' accusation came to occupy the heart of the ZANU(PF) critique of the ZCTU, and was extended to all the donor-dependent actions spearheaded by the ZCTU, including the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) and the MDC.

Yet, while the ruling party sought a smokescreen for its own liberation project gone far astray, it is true that the ZCTU, while not being 'driven' by foreign interests, was being transformed by its collision with both the neocolonial state and the labour imperialism of Northern-based trade unions. The dialogue which the ZCTU sought in 1995 was on terms that were much more palatable to the state, capital, Northern labour, and the IFIs. The dialogue was not to be on matters of national sovereignty, or worker control of production, or land redistribution. The ZCTU was no longer 'shouting from the outside'.

The *Beyond ESAP* document marked the change of strategy. It shifted the focus of the 'development' problem from politics to economics, identifying the problem not as political, requiring worker control, but technical, requiring better policy interventions. The document had a 'modernist' thrust to it, employing non-Marxist structuralist language which sought to emphasise the 'structural rigidities' of the Zimbabwean economy. It identified a 'formal' sector that was 'enclave' in nature and extroverted; and a 'non-formal' sector which provided labour and food commodities to the formal. Moreover, it called for the 'endogenisation' of growth by the integration of the two through land reform and state-led industrialisation. However, it placed among its principal objectives 'the need to upgrade the performance of the economy so that it meets international standards of global competitiveness' (ZCTU 1996, 10), thereby pinning its hopes on the invisible hand of the market after 'take off'. As Patrick Bond (1999, 4) observed, 'the ZCTU's own failure to express the popular anti-ESAP outrage reflected not the "failure of the policy" but ESAP's success in reducing all analysis to modernisation theory and all policy discourse to encouraging capital

accumulation.' The ZCTU was now abandoning its radical political unionism and entering the phase of social democratic strategic unionism.

Indeed, the ZCTU was warming up to the global agencies. In April 1996, a seminar was jointly organised by the ZCTU and the IFIs, in the first move by the IFIs to consult with labour. The seminar was attended by trade unionists from the region, including Andrew Kailembo, the representative of the African Regional Organisation of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU-AFRO). Trade unionists welcomed the new interest on the part of the IFIs in the labour movement, and especially the Bank's interest in labour issues, as demonstrated by its 1995 World Development Report on 'Workers in an integrating world'. Kailembo condemned the previous exclusion of labour from the design of SAPs, which he declared 'economic sabotage'. Other trade unionists went much further to call for compensation from the IFIs. Despite the new engagement with labour, however, the IFIs remained unrepentant, claiming that responsibility for consultation with social partners rested with governments.

In May 1996, the debate was again evading the issue of external imposition. The ZCTU and the International Labour Organization (ILO), now together with the World Bank, were arguing against the IMF visiting representative for the need for government to 'consult stakeholders' on the second phase of ESAP. In a new twist, Tsvangirai was now appealing to the IMF to exercise influence over the government of Zimbabwe in the interest of the labour movement: 'there is need for the IMF to use its influence to bring about meaningful consultations between government and all the social partners' (*TW* 36: June 1996). In the event, the IMF team leader, Jürgen Reitmaier, did not oblige: 'I have my reservations in playing a more active role in pushing the government'; 'it calls for deep intrusion' into Zimbabwe's "sovereignty"' (*TW* 36: June 1996). He added, however, that he had read the *Beyond ESAP* document and had found it 'impressive'.

This was the ZCTU's 'strategic' unionism: calling for 'worker friendly' economics without challenging political dispensations. While this had been a trend with respect to global issues, the strategic approach was also adopted in relation to issues of 'worker control' at the level of the workplace, manifest in the ZCTU's response to privatisation (to be discussed). Suffice it to note here that the strategic approach of the ZCTU on matters of workplace and external interference continued for the remainder of the decade.

The strategic call for dialogue with the ruling party did not last long. While there were contradictions all along – ongoing strikes, the enactment of EPZ legislation, the formation of the ZFTU – the reconciliation was to meet its fate in the latter part of 1997 over the ZEDLAC concept, as well as over government's decision to award war veterans unbudgeted compensation packages. With regards to ZEDLAC, agreement for its establishment was reached after the tripartite visit to South Africa. There was, however, a parallel initiative in progress at the time between government and the business sector, in the form of the Business Forum. In the event, the President's Office took the initiative to create an alternative to both ZEDLAC and the Business Forum, to be called the National Economic Consultative Forum (NECF), and created a national steering committee to this end. Controversy arose when the discussions within the committee pertaining to the structure and composition of the NECF were not taken into consideration by the President. Whereas the discussions had led to an understanding that labour, business, academia, other civic organisations and the state would nominate their own delegates to the forum, and that the body's decisions would be binding, it emerged eventually that the President had overruled this framework in favour of a forum consisting of members invited by the President himself. This violated the principle of civic representation upon which the original idea of dialogue had been premised. The ZCTU wrote to the President in September

1997 indicating that the labour movement would withdraw from the forum unless the principle of representation was respected. The ZCTU received no response and proceeded to boycott the first NECF meeting in January 1998 (ZCTU 1998).

Meanwhile, the country in 1997 continued to be rocked by industrial action, as living standards continued to erode. By 1996, the share of wages and salaries in the national income had declined to 40% from the 64% mark a decade earlier, while the share of profits accruing to owners of capital had increased to 60% from 37% over the same period, indicating beyond doubt that the share of the burden of ESAP has been borne by the working people (Kanyenze 1998). In 1997, as in the year before, strikes gripped several industries: now they spanned construction, commercial, hotel and catering, clothing, commercial farming, and cement and lime, as well as railways, urban councils, and post and telecommunications. In all, the year saw more than 230 strikes in 16 sectors. Most notably, farmworkers downed tools for the first time in protest over poor working conditions and wages that stood at less than one-sixth of the Poverty Datum Line (Z$359/ Z$2400), demanding a 135% increase against the 20% offered by employers. In the clothing industry, developments reached dramatic proportions, with the dismissal in July of 13,000 striking workers, of whom 11,000 were later reinstated as casuals on short-term contracts. And in parastatals, mass retrenchments of up to 1200 loomed on the horizon, adding to the 2000 jobs already shed over the previous five years (*TW* 50: September 1997, *TW* 51: October 1997). These developments formed the backdrop to the ZCTU's decision to stand its ground on the urgent issue of national dialogue.

That which broke the camel's back, however, was President Mugabe's promise in August, a month after the national budget was presented to Parliament, to award war veterans a Z$50,000 compensation package plus a Z$2000 monthly pension, as well as the designation of 1471 white farms for compulsory acquisition. This promise sought to diffuse an emergent crisis between the ruling party and the lower echelons of its most crucial constituency, a crisis that had been precipitated by the looting of the state-sponsored War Victims Compensation Fund, but which reflected the emergence of a new and radical force in Zimbabwean politics (Sadomba 2011). In July 1997, during the African–African American Summit, war veterans demanded an audience with the President over these matters, and moved to disrupt the Summit. The state responded once again in a heavy-handed manner by banning strikes and reinvoking the Law and Order (Maintenance) Act which had previously and successfully been challenged by the ZCTU. Despite the ban, however, President Mugabe was indeed being held to ransom by the constituency that had been providing government with security for two decades. The President capitulated and announced a new compensation package for the veterans, amounting to about Z$4000 billion, without consulting Parliament. To meet the new fiscal outlay, it was announced that a 5% tax would be imposed. This was then presented to Parliament in November, despite objections by MPs. To make matters worse, it was announced that further burdens were to be placed upon workers. Besides the war veterans' levy, there was also to be an increase in the electricity levy by 5%, an increase in sales tax by 2.5% (from 15–17%), and increase in duty on fuel by 20 cents per litre. In the same month, government took the first step of designating 1471 farms for acquisition, signalling the re-radicalisation of nationalism on the land question. On 14 November, the Zimbabwe dollar crashed by 74% in a four-hour period of trading. National politics was reaching boiling point.

The new levy announcements, in particular, pitted the labour movement and war veterans in direct confrontation and struggle over the status of each constituency in national life. The events coincided with the launch of *Keep on knocking* (Raftopoulos and Phimister 1997), the ZCTU-sponsored book whose aim was precisely to recover the history and

status of the labour movement. Tsvangirai seized the opportunity to challenge the nationalist narrative, noting that '[i]t is the workers who gave birth to the nationalist struggle, and not the other way around' (*TW* 53: December 1997/January 1998). These words echoed those in the preface to the book: '[t]he history of a nation-in-the-making should not be reduced to a selective heroic tradition, but should be a tolerant and continuing process of questioning and re-examination' (Tsvangirai 1997, xi). The struggle over national meanings was matched by the organisational struggle on the ground. Throughout September and October, the ZCTU held consultative meetings with workers in all regions, in the newly conceived Labour Forums, to decide what action should be taken. The failure of the 1996 call for a General Strike had driven home the point that full consultation with workers was a fundamental prerequisite for national action. Through the Labour Forums, a decision was finally reached to stage a country-wide strike and demonstration on 9 December, if the government refused to withdraw the announced levies.

The government did not acquiesce to the ZCTU's ultimatum – or the scrutiny of the IFIs, which now demanded to know where the funds would come from. Thus, on 9 December the labour movement proceeded to bring production to a halt in all six regions, in the first nationwide, ZCTU-organised industrial action in the post-independence era. Workers demonstrated in large numbers in all major centres, including Bulawayo, Masvingo, Mutare, Gweru and Marondera. Events transpired differently in Harare, however, and its adjacent town, Chitungwiza. An expected turnout of 250,000 persons in the capital was disrupted by riot police, who used tear gas, batons, and dogs against demonstrators converging on the centre. The demonstrators were prevented from entering Harare.

The magnitude of the strike and the resort by the state to coercion indicated that the tide had finally swung. The scale of the resistance dealt a blow to the ruling party. And the national mood had been transformed. As *The Worker* reported in its Special Issue (December 1997) on the strike:

> ... the political landscape of this country will never be the same after December 9, 1997. Rampant corruption and unemployment, collapse of health services, an ailing economy and an unaccountable government are sure recipes for disaster. The people have risen to blaze the way to salvation and it may just be a matter of time.

Two days after the strike, the use of force took a more strategic turn, with an assault on the leadership of the ZCTU. Several assailants appeared in Morgan Tsvangirai's office on 11 December and proceeded to beat him unconscious. Notably, the assault and the suppression of a peaceful demonstration internationalised the situation, with condemnations of the government and solidarity messages pouring in from the ICFTU, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), International Trade Secretariats, African trade unions, and others.

The national mood had indeed changed, and the ruling party had to face the reality, of organised workers and war veterans challenging the state on different grounds. The government finally moved to withdraw the war veterans levy, which was due to come into effect in January 1998, but in spite of the national budget, the government did award the war veterans the promised compensation.

The government also moved to scrap the electricity and fuel hikes, but the sales tax was retained. The ZCTU in its turn, enjoying a further boost of confidence, raised the stakes. The labour centre demanded the removal not only of the remaining sales tax, but also of Police Commissioner Augustine Chihuri and Home Affairs Minister Dumiso Dabengwa. The tenuous dialogue that had been ushered in by the *Beyond ESAP* project two years earlier had finally been laid to rest.

Changing notions of worker participation

Before proceeding onto the period of renewed confrontation, it is important to assess the parallel transformation of the ZCTU's notion of worker participation at the workplace under the global 'reality' of privatisation. Recall that while the first phase of ESAP was to focus on stabilisation, trade liberalisation, and public enterprise reform, the latter project did not get far off the ground. The agricultural marketing boards were commercialised, but this was the only noteworthy change. Thus, the second phase, ZIMPREST, was to focus on the privatisation of public enterprises. To this was added the project of land reform, all within the evolving framework of 'indigenisation'.

On the eve of ZIMPREST, the labour movement addressed the poor performance record of the parastatals, the corruption within them, the drain on the public purse, and the need for change. 'If these companies are left operating based on the present system', Tsvangirai argued, 'the country's economy will eventually be in shambles' (*TW* 39: September 1996). But the ZCTU's response was drastically different to that contained in its critique of the liberal investment code (ZCTU 1989) and in its workers' participation manual (ZCTU 1993), when it had called for public ownership of the economy and an accountable civil service. The ZCTU now understood privatisation as inevitable, and one that it must influence towards workers' ends. As Rudolf Traub-Merz of the Friederich-Ebert Stiftung (FES) put it, 'trade unions must decide whether they should be onlookers or get involved with their own concepts in the whole exercise of privatisation' (*TW* 40: October 1996). In this spirit, Tsvangirai indicated that:

> ... there is need to negotiate for better packages for those workers who will be affected during the process ... It is also important to embark on retraining and redeployment of the victims. Privatisation should be accepted as a labour consumption aspect for an economic need. (*TW* 39: September 1996)

Thus, the ZCTU, together with the FES, commissioned a study on privatisation which was produced in 1997 (Godana and Hlatshwayo 1997). Then, in June 1998, with the support of the Zimbabwe Enterprise Development project, the labour centre organised a workshop in Harare for trade union leaders on the topic of employee ownership. And in 1999, a regional research effort was launched, entitled 'The Privatisation and commercialisation of state entities', and involving the ZCTU, COSATU, and the National Union of Namibian Workers, to assess the various country experiences with privatisation. The regional labour centres then held a conference in March 2000 in Harare, where they each presented their country case studies.[2]

The commissioned study of 1997 pointed out that the main problems of the privatisation exercise have been the absence of a comprehensive policy approach, a legal framework, and an independent authority to oversee it. The study advised the ZCTU to put pressure on the government to establish all of the above and, furthermore, to participate in the privatisation exercise so that employee welfare would be safeguarded. Besides ensuring that the LRA provisions are observed throughout the process, the study indicated that the ZCTU had a role in ensuring that employees benefit from privatisation via 'employee share ownership' schemes and the establishment of a National Investment Trust for the warehousing of shares. Subsequently, the General Council of the ZCTU adopted the concept of employee share ownership, in relation to both private and public enterprises, and this was reaffirmed at the workshop in 1998. This, again, was drastic change of identity; earlier the ZCTU had rejected 'employee share ownership' as a system of 'petty shareholding' that was 'designed to confuse the class identity of the workers and neutralise the class struggle' (ZCTU 1993, ix).

The Zimbabwean case study produced by the ZCTU conducted in-depth assessments of privatisation and commercialisation with reference to a number of enterprises. The study re-affirmed the concerns raised above. At the close of the decade, there remained no clear privatisation strategy, there was no consistency in the exercise, workers were being largely ignored, the process was not transparent, and political interference was rife. A privatisation authority was finally established in February 2000, as the Privatisation Authority of Zimbabwe (PAZ), but even this did not meet the independence criterion, for it was placed in the Office of the President.

Privatisation was presented as a fait accompli. Workers were marginalised and generally had to engage with the process to cut their losses. Unions protested the ad hoc methods of the government, their exclusion of workers from decision-making, and the absence of transparency. Meanwhile, heavy retrenchments had already been experienced; for example, 1000 workers lost their jobs in the Cold Storage Company, 2500 in the Cotton Company of Zimbabwe, and 1300 in the Grain Marketing Board. In such cases, workers typically engaged with the restructuring process to negotiate the conditions of retrenchment. The issue of employee share ownership had been less visible, affecting the restructuring cases that had moved beyond commercialisation to privatisation.

While there have been 'success' stories in privatisation, one being Dairibord and another the Cotton Company of Zimbabwe (COTTCO), the employee share ownership experience was negative. For example, COTTCO was first commercialised and then incorporated in 1994, and was finally listed on the Zimbabwe Stock Exchange in December 1997. Government took over the debt of the Cotton Marketing Board (CMB), and thereafter COTTCO restructured operations and succeeded in turning around the failing financial performance of the CMB. Yet, not only were retrenchments large (2500), the workers that remained did not benefit meaningfully from employee share ownership. Only 5% of total shares were allocated to employees, and 20% to small-scale cotton growers. Importantly, both small-scale growers and employees subsequently offloaded their shares onto the market in order to meet current expenditures in times of economic hardship. The ZCTU study noted that small-scale growers were the worst off, given spiralling input prices.

Resolving for state power, 1998–2000

The labour movement entered 1998 with heightened confidence vis-à-vis both the state and capital, and with indignation towards the tactics of the state against its leadership. The new year thus began with fighting talk. Provocations were issued to the state, with such articles in *The Worker* as 'Will Tsvangirai run for President?' Similarly, taunts and signals were sent to unconvinced employers. 'We cannot rule out that the situation will be explosive,' warned the Chief Economist, as early as six months prior to collective bargaining. 'It will be really a tough time for industry. The only way out is for employers to negotiate in good faith and they must make a commitment to pay their workers reasonably.' The President of the PSA was more apocalyptic: 'one cannot rule out the possibility of industrial anarchy.' The headlines of *The Worker* further drove the point home: 'Workers want 50% salary rise or else . . .' Meanwhile, the ICFTU was exerting pressure of its own, calling on President Mugabe to investigate 'the brutal attack' on Morgan Tsvangirai (*TW* 55: February 1998).

The situation deteriorated much earlier than expected. The new year brought with it price hikes in basic commodities of 17% to 42%, including a rise of 21% in the price of maize-meal. This brought the country to a new convulsion. By mid January, violent protests erupted in Harare and Chitungwiza, and these quickly spread to other city centres. Businesses closed down and shops were ransacked, while the government deployed the

army and helicopters. The toll was unprecedented. Eight persons were killed and 3000 arrested (*TW* 55: February 1998).

In the face of public outrage, government moved to reverse the increase in the price of maize-meal. However, it remained intransigent on the sales tax and also on the outstanding 5% development (formerly drought) levy and the 15% tax on pensions that was due to come into effect in January 1998. Following the food riots, the General Council of the ZCTU met and resolved that the sales tax must be removed, and further added to the list the 5% development levy and the 15% pension tax. After the meeting, ZCTU President Gibson Sibanda called on the government to enter into dialogue towards a social contract, with the intention of clearly defining the sacrifices of each social partner rather than placing the burden of adjustment wholly on the shoulders of workers (*TW* 56: March 1998). Nevertheless, the labour leadership moved also to consult the movement once again, as it had prior to the December strike, on the merits of pursuing renewed mass action. Upon wide consultation and agreement, a new ultimatum was issued to government to withdraw the levies or face a job stay-away in the first week of March. As a new tactic, the stay-away aimed to bring production to a halt, while also avoiding a violent encounter with security forces.

Government and labour soon entered into talks but these again collapsed, and the labour movement proceeded to issue a nationwide call for a stay-away. This was indeed heeded by a broad spectrum of the workforce, public and private, and in fact surpassed the December strike. The March stay-away was the largest industrial action since 1948, succeeding in closing down 80% of industry, business, and public offices, particularly in the larger centres, but also in medium-sized and some smaller towns. The majority of workers who had been informed about the action and its issues in advance joined the action: more than half a million workers from all sectors. The stay-away was less successful in the rural districts and smaller towns, due to inadequate information and mobilisation, serving in this instance as a reminder of the continuing weakness of the labour movement in the countryside. Nonetheless, the urban success of the action demonstrated that lessons had been learned, mainly the principle of consultation. Besides reliance on Labour Forums, the success of the stay-away was also attributed to its non-violent format and, further, to its appeal to non-unionised sections of society. In all, the success of the event confirmed more than ever that the ZCTU enjoyed the support of a broad section of society (see *Staying away* 1998).

Despite the organisational success, however, the government did not relent. Thus, in April, the ZCTU began once again consulting with workers nationwide on the next course of action. The possibility of a second stay-away was aired, but now calls were also heard for the ZCTU to form a political party to challenge ZANU(PF) directly at the polls. It was, of course, not the first time that the latter thought had crossed the minds of workers, but in the wake of two major industrial actions against, such calls carried more weight than usual. Reservations, however, were quickly expressed by trade union leaders. The Second Deputy Secretary General, Nicholas Mudzengerere, said that it would be 'very unfortunate' if the ZCTU was derailed from its trade union agenda, while the General Secretary of the PTC Workers Union, Gift Chimanikire, warned of the dangers involved, invoking the recent Zambian and British examples of labour parties forsaking their working class constituencies. 'Our main focus should be to deal with the politics of the stomach', Chimanikire affirmed (*TW* 57: 1998). In the same month, ZIMPREST was launched, two years after its scheduled date.

The temperature for another stay-away mounted, as collective bargaining began. The persisting militancy on the part of workers was placing employers on the defensive, with some even suggesting that businesses close down to avoid the possibility of damage to

property. Tsvangirai himself predicted (or warned) as much: '[t]he collective bargaining scenario will be characterised by very high tension because we're living in a hyper-inflation situation' (*TW* 57: April 1998). In the event, workers in at least 16 industrial sectors were awarded increases of 34% on average, above the inflation rate of 29% but near the antici- pated inflation at year's end.

Worker militancy also brought President Mugabe back to the negotiating table in early July, for the first time in three years. The labour leaders called on the government to stamp out corruption, withdraw the levies, and restructure the NECF in accordance with the orig- inally agreed framework. At the same time, however, workers were warning the leadership not to back down on any demands (*TW* 60: July 1998). At the meeting, the government announced that the sales tax increase would be withdrawn at the beginning of 1999, but remained adamant about the levies. In the same month, the government went ahead and registered the new labour centre, the ZFTU.

Judging the response to be disappointing, the ZCTU, by the end of July, was again issuing an ultimatum and planning a stay-away for early September. This time, under mounting pressure and aware of the organising successes of the ZCTU, government relented. On 4 September, four days prior to the planned stay-away, a tripartite meeting was held at which government agreed to remove the sales tax, the development levy, and the pensions tax, and also agreed to restructure the NECF.

Although this marked a new victory for the ZCTU, it was once again to be overtaken by events. In August, the government, in joint action with Angola and Namibia, resolved to undertake a military campaign in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), in the clearest sign yet of the re-radicalisation of the ruling party's nationalism, against foreign interfer- ence in the SADC region, especially by the United States. But having made a new fiscal outlay for the campaign, inflation spiked to 34% by September, an amount equal to the wage increases that had been won two months prior. In October, following a depreciation of the currency, fuel prices shot up by 67%, sending inflation to 45% in November and to 46% in December. The delay of ZIMPREST had also denied the government the requisite balance-of-payments support from the IMF and the donors, who followed suit. As of late 1998, Zimbabwe was being caught in a closing circle of military sanctions and financial isolation by the West. Yet, this was not opposed by the ZCTU, which was now making the transition to a Western-supported 'regime change' mentality.

In early November, new riots broke out in Bulawayo, Chitungwiza, Harare and Gweru over the fuel hike, amid public recognition of corruption at NOCZIM, the state-owned oil- procurement monopoly, and allegations of a link between the fuel hike and the DRC inter- vention. On 7 November, the ZCTU's General Council called for a 20% cost of living adjustment and the suspension of the fuel hike, and resolved to stage stay-aways every Wednesday and review the situation every two weeks. Two stay-aways were held, on November 11 and 18, in the course of which a Mutare resident was shot and killed by the Zimbabwe Republic Police during a riot. A third stay-away was finally suspended after government requested to reconvene an urgent tripartite meeting. This did not resolve the stand-off, however, for on 27 November, the State President issued a decree banning stay-aways for 180 days, under the Law and Order (Maintenance) Act.

After three successful nationwide industrial actions over the course of one year, the labour movement had discovered its strengths, but also its limitations. Besides being able to mobilise unionised workers, the ZCTU could claim to command the respect and support of a broader swathe of the nation that was not incorporated into its structures. The ZCTU certainly appeared to have become the leading oppositional force in Zimbabwe. But one limitation was that industrial action would make enormous demands on workers

(who would sacrifice wages and face intimidation upon return to work) without effectively stemming the tide of job cuts and wage erosion. Another limitation, although less acknowledged, was the fact that, despite the groundswell of support that the centre received, it still lacked organisational grounding in the informal sector and the rural areas.

Indeed, at this time, the countryside was witnessing its first high-profile protest movement against government, *outside* ZCTU structures, in the form of mass land occupations. These were being organised by circuits of dissident local party cadres and war veterans, and timed to coincide with the International Donors' Conference on land. In the event, the latter limitation did not override the first. For in light of the ineffectiveness of industrial action, the ZCTU began to consider seriously the option that had overshadowed Zimbabwean politics throughout the decade, that is, the formation of a political party and the removal of ZANU(PF) by the ballot.

The objective of prying open the national debate had been pursued by the ZCTU via the NECF strategy, by which the centre sought to bypass Parliament, but also via electoral reform which sought the prying open of Parliament itself. The ZCTU was part of a broader movement, inclusive of human rights organisations, churches, academics, students and opposition parties, whose origins were to be found in the late 1980s mobilisation against the one-party state. The high-point of this movement in the 1990s was the boycotting by opposition parties of the 1995 elections in protest against the first-past-the-post system of representation, which was enabling the ruling party to monopolise Parliament and maintain a de facto one-party state. The broad social movement, however, remained loose and relatively ineffective until January 1998. At this juncture, it consolidated itself into the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) with a mandate to carry out civic education programmes and to campaign for wide-ranging constitutional reforms, with Western support. At the time of its inception, the NCA marked a formidable consolidation of diverse civic organisations into a formal alliance against the ruling party. It furthermore linked all of these to the organisational powers of the ZCTU.

Hereafter, the removal of ZANU(PF) entailed the double project of constitutional reform and formation of a political party. One turbulent year after the founding of the NCA, it was the view of the opposition that restoring the rule of law and removing the ruling party were urgent and parallel projects. Apart from the repeated use of the Law and Order (Maintenance) Act, the government in January 1999 once again overstepped constitutional boundaries by giving the military the green light to arrest and torture journalists of *The Standard*, a private newspaper, after they published a story alleging that there had been a foiled military coup against the government in protest over the DRC intervention (*The Standard*, 10 January 1999). The President sought to justify the actions by labelling the private press as 'white' and 'foreign owned', 'bent on ruining national unity' (*The Herald*, 9 February 1999; see also Raftopoulos 1999). The journalists were committing 'treason' against the state, and hence, in the words of the Permanent Secretary, were 'subject to military law' (*Financial Gazette*, 28 January 1999).

In late February, the task of forming a new political party to remove ZANU(PF) gained momentum. Over 40 civic organisations, including the ZCTU, convened a National Working People's Convention to discuss the formation of a political movement. The Convention arrived at a proposal to mandate the ZCTU to spearhead the MDC, but also established that the civic organisations must return to their constituencies to consult on the proposal, receive feedback, and then reconvene a final meeting on 5 May. It was also agreed at the Convention that the MDC would not be an exclusively workers' movement but that it would also serve the interests of professionals, civic organisations, business, peasants, the informal sector, and the unemployed (*TW* 68: April/May 1999). For its own part,

the ZCTU held labour forums throughout the country, during which the proposal received wide support. The movement received resounding support among the other constituencies as well, and was finally launched in May. This however was still a 'movement', not a party. Forming the party was the next task. On 7 August, the ZCTU held an extraordinary congress at which 164 delegates from the affiliates met and voted unanimously in favour of the ZCTU's role in facilitating the transformation of the MDC into a political party.

The events of 1998/99 had transpired at such a quick pace that the reservations expressed only one year earlier by top trade unionists had been drowned out. Only scattered sceptics remained, warning against the dangers of subordinating the longer-term objectives of workers to a broad array of interests whose sole point of convergence was the finite objective of state power. An observer close to the labour movement voiced precisely such scepticism in June. 'I am alarmed', wrote Yash Tandon (1999), 'at what seems to be an emerging consensus within the ranks of the general membership and the present leadership of the ZCTU'. While acknowledging that the ZCTU had an important role to play in politics, he urged for a politics of opposition. It is only in 'oppositional mode', he argued, that the labour movement could best pursue the interests of workers, pointing to the contrary experiences in Zambia and South Africa. Tandon further warned of the organisational weaknesses at the grass roots of trade unionism in Zimbabwe, the dangers of an untrained leadership taking over the labour movement and becoming subservient to their mentors in a post-ZANU(PF) government, and the 'illusion that these "working class" ministers will be able to break with the present hold of the IMF and the World Bank over the economy when in power'.

The alarm was sounded, but the range of options available to the labour movement had narrowed. Nor was the mood in the street patient. Nor, for that matter, had the leadership articulated a class perspective founded on national sovereignty. Over the previous few years, the centre's contribution to the public debate had increasingly zeroed in on 'economic mismanagement' by ZANU(PF). 'The ZCTU has not really changed', claimed Tsvangirai at the millennium, in a telling interpretation of his own. 'It has always been social democratic in practice. The Marxism–Leninism of the '80s was rhetorical, within the political climate created by ZANU(PF)' (interview, 13 January 2000).

The party was launched at Rufaro Stadium on 11 September, with 15,000 supporters in triumphant spirit. Gibson Sibanda proceeded to relate the MDC project as the successor to previous national struggles, as the 'third *chimurenga/umvukela*', invoking even biblical imageries (*TW* 72: September/October 1999):

> Our struggle in Zimbabwe has always been a struggle for the dignity and sovereignty of the people. We, the workers and peasants have always been in the leadership of that struggle. In our first chimurenga/umvukela, workers fought against massive exploitation in the mines, farms and industry, and peasants against the expropriation of their land. The nationalist and liberation movement that led the second chimurenga/umvukela was born from and built on the struggles of workers and peasants. But after twenty years of Independence, we now have a ruling nationalist elite that has exploited this long history towards its own ends, betraying the people's struggles. Is this the country that we fought for and rejoiced in 1980? . . . For how long shall we wait for the biblical Moses?

The fact that State House was not the Promised Land continued to be demonstrated throughout the year as workers locked horns with capital. From the inception of ESAP to the millennium, real wages had collapsed by 50% (*TW* 70: July 1999), while employers continued to siphon off increases in productivity and the bulk of gross domestic income. Between 1985/90 and 1991/97, productivity had increased by 4.4%, while real average

earnings had declined by 12.5%, and the share of wages and salaries in gross domestic income had declined to 39% in 1997 from 54% in 1987. In the private sector, the lowest minimum wage (excluding domestic service) in April 1999 was a starvation wage, as low as 21% of the Poverty Datum Line (ZCTU Economics Department 1999, 6). The latest struggle, now in 1999, was being waged over the 20% cost of living adjustment demanded by workers in November 1998, after inflation soared far beyond average salary increments for the year. By mid January 1999, only half of the National Employment Councils had agreed on the 20% adjustment. By April, one-fourth of NECs were still refusing to pay, most notably in the textile, transport operating, engineering, and commercial farming sectors. In the latter, a strike was averted when GAPWUZ – the General Agricultural Plantation Workers Union of Zimbabwe – and employers agreed on a 15% adjustment (*TW* 68: April/May 1999). By the time of collective bargaining in July, inflation was hovering above 53%. Employers provoked further controversy when they sought to withdraw the 20% adjustment during bargaining. And government outdid employers when in August it announced that it would raise the salaries of government ministers by a whopping 182%. By September, a wide range of wage bargains had been struck between workers and employers, from as low as 25% by the Commercial Workers Union to 65% by the Construction and Allied Trades Workers Union, while in some sectors negotiations were still pending. Strikes continued for the remainder of the year. Hospitality industry workers took their employers to task for several days in September, demanding a 70% wage increase, while junior doctors thereafter brought the health system to a halt for several weeks, as the government refused to improve their wages and conditions.

Nonetheless, at the turn of the millennium the State House objective gained further momentum. The national situation deteriorated on account of severe foreign exchange shortages and a crippling fuel crisis, alongside frustration over constitutional reform, and all against the background of the ongoing DRC campaign. The resentment culminated in the stunning rejection of the government's own draft constitution at the February referendum, which the government had sought to win on a radical land acquisition clause, handing the ruling party its most crushing defeat in its 20 years at the helm.

This was a turning point for intra-ZANU(PF) politics, and national politics by extension. With parliamentary elections around the corner, the leadership was compelled to deepen a re-radicalisation that had been under way since 1997. Soon after the rejection of the draft constitution, war veterans and supporters embarked on a series of mass land occupations of white commercial farms. Leading members of government expressed their unequivocal support at this juncture, not least the President himself who went further to issue threats to 'those who try to cause disunity among our people': 'death will befall them' (*Daily News*, 17 March 2000). Such threats resonated among the leadership of the ex-combatants as well, who warned of a return to war and the installation of a military government in the event of a ZANU(PF) defeat at the polls (*The Herald*, 16 March 2000). High Court orders to evict squatters were ignored by the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Police, on the grounds that squatting was now a 'political' issue. As the election period dragged on, land occupations proliferated, on as many as 900 farms. The occupations dovetailed with an electoral campaign, which saw violence rising to new levels.

It would be wrong to see the ruling party's radical turn on the land question as a mere electioneering issue, although it was prompted by its first ever defeat in the referendum. Deeper changes were under way in nationalist politics, from the rise of disaffected war veterans, to a US military assault on the DRC via proxy states, to multiplying sanctions against Zimbabwe (Moyo and Yeros 2013). Structural adjustment had proved an economic disaster for all to see: working people, in both town and country, as well as the aspiring

black bourgeoisie, had all lost out. It also proved to be a serious strategic setback, which was threatening Zimbabwe's sovereignty, as well as the advances made in the region as a whole in the post-apartheid period. However, this setback was not recognised as such by the ZCTU, which now rowed against the current *not* of neoliberalism, but its antithesis, radical nationalism.

Conclusion

It is, indeed, a tragic irony that the ZCTU became a socio-political force to be reckoned with at the same time as it adopted a highly limited 'regime change' agenda, consistent with the strategy of the West's renewed campaign of destabilisation. This was a far cry from the ZCTU of the early 1990s, for which worker control of production and national sovereignty were the basic pillars of its coveted democratic project. It lies beyond the purposes of the present study to assess the fate of the labour centre in the 2000s; research on this more recent period is now beginning to emerge. By way of conclusion, and with a view to take the research agenda forward, two brief points will suffice.

First, it is necessary to acknowledge properly the organisational and ideological character of the ZCTU in the 1990s, as a first step towards identifying 'what is to be done' under the new conditions. There is still a tendency to dilute the deep qualitative changes that the labour centre underwent and the extent of its absorption and instrumentalisation by the 'regime change' agenda of the West. More recently, for example, Raftopoulos (2010, 708) has acknowledged that '[t]he discourse of human rights so effectively deployed by the civic movement since the 1990s has also had an ambiguous effect on the politics of democratic struggle in Zimbabwe.' One the one hand, he continues, it has expanded the debate on democratic participation; on the other, it has diverted attention from political economy issues. But unless we fully understand what the transition from one to the other entails in terms of organisation, political programme, and alliances, such a call will amount to no more than a resurrection of the voluntarism evinced by the ZCTU in the early 1990s.

Second, in matters of political economy, it is necessary to face up to the social structure of Zimbabwe, and especially its new agrarian structure. No trade unionism will be worth its name, unless it takes this seriously. In this respect, it is not sufficient to decry 'the rapid informalisation of labour' (Raftopoulos 2010, 708), as if this is a new phenomenon; or lament the erosion of the 'structural basis for labour and opposition mobilisation', as if mobilisation is only possible in the formal sector. This is exactly the misconception propagated by the ZCTU in the 1990s, only to be outflanked by a new radical social force based in the countryside.

Note on contributor

Paris Yeros is Adjunct Professor of International Economics at the Federal University of ABC, São Paulo, Brazil. He is Research Associate of the African Institute of Agrarian Studies, Harare, Zimbabwe, and a member of the Editorial Board of *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy.*

Notes

1. The evolution of the ZCTU is traced largely through *The Worker*, the official monthly newspaper of the labour centre. Citations to the newspaper are denoted by *TW*, followed by the issue number, month and year (e.g., *TW* 1: January 1987).
2. The Zimbabwean case study was carried out by the Economics Department of the ZCTU; see Kanyenze (2000).

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Rescuing African bodies: celebrities, consumerism and neoliberal humanitarianism

Patricia Daley*

School of Geography and the Environment, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

This article examines the role of Western celebrities as part of new networks in the increasing commodification of humanitarianism in Africa. It explores the relationship between celebrities as neoliberal subjectivities and their shaping of ethical consumerism and humanitarian interventions. Using various case studies (Product RED, 50 Cent's SK drink, Save Darfur Campaign [United to End Genocide], Kony2012, Raise Hope for the Congo and the Eastern Congo Initiative), the article considers how celebrities frame humanitarian crises for public consumption, their link to accumulation by dispossession, and their impact on African agency and on international solidarity against corporate exploitation.

Keywords: celebrities; humanitarianism; Kony2012; commodification; consumerism

[Secourir des corps africains: stars, consumérisme et humanitaire néolibéral.] Cet article examine le rôle de stars occidentales membres de nouveaux réseaux dans la marchandisation croissante de l'humanitaire en Afrique. Il explore les relations entre les stars, êtres néolibéraux, et leur façon d'élaborer un consumérisme éthique et des interventions humanitaires. Utilisant diverses études de cas (Produit rouge Product RED, boisson SK de 50 Cent, campagne pour sauver le Darfour [unis pour mettre fin au génocide], Kony2012, Espoir pour le Congo et l'Initiative pour l'est du Congo), l'article étudie comment les stars formatent les crises humanitaires pour la consommation du public, leur lien à l'accumulation par dépossession et leur impact sur l'agence africaine et la solidarité internationale contre l'exploitation commerciale.

Mots-clés: stars ; humanitaire ; Kony2012 ; marchandisation ; consumérisme

Introduction

In April 2012, Africa was the continent with the most humanitarian interventions; 30 out of 54 African countries were sites of disasters ranging from cholera, flooding to drought.[1] Globally, humanitarian interventions have grown rapidly since the 1990s and so have humanitarian agencies, which are predominantly Western in origin. Some US$44.5 billion was spent on humanitarian aid between 2007 and 2009, and an estimated 500,000 people are employed in this growth industry (Harvey *et al.* 2009; GHA 2010). Humanitarian aid comes increasingly from Western governments, who are providing the bulk of the budgets, supplemented by donations from citizens. In effect, humanitarianism has become corporatised and professionalised at the same time that neoliberal economic restructuring

*Email: patricia.daley@geog.ox.ac.uk

has reduced state-provisioned social welfare, so much so that Duffield (2010, 66) sees the contemporary humanitarian system functioning 'as an international insurance of last resort for the world uninsured'. Western humanitarian actors have become increasingly diversified, ranging from government agencies, Western militaries, multilateral organisations, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), wealthy philanthropic individuals, ordinary citizens, and celebrities.

Celebrities are people with a high public profile in a range of fields, though the term is used mainly to refer to those in the entertainment industry. Since the mid 1980s, celebrity advocacy has become more widespread; through its association with the technological developments in the social media, it is helping to reshape public engagement with politics in Western societies (Meyer 1995; Bang 2005; Furedi 2010; Marsh, 't Hart and Tindall 2010). The literature on social movements concerned with international development points to the growing use of celebrity advocacy in anti-poverty campaigns (Cottle and Nolan 2007; Goodman 2008; Richey and Ponte 2008; West 2008; Harrison 2010; Huliaras and Tzifakis 2010; Biccum 2011; Ponte and Richey 2011). Multilateral organisations, such as the United Nations agencies (Children's Fund [UNICEF], High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] and World Health Organization [WHO]) and INGOs, such as OXFAM and Action Aid, have sought celebrity endorsements ostensibly to raise public awareness and profile their work in what is increasingly a crowded market place (Samman, Mc Auliffe, and MacLachlan 2009). Such a strategy may be beneficial, as research on the use of celebrities in corporate brand promotion indicates that there is often a positive return to companies, especially if the celebrity is perceived favourably and is exclusive to one product (Tripp, Jensen, and Carlson 1994).

Western celebrities, addressing issues of social inequality and poverty, tend to direct their attention to the non-Western other. Ninety celebrities on the *Look to the Stars.com* site have charitable links with Africa. The continent is the focus of much of celebrity humanitarian advocacy, primarily because of its well-established inferior position in global imaginative geographies – at the bottom of the development hierarchy and outside of modernity, coupled with a colonial legacy that constructs it as the 'White Man's burden' (Abdul-Raheem 1996; Brockington 2008; Cole 2012). Critics of the celebritisation of poverty highlight celebrity activism's role in perpetuating gendered and racial ideologies (Richey and Ponte 2008; Balaji 2011; Repo and Yrjola 2011). Humanitarian action tends to reinforce hegemonic discourse by tapping into preconceived images and stereotypes of people and (distant) places. Since the 1980s, Africa has also become the scene of neoliberal interventions and practices aimed at bringing the continent within the sphere of globalisation through the extension of market forces. This has been spearheaded by a range of actors: international financial institutions, private sector entrepreneurs and INGOs. In this context the role of Western celebrities cannot be trivialised due to their increasing influence on public opinion and access to global power brokers. Critics have begun to shift their analyses from scepticism towards the effectiveness of celebrity advocacy and its apparent superficiality to consider its increasing significance in international relations (Huliaras and Tzifakis 2010) and its role in shaping Western civil society's 'political' activism and acceptance of neoliberal imperialism (Biccum 2011).

This article examines the role of celebrities in the increasing commodification of humanitarianism and the networks that are formed to facilitate this process. It demonstrates that celebrities, as branded commodities – in essence neoliberal subjectivities – and their advocacy, serve to enhance consumer capitalism – thus helping firstly to commodify humanitarianism as a largely privatised concern that sits easily with neoliberal imperialism and secondly to divert attention from the structural inequalities associated with such forms of

domination. Celebrity activism involves new configurations of networked relationship that obfuscate the workings of neoliberal imperialism; thus reinforcing global power hierarchies in which hegemonic powers are depicted as humanitarian 'saviours' whilst enforcing 'accumulation by dispossession' in the periphery (Harvey 2003). Celebrities, it is argued, play an intermediary role, making market relations and its effects acceptable at the core through consumption and at the periphery via humanitarian intervention. Central to this process is how humanitarian crises are framed by these Western cultural elites – often in opposition to African agency and progressive social movements. Crises are decontextualised and non-consumerist and radical political agenda are represented as flawed. Celebrities act to steer global mass political engagement away from those that are antagonistic towards capital, therefore, undermining the potential for global cohesion around emancipatory politics. In spite of attempts to render African voices silent, the social media has opened up spaces for them on the world stage. Progressive forces in the West now need to challenge these non-transformative celebritised ways of building international solidarity among global civil society.

Evidence for this article comes mainly from the publicity material produced by celebrities themselves, the consumer goods and the humanitarian agencies they endorse, from media reports, especially websites such as *Look to the Stars.org: the World of Celebrity Giving*, and newspapers. *Looktothestars.org* identified 90, mainly A-list celebrities who are involved in philanthropic activities in Africa. For the purposes of this article, I have selected a sample of initiatives by high-profile celebrities: Paul David 'Bono' Hewson (Product Red™), George Clooney (Save Darfur Campaign/United to End Genocide and the Satellite Sentinel Project), Raise Hope for the Congo, 50 Cent (Street King high-energy drink), and Ben Affleck (Eastern Congo Initiative) and Invisible Children (Kony2012).

The article begins with brief reviews of the nature of celebrity culture under neoliberalism and of the recent literature that tries to interrogate the role of celebrity in development and humanitarian campaigns. Drawing on the case studies, the discussion then focuses on the ways in which celebrity advocacy, with respect to Africa, involves the commodification of humanitarianism. Emphasis is given to the marketing of commodities to appeal to 'caring' consumers, the new networks that facilitate this process, and the link between celebrity-promoted humanitarian intervention and neoliberal imperialism. The latter is then shown to be masked by the depoliticisation of humanitarian crises by celebrity experts, the racialised discourses underpinning their actions, and the performative nature of 'clickism' – social media mobilisation. The conclusion explores the potentiality for African agency to engage with global civil society in the context of new media.

Celebrity subjectivity under neoliberalism and the humanitarian turn

This study of the relationship between celebrity advocacy and humanitarianism reflects three aspects of contemporary neoliberalism. First, neoliberalism seeks to commodify all that has never before been treated as commodities (Harvey 2005). Second, neoliberal globalisation forces open markets in spaces where they do not exist or are underdeveloped. Here, Harvey's (2003) concept of 'accumulation by dispossession' is used to explain the continued practices of primitive accumulation by hegemonic capitalist powers in spaces in the periphery. Third, with market hegemony, governance becomes less state-centred, more networked, and involving a range of actors, including celebrity experts (Bang 2005; Marsh, 't Hart and Tindall 2010).

Of the growing multidisciplinary literature on the rise of celebrity culture in late modern societies, two sets are of importance here: that which focuses on the celebrity as commodified individuality or 'personality brand' and his/her wider involvement in political culture (Goldman 1987; Graeber 2001; Marshall 2006; Bauman 2007; Jorgensen and Bang 2007; Zizek 2008; Furedi 2010; Marsh, 't Hart and Tindall 2010); and that on the relationship between celebrity advocacy and the growth of 'ethical'/'development' consumption (Cottle and Nolan 2007; Richey and Ponte 2008; Goodman 2008; West 2008; Harrison 2010; Biccum 2011; Ponte and Richey 2011).

Contemporary celebrity status represents the commodification of the individual, of identity and personality. Marshall (2006, 635) sees individuality as 'one of the mainstays of consumer capitalism, where through consumption, we as individuals can have a serial frisson of transformation and change and the sensation of choice and possibility even when we do not act on that possibility'. As the aura and charisma embodied by celebrities provide the same sensation to their followers as shopping, this enables Biccum (2011, 1340) to argue that celebrities are 'embodied commodities of affective labour'. In other words, celebrities are branded personalities that are professionally marketed – increasingly by the celebrities themselves – with their worth determined by their ability to garner loyalty through affectivity. In effect, celebrities represent another type of Karl Marx's 'commodity fetishism' under late capitalism. Goldman (1987) labels them 'commodities signs' – the joining together of a material entity with a signifier; in essence, by associating particular emotions with the consumption of goods, celebrities do the 'interpretative labour' for consumer capitalism (Graeber 2001). As Marshall (2006, 635–636) argues, 'celebrities embody the power of the audience members . . . their economic clout – is represented by the celebrities and their capacity to deliver the audience for the industry.' Therefore, corporations, politicians and charitable organisations utilise celebrity power to tap into the 'affective investment' of an audience.

Much of the recent literature draws attention to the burgeoning scale of celebrity involvement in wider social life and the consequent blurring of the boundaries between politics and popular culture (Furedi 2010; Marsh, 't Hart and Tindall 2010). Celebrities are said to have democratic currency because of their audience appeal, embodying the personification of Max Weber's 'charismatic individual' – as an alternative source of authority within society. Furedi (2010) argues that politics is being celebritised at the same time that formal authority is being stigmatised; political authority is being 'outsourced' to celebrities, whilst politicians are captivated by the aura of celebrity. Jorgensen and Bang (2007) links the rise of celebrities to the hollowing out of the state under neoliberalism and envisages them as part of a discursive network of governance composed of elites incorporated by the state to shape and promote its agenda among a public disinterested in conventional politics.

Celebrity advocacy in the field of development, anti-poverty campaigns and humanitarianism can be interpreted as strategic in that it helps to shape public opinion on the causes and solutions. Biccum (2011), in her examination of the role of celebrity advocacy in the development education of UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Australian government's Agency for International Development (AusAid), argues that these governments use celebrity-linked INGO projects to mobilise youth in the production of new global citizens who proselytise and support neoliberal globalisation as the answer to social injustice in distant lands. This, she notes, is in sharp contrast to the form of citizenry mobilised as part of the anti-globalisation [and Occupy] movements that emerged out of disillusionment with free-market approaches to development and poverty.

Celebrities can serve to depoliticise globalisation and its humanitarian consequences by presenting their moral concern for humanity as being outside and above conventional politics (Zizek 2008). Many, such as Bono, the singer with the Irish rock band U2, forge public relations with both conservative and liberal political parties. As Zizek (2008) contends, these new breed of philanthropists have no time for the old right and especially the old left. For Bono (2010), 'It's no secret that lefty campaigners can be cranky about business elites. And the suspicion is mutual. Worldwide. Civil society as a rule sees business as, well, a little uncivil. Business tends to see activists as, well, a little too active.' Such celebrities believe that they are equipped to step back from politics, talk straight to big business and to the leaders of G8 countries, and solve global, distant problems through consumption and aid.

Under neoliberalism, development and humanitarian aid offers opportunities for 'accumulation by dispossession' through the increasing privatisation of service delivery. Contracts for humanitarian assistance and poverty alleviation are competitively tendered among a diverse range of potential 'carers'. Consequently, humanitarian agencies, multinational corporations and celebrities are operating in a crowded marketplace and have recognised that joint collaborations may produce mutual benefits (Cottle and Nolan 2007; Ponte and Richey 2011).

Some celebrities, while chastising Western governments for doing little to alleviate humanitarian disasters in the global South, adopt neoliberal solutions that involve shifting part of the responsibility to Western individuals as consumers. Celebrities link development with 'ethical' consumption, where the process of purchasing everyday goods becomes not just consumption per se, but an act that is enveloped in ethical or moral values that add to the empty and temporary gratification of consumption (Goodman 2008). In a consumer society, Bauman (2007) argues, happiness is only temporary, as consumption depends on the perpetual creation of new needs. Justification of such needs, amidst images of global suffering and poverty, requires some compensatory activities. Ponte and Richey (2011, 2073) term this sort of action 'causumerism' and argue that consuming ethically has shifted from addressing the problems associated with the production and marketing side of commodities to 'solving their manifestations' via a cause – often fronted by celebrities. By using their wealth and influence in the West to sell branded goods that raise money, celebrities help to reconstruct humanitarianism as an economic enterprise and consumption as an 'ethical' act. For this new breed of celebrity philanthropists, according to Zizek (2008, 15), the 'market and social responsibility are not opposites; they can be reunited for mutual benefit'. Therefore, humanitarian crises resulting from 'accumulation by dispossession' are treated in isolation from their economic and geopolitical roots.

Celebrities look for their own causes and are recruited by development agencies, especially UN agencies and INGOs. High-profile examples include the actor Angelina Jolie's role as UNICEF ambassador and her appointment in April 2012 as a Special Envoy of UNHCR, and the singer Beyoncé's cooptation for World Humanitarian Day 2012. The motives behind such advocacy are mixed; some celebrities use their high-profile status to promote their personal politics, while for others the cause is a public relations strategy to add an ethical component to enhance their market value. The actor George Clooney explains how he became involved in the Save Darfur Campaign: 'The one thing I learned from Bono (U2's lead singer) early on was you have to pick [a cause] you specifically want to work on, and you have to really engage' (quoted in Horn 2012). According to Colapinto (2012), a celebrity with a negative profile might be told by his/her marketing agency that 'we need you to start doing things that make you look sacrificing and compassionate.' Central to this article's analysis of celebrity advocacy is

an understanding of (i) the increasing commodification of compassion through celebrity branding – a process that involves collaboration with a network of actors, (ii) how celebrity 'experts' frame humanitarian crises in Africa for a global audience who are enthralled to their aura, and (iii) the consequences of such framings for the expansion of neoliberal imperialism and global political activism.

Buying to save lives: promoting consumption as a humanitarian act

'This is a new way of doing business' (Chief Executive Officer, Pure Growth Partners, 2011, quoted in Ramos 2011)

Celebrity commodification of humanitarian involves the use of themselves as 'brands' to enter the market with consumer goods that they represent as 'ethical'. Celebrities also join forces with established global brands, such as Coca-Cola and Nike, to produce and market the celebrity-branded products, and with aid agencies to gain moral legitimacy. This linking of celebrity with 'ethical consumption' has created new business opportunities in the global North, whilst representing old business practices in the periphery as socially responsible and humanitarian.

Three examples illustrate this perspective: First, Product (RED)^TM is the brand name of a business venture that links celebrities, social responsibility (in this case the fight against diseases) and multinational corporations. Several studies have already examined how the concept, created by Bono in 2003, uses the celebrity 'cool' to market products, straddling the line between trade, ethical consumption and aid (Richey and Ponte 2008; Ponte and Richey 2011). RED teams up with corporate brands such as Armani, Starbucks, Apple, Dell, Nike, Gap, Converse and Dr Dre to produce a red version of their products with the RED label attached. Socially responsible 'ethical' consumers can distinguish themselves by opting for red-coloured American Express cards, MP3 players, vodka, trainers and earphones.

RED also helps to shift the nature in which poverty is represented by celebrities by making poverty sexy and technical, rather than structural (Cameron and Haanstra 2008). To make their products appealing to the discerning consumer, RED, as Richey and Ponte (2008, 720) note, eschews conventional 'humanitarian imagery of death and suffering', by presenting its products and promoters with the 'same glitz, glam and fashion-magazine gloss as any luxury goods, [demonstrating that] the desire to shop and to see the world a better place – are not always contradictory'. RED appeals to a young and trendy audience by linking up with brands that are popular among fashion-conscious trend-setters.

A percentage of the profits from the sale of RED products (US\$190 million by August 2012) go to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in Africa. The Global Fund is a private–public organisation set up in 2002 to tackle HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, with a mission to link disease control to corporate investments. It is a conglomerate of international financial institutions, governments and corporations that disburses grants to a range of actors: public, private, and INGOs. In its operations, the Global Fund justifies the absence of local NGOs as partners as being due to 'the lack of capacity and experience'.[2] This response is typical of the new type of networked governance. In these new forms of collaborations, the same development institutions, such as the World Bank and DFID, occupy primary positions in the governance structure, replicating the same power differentials of other development arrangements. The Global Fund claims that civil society activism plays 'a central role in resource mobilisation, advocacy and policy dialogue'. However,

such activism seems largely to be driven by Bono, who has become the celebrity face of the Fund (Ponte and Richey 2011).

The Global Fund is directly linked to corporations associated with accumulation by dispossession. Grants from the Fund support private sector enterprises that appear to be extending a bio-political control over their local labour force. One such project is the grant of US$154 million to extend Anglo-Gold Ashanti's (the gold mining multinational corporation) malaria control programme in Obuasi district, Ghana, to 40 other districts countrywide. The corporation's programme was designed to reduce employees' absenteeism due to sick leave and involved spraying insecticides in all public and private structures in the area (The Global Fund 2012a). A similar strategy in Liberia is used by the Liberia Agricultural Company (rubber plantations) and Firestone Mining to provide antiretroviral treatments to its workers and their families (The Global Fund 2012b). Even though these interventions may have provided much needed relief for residents, they, nevertheless, are presented by these multinationals as fulfilling corporate social responsibility (CSR) through direct action against poverty. However, the resources used are derived partly from RED's ethical consumers, rather than wholly from own surpluses, which are likely to be enlarged by the interventions.

The second example is of the African American rapper, Curtis '50 Cent' Jackson, who adopted a similar networking strategy to launch *Street King* (SK) – a high-caffeine, vitamin-enriched water drink – aimed at the urban market. Here, the charity of choice is the World Food Programme (WFP), dubbed by 50 Cent as 'the number 1 humanitarian agency'. According to the promotional material in September 2011, one shot of SK equals one meal for a starving African. At the launch, 50 cent tweeted that he 'wants to impact people's lives more... I created a new goal for myself, I want to feed 1 billion people in Africa over the next five year'.[3] Here, the facts became confused. Given that Africa's estimated population in 2011 was 811 million, one can only assume that 50 Cent was accurately predicting an increase of 189 million in Africa's population over the next five years; moreover, everyone on the continent will be suffering from hunger! 50 Cent later changed his goal to providing 1 billion meals. By January 2012, 50 Cent could claim to have provided 3.5 million meals through the WFP. Evidence for this claim is unclear, and probably based on an estimate of how many SK cans had been sold.

A few lucky SK consumers are rewarded with access to 50 Cent and the opportunity to share in his fame. Fans of SK can sign up on Facebook or on Twitter and, using the codes from the drinks container, collect points that they can redeem for 'exclusive offers', which include swag, celebrity-branded earphones, tickets to, and VIP experiences at, 50 Cent's concerts. Much like Bono, 50 Cent chastises global corporate greed, yet forms an alliance with the multinational corporation Pepsi-Cola for SK's marketing and distribution. As with RED products, SK forms part of the trend in consumer goods being repackaged as humanitarian goods. Celebrities have helped to spearhead this form of social finance – investment that delivers social good. However, such branding helps to extend the market into areas hitherto considered to be largely the consequence of market failure, state ineptitude and unequal global power relations.

The third example illustrates the emergence of a new business model based on finding suitable ethical investments for celebrities. This has resulted in the establishment of several commercial enterprises trading in such activities; one of these is a New York-based start-up company, Pure Growth Partners, which was established in 2011 specifically to help celebrities produce and market products that have an ethical component, and which describes itself as having a 'revolutionary mission to find and create sustainable brands using a "one to one" give-back component to donate directly to the world's most effective charities'

(Ramos 2011). Its first client was 50 Cent and his SK drink. Another company is the California-based Global Philanthropy Group, set up in 2006 to manage the philanthropic activities of the very rich (Colapinto 2012). The company markets itself as socially responsible by claiming that it is founded: 'in the spirit of traditional philanthropy, for the love of humanity, [it] was formed to improve the world' (http://www.globalphilanthropy.com/, 2012).

Framing the crises: power and authority in celebrity advocacy

Celebrities frame humanitarian crises in two principal ways, by decontextualising them from the causes; allowing for the forging of seemingly politically neutral networks aimed at resolving the crises, and by using their charismatic status as a guarantee of expertise, much to the detriment of local agency and alternative contextual readings.

In terms of the framing, the apolitical presentation of humanitarian crises, in order to appeal to a wider audience, serves to strip them of their historical and political context. Goodman (2008, 109) suggests that 'wider structural and social problems are forcefully refracted through the neoliberal lens of the "heroic individual" taking responsibility off the institutions, states and the economic structures of inequality more generally.' The argument here, however, is that such individuals appeal for action to the benevolence of the hegemonic states, of which they are a part, whilst criminalising and by-passing those in the periphery.

The case of celebrity advocacy on the conflicts in Sudan illustrates this point. The actor George Clooney has styled himself as the unofficial spokesperson for the victims of the Omar al-Bashir regime in Sudan after taking the leading role in the Save Darfur Coalition (SDC), a US-based group campaigning against genocide in the Darfur region. SDC, which started out as a student- and faith-based initiative in 2004, led to the setting up of the 'Not on our Watch' project supported by celebrities Don Cheadle, George Clooney, Matt Damon and Brad Pitt. These celebrities aim to bring media attention to areas of the world suffering from violations of international human rights and mass atrocities that are happening outside of the limelight. However, SDC, part of the NGO United to End Genocide since 2011, is selective in its geographical focus on states that are seen as problematic by the USA.

Mamdani (2009), in an analysis of the campaign of the SDC, has already highlighted the decontextualising practices of the movement. He contends that the SDC ignored the complex history of Sudan, simplified the issues to racial and religious binaries of Arab Muslim perpetrators and black Christian victims. Furthermore, he claims that through the media and an advertising blitz, SDC reported fictional mortality data to support its claim of genocide in Darfur and its call for military intervention.

Mamdani (2009, 62) suggests that SDC's campaign, following so closely after 9/11, presented Darfur as a moral rather than a political issue. Comparing Americans' response to Iraq at the same time, he argues that 'those who march for to Save Darfur were responding as humans with a moral obligation, not as citizens.' He proposes that Darfur and the Congo are easier for Americans to campaign for – 'an act not of responsibility but of philanthropy – of largeness of heart . . . cause(s) about which they can feel good'. Iraq and Afghanistan on the other hand '[make] some Americans feel responsible and guilty [and force some] to come to terms with the limits of American power' (p. 62).

Certainly, the evidence since Mamdani's study supports his thesis; tackling crimes against humanity in distant Africa is perhaps more politically palatable for US citizens. American discourse on race in Darfur and Sudan positions Americans as 'powerful saviours' located at the top of the hierarchy of humanity. As the contours of the conflict

in Darfur became less simplistic to the public, the celebrity campaigners, perhaps not wanting to lose their investment in Sudan, extended their brief to policing the Sudanese state more widely and supporting the independence of 'Christian' South Sudan. After which SDC turned to the monitoring of 'Islamic' Sudan using spying equipment and regular satellite imagery.

Clooney took on the role of the 'heroic individual' through his Satellite Sentinel Project (SSP)[4] (a monitoring device tracking Sudanese troop movements and military activities). SSP has been heavily criticised by its supposed beneficiaries, the South Sudanese, who see it as spying that undermines the sovereignty of the state. In response, Clooney justifies his project as protecting South Sudanese from genocidal violence perpetrated from the Islamic Sudan to the north. He declares himself to be 'the anti-genocide paparazzi . . . We want them [the Sudanese government] to enjoy the level of celebrity attention that I usually get. If you know your actions are going to be covered, you tend to behave much differently than when you operate in a vacuum' (quoted in Benjamin 2010).

Critics of SSP, such as Samar Al-Bulushi (2011), highlight the fact that the company that is collecting the data on behalf of SSP supplies data to the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) – a force set up by the USA to protect its interests in Africa through further militarisation, in spite of opposition by African people (Keenan 2008). As Clooney's partners are all US-based, Al-Bulushi asks: where is South Sudan in this power equation; what does independence mean for South Sudan? For him the exclusion of Sudanese actors and thinkers from the campaign signals 'a lack of interest in the internal political processes that are crucial for strengthening democratic citizenship' (Al-Bulushi: npn). SSP may not have factored in the ability of the South Sudanese to act independently and unilaterally drop its victim status by launching a military attack against Sudan in April 2012.

In March 2012, the Nuba Mountains of south-eastern Sudan became the new 'celebrity hotspot', as Clooney switched the geographical location of his mission in Sudan. Clearly, the Sudanese state was bombing the region, but the complex nature of the war in the Nuba mountains and its links with the South Sudanese conflict cannot be neatly encapsulated by the Muslim/Christian war portrayed by Clooney and SSP. Sudanese activists and opponents of the al-Bashir regime in Sudan accused Clooney of decontextualising the crisis from its history and taking ownership of their struggles for justice and peace (Al-Bulushi 2011; Malik 2012). These civil society groups find themselves marginalised in the global discussion of how to transform the authoritarian Sudanese state (Sudan Change Now 2012).

Unchallengeable experts

For celebrities framing of crisis to be authoritative, and in order not to jeopardise their core brand, they have to demonstrate a certain level of expertise. Clooney states reportedly: 'you have to be more knowledgeable than most reporters would be on it, [for] when they try to make you sound stupid because you're just an actor' (Horn 2012). Expertise is achievable in two principal ways – visits to Africa and association with a known 'expert'.

According to Goodman (2008, 109) being 'placed' in place is designed to provide the celebrity with first-hand, on-the-ground experience with respect to 'their cause', in order to develop the celebrity's 'convince-ability'. Credibility demands a fleeting visit to Africa, in the company of Western journalists and video cameras. Clooney established his credentials on Darfur by visiting Chad and South Sudan, where he met Darfuri. He explained the basis of his authority with, 'well, I can name all the rebel leaders, and I have [their numbers] on my phone' (quoted in Horn 2012). A visit to the Nuba Mountains in March 2012 and the production of a short film in which Clooney played the starring role strengthened his

credibility as a serious and knowledgeable activist. Despite the possibility of real time reporting from Africa, celebrities return with films – similar to the sketches, photographs and trophies of earlier explorers. Africa's image as a 'remote' and 'dangerous terrain' is utilised to enhance the intrepidness, determination, courage, and moral worth of the celebrity. Imaginative, geographically distant and racial privileging, along with charismatic status, gives credence to whatever narratives they present on their return.

Authority is also gained through alignment with a humanitarian agency or a recognised Western expert. If the celebrities are not attached to an established NGO and are developing their own personal campaign, they link up with a known Western expert, 'a human rights or development activist' (John Prendergast in the case of Clooney and Jeffrey Sachs for Bono). These experts move seamlessly between government and the non-governmental world. Prendergast was Director for African Affairs at the National Security Council and special adviser to the State Department (1996–2000) under the Bill Clinton presidency. He is also a co-founder of the Enough Project which campaigns against genocide and war crimes. Jeffrey Sachs is a former architect of the 'shock therapy' that brought market fundamentalism to eastern Europe at the end of Communism, and now a reformed free-market economist and adviser to the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals. These experts are celebrities in their own right, but give domestic and international legitimacy to the entertainers' own projects – Prendergast to Clooney's 'Not on our Watch' project and the 'Satellite Sentinel Project' and Sach to Bono's DATA (Debt, AIDS, Trade, Africa) and ONE campaigns.[5]

The aura of celebrity ensures that Clooney and Bono can be called to address the UN Security Council, the US Senate and meet business elites at the World Economic Forum. After his brief visit to Chad and Southern Sudan in 2006, Clooney was asked to address the UN Security Council on the problems in Darfur. In March 2012, following his visit to the Nuba Mountains, Clooney was invited to speak to the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee and was praised by Democrat Senator John Kerry as demonstrating the best of 'citizens' activism' (Harris 2012). Clooney's wealth and influence remove him from the category of an everyday citizen, with his political power increasingly being channelled into being a consumer and limited to a 'hit', 'ping', 'tweet' or 'click' in the social media.

Celebrity, networks and hegemonic states

Celebrities, as elites of hegemonic states, can give credibility to networks that appear to be horizontal in participation, but which instead reinforce traditional hierarchies of states and peoples. Those celebrities operating in the field of humanitarianism, who demand greater intervention of hegemonic Western states, can act to promote the agenda of those states. This traditional form of imperialism is packaged as a new form of politics that is collaborative and empowering for participants. For the purposes of illustration, three recent examples, including Kony2012, Raise Hope for the Congo, and the Eastern Congo Initiative, are discussed below.

Kony2012: networked clickism and neo-imperial solutions

Kony2012 is a celebrity-supported geopolitical campaign, masquerading as humanitarian, that gained worldwide publicity in March 2012. It exemplifies further the ways in which contemporary humanitarian issues are framed for mass mobilisation with the use of the social media; the coalescence of powerful networks of actors in Western humanitarian advocacy; but also highlights the potential for affected people in Africa to challenge such representations.

Kony2012 is a 29-minute film (http://www.kony2012.com/) launched online on 5 March 2012 by the American-based NGO, Invisible Children, to raise public awareness of the abduction and brutalisation of children by the rebel Joseph Kony, leader of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Northern Uganda. Kony has been part of a rebel movement in Northern Uganda that dates back to 1986 and uses Christian fundamentalism as the rallying cry for a war against the Ugandan state. The LRA became notorious for the kidnapping of children and their use as child soldiers and 'bush wives'. Atrocities were also allegedly committed by the Ugandan military in its offences against the LRA. One strategy was to displace forcibly the population of two million into camps supported by international humanitarian agencies. Since 2004, Northern Uganda has been returning to normality. On the request of the Ugandan government, Kony was the first African indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC), in 2005, for war crimes. Since 2006 the LRA has shifted its base to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and more recently to the Central African Republic.

The NGO, Invisible Children, established in 2004, represents itself as a charitable organisation that seeks to 'inspire young people' to campaign to end the LRA's war in East and Central Africa after the founder, Jason Russell, visited Uganda as a child missionary and saw the devastation that the war had exacted on the people. Russell's links with Christian fundamentalist groups, such as the Christian Broadcasting Network and Liberty University, challenge the secular, all-inclusive image that he presents in Kony2012.

However, Russell's background has encouraged the interpretation of Kony2012 as a disinformation and counter-radicalisation strategy by the American right and the military.[6] Russell graduated from the US-military-funded Institute of Creative Technologies of the University of Southern California, where story-telling and common sense reasoning using social media are developed as key counterinsurgency strategies. Bratich (2012) unpacks the use of the social media and the video format typified by Kony2012 as part of a US government strategy focused on 'domestic dissenters, such as the Occupy Movement'. He argues:

> Youth are dissuaded from seeing in their own neighborhoods and local organisations the opportunity to get involved in street activism and direct action in which they also shape the goals. Instead, they are routed into a heavily pre-organized package, complete with easy heroes/enemies and a game-like scenario (Bratich 2012, npn).

Kony2012 was a social media success story, having attracted over 100 million viewers across the globe within a month of its launch. The film promoted four forms of activism for the ordinary socially conscious person: consumption, donation, invisible night protest and clickism. Young people were entreated to buy a bracelet and a US$30 action kit and to make monetary donations for the charity's reconstruction work in Uganda. The action kit included branded materials, such as posters, to be used in a coordinated mass publicity in several global cities on 20 April 2012, as part of the charity's 'cover the night' campaign. This form of protest, unlike conventional methods such as street marches, is silent, anonymous and non-confrontational.

Clickism forms part of the participatory activism that is characteristic of the social media, based on 'performative action that [does] not require solidarity … and [can be] devoid of any critical or radical urge' (Tatarchevsky 2011, 309–310). Activists can share their concern with others and sign petitions. With one click of the computer mouse on Invisible Children's webpage its supporters can send messages directly to 21 celebrities, comprising entertainers and dot-com billionaires and 13 policy-makers (a mix of Republicans,

Democrats and the UN Secretary General). These are depicted as change agents, in that 'they have the authority to see Kony captured'. For some people the 'click' enables them to pass on responsibilities and marks the end of their activism. In the case of Kony2012, after the initial surge in viewers, the participation rate started to decline to the extent that the 'cover the night' campaign was not as widespread or successful as the organisers anticipated.

The Kony2012 campaign was structured on the creating of branded personalities and strategic use of celebrity status. The film does this in three ways: it draws on existing high-profile celebrities, it seeks to give celebrity status to the key interlocutors in the film, the charity's founder, his young son and the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, and it seeks to give international notoriety (a form of celebrity status) to Joseph Kony.

First, using A-list celebrities, both as endorsers and opinion makers, is central to the film's mobilisation among the young. Endorsed by high-profile celebrities, such as George Clooney and Oprah Winfrey, the film gained publicity and legitimacy. Second, fame is seen as conveying authority and legitimacy – reinforcing the cult of the individual. By centring the film on himself and his five-year-old son as authoritative voices, Russell also uses the film for self-promotion, and his eventual psychological breakdown demonstrates the limitations of too much fame. The then Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) Louis Moreno-Campo – who endorsed the charity's actions and appeared in the film – seemed also to have been drawn to the charisma of the celebrity. Moreno-Campo was reported as having attended a Hollywood dinner in his honour accompanied by Invisible Children's Director of Ideology, Jedidiah Jenkins, at which Moreno-Campo encouraged the celebrity guests to support video activism (Slosson 2012). The irony is that Kony2012 sought to mobilise American children to put pressure on the US government to bring a war criminal to an international court that the US does not recognise. Prior to Kony2012, the ICC and Moreno-Campo were criticised for being biased in only indicting those leaders and countries that are not friends of America, and in the case of Uganda, for not indicting the government for the commitment of war crimes in its military campaign against Joseph Kony (Mamdani 2012).

Third, Joseph Kony was accorded celebritised notoriety: branded, using 'wild west' mythology, as 'a bad guy' who 'good guys' can stop militarily. George Clooney reinforced this by exalting the 'viral' effect of the film in the social media when he stated: 'there's 100 million people who know the name of a war criminal now that didn't necessarily before, and that's a good thing' (quoted in Cassata 2012). The narrative of the film assumes that because the producers and America's youth had no knowledge of Kony's 26 years of infamy in Africa, he was 'invisible', and that making him and his atrocities famous will ensure his capture and return Northern Uganda to normality.

Invisible Children's solution involves the extension of America's military intervention in the search for Kony. Moreno-Campo reiterates this with: 'the only way to stop Kony is to arrest him and solve all the problems.' Advocating a naïve military solution to a complex regional problem reinforces the view among some critics that Kony2012 is a disinformation tool.[7] The film simplified and misrepresented the problem, since the war in Northern Uganda had ceased (Atkinson *et al*. 2012; Mengestu 2012). It also omitted that, in 2008, the USA had already sent 17 advisers from its African Command to help Uganda in its search for Kony and that an African Union force had found military intervention the least effective means of ending the campaign of the LRA. Invisible Children's pressure may have provided a cover for the US to send 100 troops to Uganda in October 2011 allegedly to support the Ugandan army in its hunt for Kony and, in March 2012, the African

Union also agreed to dispatch a 5000 strong military force, which, however, by July 2012 had not obtained the resources necessary to mount the operation.

In Kony2012 and celebrity advocacy in general, there is an uncritical representation of Western governments as forces for good in the world, if only they could be pressured to do so by public activism. The makers of Kony2012 promote what Belloni (2007, 454) sees as 'the belief that western involvement in weak states in order to protect individual and group rights arises from unquestionably altruistic motives and is the answer to addressing human suffering worldwide.' By linking ordinary young people with celebrities and politicians, Kony2012 forms a powerful network that appears credible and essentially humanitarian.

Because Kony2012 producers present Kony as 'bad' and seek to appeal to 'good' people by calling on a common humanity, the political complexity of the LRA's war was absent from the film. The film's motto ('humanity's greatest desire is to love and connect') draws on what Mamdani (2009) calls 'the largeness of heart'. Therefore, calls for Western military intervention by Invisible Children and the Save Darfur Coalition ignore the contribution of the imperial legacy, the history of Western interventions in the affected regions, and how the pursuance of a military–industrial complex in the West contributes to the militarisation of Africa, thus creating opportunities for rebels, such as Kony. Furthermore, as many have argued, a poorly conceived military approach to capture Kony is likely to cause more civilian casualties (Atkinson *et al*. 2012).

In sum, Kony2012 and other celebrity-supported advocacy, such as United to End Genocide, promote a form of global citizenship under neoliberal governance that seeks to mobilise global youth on international issues from a narrow militaristic, corporate and politically conservative perspective, whilst claiming to be transcending politics.

The Congo: celebrity advocacy and networks of power

A number of celebrity advocacy networks have formed to draw attention to the scale and intensity of violence in the DRC – a country renowned historically and in the contemporary as a site of accumulation by dispossession (Nzongola-Natalaja 2002; UNSC 2003). In 2011, George Clooney, under the umbrella of United to End Genocide, called for Western military intervention in the DRC because of the scale of estimated deaths there. Since 1998, warfare in the DRC, especially in the east, has led to widespread humanitarian crises. In response, the UN established its largest ever peace-keeping mission in the Congo. Despite the signing of peace agreements and two successive national (2006 and 2011) elections, eastern Congo continues to suffer from endemic violence. The resource-rich provinces of North and South Kivu and Maniema have been the scene of intense competition between local, regional and international interests for control of mines and farmland, including armed groups partly driven by ethnicity (Pottier 2010; Autesserre 2012). The impact on the civilian population has been so horrific that it may seem churlish to criticise advocacy aimed at alleviating their suffering.

Celebrity advocacy targeting eastern DRC has grown, many addressing sexual violence, as aid agencies – such as Raise Hope for Congo, a subsidiary of the Washington-based NGO the Enough Project – along with the Western media, have dubbed the eastern Congo 'the rape capital of the world'.[8] Celebrities, such as Javier Bardem, Robin Wright, Eve Ensler, Angelina Jolie and Ashley Judd, have visited the DRC to highlight sexual violence. As with Darfur, celebrity advocacy helps to reduce a very complex and 'multilayered' context to simple narratives focusing essentially on conflict minerals and sexual violence and proffer solutions that de-link cause and effect (Autesserre 2012).

Celebrity advocacy encourages the formation of networks promoting military intervention by the USA, as well as socially responsible behaviour among corporations operating in the Congo. As with Invisible Children, United to End Genocide links young people in churches, schools and universities with corporate investors through its Conflict Risk Network (CRN). According to its site, this is a network of 'institutional investors, financial providers and related stakeholders' (http://crn.genocideintervention.net, 2012), which acts as an intermediary for corporate sector investors in conflict-ridden countries that are seeking to act in a socially responsible fashion. CRN develops and monitors human rights policies for corporations. Through CRN, corporations can gain legitimacy for resource extraction among its consumers, often by providing to the communities in the areas in which they operate the most basic development facilities. For example, the NGO Raise Hope for Congo highlights the coming together of celebrity and mineral exploitation in the form of the black Canadian actor Jeffrey Wright, who has his own mining company (Taia Lion Resources Inc.) in Sierra Leone that is used as an example of a new socially conscious business model. This company is touted as a model for ethical mining, since it has established a foundation that amasses grants from a range of donors that are used for development projects in the company's operational areas.

Another example of the merger of celebrity advocacy with multinational corporations and the US state is the Eastern Congo Initiative (ECI) founded in 2009 by the actor Ben Affleck.

ECI targets community-based organisations in partnership with Causes.org and the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and is backed by a range of investors, notably Google, the Howard G. Buffet Foundation, Humanity United, the Bridgeway Foundation, and Cindy Hensley McCain. According to its website, ECI 'believes public and private partnerships, combined with advocacy that drives increased attention and public policy change, will create new opportunities for the people of Eastern Congo'.[9] By the nature of its partnerships, ECI cannot empower communities, but draws them into a dependent institutional relationship with an international and Western INGO, from which the Congolese people's chances of acquiring democratic accountability are even more remote than the Congolese state. ECI further proclaims that it will drive 'policy changes that will increase US government's engagement in Congo'. There is no mention of geopolitics or the US government's long history of involvement in the Congo, especially its support for the kleptocratic regime of President Mobutu Sese Seko during the Cold War (De Witte 2001).

Challenges to celebrity advocacy

What are the implications of celebrity activism for progressive social movements in Africa? Social movements challenging accumulation by dispossession in Africa tend to situate issues within the national and global political economy. This is in marked contrast to the type of celebrity activism discussed above. Since the celebrities do not seek their legitimacy from Africans they present humanitarian crises not as political but as moral problems. This occurs partly because contemporary Western celebrities' engagement with Africans draws on the colonial legacy of proselytising Christianity, Western enlightenment and assumed custodianship of humanity (Biccum 2011). Bono and Jason Russell (the founder of Invisible Children) both draw on Christian beliefs as the motives behind their interventions. They rely on their audiences' pre-existing assumptions about Africa in order to evoke superiority of knowledge and rightfulness of purpose. As Richey and Ponte (2008, 720) explain, 'Africa's place in the hierarchy of development is so well-established' that the 'construction of donor and recipient would not be challenged'. Therefore, celebrities can

position themselves as self-appointed intermediaries for Africans (Alibhai-Brown 2005; Daley 2005). In his speech to the UN Security Council in 2006, Clooney could claim, 'I am here to represent the voices of people who cannot speak for themselves.' Challenging the disempowering representation, Al-Bulushi (2011), in an open letter to Clooney and others at SSP, writes:

> The people of Sudan are invisible in the global conversation, now heavily shaped by your project. The very real political issues at stake are diluted into nebulous questions of morality and the 'responsibility to protect', in which external actors like yourself claim a moral authority to defend people who have no way of holding you accountable.

In the contemporary period, the social media has enhanced the capacity of Africans to mount a challenge to the stereotyping and the negatively skewed representation of the continent. Ugandan activists quickly dismissed Kony2012 as disinformation by claiming that the film did not reflect the situation on the ground. The Ugandan state was concerned about the implications for tourism of the negative image of the country. Rosebell Kagamire, a Ugandan journalist, was quoted as saying.

> If we hadn't [challenged the representation in Kony2012] god knows how many people would still have believed there was a war here. The media and community groups stepped in and said look what's happening on the ground. Even organisations on the ground were coming out and saying the military option is not the only option. It's good the other side was covered. (Quoted in Curtis 2012)

Invisible Children's reaction to the criticism of the absence of African voices in Kony2012 was to produce another video, *Kony2012 Part II: Beyond famous*, with more African voices – predominantly the charity's workers in Uganda. This time, in classical neoliberal parlance, the film refers to African ownership of the solutions to the problem of Kony – even though the path and strategy had already been defined by the charity – with which Africans are expected to demonstrate compliance. As Belloni (2007, 454) argues, 'rather than originating from a transnational morality, humanitarianism originates and reproduces the unequal power relationship between the West and the less developed world.' Celebrity advocacy means that social movements seeking to address wider political and economic dynamics that impoverish people, especially capitalist exploitation in Africa, can be marginalised precisely at the moment when the extension of social media to Africa offers so much opportunity for transnational alliances.

Conclusion

Contemporary humanitarianism reflects material and hegemonic geographies and is embedded in the metropolitan core/periphery relations based on developmentalism that see certain spaces – the West/global North – as superior centres of human progress, from which emanate the knowledge and ability to instruct and protect 'global others'. Humanitarianism is partly bound up with neoliberal processes of 'accumulation by dispossession' within a hierarchical network of power relations. As a result, humanitarianism can serve to undermine the potentiality of an emancipatory transformation of the state, thus embedding the neoliberal vision as morally acceptable and marginalising other forms of opposition politics.

   However honourable the intentions of celebrities, the nature of their engagement with humanitarianism suggests that they form part of an emerging discursive network of

governance of others who are seen as being outside the sphere of modernity. Celebrities are examples of neoliberal subjectivities, and their attempts to monopolise particular crises lead to humanitarianism becoming privatised around the cult of the individual, and commoditised, as protest is channelled through increased consumerism. This trend towards the commodification of 'care' offers immense opportunities for capital accumulation by celebrities and their corporate backers – using new business models.

For the Western public, consumerism, especially overconsumption, is no longer a banal, trivial pursuit; it becomes morally justifiable when presented as the first step to active protest, and delivers moral gratification. By promoting conspicuous consumption as 'ethical' and the solution to poverty and dispossession, celebrity humanitarianism helps to further entrench non-Western others in globally unequal relations.

Celebrities, like humanitarian agencies, seek to appear politically neutral in domestic politics, as they garner support and funds across the political spectrum and adopt technical and managerial solutions that often do not reflect the realities on the ground. As cultural elites and products of global capitalism, they do not challenge the inequalities of global power relations, but work with them to produce new disciplinary networks of governance of the global civil society.

Western celebrities render Africa invisible to probing by dehistoricising and depoliticising the causes they support. In this way they shift the public's attention (especially that of the young) away from exploring the roots of the crises to tackling the manifestations. Africa's problems are presented essentially as moral – as the consequences of human failure that can be technically fixed – by the Western leaders.

Humanitarian work is presented as if it is in isolation from the hegemonic discourse of race and the spatial hierarchies of power embedded in such action. In the context of Africa, celebrity and humanitarian activities are predicated on economic power and ideologies of race and place. Celebrities can demonstrate their marketability by claiming power over life and death in a 'remote' Africa, in which Africans remain as 'docile bodies'. Claims of unaccountability, false authority and racism are brushed aside as minor, because of the urgency of the need to save lives.

Finally, the ephemeral nature of celebrity status can mean that an individual celebrity's influence is likely to be superficial and short-lived, but together celebrities might have a profound impact on the ability of global social movements to mobilise against the exploitative effects of global capitalism and geopolitical interests. However, despite attempts to marginalise African voices, through the use of the social media Africa's challenge to celebrity advocacy is gaining prominence. Progressive forces in the West, seeking to build international solidarity, will need to seek out ways of giving prominence to such voices.

Note on contributor

Patricia Daley is a university lecturer in Human Geography at Oxford University and a fellow of Jesus College Oxford.

Notes

1.   According to *reliefweb.int* [last viewed 20 August 2012].

2. Quote taken from http://www.theglobalfund.org/en/about/partnership/civilsociety/ [last accessed 12 August 2012].

3. Also quoted in '50 Cent talks about his Street King Mission to feed starving Africans', 20 October 2011 http://omg.yahoo.com/news/50-cent-talks-street-king-mission-feed-starving-183100358.html [last accessed August 2012].

4. SSP is a collaboration with Not on our Watch, the Enough Project, Sudan Now, Google Trellon, the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative and DigitalGlobe.

5. Debt, Aid, Trade Africa (DATA) and ONE are NGOs co-founded by Bono in 2002 and 2004 respectively, and merging in 2008. Both organisations target Western governments and audience in their anti-poverty campaigns. ONE boasts that it is a grassroots advocacy organisation, but its board and that of DATA are made up of some of the elites of neoliberal economic governance.

6. Jason Russell, one of the founders of Invisible Children, studied at the Institute of Creative Technologies at the University of Southern California, a US military-sponsored centre focusing on the use of cybertechnology as a counter-intelligence strategy. See Campbell (2012).

7. See the Rosebell Kagumire video at http://bit.ly/GTIv8T; Women Civil Society Groups in Uganda: Kony2012 Campaign, Blurring realities! at: http://www.isiswomen.org/ 16 March 2012; Cole, at: http://www.theatlantic.com; Lancaster (2011); Mamdani, at: http://www.monitor.co.ug; Campbell, at: http://pambazuka.org/en/category/features/80989; and Atkinson *et al*. (2012).

8. 28 April 2010. 'UN official calls DRC 'rape capital of the world'; http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8650112.stm.

9. See http://www.easterncongo.org.

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Neoliberal globalisation and evolving local traditional institutions: implications for access to resources in rural northern Ghana

Joseph A. Yaro*

Department of Geography and Resource, University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana

The world has become interconnected and interdependent well beyond the economic domains of life and this has consequences for the role of major institutions governing access to resources in rural Africa. Neoliberal globalisation is eroding the moral foundation of rural societies in ways that create unequal access to the resources needed for involvement and inclusion in the market relations of production and social reproduction. Using the case of rural northern Ghana, this article shows how the transformation of local traditional governance and institutions led to processes of accumulation for a few privileged ones while the majority are excluded through dispossession.

Keywords: neoliberal globalisation; tradition; local institutions; rural Ghana

[Mondialisation néolibérale et évolution d'institutions traditionnelles locales: impacts pour l'accès aux ressources dans le nord Ghana rural.] Le monde est devenu interconnecté et interdépendant, bien au-delà des questions économiques et cela a des conséquences pour le rôle d'institutions majeures qui gèrent l'accès aux ressources dans l'Afrique rurale. La mondialisation néolibérale érode les fondations morales des sociétés rurales à tel point qu'elle génère des inégalités dans l'accès aux ressources nécessaires pour l'inclusion au marché de la production et de la reproduction sociale. En travaillant sur le cas du nord Ghana rural, cet article montre comment la transformation des modes de gouvernance et institutions locales traditionnelles a conduit à des processus d'accumulation réservés à quelques rares privilégiés tandis que la majorité était spoliée et victime d'exclusion.

Mots-clés : mondialisation néolibérale ; tradition ; institutions locales ; Ghana rural

Introduction

The world has become interconnected and interdependent, not only in the economic, but also in the social, cultural, political and environmental domains of life. Globalisation has intensified worldwide social relations which link distant localities, so that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa (Giddens 1990; Veltmeyer 2005). This situation has important consequences for the role of major institutions governing access to resources in rural Africa. This is because apart from economic interconnectedness globalisation also generates global flows of ideas, cultures, and people, which in turn affect traditional socio-cultural, economic, and political patterns on the local stage (Katalin and Un 2009). Such effects are not always positive, as can be seen in the ways in which

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*Email: yarojoe@yahoo.com

neoliberal globalisation is eroding the moral foundations of rural societies. The result is unequal access to resources needed for involvement and inclusion in the market relations of production and reproduction. Neoliberal globalisation policies have caused significant institutional changes in rural northern Ghana. These changes, however, are not the only driving force of traditional institutional change; nevertheless, they have served to intensify old tendencies using new mechanisms. By addressing how global changes/trends affect local institutions, which are directly relied on by rural people, the paper adds a refreshing insight to understanding the relationship between globalisation and rural livelihoods.

Changes in traditional institutions are the result of a complicated nexus between government and global policies, population growth, urbanisation, and environmental degradation. Constant contact between proximate cultures, which have coexisted for centuries, is equally important in shaping traditional institutions. However, the paper seeks to show how neoliberal globalisation shapes the processes of local traditional institutional change and the mechanisms that impel different paths for accessing resources. It argues that the changing institutional structure at the local level privileges a minority of power holders and their 'subject-clients' to the disadvantage of the majority who lose out in the struggle for resources and social justice.

Ghana adopted a neoliberal paradigm of development in 1983 and effectively opened its borders to the rest of the world without any of the restrictions that pertained earlier. Two important policy reforms include the democratic decentralisation and land tenure reform changes under legal pluralism. Also, the state's role has been rolled back and private sector export-led growth is encouraged, and this has had implications for the adaptive and coping strategies of various institutions and individuals. There is increasing poverty among some socio-economic groups and geographical areas, and decreasing standards of living due to poor access to basic facilities (Konadu-Agyemang 2000; Obeng-Odoom 2012; Rimmer 1992; Rothchild 1991; Songsore 1992). The agricultural policies adopted under the structural adjustment programme in Ghana have not addressed the long-term difficulties that farmers face. Instead, these policies have exacerbated the complex and contradictory relations between the state, capital and farmers regarding access to agricultural resources (Puplampu 1999). In the urban sphere, the informal economy has grown substantially but without the corresponding necessary welfare enhancement for the majority of its participants, especially private sector and small-scale self-employed workers (Otiso and Owusu 2008; Owusu, Agyei-Mensah, and Lund 2008; UN-HABITAT 2009). The role of the state was diminished as state enterprises were privatised, the size of the public sector reduced, economies deregulated, and international trade encouraged, with more imports and exports along the comparative advantage thinking (Anyinam 1994; Boachie-Danquah 1992; Easterly 2005; Konadu-Agyemang 2000). The emergence of land markets and private property led to drastic changes in both governance and institutions at national and local levels. Continuous primitive accumulation, an inherent feature of the capitalist mode of accumulation, is one of the mechanisms and power relations that liberal democracy masks in Ghana (Ayelazuno 2011). The privatisation and liberalisation of economies removes the stumbling blocks to global capital and exposes rural communities to both market forces and individualistic norms (Amanor 2010).

The abuse of power by chiefs and other power brokers in Ghana, especially with regard to land sales, arbitration, participation and the consequent marginalisation of the poor is well documented (Abdulai 2002; Berry 2000; Owusu 1970; Ubink and Quan 2008; Yaro 2010). The checks and balances on chiefly authority are being eroded in northern Ghana (Kasanga and Kotey 2001). In the rest of Ghana, some have decried changes in the control of land and labour relations within the community under neoliberal policy, which

are viewed as increasingly commoditised and unequal (Amanor 2001; Antwi and Adams 2003; Berry 2009). These changes have led to the monetisation of the institution of chieftaincy and other positions of power in local governance (Alhassan 2006, 2009; Lentz 2006, 2010).

Neoliberal globalisation, through its market-oriented approach, intensifies past processes of resource capture and dispossession, leading to wider inequalities. I acknowledge that economic development is by its nature 'destructive' to certain traditional forms of institutions. These can have both beneficial and detrimental consequences. Changes are bound to occur, and not just due to the adoption of neoliberal policies, as the circumstances of poverty, deprivation, and livelihood diversification detailed by Hart (1973) show. However, the nature of the changes will differ in terms of the mechanisms associated with the paradigm of growth, and will have varying consequences for different social relations and social differentiation.

The adaptations and the reinterpretation of 'tradition' in these spaces lead to changing sources of economic and political power. The critical questions are then: what kind of local institutional changes are caused by neoliberal globalisation, and how are these defining a new landscape of access to resources? How have neoliberal globalisation and neoliberal policies exacerbated processes of social exclusion/inclusion, and who benefits or loses from the processes of change? This paper seeks to provide some answers to these questions using the case of northern Ghana, an area in which little has been written about the local political economy and processes of dispossession among the diverse actors. By classifying the study sites in terms of degree of integration with the global economy, the paper provides a comparative understanding of the implications of neoliberal globalisation on governance, land tenure, gender equity and social justice. Although the paper does not discuss state and civil society institutions and organisations at the local level, it recognises their importance as they interact with traditional institutions by acting as the axis along which neoliberal globalisation influences traditional institutions.

In the following sections the paper presents the literature on the processes and mechanisms generated by neoliberalism and how these influence societal changes. The third section describes the research communities and research methods. The fourth section presents the results by major themes. The fifth section discusses the findings and the conclusions.

Neoliberal globalisation: reincarnated primitive accumulation and changing traditional governance

The structural adjustment policies (SAPs) backed by the IMF and the World Bank mark the introduction of neoliberal globalisation into the African continent (Parfitt and Wysocki 2012). Neoliberalism is the belief in the efficacy of market mechanisms for the allocation of resources and the reward of factors of production, where markets can be made competitive by deregulation. It argues that competitive markets, based on private ownership, produce the most efficient economies and the highest levels of welfare (Bowles 2005; Harmes 2012).

Neoliberal globalisation processes have brought about profound changes in societies with contradictory consequences, as some sections of the population accumulate wealth while others suffer marginalisation and exclusion (Amin 1997; Giddens 1990; Harvey 1998). The World Systems Theory by Wallerstein provides a broader understanding of the core–periphery relations in the process of capitalism's expansion within the entire capitalist world-system. It assesses the historical and transformative processes, as well as the reproductive process, as the results of actions taken by hegemonic state and powerful

corporations in overcoming structural contradictions (Wallerstein 1974, 1995, 2000). Neo-liberal globalisation is merely an extension, in a deeper fashion, of the capitalist forces and liberal ideologies embedded in the process of internationalisation.

The interactions between global and local forces result in substantial (positive and negative) impacts on rural people in developing countries (Round and Whalley 2002; UNDP 1999; World Bank 2000). Pro-globalist arguments that efficiency gains have resulted in increasing growth and poverty reduction often neglect the social and economic contradictions inherent in the process of capital accumulation. The neoliberals argue that the new reforms will create greater incentives for rural farmers, which will fuel an increase in agricultural output due to the use of modern methods (Watkins 1995; World Bank 1981). Anti-globalists, on their part, provide important insights into the changing inequalities and contradictions (Bello 2002; Braun 1997; Chossudovsky 1998; Polanyi 2001) but tend to overlook the considerable success gained in turning around countries that were heading towards an economic abyss, and the consequent quantitative reduction in poverty worldwide. The question is not about the merits of neoliberal globalisation, but rather about the neglected aspects of this process that create contradictions in the bid to achieve development for all through an inclusive participatory process.

The process of social exclusion is fast-tracked under the influence of neoliberal globalisation, as both traditional and modern institutions adapt to the new challenges of the market logic. The processes of dispossession that pertained in the past are reincarnated in peculiar ways in a neoliberal world. This is done through the intertwining of political and economic power as dictated by the invisible hand of the market (Bush 2009; Bush, Bujra and Littlejohn 2011). Under the influence of neoliberal globalisation, African traditional governance systems are changing rapidly. The colonial regimes that at first tried to dismantle these institutions later relied on them to deliver their policies and ultimately created chieftaincies and the hierarchies of traditional governance (Busia 1951; Mamdani 1976). These traditional authorities were made largely accountable to the colonial office rather than to the people, a situation which effectively diluted the traditional system of checks and balances (Kennedy 1988; Platteau 2009). Thus, critical reviewers have described the posture of traditional rulers within the colonial governance system as 'decentralised despotism' (Berman, Eyoh and Kymlicka 2004; Young 2000).

Traditional institutions are not immutable but continually change, making them compatible with modern trends and institutions (Wunsch 1979). It is argued that under favourable historical and structural circumstances, traditional institutions can actively serve the cause of 'development' (Whitaker 1970). In such circumstances, tradition and modernity may evolve and adapt in response to mutual needs (Silver 1981). Some scholars have argued that these institutions and their guardians/leaders are power-hungry patriarchs and authoritarians attempting to both reinvent their political, social and economic power and reassert their control over local level resources at the expense of the larger community (LiPuma and Koelble 2009; Mamdani 1996). The process of neoliberal globalisation has been accompanied by major changes in the role and responsibilities of a wide range of institutions such as families, communities, civil society institutions, business corporations, states and supranational organisations (Ghai 1997). These changing roles pertain to the redistribution of power and the rights of people, the essential ingredients for access to resources. The processes lead to the emergence of winners and losers (O'Brien and Leichenko 2003) and the entrenchment of patron–client relations that are inimical to the socio-economic progress of the losers.

The study sites

The research was undertaken in six communities in northern Ghana representing different levels of integration into global production circuits and degrees of 'foreign' influences. From each region two communities were selected according to micro agro-ecological conditions, commercial crop production, modern institutions, population density, commoditisation of land tenure, accessibility and level of economic activity. Savelugu and Yapei were selected in the Northern Region; Loho and Danko in the Upper West Region; and Tenzug and Kajelo in the Upper East Region. The choice of sites reflects the effect of roadside location on the influence of globalisation via accessibility, by determining the degree of incorporation into the global circuits of trade, knowledge, and culture. Also, the selection took into consideration the importance of the presence of state institutions which act as gateways to globalising influences. About 80% of the population depends on rain-fed agriculture (Yiridoe *et al*. 2006). Below are the profiles of the communities.

Savelugu is located in the Savelugu–Nanton district of the Northern Region and has a moderate population density. It is found on the main trunk road between Tamale and Bolgatanga. Savelugu is mainly dominated by the Dagomba ethnic group who are predominantly Muslim, with the minority being traditionalist and Christian. The dominant occupation is farming. The main crops grown by men include maize, millet, yam, groundnuts and cassava. Women engage in large-scale shea butter processing. There is increasing youth unemployment and migration of girls and boys to the major cities in the south to work as head potters (known as *kayaye*) and scrap metal collectors respectively.

Yapei is a river port town in the Central Gonja District with a low population density. The indigenes are predominantly Muslim, with a minority Christian immigrant population and a few traditional religious believers/practitioners. The White Volta is a major natural resource for the community. The main livelihood activities include farming and fishing for the men, and farming, fish smoking and trading for the women. The main farm produce comprises maize, groundnuts, beans and millet. Social infrastructure in the town includes schools (ranging from primary to junior high), a clinic, a market, a community centre and a major trunk road.

Kajelo is located in the Kassena–Nankani West District of the Upper East Region and has a high population density. The people belong to the Kassena tribe and are mainly Christians and African traditionalists. Kajelo has a day nursery, a primary school and a junior high school. The Tono irrigation dam is not far from the community so, not surprisingly, some members rent land from the project. The water table in Kajelo is high and thus enables irrigated vegetable cultivation, an important component of livelihoods in a land hungry community with a short rainy season.

Tengzug is in the Talensi–Nabdam District of the Upper East Region, a town with a high population density. Tengzug is located on rocky hills. The people are mainly traditional African religious worshippers and indeed, the village plays host to a revered deity used by people all over the country. Tenzug has a tourist office run by US volunteers. Tourism attractions include the Whistling Rock, the Tengzug shrine (Tongnaab) and the historical caves. The main crops include millet, sorghum and groundnuts. Migration of the youth to the south, especially during the dry season, is an annual survival strategy.
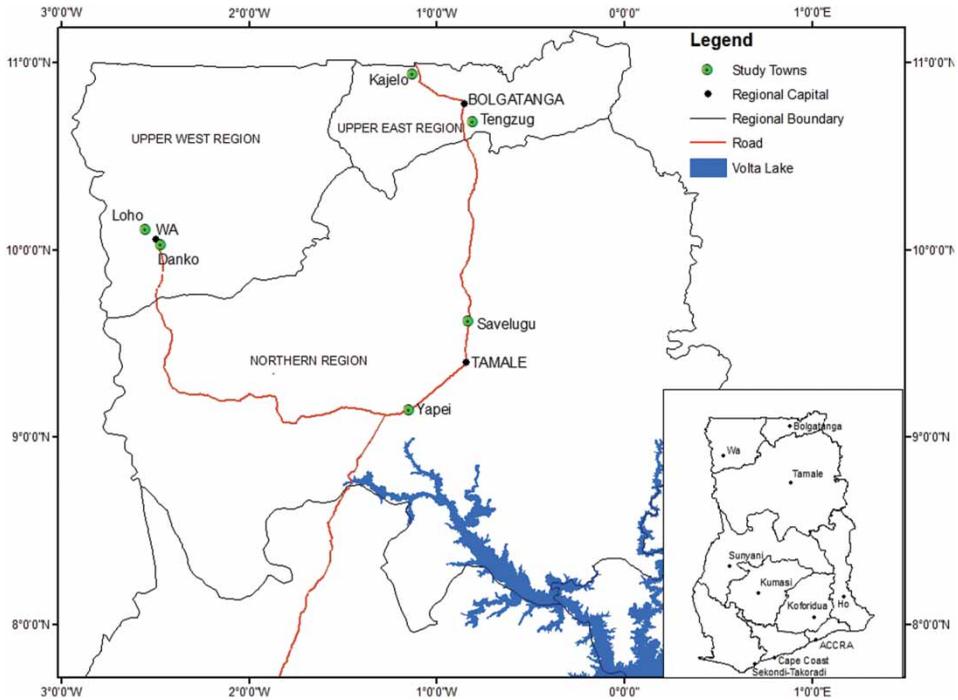
Figure 1.   Map showing study communities in Northern Ghana.

Danko is located in the Wa municipality in the Upper West Region and has a moderate population density. The people belong to the Wala ethnic group and are mainly Muslim. The main crops cultivated include yams, beans, sorghum, maize and cassava on a semi-subsistence basis, and groundnuts and cotton as the main cash crops. Women engage in shea butter extraction and *dawadawa* production. There is growing scarcity of land and land fragmentation due to rapid peri-urbanisation from Wa. The University for Development Studies is located partly on Danko lands, and its establishment has propelled private demand for land.

Loho is located in the Nadowli District and has a high population density. Loho is a Dagaaba village located about 5 km from Wa. The inhabitants practise mainly Christianity and African traditional religion. Food crops cultivated are yams, beans, sorghum, maize and cassava, mainly on a semi-subsistence basis, with groundnut as the main cash crop. Women rely heavily on shea butter extraction, dawadawa production, and 'pito' brewing as their main economic activities. Out-migration to surrounding villages and to the south of Ghana is high (Figure 1).

Research methods

The paper uses qualitative data gathered from individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, under the broader umbrella of the participatory research approach. Participatory approaches enable a much deeper understanding of the social dynamics, as well as perceptions of the structure of power, of rights, of cultural change and behaviours. A systematic approach was employed in all the communities. Five individual interviews were

conducted in each community composed of two women, two men, and the assemblyman. A total of 30 individual interviews were conducted with respondents, almost half of whom were below the age of 30, and half of whom considered themselves very poor. Selection of interviewees was carried out with the assistance of some community members after the focus group discussions. The themes for the interviews revolved around livelihoods, family situations, geographical conditions, land tenure, local governance, gender issues, access to resources and perceptions of changes in society and their consequences.

Three focus group discussions were held in each community. The first group discussion in a village was by a mixed group of 10 people in Kajelo, Loho and Danko where the chiefs/ elders kept to the numbers given them. In Savelugu, Yapei and Tenzug, the numbers surged to 20 people as enthusiastic community members joined in. These community discussions had three important elders or sub-chiefs of the village in attendance. The groups delineated the socio-economic changes in their communities showing both past and present trends, the structure of power and various responsibilities, the emerging problems with new trends, some explanations and solutions. The powerful local elite had a larger say in these meetings.

The other two focus group discussions were by male and female groups representing more marginalised groups. The groups consisted of three elderly and four middle-aged women or men. In the interaction with the women the main interest was to elicit views on the gender dimension of power, rights and access to resources. They discussed socio-economic processes taking place and how these affected their livelihoods and assessed changes in norms and practices that affected access to resources for their livelihoods. The elderly representatives were in their fifties and sixties and they understood the political structure and resource access rules. However, the younger persons represented change and agency. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded.

Changing traditional governance systems

Traditional governance before neoliberalism

In the Northern Region, local traditional institutions included the hierarchical chieftaincy system with a subset of sub-chiefs, earth priests and family heads. African 'traditions' of reverence, respect, reciprocity, and fairness guided these institutions. All of these values were strictly adhered to due to the belief in deities and in the power of the earth god. The earth priest of Savelugu claimed that 'no power holder in the past would contravene any of the principles of ensuring a happy society because the land deity would strike the person dead.' An elder in Yapei described the system of installing new chiefs in the past as very smooth following nominations by the earth god through soothsayers. He said that 'we always had a few candidates from a specific clan, so the soothsayer had a job of selecting one who would obey the gods and serve the people by ensuring peace so that people could go about their normal lives.' In both communities the number of sub-chief positions was fixed, probably due to low populations. Kingmakers assessed the background of possible candidates based on their interactions with them. Hence, a track record of good social relations, economic ability and knowledge of tradition were central to being elected, as lists for/from the soothsayer were narrowed down (kingmaker in Yapei). Family heads were important in that they managed what an elder in Savelugu called the *kagsogu*, which is the family land over which chiefs had no control. Also, the *buglilana* (earth priests) were important because they sacrificed to the gods and influenced village decisions by prescribing what the gods wanted and disliked. Several sacred groves with thick

vegetation formations were to be found in every community. The hierarchical chieftaincy system had a specific pattern of promotion even though a few were subject to intense lobbying. Hence, rivalry was limited to those open positions for which only a specific number of chiefs could contest (general group discussions).

In the Upper East Region, the local governance system was highly decentralised, with clan heads as the elders. In Tenzug, the chief said there had always been three earth priests who ruled the community based on the dictates of the deity in the village. None of the three was considered the leader. Earth priests (*tendamba* or *tigatiina*) have been the most important because they control the economic and spiritual asset of land. Family heads acquired land by making sacrifices to the earth priest, who relinquishes the economic aspect to the family but maintains the spiritual aspects. The elderly in both group discussions affirmed that due to the respect and fear for the deities, which were also linked to the thunder deity, no power holder wavered in carrying out their responsibilities, and if they did, it led to illness, death and family misfortunes. Seniority was the main yardstick for ascension to positions of power, even though a soothsayer still had to confirm the obvious candidate (chief of Tenzug). The title of chief was normally conferred on one of the elders of the village merely to satisfy the colonial authorities who needed a contact person in the village. An elder in Kajelo said this position did not change the traditional role assigned to that person's original position.

The governance system in the Upper West Region was also decentralised, with clan heads and earth priest having the disaggregated mantle of power. In many instances earth priests also doubled as clan heads by virtue of seniority and relationship to the deity (son of earth priest in Loho). However, the compound family head had the most power, as he was not directly accountable to the elders except where his rule incurred the dissatisfaction of his family members, who would report such matters to the clan elders and the earth priests. Access to resources and justice was therefore the preserve of the family head, upon whose shoulders lay the burden of procuring more landed resources from the earth priests. Chiefs occupied symbolic positions given to clan heads (confirmed by the elderly in both communities). The gods/deities regulated traditional governance systems and life in general, hence each family possessed gods belonging to the ancestry and/or 'bought' from other sources (elder in Loho).

Changing 'traditions'

Traditional governance

In the Northern Region, Yapei and Savelugu have divisional chiefs controlling several villages under their jurisdiction. They have sub-chiefs who rule over different sections of the community. Appointment to the different levels is by contest where reverence for higher-level members is important. An elder in Savelugu stated that 'these days if you don't have money and livestock to pay your way through, it is difficult to become a sub-chief or chief.' These days, as one youth lamented, 'it is very important and beneficial to be a sub-chief because the candidates for positions of village chief bring lots of gifts to the sub-chiefs for their support.' An elder told me that this is not a new practice but rather tradition, the difference being that people are richer or willing to pay cash in addition. Also, he explained that currently there are many more interested candidates and therefore the contest is keener. In Yapei the situation was no different, as contestation for positions involved increasingly modern influences where relatives lobbied with gifts including fertilisers, livestock, attendance at social functions of kingmakers and support for their policies

(group discussion). In both Savelugu and Yapei the number of sub-chiefs has increased over the last two decades. The elders explained that the population has increased and new sectors such as youth chief, religious chief and development chief have been added to the original sectors of war, vegetation, land, deity and clan. Also, the role of family heads is changing rapidly as they lose power to their members who now make many of their own life decisions – a departure from the fixed pattern of the past when they contributed labour to family production and benefited from a range of assistance (mixed focus groups). Due to the influence of religion, the role and position of the earth priest has been relegated to the background while those of imams or Muslim clerics have risen. The position of imam was considered on a par with the linguist and war chief. Soothsayers are no longer the main means of selection and confirmation of chiefs, but rather intense lobbying and contest.

In the Upper East Region, there is an increasing interest in the position of chief, mainly because the state's interaction with the chieftaincy institution grants privileges and new powers that enable chiefs to access appropriate resources. In Tenzug, one of the four care-takers of the shrine has been transformed into the chief and wields powers beyond his original mandate. Each family is controlled by its head, whose accountability to the chief is much more limited. In Kajelo the chief is the political figurehead, but the *tigatuu*[1] is the spiritual landowner, followed by the clan heads, the compound house heads and then the nuclear family. Due to the considerable powers still maintained by the *tigatiina* and family heads who 'own' their farmlands, the role of chiefs is more limited than what pertains in the Northern Region.

In the Upper West Region the chiefs in Loho and Danko are heads of their clans selected to represent the village. They coordinate all other clan heads who now constitute a kind of cabinet. The structure in Danko is however different from that in Loho due to the influence of Islamic norms which confer considerable powers on the chief, the imam and the council of elders. The chief in Danko was able, with the connivance of some of his elders, to sell off lands belonging to clans, contrary to traditional governance rules which ascribe such powers to the *tendana* (traditional spiritual landowner). The chiefs are challenging the tendana for ownership rights over land. Resistance to this move, especially by the youth, has reversed this pattern and now some families have taken control of their lands (men's group discussion in Danko).

Struggles between chiefs and tendana/tigatiina for control over land are commonplace in the Upper Regions. Informants narrated bitter struggles between the chief of Pungu Bavugunia (a neighbouring community to Kajelo) and his *tigatiina* over rights to sell land. This situation has been observed also by Lund (2006) in the case of Bolgatanga.

In all regions significant changes are occurring that have resulted from the enabling policies and consequences of neoliberal globalisation. The changes are remarkable in the Northern Region, where centralisation of power by chiefs has altered the governance structure and processes. Religion and family land ownership systems mediate the nature of changes in the two Upper Regions where a further decentralisation of traditional governance has occurred, with stiff resistance to efforts to legitimise the chief as a manager of resources. Neoliberal influences result from the economic changes, cultural influences, decentralisation processes and the land tenure administration reform. Economic changes induced a shift from semi-subsistence agriculture reliant on state support to commercial production under individualistic social systems. The hardships of the economic reform and the exposure of consumers to foreign products and cultures through the mass media have increased materialistic tendencies. The granting of permission to chiefs to transact in land as enabled by the 1986 land title law, which fed

well into a huge urban demand for residential land, has been taken advantage of by power holders to commoditise land.

The decentralisation process has ascribed an important role to chiefs and community leaders, thereby enhancing their powers over their citizens. Chiefs are now accountable to the state rather than to the citizens, a situation where the apparatus of the state can be used against community members. Increasingly, the position of the chief has become very important because 'being a chief means acting as a gateway to the state and the outside world which brings in dividends' (assemblyman of Kajelo). Some divisional chiefs are paid allowances, while the state has provided cars and tractors for these leaders as a way of soliciting their assistance in governing the country and winning elections.

Land commoditisation and dispossession

The commodification of land in the peri-urban areas of Savelugu, Yapei and Danko has led to the interpretation of allodial title as ownership title to enable the chiefs and sub-chiefs demarcate and sell off the lands of families to willing buyers. The chiefs effectively used the provisions of the nation's constitution that divested land back to skins (chiefs sit on skins as symbol of power in northern Ghana) and the traditional idea that the chief 'owns' the people and the land (mentioned in group interviews in Savelugu and Yapei). Chiefs' appropriation of prime land is thus legitimised and ordinary people are denied the vital income needed as start up capital in a commercialised global environment.

In Savelugu in the Northern Region, chief and elders sell/have sold subjects' farmlands after holding consultations with family representatives and the youth, basically to tell them of the need to sell off land on which 'visitors' wanted to construct houses and other commercial infrastructure. No family can object to the decision when their farmlands are affected, so instead they try to negotiate for a number of plots for themselves based on their numbers (men and women's focus group, Savelugu). In Yapei, at a meeting to discuss the granting of fishing rights, dissenting voices that spoke against granting such rights to migrants were silenced by the chief and those who stood to gain from the rents. Elders and the youth representative of fishermen were told that the river was available to them and that the chief and sub-chiefs had decided to rent out the ponds. A fisherman at the meeting said 'The chief said our presence in the meeting was basically to carry the information to our colleagues that fishing in the village ponds was henceforth prohibited.'

In the Upper West Region, the case of Danko illustrates how the initial sale of land by the chief and clan heads led to the disaggregation of larger compounds into smaller families (reflecting the nuclear family system) in order to lay claim to family lands (men's group discussion). The chief and elders appropriated land for sale but faced tough opposition as villagers started interpreting tradition along clan ownership lines, which recognise the powers of tendamba, compound and nuclear house heads rather than those of elders and chiefs (male focus group). This allowed some family heads to keep their farms or sell them, with smaller percentages of the proceeds going to the elders and the chief (Interview with assembly man). The people effectively challenged the legitimacy of chiefly actions. In Loho, which was gearing up for land sales, it was not clear what would happen. But various individuals asserted that their family heads would transact their family lands while the tendana and the chief would deal with common property lands.

In the Upper East, the case of rural Kajelo and Tenzug show that land resources have been maintained as individual properties of the families once the required sacrifice is made by the tendana. This state of affairs is attributable to the decentralised governance

system in these communities, as well as the family system of land ownership, the long distances from major roads, and their poor integration into global circuits. Land scarcity makes it impossible to acquire more land by the traditional means of sacrifices to the earth shrine through the tendana. The tendamba families now own the common property lands and would only allocate land to their extended families (this was echoed in all individual interviews). The youth complained of not being able to access land in this new system where every plot is claimed on an individual basis. This system leads to land fragmentation with continuous cultivation regimes.

Participation and communitarianism

Participation through representation by elders was expected to ensure that the views and interests of all households were taken into consideration in the decision-making process. Consensus building is an important traditional governance tool. Generally, women are not part of the governance system except for informal advice and representations made through women's associations.

In the Northern Region, where sub-chiefs speak on behalf of all people, it is obvious that such chiefs defend the interests of their social class rather than those of the members of their clans or families. Depending on the issue at stake, some ranks in the hierarchy are not invited to meetings (men's group discussion in Savelugu and Yapei). The youth groups in Yapei and Savelugu pointed out that this system represents a club of old fashioned 'commercialised traditionalists' making decisions for a generation of young educated people. The Loho assemblyman attempted to justify this situation by arguing that: 'not all people are kingmakers, so some people should have a larger say than others.' The magazia (women's leader: normally rich traders) in the Northern Region plays a role by negotiating with the elders on women's issues (women's focus groups in both sites). The interest of the elderly is of prime importance in consensus building. Relationships between the various hierarchies and the nuclear household could be described as those between superiors and their subordinates, particularly since the young who constitute most of the nuclear family do not have much of a voice. As a result the youth in non-royal families use the traditional system and respect it when they need it, but resort to modern institutions such as police and the courts to contest traditional norms that negatively affect them (elderly man: general focus group in Savelugu). This points to a growing dissatisfaction with these systems and also to the growing influence of the modern state on distant rural places.

The clan based representation of the two Upper Regions results in smaller deliberations within clans, with the exception of larger community discussions which mostly involve different actors, depending on the issue at stake (general group discussions in all four sites). The commercialised economic landscape makes it difficult for the higher hierarchies of power to provide the needs of the lower ones as tradition obliges them to. The joint ownership of family resources of the past is altered and each nuclear family now owns its farmland and economic trees (reported in all discussions). The family pool system of food, labour and expenditure is now disaggregated, a situation which also reflects the declining power of elders over nuclear family units.

The 'communitarian' attribute of local traditional social and economic life is eroding fast under the influence of neoliberal forces. These are emerging cracks in the 'collective' philosophy of traditional systems, as nuclear families develop individualistic tendencies in response to difficult economic situations and perceived opportunities. A breakaway family head in Savelugu lamented his actions but defended them on the grounds that his brothers were lazy and depended on his efforts. The perception of being used by non-performing

lazy family members was echoed in the focus groups in Yapei, Danko and Savelugu. The rising individualistic tendencies in their communities were attributed to the ability of individuals to survive economically in the new monetised and altered social system.

People are now becoming independent, thereby making fewer claims on traditional sources. An elderly participant in Savelugu asserted that:

> The youth now refuse household jobs and prefer market jobs to earn a living. The market has made the youth self-sufficient economically, enabling them to earn income, and the elders who are family heads are no longer respected.

Even children are involved in hard work on mines to meet their educational and other livelihood needs (Hilson 2010). Social capital is being eroded gradually. In all the communities, communal labour for the chiefs' or clan heads' farms had diminished. Similarly, family heads struggled to get their sons to work on their farms. Young men now engage in what is called 'by-day work' for wages instead of working collectively for families and clan heads or even in-laws (reported all regions). Fierce competition for resources leads to discontent and the pursuit of individual strategies of accumulation.

Social justice and gender dynamics

The traditional governance system should play the role of arbitration and ensuring peace and good neighbourliness in their communities (elderly woman in Kajelo). Respondents in all the villages repeated the adage that 'who you are' and 'whom you know' counts in how your case will be heard and dealt with by the chiefs and elders.

The rich may bribe their way out or use their power to intimidate chiefs into supporting them (assemblymen in Yapei and Savelugu). It could even be the case that most of the chiefs are sponsored by the rich and educated elite to ascend to their current positions, as the chieftaincy title itself is now highly commercialised and goes to the highest bidder among the 'royals' (assemblymen in Danko and Savelugu). The *wulana* (linguist) of Savelugu explained that people accuse them wrongly because such people do not understand tradition, which prescribes that chiefs and elders are supposed to ensure peace. As a result, not all cases against the rich and the powerful result in sanctions. Using this excuse, the powerful in society will escape justice by rendering unqualified apologies without due compensation. The passage below captures one such ambiguous reinterpretation of traditional rule:

> Though both the poor and the rich have access to the system of arbitration, sometimes the poor might not receive justice because when the rich are wrong, the elders will only ask for forgiveness from the poor thereby allowing the rich to get away. Some rich people can connive with the elders to interpret the rules or logic in their favour especially in new cases that have no traditional blueprint to follow. (Assemblyman of Danko)

The power of interpretation implies that the personality in charge of arbitration is also very important. The chief of Tenzug, although checked by the powerful deity from 'misbehaving', was praised by all interviewees for being just, dynamic and highly committed to the development of the community.

An old man in Danko recounted a more just society when he was in his twenties but asserted that 'these days everything has changed and so has the judgement of elders. In most instances the rich get away with their misbehaviour due to discrimination.'

Spatially, the pattern of discrimination is highest in the Northern Region where modernisation defined by urbanisation, infrastructure, and commercialisation is highest, while Tenzug in the Upper East has the lowest (based on responses from all 30 individual interviews). Commercialisation is high in Yapei as evidenced by the selling of rights to fishing ponds to Tongu fishermen rather than to indigenes; the growing business of fish trading/mongering around the toll bridge on the White/Black Volta; and the rise of land values due to the establishment of a petroleum depot/booster station, the TAYSEC Construction Company and other non-governmental organisation infrastructure. In the case of Savelugu, urbanisation, education, strong state institutions, commodification of land, and other modern infrastructure that enable connectivity with the rest of Ghana explain the level of commercialisation and monetisation of social and economic life.

In contrast, Tenzug, which is characterised by traditional religiosity, a low level of commercial activity, ecotourism and a leadership committed to tradition, has a more equitable society. Loho and Kajelo rank closer to Tenzug, while Danko is closest to Yapei along a continuum of more traditional to more modernised.

Discrimination by gender is most noticeable and acknowledged in all discussions. In the Northern Region women are not allowed to inherit land, and can only cultivate family land or borrow from outside the family. Women can only take part in sharing assets other than land, such as personal belongings. This situation pertains especially among Muslims. Women can also be co-owners of houses rather than full owners; they now own houses because they are allowed to buy land as long as they can afford it, although males would normally do the land purchase transactions on their behalf. An elder in Savelugu explained that all of this is 'because they have the financial ability which is the major determinant in today's Ghana'. Women can own property, but not by inheritance from family pools. A woman interviewee in Savelugu explained that though traditional rules do not specifically grant them these rights, a few women have benefited from the property of their late husbands and their children, depending on how humane the elders in charge were. Land was accessible to women in all regions, even though they had only usufructuary rights. In reality, women find it more difficult to expand cropland than men, and women depend on men for access (reported in all female focus groups). Globalisation can be credited for the current access of women to property via their financial ability, enabled by commercialisation and also through national laws that reflect the gender neutrality of international guidelines.

Discrimination and favouritism have worsened in these neoliberal times, and this is due to the utilitarian perceptions of actors. Interviewees stressed the importance of 'knowing' the chief and landowners in accessing resources. 'Knowing' here refers not to mere acquaintance, but to systematic relations of reverence, reciprocity, respect and loyalty. Interviewees reiterated the saying 'poor man no get friend', which means that the poor are excluded from social networks of assistance because no one expects anything from them. To be part of a network of assistance requires some utility value, as in neoliberal thinking. Both traditional leaders and their subjects have become rational economic agents whose actions are guided by the logic of making some gains – rents and profits. Eggen's (2011) studies in Malawi show similar practices of discrimination by chiefs against the poor and opponents, and favoritism for relatives and friends.

Discussion and conclusions

The current era of neoliberal globalisation has brought tremendous changes in traditional governance structures, proving the assertion that African traditions evolve flexibly in

tandem with changing conditions (Platteau 2009; Silver 1981; Wunsch 1979). The differences in level of changes and influences in the different communities indicate a convincing relationship between capitalism's penetration and socio-cultural changes. Communities which lie along the major trunk road and which are also district capitals exhibited higher globalised values and economic structures. More remote locations tended to have lesser influence on political structure, but nevertheless the social relations between the different levels are changing to suit individualist profit-oriented aspirations.

The policies of the state regarding privatisation and individualisation of land ownership through land title registration, divestiture of land to skins and family heads, and mechanisms to protect private property, led to the emergence of land markets, especially in peri-urban areas where demand for housing land blossomed. The magnitude of abuse of power in appropriating resources in a typical primitive accumulation fashion is higher in more globalised Savelugu and Yapei than Tenzug and Loho. The austerity measures of structural adjustment and the new opportunities for cash income transformed social relations according to the market logic. Participation is a necessary precondition for benefiting from market relations. However, the evolved traditional governance systems have poor levels of participation in decision-making and social justice, which are important for access to economic resources and for the building of capability. Globalisation redefines local institutions of access to resources and realigns cultures in tandem with global production and consumption (Quaye *et al.* 2010).

Unlike under democratic systems, the local patriarchal hierarchical systems do not allow participation of the kind that produces inclusiveness. Local patriarchal institutions are highly compatible with neoliberal globalisation's accumulative strategies, as the power wielders transform into economic agents who transform local institutional rules and norms for an effective penetration of capitalism and for the consequent erosion of more 'communal' and 'egalitarian' traditional values. This process runs contrary to the positive adaptability found by Wunsch (1979). The traditional notion of participation is a representative articulation rather than a direct confrontation as pertains to the modern Western concept. The problem with representation lies in the practice whereby men purport to represent the views of women, while the elderly represent the youth. Contemporary traditional governance systems often show a facade of inclusiveness and representativeness, when in reality they are based on patronage. The incentives generated by globalised market systems allow chiefs and clan elders to impose their wishes and interests on their members and to deny the latter a voice in development debates similar to findings by Ntsebeza (2005). These findings are in consonance with Spear's (2003) conclusion that tradition is a complex discourse in which people continually reinterpret the lessons of the past in the context of the present. Principles of the past are reinterpreted to meet the needs of the present. But the needs of the present reflect the interests of the louder voice, in this case, the top hierarchy, using a flawed model of deliberative democracy as indicated by LiPuma and Koelble (2009) in the case of South Africa.

The modern state, acting as the instrument for facilitating neoliberal globalisation, does not provide the alternative checks and balances on tendencies that discriminate and sever people's access to resources. The state's incapacity to check and transform traditional governance and institutions in line with modern principles of accountability, participation and transparency is recognised in other studies (Berry 2009; LiPuma and Koelble 2009; Ubink and Quan 2008). State institutions and laws constitute important axis for the penetration of neoliberal capitalist norms.

The respondents in this study, like those in the study by Awanyo (2001), acknowledged the production incentives of neoliberal paradigms, yet many farmers are unable to increase

production. The competition for land, capital, technology and labour made positions of power and wealth important in surviving the capitalist storm. As explained by Amanor (2010), commercialisation produces new alliances based on financial gain. In Yapei, the assemblyman claimed that most of the few rich farmers were sub-chiefs who had benefited from state programmes of subsidised mechanisation and improved seeds, which he claimed, were to be made accessible to the poor. However, these 'innovator–farmers' failed to diffuse the technologies and instead enriched themselves. Similarly, villagers in Danko co-opted into cotton production explained how the wealthier farmers gained while the poor lost out because of constraints to labour. Monetisation of social relations had led to the decline in labour parties. The poor therefore became labourers rather than participating in the lucrative cotton farming. Social networks are no longer determined by obligations to kin or reciprocity, but rather by new vertical alliances, often in commodity production and exchange systems, that create losers and winners.

Traditional local structures worked hand in hand with state policy in producing the landscape of losers and winners. The winners are the few privileged capital accumulators in the local circuits with links to national circuits of accumulation. Berry (1993) confirms these conclusions by stating that farmers' access to the means of production is shaped by the mobilisation and exercise of power and the terms in which rights and obligations are defined. The processes of dispossession under neoliberal globalisation are characterised by primitive accumulation, where force is used to enforce adapted rules and norms that enable resource grabbing by those in positions of power. The second source of dispossession emanates from the more silent but effective squeezing out of the poor peasantry by market forces through rising cost of production and inaccessibility to productive inputs and markets.

This paper has shown the concrete manifestation of the erosion of traditional norms and values by state enabled neoliberal globalisation processes, and the magnification of social inequalities inherent in traditional patron–client relations. The paper has demonstrated how processes of accumulation and dispossession at macro levels are replicated at the local level among those often described as the 'homogenous poor'. Neoliberal globalisation, through invisible market forces and state policies aimed at removing stumbling blocks to the operation of global capital, has transformed traditional governance systems and values in varying degrees with common outcomes. The findings do not suggest that traditional systems should be immutable, but simply point to the contradictions of neoliberal globalisation as it neglects mechanisms for including the lower classes in society in the process of accumulation. The findings have implications for the processes of decentralisation, which often assume a coherent community structure with shared interest. Policy makers need to rethink how local communities are engaged in the development process in order to prevent the hijacking of the process by those capable of reinterpreting tradition.

Note on contributor

Joseph A. Yaro is a human geographer specialising in land tenure, climate change and livelihoods research. He is an associate professor with the Department of Geography and Resource Development, University of Ghana.

Note

1. The *tigatuu/tendana* is the earth priest who possesses allodial title to land. The plural form of *tendana* is *tendamba*.

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Have we heard the last? Oil, environmental insecurity, and the impact of the amnesty programme on the Niger Delta resistance movement

Daniel Egiegba Agbiboa*

School of Sociology, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University

The paper draws on the theories of relative deprivation (RD) and Edward Azar's protracted social conflicts (PSC) to explain how the twin woes of oil and environmental insecurity are implicated in the Niger Delta conflict. The paper presents a new empirical angle on the existing Niger Delta narrative by assessing the impact of the 2009 amnesty programme on resistance movements in the oil-rich region, while focusing on the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). The paper argues that the amnesty programme stops short of addressing underlying issues that continue to nurture sustained grievances in the Niger Delta.

Keywords: Niger Delta; amnesty programme; environmental security; MEND

[Avons-nous entendu la dernière? Pétrole, insécurité environnementale et impact du programme d'amnistie du Mouvement de résistance du delta du Niger.] Ce document s'appuie sur la théorie de la privation relative et celle des conflits sociaux prolongés d'Edward Azar pour expliquer comment la double malédiction du pétrole et de l'insécurité environnementale est impliquée dans le conflit du delta du Niger. L'article présente un nouveau point de vue empirique sur l'histoire actuelle du delta du Niger en évaluant l'impact du programme d'amnistie des mouvements de résistance de 2009 dans cette région riche en pétrole, tout en se concentrant sur le Mouvement pour l'émancipation du delta du Niger. L'article affirme que le programme d'amnistie n'aborde pas les problèmes sous-jacents qui continuent d'alimenter les conflits dans le delta du Niger.

Mots-clés : Delta du Niger ; Programme Amnesty ; insécurité environnementale ; MEND

Introduction

> The [Niger Delta] is at the base of Nigeria and it's like putting a keg of gunpowder under Nigeria. If the Delta explodes, Nigeria goes with it. (Maier 2000, 13)

Nigeria's Niger Delta region is home to an estimated 33 million people (Ibeanu 2006). It covers an area of about 70,000 square kilometres and is ranked among the top 10 coastal marine ecosystems in the world (Civil Liberties Organisation 1996; Omotola 2006). The Delta wetland comprises 36,000 square kilometres of marshland, creeks, tributaries and

*Email: danielagbiboa@gmail.com

lagoons. The region has a high biodiversity and a miscellany of flora and fauna (Agbiboa 2011a; Obi 2009). During her travels in West Africa, Mary Kingsley notes:

> I believe that the great swamp region of the Bight of Biafra [Niger Delta] is the greatest in the World, and that in its immensity and gloom, it has the grandeur equal to that of the Himalayas (cited in Onwuka 1956, 19).

Yet, today, the Niger Delta remains one of the most fragile ecosystems and the most endangered delta in the world (Okuyade 2011). The geopolitics of the Niger Delta involves nine states (see Figure 1). The region is also a melting pot for more than 25 ethnic minority groups, with the Ogoni and the Ijaw featuring prominently (Oyerinde 1998).

Oil in the Niger Delta was first discovered in the Niger Delta by Shell D'Archy in 1956. The region currently holds an estimated 33 billion barrels of crude oil, with its natural gas reserves amounting to roughly 160 trillion cubic feet (Omotola 2009). Most importantly, the Niger Delta's oil is the mainstay of the Nigerian economy, accounting for 95% of the country's foreign exchange and 80% of state revenues (Agbiboa 2011b). This translates to about US$20 billion annually or US$54 million daily (Ibeanu 2006). However, decades of elite corruption and opportunism have debarred the potential benefits of the oil industry from trickling down meaningfully to many in the Niger Delta. Indeed, the presence of oil in the region has been described as a curse rather than a blessing (Obi 2009; Omotola 2009).

Drawing on a report from the World Bank, Jerome Afiekhena (2005, 15) estimates that:

> . . . about 80% of Nigeria's oil and natural gas revenues accrue to one percent of the country's population. The other 99% of the population receives the remaining 20% of the oil and gas revenues, leaving Nigeria with the lowest per-capita oil export earning put at $212 per person in 2004.

The fact that such ill-gotten wealth is usually stashed in hard-to-trace bank accounts overseas further robs the state of productive capital. As noted by one commentator,
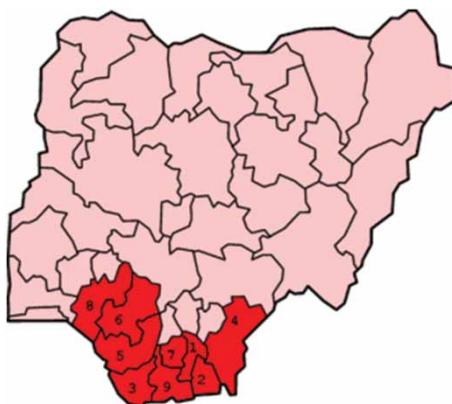

Figure 1.   Map of Nigeria numerically showing the states of the Niger Delta region.
Source: *Wikipedia*, Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niger_Delta. Retrieved on 16 May 2011. Notes: [1] Abia; [2] Akwa Ibom; [3] Bayelsa; [4] Cross River; [5] Delta; [6] Edo; [7]. Imo; [8]. Ondo; [9]. Rivers.

'corruption has become [Nigeria's] major export apart from oil' (Ojodu 1992, 8). Today, the Niger Delta area remains 'the ultimate desecration and monumental testament to the failure and criminality of our ruling class' (Ogbunwezeh 2009, 1). A study by Okechukwu Ibeanu (2006, 11) reveals that:

> There is one doctor per 82,000 people, rising to one doctor per 132,000 people in some areas, especially the rural areas, which is more than three times the national average of 40,000 people per doctor. Only 27% of people in the Delta have access to safe drinking water and about 30% of households have access to electricity.

Worse still, oil operations in the Niger Delta have impacted disastrously on the socio-physical environment of the oil-bearing communities, massively threatening the subsistent peasant economy and the environment and hence the entire livelihood and basic survival of the people (Eteng 1997).

The burden of this essay is not to rehearse existing narratives on the causes of the Niger Delta problematic, since a large corpus of work already exists on the subject matter (see Ikelegbe 2005; Omotola 2009; Naanen 1995; Ross 2003). Instead, this paper provides a new empirical angle to the Niger Delta conflict by assessing the impact of the 2009 amnesty programme on resistance movement in the region. The rest of the paper is structured as follows. The second part sketches a conceptual analysis of environmental security and argues that mainstream environmental literature articulates a strong nexus between environmental degradation and conflict flares. The third part explores the relationship between oil pollution, human rights abuses and the tragedy of development in the Niger Delta. The fourth part draws on the theory of relative deprivation and Edward Azar's protracted social conflicts to delineate the movement of the Niger Delta crisis from grievance to violence. The fifth part comprises a brief case study of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). In the sixth part, the paper critically examines the amnesty programme in the Niger Delta. The final part provides concluding remarks.

Conceptual analysis

Environmental security is commonly theorised as 'the relative public safety of environmental damages caused by natural or human processes due to ignorance, accident, mismanagement or design and originating within or across the national borders' (Glenn *et al*. 1998, 1–2). The notion of environmental security encompasses 'freedom from social instability due to environmental degradation' (Omotola 2006, 76). Inversely, 'environmental insecurity' captures the 'vulnerability of people to environmental degradation' (Barnett 2001, 8). Elsewhere, environmental insecurity is defined as a situation 'where rates of extraction exceed the rate of recovery of 'renewable' resources (natural capital), or non-renewable resources are depleted' (Obi 2000, 50). This may occur in cases where the operations of the oil industry run contrary to the required minimum international safety standards.

Writ large, mainstream literature on environmental security articulates a strong nexus between environmental degradation and the escalation of conflict (Collier 2000; Ikelegbe 2005; Obi 2009; Okonta 2006; Omeje 2006; World Bank 2000). In this regard, two fundamental theses are instructive:

Thesis I: ***Environmental degradation is a potential catalyst for conflict rather than a sole determinant.*** Passages in support of this thesis have gained increased currency since the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s. Peter Gleditsch (1997, 251), for example, contends that 'global environmental degradation . . . as well as the depletion of renewable

resources . . . and non-renewable resources . . . are major contributing factors to conflicts.' Opschoor (1989, 137) similarly argues that 'ecological stress and the consequences thereof may exacerbate tension within and between countries.' For his part, Renner (1999) maintains that 'the depletion of freshwater resources, excessive exploitation of fisheries, degradation of land, and deforestation not only affect human health and well-being and imperil the habitability of some regions, but they . . . play a key role in exacerbating some conflicts.'

Thesis II: ***The poor and marginalised communities suffer disproportionately from the effects of environmental degradation.*** In this connection, Edwards (1995, 36) expresses consternation over the fact that those who live or work in close proximity to the source, storage destination, or waste stream of environmental contaminants bear most of the burden and risks associated with their production. By contrast, 'the economic benefits of production are concentrated among wealthier groups whose communities are insulated by distance from their daily exposure.' Edwards' avowal resonates with that of Pulido (1996, xv) who powerfully argues that 'It is . . . the poor and marginalized of the world who often [suffer from] pollution and resource degradation simply because they are vulnerable or lack alternatives.'

Nowhere are these two above theses better illustrated than in the Niger Delta region. If one adopts a broad definition of security as 'the assurance people have that they will continue to enjoy those things that are most important to their survival and well-being' (Soroos 1997, 236), then it is appropriate to argue that years of oil operations in the Niger Delta have had a minatory influence on security in the region, resulting in 'violations variously of rights to an adequate standard of living, to adequate food, to water, to adequate housing, to health and to life' (Amnesty International 2009, 13).

Oil pollution, human rights violations and the tragedy of development in the Niger Delta

For many oil-bearing communities, especially in developing regions, the net effects of oil production have been devastating. Many years of campaigning by local people and by their allies abroad have, in the words of Shelley (2005, 155), 'highlighted the *double standards* often applied by oil companies and financial institutions, which are far more likely to demand environmental and social mitigation efforts in, say, the North Sea or Alaska than in a more remote district of a developing country far away' (emphasis added). The main concern of this paper is the Niger Delta region of Nigeria where the benefits from the oil industry have been dwarfed by the enormous human and environmental cost, resulting in a tragedy of development.

Going by World Bank estimates, there are 300 major spills of oil annually in the Rivers and Delta States of Nigeria. In the same country almost 90% of the natural gas produced alongside oil has been flared for decades, burned off into the atmosphere at the rate of some 80 billion cubic feet per year (Okonta and Douglas 2001). According to Shelley (2005, 155), 'flaring near to settlements has meant that some communities have not had a dark night for years. The rain is acidic and crops and animal life are destroyed.' A recent study by Amnesty International (2009, 13) shows that, 'the damage from oil operations is chronic and cumulative, and has acted synergistically with other sources of environmental stress to result in a severely impaired coastal ecosystem and compromised the livelihoods and health of the region's impoverished residents.'

The phenomenon of 'gas flaring' and its negative impact on the human and environmental wellbeing of the Niger Delta region is noteworthy. According to one World Bank

study, around '76% of all the natural gas from petroleum production in Nigeria is flared vis-à-vis 0.6% in the US, 4.3% in the UK and 21% in Libya' (Na'Allah 1998, 68). The study also showed that gas flares release 35 million tons of carbon dioxide a year and 12 million tons of methane (Omotola 2006). Some of the gaseous pollutants released into the atmosphere such as carbon monoxide, chlorine, nitrogen oxides, sulphur oxides, acid aerosol, beryllium etc, are notorious for causing headaches, heart problems, irritation, oedema, dizziness, dysentery, asthma and gene or neuron problems, depending on the pollutants (Amnesty International 2009; CLO 1996; Soremekun and Obadare 1998). The health and ecological hazards caused by excessive gas flaring are also highlighted by Ake (1996, 62): 'At temperatures of 1300–1400 degrees centigrade, the multitudes of flares heat up everything, causing noise pollution, and producing CO_2, VOC, CO, NOX and percolates around the clock.'

Gas flaring aside, oil spillage is another primary cause of environmental pollution in the Niger Delta. A study conducted by the UNDP (2006, 184) shows that 'a total of 1,100,000 barrels oil was spilled in the Niger Delta between 1979 and 2005'. This excludes unreported oil spills. Repeated oil spillage is partly responsible for the soaring rate of unemployment in the region (Omotola 2009), since the majority of Niger Delta inhabitants were historically farmers and fishermen. In addition, owing to the continual pollution of streams and creeks, fish can only be caught in deeper and offshore waters for which the Niger Deltans are ill-equipped (Na'Allah 1998). In 1972, an incidence of oil spillage (by Shell) that occurred at Dere – a small village in the Niger Delta – was so devastating that '20,000 people lost their means of livelihood. Acid rain fell on the area for months following this and both children and adults coughed blood' (Saro-Wiwa 1992, 44). Worse still, 'a High Court presided over by a British-born judge awarded damages against Shell [to the paltry sum of] £168,468, thus pre-empting the imposition of fines of tens of millions of dollars agreed upon by a special governmental committee set up to investigate the matter' (*Ibid*.; Na'Allah 1998).

As at the end of 1998, Shell was involved in over 500 pending court cases of which 352 were related to oil spills (Frynas 2000; Omeje 2006). Notably, while Shell set up its first oil rig in the Niger Delta region in 1958, not a single satisfactory Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has been conducted in the region before operations begin, to determine what potential harmful effects such oil activities are likely to have on the area (Agbiboa 2011b; CLO 1996; Okonta and Douglas 2003). Yet, the same oil juggernaut painstakingly conducts EIAs for its operations in Europe and North America (Amnesty International 2009). This reinforces the double-standard practice of oil multinational companies in developing countries. The following Ogoni song sums up the loathed presence of Shell in the Niger Delta region:

> The flames of Shell are flames of hell
> We bask below their light
> Nought for us serve the blight
> Of cursed neglect and cursed Shell
> (Saro-Wiwa 1995, 79)

It should be stressed here that government and corporate inertia towards cleaning up oil spills in the Niger Delta has often increased the chances of outbreaks of fire, with serious consequences for lives and properties. A case in point is the Jesse explosion and outbreak of fire of 1998, which needlessly claimed around 1000 lives in the Niger Delta (Amnesty International 2009). In fact, the human rights violations in the Niger Delta, especially with regards to oil pollution, often go underreported (or unreported) and have

received less attention from the Nigerian government and oil multinationals. A precis of the oil-related human rights violations in the Niger Delta, as revealed by the most recent Amnesty International study, is spotlighted below:

(1) Violations of the right to an adequate standard of living, including the right to food – as a consequence of the impact of oil-related pollution and environmental damage on agriculture and fisheries, which are the main sources of food for many [Niger Deltans].

(2) Violations of the right to gain a living through work – also as a consequence of widespread damage to agriculture and fisheries, because these are also the main sources of livelihood for many people in the Niger Delta

(3) Violations of the right to health – which arise from failure to secure the underlying determinants of health, including a healthy environment, and failure to enforce laws to protect the environment and prevent pollution.

(4) The absence of any adequate monitoring of the human impacts of oil-related pollution – despite the fact that the oil industry in the Niger Delta is operating in a relatively densely populated area characterised by high levels of poverty and vulnerability (Amnesty International 2009, 10).

Environmental insecurity and human rights violations are not unrelated to the tragedy of development in the Niger Delta. Michael Watts (2008, 44), for example, argues that 'by any measure of social achievement the oil states [in Nigeria] are a calamity', marked by 'nestled shacks, broken-down canoes, and children who will be lucky to reach adulthood'. Similarly, Osha (2006, 17) contends that 'what marks out the [Niger Delta] region in recent years is its chronic underdevelopment, the jolting sense of neglect that engulfs the place and the general misery and violence that govern the lives of most of its inhabitants.' To address this uneasy state of affairs, particularly in Ogoniland, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) was founded in the early 1990s. MOSOP instantly became an articulate rallying point for the people. The *raison d'être* of MOSOP was primarily to enable the Ogonis – the largest ethnic minority group in the Niger Delta – to press for reprieve, to gain a degree of autonomy, and to draw international attention through the 1990 Ogoni Bill of Rights (OBR) (Ojo 1996).

The OBR (1990) bemoaned the fact (1) 'that the search for oil has caused severe land and food shortages in Ogoniland one of the most densely populated areas of Africa'; (2) 'that neglectful environmental pollution laws and substandard inspection techniques of the federal authorities have led to the complete degradation of the Ogoni environment turning our homeland into an ecological disaster'; and (3) 'that it is intolerable that one of the richest areas of Nigeria should wallow in abject poverty and destitution' (OBR 1990, 2–3). The OBR (1990, 2) further called for 'control and use of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni development' and demanded the 'right to protect the Ogoni environment and ecology from further degradation'.

As MOSOP tabled their problems, and as accusing fingers pointed at Shell, 'the stage became set for the Ogoni leaders who dared to speak the truth consistently to be persecuted' (CLO 1996, xii).

The Niger Delta conflict: from sustained grievance to violence

Two theories of conflict are useful for understanding the Niger Delta conflict: (1) the theory of relative deprivation and (2) Edward Azar's (1990) theory of protracted social conflicts.

Beginning with the former, the theory of relative deprivation (RD) offers a clear lens through which the movement of the Niger Delta conflict from grievance to violence can be viewed. The RD theory can be gleaned from the works of its finest exponents, such as Gurr (1970), Birrel (1972), and Davies (1962). In his oft-cited work 'Why men rebel', Gurr (1970) argues that people become dissatisfied if they feel they have less than they should and could have. Over time, such dissatisfaction leads to frustration and then rebellion against the (real or perceived) source of their deprivation. Drawing on his studies of relative deprivation and conflict in Northern Ireland, Birrel (1972, 317) contends that group tensions develop from a discrepancy between the 'ought' and the 'is' of collective value satisfaction. In his article entitled 'Towards a theory of revolution', Davies (1962, 5) contends that political violence is due to the insupportable gap between what people want and what they get: 'this discrepancy is a frustrating experience that is sufficiently intense and focused to result in either rebellion or revolution.' The central point of all these works is that collective violence flourishes within a context of sustained grievances caused by relative deprivation.

As one of the forefathers of the conflict resolution field, Edward Azar was the first to describe violent events in the developing world as *Protracted Social Conflicts* (PSC), which he defines as follows:

> In brief, protracted social conflicts occur when communities are deprived of satisfaction of their basic needs on the basis of the communal identity. However, the deprivation is the result of a complex causal chain involving the role of the state and the pattern of international linkages (Azar, 1990: 12).

Azar further argues that 'initial conditions (colonial legacy, domestic historical setting, and the multi-communal nature of the society) play important roles in shaping the genesis of protracted social conflict' (Azar 1990, 12). He suggests that the most significant of all factors that facilitate the formation of PSC are societies that can be characterised as having a 'multi-communal' composition. Multi-communal societies, whether formed as a result of divide-and-rule policies of former colonial powers or whether through historical rivalries, often resulted in the dominance of one group over the other, which Azar (1990, 7) states as being 'characterised by disarticulation between the state and society as a whole. With the state usually dominated by a single communal group or a coalition of a few communal groups that are unresponsive to the needs of other groups in the society.' Azar claims that efforts to reconcile this by enforcing integration or cooperation 'retards the nation-building process, strains the social fabric and eventually breeds fragmentation and protracted social conflict' (*Ibid*.).

Furthermore, Azar (1990) posits a 'human needs' variable which allows us to consider to what extent identity groups are able to access developmental human needs:

> The most obvious ontological need is individual and communal physical survival and well-being. Individual or communal survival is contingent upon the satisfaction of basic needs. In the world of physical scarcity, these basic needs are seldom evenly or justly met. Whilst one group of individuals may enjoy satisfaction of those needs in abundance, others do not. Grievances resulting from need deprivation are usually expressed collectively. Failure to redress these grievances by the authority cultivates a niche for a protracted social conflict' (Azar 1990, 7–8).

Azar (1990) adds that developmental needs do not need to be theorised as primarily physical and neither do such unmet material needs lead directly to conflict. What is key,

however, is the degree to which minority groups can access the market or political institutions or the recognition of communal existence. This then leads to us having a much broader understanding of human needs that, if unmet, may become causal variables which will be attempted to be readdressed by violence. Elsewhere, Azar powerfully argues that:

> Collective protest is usually met by some degree of repression or suppression. As tension increases, the victimised communal groups begin to draw the attention of their constituents not only to the event itself, but also to a broad range of issues involving communal security, access and security needs (e.g., selective poverty and political inequality). The spillover of the event into multiple issues increases the momentum for organising and mobilizing resources. As the level of communal organisation and mobilization becomes greater, communal groups attempt to formulate more diverse strategies and tactics, which may involve civil disobedience, guerrilla warfare or secessionist movements. (Azar 1990, 13–14)

At the level of state action and strategy, Azar notes that in the majority of cases, the response by states to communal grievances (i.e., the Nigerian state), particularly those which have weak governance structures is usually one of coercive repression or instrumental co-option to avoid outward signs of weakness or defeat.

> In many cases, a militant or harsh response constitutes the core of state strategy in coping with communal dissent. Such a hardline strategy invites equally militant responses from repressed groups. Co-option could serve to mitigate communal grievances, but it is usually perceived as being a tactical maneuver to fragment the opposition and divert its attention. Failure of the co-option strategy further justifies coercive repressive options, leading to an upward spiral of violent clashes. (Azar 1990, 14)

The foregoing theoretical analyses are implicated in the Niger Delta problematic. The crux of the problem is that the Nigerian state has centralised the ownership and control of oil resources in such a way that nearly all component states and local government areas depend primarily on transfers (Uzodike Allen, and Wetho 2010, 172). The Niger Delta people argue that others far removed from the harrowing effects of oil exploitation have been enabled to benefit inordinately from the oil resources of the Niger Delta due to their dominant political power (Agbiboa 2011b; Ikein 1990; Obi 2009). While entrenching and nurturing the hegemony of the country's three major ethnicities (namely, the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba), Nigeria's three-legged federal system legitimised 'the expropriation of the resources of the oil-producing communities as part of an official strategy of centralised national cake-sharing' (Suberu 1996, xii).

This aside, rather than serve as a safety net for the abused, the law in Nigeria is a leviathan, an instrument of elite expropriation and denial in the Niger Delta (Frynas 2000). At best, the Nigerian legal system has been remote, inaccessible and expensive, for the wider society. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the provisions of the elitist Land Use Act of 1976 which arrogated to the Nigerian federal government the exclusive power to claim ownership rights over community lands in the Niger Delta, thus contravening the common law doctrine of '*quic quid plantatur solo cedit*/what is attached to the land accrues to the land and belongs to the owner' (Agbiboa 2011b, 12). By government fiat, land ownership licences were issued to oil multinationals, 'without any meaningful consultation with the local people' (CLO 1996, 6).

Beginning in the early 1990s, the struggle for survival intensified in the Niger Delta, much to the discomfiture of Shell and the Nigerian state. Killing the goose that lays the golden egg became the option for the military junta of the day. But this is hardly surprising

if we recall the words of the late Nigerian scholar, Claude Ake (1992, 16): 'more often than not, the post-colonial state in Nigeria presented itself as an apparatus of violence, and while its base in social forces remained extremely narrow it relied unduly on coercion for compliance, rather than authority.' The Niger Delta was effectively turned into a 'slaughterhouse', following the emplacement of draconian laws designed to unleash terror and to command compliance in the Niger Delta. As summarised by Suberu (1996, xii), these laws include

> ... the proscription of ethnic minority associations; the confinement, detention, arbitrary conviction and/or imprisonment of outspoken oil minority elites; the violent suppression, by military force, of protests, demonstrations and uprisings by oil minority communities; and the official declaration of ethnic minority agitations for self-determination, or any disturbances of oil production activities for that matter, as a seditious or treasonable offence punishable with the death penalty!

As the leader of MOSOP, Saro-Wiwa had been the sharpest thorn in the flesh of the Nigerian military regime. The junta found him a much more principled fighter for what he believed to be right and just. However, on the 21 May 1994, during a secret meeting held by a left wing of MOSOP, four prominent Ogoni chiefs were gruesomely murdered. Subsequently, Saro-Wiwa and eight others were arrested and charged with inciting the youths to murder. They were later arraigned before a 'special' military tribunal, which sentenced them to death by hanging. According to the famous Nigerian Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka (1996), the execution of Saro-Wiwa was intended to eliminate the pivotal figure of opposition around which a united Delta front could emerge. He was correct in this, as, following the death of Saro-Wiwa, MOSOP declined appreciably.

Democracy has not been the instant panacea many Nigerians, especially the Niger Deltans, hoped for on 29 May 1999. Like his military predecessors, President Olusegun Obasanjo relied on military force to silence dissenting voices in the Niger Delta. Ake eloquently describes this situation as the 'militarisation of commerce' and 'privatization of the state' (Rowell, Marriot and Stockman 2005, 15). Cases of violent actions by the Obasanjo-led government include: (1) the invasion of Odi Town on the direct orders of Obasanjo in revenge for the murder of 12 policemen by youths in the town in 1999. Over 2000 people were killed and properties razed; (2) brutal rapes of women and young girls by Nigerian Army personnel in Choba; and (3) the massacre in 2000 of 15 youth protesters in Tebidaba (INAA 2000, 16). While Shell has been strongly linked to 'spate of killings, rapes, and inter-communal feuds' in the Niger Delta, 'not a single one of the industrialised countries that makes use of Shell's oil has called for sanctions to be imposed on the oil companies operating in the Niger Delta' (Douglas *et al*. 2004, 8).

It was Edmond Keller (1983, 274) who once argued that an overreliance on 'intimidatory techniques' not only presents the 'image of a state which is low in legitimacy and desperately struggling to survive', but also 'in the long run can do more to threaten state coherence than to aid it'. Keller's words turned out prophetic, with the mushrooming of local resistance movements in the Niger Delta, many of which adopted the same pedagogy of violence used by the Nigerian state. According to Omeje (2006, 59), the principal methods of violence employed by the local resistance movements, who comprise the 'armed vanguard of the anti-oil campaign', include 'kidnapping of oil workers for a ransom, explosion of oil pipelines, attacks on oil installations (e.g., wells, exploration sites, flow stations), and abduction of oil workers and some of the government security personnel deployed to safeguard oil installations and activities'.

It is important to note that while most of the local resistance movement seemed motivated by genuine concerns, 'the process has since acquired a logic and momentum of its own with large sections of the protagonists hustling and jostling for rentier dividends on high stakes' (Omeje 2006, 59). These sections of the local resistance movement thrive on the existence and persistence of petro-conflicts and bring into bold relief what Ikelegbe (2005, 208) describes as 'the conflict economy in the Niger Delta, comprising an incessant and violent struggle for resource opportunities, inter and intra communal ethnic conflicts over resources and the theft and trading in refined and crude oil, which has blossomed since the 1990s'. In particular, through 'oil bunkering' (i.e., stealing of large quantities of crude oil from perforated pipelines, barges and other delicate sources) ethnic militias have institutionalised 'high stake processes of accumulation as normal patterns of livelihood' (Omeje 2006, 59). The expanding 'business' of oil bunkering causes the state to lose roughly US$50 million in revenue on a weekly basis (*Ibid.*). Moving on, the next section considers arguably the most notorious resistance movement to have emerged from the Niger Delta: the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND).

MEND and the militarisation of resistance

> . . . remember your seventy-year-old grandmother who still farms before she eats; remember also your poverty stricken people; remember too your petroleum which is being pumped out daily from your veins, and then fight for your freedom.[1]

With its origins in the Ijaw ethnic minority group dispersed across the coastal states of the Niger Delta, MEND is the largest and most dangerous of all resistance groups to have emerged from the Niger Delta. According to MEND and its supporters, the Niger Delta people have suffered from decades of environmental degradation due largely to unregulated pollution produced by oil companies operating in the area (Watts 2008). This is facilitated by national state policies that continue to deprive local communities of their land in favour of foreign oil interests and capitalist expansion (Omotola 2006).

The Economist (18 September 2008) describes MEND as a:

> . . . political organisation that wants a greater share of Nigeria's oil revenues to go to the impoverished region that sits atop the oil. In fact, it is more of an umbrella organisation for several armed groups, which it sometimes pays in cash or guns to launch attacks.

This description resonates with a statement made by Jomo Gbomo, a spokesperson for at least one of MEND's factions: 'MEND is an amalgam of all arm bearing groups in the Niger Delta fighting for the control of oil revenue by indigenes of the Niger Delta who have had relatively no benefits from the exploitation of our mineral resources by the Nigerian government and oil companies over the last fifty years' (cited in Obi 2009, 123). Ike Okonta, author of *Behind the mask: explaining the emergence of the MEND militia in Nigeria's oil-bearing Niger Delta*, interviewed some of MEND's declared members directly and describes the group as not so much an 'organisation' but 'an idea in which many civic, communal, and political groups, each with its own specificity and grievances, have bought into' (Okonta 2006, 4).

Membership in MEND is reputed to be fluid, with militants involved with several groups simultaneously or concurrently (*Daily Trust*, 23 May 2009; Jamestown Foundation, 26 April 2007). Jomo Gbomo indicates that the group's members are 'volunteers' (*The Guardian* 21 March 2006). Furthermore, a majority of MEND members are reported to

be from the Ijaw ethnic group (Okonta 2006; Council on Foreign Relations, 22 March 2007; Lionberger 2007, 73–74), which is the largest ethnic group in the Niger Delta (*Daily Trust*, 23 May 2009; Small Arms Survey, 2007, 123). The Jamestown Foundation, a research institution based in Washington, DC, indicates that MEND, which draws members from communities across the Niger Delta, differs from other cults and ethnic militias by 'placing its struggle in a social rather than ethnic context' (Jamestown Foundation, 26 April 2007).

On many occasions, MEND has been profiled by the Memorial Institute for Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT) as 'an active terrorist group that uses violent means to support the rights of the ethnic Ijaw people in the Niger Delta' (MIPT 2006). The MIPT further notes that:

> ... led by a notoriously shadowy and secretive elite cadre, MEND's ultimate goal is to expel foreign oil companies and Nigerians not indigenous to the Delta region from Ijawland. In the short run, the group wishes to increase local control over the money made from the exploitation of the region's abundant natural resources. (*Ibid*.)

In its cosmetic focus on labelling MEND as a terrorist group that constitutes an imminent threat to Western energy interests, MIPT failed to appreciate the background events in the Niger Delta that led to the emergence of MEND in January 2006.

A more nuanced view is provided by Ike Okonta (2007, 711) who locates the emergence of MEND within 'the lethal cocktail of economic deprivation, military dictatorship and worsening environmental crisis' in the Niger Delta, and its tapping into 'the fifty year Ijaw quest for social and environmental justice in the Niger Delta'. Beyond this, while MEND has kidnapped foreign oil workers as part of resistance movement:

> ... it has released all such hostages after a period, all unharmed, giving credence to the view that they are used to draw international attention to the injustice in the region, seen as an important aspect in globalising local resistance in the Niger Delta. (Obi 2009, 123)

According to Omeje (2006, 59), 'it is only in rare cases of explosive conflicts or in cases of perceived recalcitrance of the TNOCS (transnational oil companies) after repeated entreaties that abducted oil workers have been murdered.' Writing in the *Stanford Progressive*, Shadi Bushra (2009) powerfully observes that:

> ... the overarching theme of this and similar resistance efforts, the liberation of a land occupied by an irresponsible foreign goliath cannot be dismissed as 'terrorism'. It is this oversimplification that forces people into arms. Whenever we regard the pain of others, regardless of how many borders or oceans are between us, with indifference, we open the door for such violent groups. We invite them into a world which doesn't recognize a shared purpose, but instead chooses to reward those who recklessly pursue power and wealth. Without addressing the problems we have all helped fashion, we have all but invited such extremism into our shared world.

MEND's avowed goals are to localise control of Nigeria's oil and to secure reparations from the federal government for decades of pollution caused by the oil industry. In an interview with one of the group's leaders, Major-General Godswill Tamuno, the BBC reported that MEND was fighting for 'total control' of the Niger Delta's oil wealth, saying that local people had been deprived of the riches under the ground and the region's creeks and swamps (BBC News Online, 20 April 2006). MEND's goals were also built around notions of 'fiscal federalism' (a return to the 1960 constitutions

which allowed regions to retain 50% of locally generated revenues), resource control and a stinging critique of an unregulated oil industry (Nwajiaku-Dahou 2012). The latter is corroborated by a recent report by Amnesty International (2009, 81) which shows that 'the regulatory system in the Niger Delta is deeply flawed and lacks independence. The oil companies are too involved in the regulatory system, and the main government agency is both ineffective and represents conflicting interests.' Press statements in 2007 called for Shell to make a court-sanctioned US$1.5 billion compensation to local communities in Ijaw territory.

MEND has been linked to attacks on petroleum operations in Nigeria as part of the conflict in the Niger Delta, engaging in actions including sabotage, theft, property destruction, guerrilla warfare and kidnapping. In a January 2006 email, MEND warned the oil industry: 'It must be clear that the Nigerian government cannot protect your workers or assets. Leave our land while you can or die in it .... Our aim is to totally destroy the capacity of the Nigerian government to export oil.' Specifically, MEND is notorious for kidnapping foreign oil workers and demanding huge ransom for their release (Okonta 2006). For example, in January 2007, 'at least 50 foreigners were taken hostage ... That compares to a total of around 70 foreigners snatched in the whole of 2006' (Obi 2009, 104). Moreover, attacks by MEND on oil facilities have featured prominently in global media; in some cases, the group has given information prior to attacks, showing the inability of the Nigerian security forces to forestall its attacks. Furthermore, the group gained world publicity through its threats to 'cripple the Nigerian oil exports' (IRIN 2006, 3). True to its threat, attacks by MEND forced oil production shutdowns in Nigeria of up to 800,000 barrels per day or over 25% of the country's oil output. By March 2009, crude oil exports had fallen to 1.6 million barrels per day, down from 2.6 million in 2006 (Nwajiaku-Dahou 2012).

MEND has constantly reminded the public that their action was propelled by the desire for justice and fairness. According to the organisation's spokesperson, 'We are asking for justice. We want our land, and the Nigerian government to transfer all its involvement in the oil industry to host communities which will become shareholders in these oil companies.'[2] In April 2009, the idea of an amnesty for repentant militants was first mooted by the late President Yar'Adua in an urgent bid to address the worsening security in the Niger Delta and to curb relentless MEND attacks on oil facilities in Nigeria. The next section explores the impact of this amnesty initiative on resistance movement in the Niger Delta.

The impact of the amnesty on resistance movements in the Niger Delta

According to Ndutimi Alaibe, National Coordinator and Chief Accounting Officer of the Federal Government Amnesty Programme for Niger Delta ex-militants:

> The amnesty programme was a response to security conditions in the Niger Delta at the time. It was a response by the then President to reduce fundamentally the violence that was taking place. After consultation with stakeholders, it was decided that there was a need to get the militants to lay down their weapons. That was the basis of the amnesty which was meant to stabilise, consolidate and sustain the security conditions in the Niger Delta region, as a requisite for promoting economic development in the area. (*Daily Independent*, 3 June 2012)

The amnesty policy was announced by the late President Yar'Adua on the 25 June 2009. The amnesty policy stated that militants who freely surrender their arms within 60 days (6 August 2009 to 4 October 2009) will not be prosecuted for the crimes committed in the

process of disrupting the Nigerian oil industry. President Yar'Adua made clear that the amnesty deal was aimed at reintegrating and rehabilitating militants willing to surrender their arms into the Nigerian society (Onuoha 2011, 52). A member of the presidential amnesty plan, Dr Timiebi Koripamo-Agary, noted that militants are expected to make their way to the nearest screening centre, turn in their arms and ammunitions, take the oath of renunciation (of armed violence) and receive presidential amnesty and unconditional pardon, and then register for a rehabilitation and reintegration programme (*Ibid.*). According to Korpamo-Agary, the disarmament and subsequent reintegration of the militants is only a first step towards bringing the urgently needed development to the Niger Delta regions, since there cannot be development without peace (www.ipsnews.net).

The disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of militia groups, closely associated with the amnesty deal in the Niger Delta, was a policy recommended by the Niger Delta Technical Committee (NDTC) – a committee established in 2008 by the Nigerian government to determine appropriate peace-building strategies in the restive region (Ibaba 2011). Made up of scholars and opinion leaders drawn from the region, the 40-member committee consulted widely with stakeholders, including the combatants, before making its recommendations. In part, the policy recommendations on DDR state that the federal government should: (1) establish credible and authoritative DDR institutions and process, including international negotiators to plan, implement, and oversee the DDR programmes at regional, state and local government levels; (2) grant amnesty to all Niger Delta militants willing and ready to participate in the DDR programme; (3) work out long-term strategies of human capacity development and reintegration for ex-militants; and (4) exclude from amnesty and criminalise the activities of those militants unwilling to surrender their arms (NDTC 2008, 66).

In particular, state governments were required to support the rebuilding of communities destroyed by military invasion, and establish youth development centres and community demobilisation and reintegration committees to enhance reintegration and capacity building (Ibaba 2011). State governments were also required to provide social amenities, including health centres and schools at the site of former militant camps (NDTC 2008, 67). In July 2009, a budget of N52 billion (US$145 million) was controversially announced for the Amnesty deal intended for 20,192 registered militants. There was an appreciable lack of clarity about exactly how the budget was to be spent and the proportion was to be allocated to monthly allowances, versus the proportion allocated to a broader reintegration and rehabilitation package. Former combatants who registered for the 42-month period of training, reintegration and rehabilitation in government-designated residential training centres received monthly allowances of N65,000 over the same period. This was three times the average salary for a young public sector worker in Nigeria, but just a little higher than the foot soldier salary, which stood at N50,000 (US$400) in 2006 (Nwajiaku-Dahou 2010).

However, the criteria used to establish eligibility for inclusion were largely unclear, with the numbers of intended 'beneficiaries' widely believed to have been inflated. According to Abubakar Kari, anyone could claim to be an ex-militant to make some money:

> A plain, unemployed youth who was never involved in any militancy, realizing that they could easily make money by claiming or pretending to be militants, have been going into militant camps and so on and demanding that they too should be accommodated within the amnesty program. (Cited in Murdock 2012, 1)

Whatever the case, the amnesty deal saw over 15,000 militants surrender their weapons at the expiry date of the Disarmament and Demobilisation phase (Onuoha 2011, 52).

Weapons recovered during the disarmament process included '2760 assorted guns, 287,445 ammunitions of different calibre, 18 gun-boats, 763 dynamite sticks, 1090 dynamite caps, 3155 magazines and several other military accessories, such as dynamite cables, bulletproof jackets and jack-knives' (Onuoha 2011, 52; Ologun and Okeneye 2009, 1–2; Joab-Peterside 2010, 85–98). Many militants also turned themselves in as well, albeit major militant groups like MEND viewed the amnesty policy with suspicion since it made no room for dialogue and did not address the root causes that gave rise to the struggles in the first place. In an interview posted on the *Daily Independent* newspaper (3 June 2012), Ndutimi Alaibe noted that 'these militants …wanted assurances … Some of them went to the mundane level of committing me to take an oath with them.' The popular belief is that militants only handed in a small fraction of their arms as most of them doubted the government's genuine commitment to the amnesty deal (Onuoha 2011).

Although the amnesty deal has led to a lull in violence in the Niger Delta since 2009, this paper argues that it affords only a cosmetic and temporary solution to the conflict. Specifically, cash payouts to armed militants and proposals to give oil-bearing communities a 10% stake in state oil revenues fail to seriously address the underlying issues of 'government corruption, political sponsorship of violence and environmental degradation' that continues to fuel resistance in the Niger Delta (Human Rights Watch 2010). As Omeje (2004) argues, what prompted the proposal of the amnesty programme was not the environmental tragedy in the Niger Delta region but the urgent need to put an end to MEND's crippling attacks on oil facilities in Nigeria which has negatively affected the country's oil productivity. In short, 'the prime concern by the Nigerian state in the management of the oil conflicts in the Niger Delta has been to maximise oil revenues' (Omeje 2004, 425).

The amnesty programme has also been questioned by some scholars who argue that, by its conception and operation, the programme does not adhere to the fundamentals of the DDR process (Ibaba 2011, 244). As Davideheiser and Kialee (2010, 1) argue:

> A DDR program is typically adopted as a means of transition from conflict to peace since its function is to remove one or more of the disputing parties from the scene. Accordingly, peace negotiations generally include DDR clauses, yet in peace-building theory, a DDR program is only expected to comprise the preliminary phases of a much broader process of addressing root causes that initially motivated the combatants. By failing to include the latter, the amnesty program does not conform to this model.

So, the failure of the Nigerian government to negotiate with combatants in the Niger Delta is identified here as a major flaw which dissociates the amnesty programme from DDR. However, scholars like Ibaba (2011, 244) argue that 'to insist that there must be negotiation between the government and combatants will be ignoring context, and thus missing out the point.' Ibaba further contends that the Niger Delta violence was championed by a welter of groups, and for this reason, negotiations with combatants could have been disorderly. In addition, he maintains that the amnesty deal satisfies the core phases and goals of DDR, as it adopted the DDR phases and processes of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (see Table 1).

Quite aside, in an interview posted in the *Daily Independent* newspaper (3 July 2012, 1–2), Ndutimi Alaibe, National Coordinator of the Amnesty Programme, noted that:

> Some of the challenges facing the programme today have to do with the background of some of the militants themselves and the initial process of de-briefing. You may take them abroad, and on arrival find that the individual is not even psychologically prepared and then indulge in negative habits and in the process, they get deported. There is therefore need to properly

Table 1. The phases and processes of DDR phase.

Phases	Processes
Disarmament (removing the weapons)	Collection and documentation of arms and ammunitions from combatants and development of arms management programme
Demobilisation (discharging combatants from their units)	Discharge of active combatants from armed groups and the provision of reinsertion (traditional assistance) in the form of allowances to cover basic needs, short-term education, training and employment
Reintegration (the socio-economic process of becoming a civilian)	Status change process from combatant to civilian

engage the ex-militants to determine their career aspirations before re-integration. The programme has recorded fundamental success in terms of some of them who have been trained in specialised disciplines; and more can still be achieved. There are those who have graduated as pilots. Managing 26,000 ex-militants through reintegration can be very challenging. The cooperation of all stakeholders is imperative.

Conclusion

This paper has assessed the environmental tragedy and oil conflict in the Niger Delta region and the impact of the amnesty programme on local resistance movement in the region. Three years after the amnesty programme, oil-producing communities in the Niger Delta still suffer from grinding poverty and underdevelopment. These communities continue to lack basic infrastructural facilities such as paved roads, pipe-borne water, and stable power supply, while unregulated oil pollution continues to compromise the land and water upon which their livelihood depends. Yar'Adua's announcement of a presidential pardon in 2009 is essentially conceived in this paper as a means of buying off militants and re-establishing oil and gas production in the Niger Delta without dealing with the root causes of sustained grievances and conflict in the region. Moreover, the protracted illness and subsequent death of Yar'Adua – the main architect of the amnesty programme – meant that little real progress was made on the reintegration and rehabilitation front. Ex-militants complained bitterly that promised allowances and training were either not forthcoming or ill suited to their needs.

Unless the Nigerian government seriously addresses underlying problems in the Niger Delta, such as political grievances relating to poverty and underdevelopment, the poor regulation of an environmentally polluting oil industry, and the alienation of local people from rights to land and resources in the Niger Delta, militant activities in the region are likely to resume in earnest. Indeed, the twin bomb blasts of 1 October 2010 in Abuja, as Nigeria marked her fiftieth anniversary of independence, is a clear indication that we are yet to hear the last of local resistance movements in the Niger Delta.

Note on contributor

Daniel Egiegba Agbiboa is an International Postgraduate Research Scholarship and Undergraduate Research Scholarship PhD Scholar in the School of Sociology, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University (ANU). He is currently employed as a professional research assistant for a UN research project on transnational corruption and conflict of interest at the Transnational Research Institute on Corruption (TRIC) and the ANU School of Politics and International Relations. His research interest is in the field of African Development, particularly its intersection with corruption, conflict and security. He is the author of over 25 peer-reviewed articles in academic journals,

including *Third World Quarterly, Journal of Black Studies, Conflict, Security and Development, Peace Review,* and *Peace Research*.

Notes

1. Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro addressing his 59-man 'ragtag' army before the first revolt against the oil multinationals and the Nigerian government in 1966. See Tebekaemi (1982, 117).
2. Jomo Gbomo's online message to the media.

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The legacies of Thomas Sankara: a revolutionary experience in retrospect

Ernest Harsch*

Institute of African Studies at Columbia University, New York, USA

A quarter century after the 15 October 1987 assassination of Thomas Sankara in a military coup, the late president of Burkina Faso remains a near-mythical hero for many young people in his country and across Africa. They idealise the image of a committed, self-sacrificing rebel, who during four years as leader of a small, impoverished Sahelian nation sought to improve the lives of ordinary people while at the same time projecting the country onto the international arena. Why has popular interest in Sankara persisted for so long, despite the collapse of his short-lived revolutionary venture? How is it that each anniversary of his death draws hundreds, if not thousands, to commemorations at his gravesite? This article offers some retrospective reflections and re-examines those features of Sankara's revolutionary era that still resonate with many citizens today, as well as those that have been left behind.

Keywords: Sankara; Burkina Faso; revolution; mobilisation; development

[Héritage de Thomas Sankara ; retour sur une expérience révolutionnaire.] Un quart de siècle après l'assassinat de Thomas Sankara le 15 octobre 1987 lors d'un coup d'état militaire, cet ancien président du Burkina Faso demeure un héro quasi mythique pour de nombreux jeunes dans son pays et à travers l'Afrique. Ils idéalisent l'image d'un rebelle engagé, plein d'abnégation, qui a cherché, pendant quatre ans à la tête d'une petite nation sahélienne pauvre, à améliorer le sort de gens ordinaires tout en projetant le pays sur la scène internationale. Pourquoi l'intérêt populaire pour Sankara a-t-il perduré si longtemps, malgré l'échec de son entreprise révolutionnaire de courte durée ? Comment se fait-il que chaque anniversaire de sa mort amène des centaines, voire des milliers de personnes à venir sur sa tombe en commémoration. Cet article offre des réflexions rétrospectives et réexamine les caractéristiques de l'ère révolutionnaire de Sankara qui fait toujours sens pour de nombreux citoyens, comme pour les laissés pour compte.

Mots-clés : Sankara ; Burkina Faso ; révolution ; mobilisation ; développement

Two weeks before the end of 2011, an exceptionally turbulent year in Burkina Faso's political life, angry youths took over a main road in the Zogona neighbourhood of Ouagadougou, the capital. They played a football game in the street to symbolise their opposition to construction work for a hotel on land they were using as a sports field, the last open area in Zogona not already taken over for commercial development. As traffic backed up and riot police watched, the protesters chanted slogans to denounce their field's appropriation. Among them: '*malheur à ceux qui bâillonnent leur peuple*' (woe to those who stifle

*Email: eharsch@igc.org

their people). There was no explicit mention of Thomas Sankara, who used that phrase decades earlier to denounce an authoritarian regime. However, the protesters knew well that most Burkinabè would understand the words' origin and significance. By directing the slogan at the municipal authorities, the youths likely intended it as a general warning, as well as a specific reminder that the field had initially been set aside for Zogona's youth in 1984, during Sankara's presidency. After the district mayor promised that half the land would be devoted to a new sports complex, the protesters agreed to lift their blockade (*L'Evènement*, No. 224, 25 December 2011).

A quarter century after his assassination, Sankara remains a notable political presence in his country. Each 15 October, on the anniversary of the 1987 coup that brought his death, admirers rally by his grave in Ouagadougou to commemorate their fallen hero. Sometimes the gatherings are relatively modest, almost ritual ceremonies. Sometimes, however, they have drawn tens of thousands and turned into exuberant protests against the regime of President Blaise Compaoré, the former captain who seized power in 1987. While the speakers are usually senior opposition figures or former comrades of Sankara, many in the crowd are young, too young to have had any direct experience of Sankara's revolutionary era. Beyond Burkina Faso's own borders – in other African countries, Europe and the Americas – radical intellectuals and young activists from time to time also gather to discuss Sankara's ideas and the lessons of the revolutionary effort that he led.

While open mention of Sankara was virtually taboo in Burkina Faso for years after his death, his name has since re-entered the country's mainstream. In 2000 he was officially rehabilitated and designated a national hero. Even before that, since the restoration of a multi-party system in the 1990s, a variety of parties identifying themselves as 'Sankarist' have fielded candidates in every election and since 2002 have elected a half dozen or so deputies to the National Assembly. In the 2005 presidential election, the head of the largest Sankarist party, Bénéwendé Sankara, a labour rights lawyer (but no relation of the late president), came in a far distant second. In the 2010 presidential poll he came in third, slightly behind the second-place finisher.[1] The electoral impact of these Sankarist parties – which together generally poll under 10% of the vote – is handicapped by their fragmentation and factionalism, as well as a public impression that some of their leaders may not be motivated entirely by revolutionary ideals.

More significantly, ideas from the Sankara era are often raised as alternative solutions during times of acute crisis. They are proposed not only by those who view themselves as followers of the Sankarist tradition, but also by liberals, nationalists and others exasperated with the country's affairs. During the popular protests that rocked the country after the December 1998 assassination of independent newspaper editor Norbert Zongo, anger over the prevalent impunity enjoyed by high-level officials for their rights abuses and corrupt dealings elicited calls for a return of the revolutionary courts of the Sankara era (Harsch 1999, 404). After the food price demonstrations that swept Burkina Faso, Senegal and other African countries in early 2008, the Senegal-based rapper Didier Awadi released a hard-hitting song, *Bang Bang/Woye,* and an accompanying series of videos linking hunger to the wide gaps between rich and poor, interspersing his lyrics with quotes from Sankara excoriating the capitalist and imperialist systems. When Burkina Faso erupted after the February 2011 beating death of a student in Koudougou and anti-government demonstrations roiled the country, popular reggae artist Sams'K Le Jah premiered a new song at a concert suggesting that Compaoré leave the presidency – and sang it while wearing a Sankara T-shirt. The repeated army mutinies of 2011, with their looting of merchants' shops and residential areas, led several commentators to cite

Sankara's adage that 'a soldier without political training is just a criminal with power' (*Bendré*, 27 April 2011; *Le Pays*, 7 June 2011).

Why this lasting legacy? Why do oppositional youths in Burkina Faso – and elsewhere in Africa – continue to raise Sankara and his ideas? Undoubtedly, much of the explanation lies in their dissatisfaction with the way things are today: hunger, poverty, widespread abuses and corruption, electoral 'democracies' that bring little real change, elites that incline more towards Western capitals than to their fellow citizens. For some across the region, singing Sankara's praises or wearing a T-shirt with his image can symbolise their alienation and defiance, a political–cultural expression comparable to the ubiquitous portraits of Che Guevara and Bob Marley. In Burkina Faso specifically, the message conveyed by brandishing Sankara's name or image is especially pointed. Not only was he a home-grown rebel, but the person seen as responsible for his martyrdom still sits in the presidential palace. What better way to visibly express rejection of the established order?

This article does not assess affairs in post-Sankara Burkina Faso (for which, see Englebert 1996; Otayek, Sawadogo and Guingané 1996; Harsch 1998, 1999, 2009; Hilgers and Mazzocchetti 2010). Nor does it analyse the activities of those who claim to be following in Sankara's footsteps, except to note how they have taken up some of his initiatives and ideas. Mainly, I look back at certain aspects of Burkina Faso's revolutionary experience and the role of its most celebrated leader. This effort is admittedly selective. Revolutions are complex affairs and always stimulate divergent reactions, from detractors and admirers alike. Even staunch partisans generally cannot agree on which features were most important, innovative or successful, which failed, which should be remembered or forgotten. These reflections also are inevitably coloured by the author's own particular research on Burkina Faso, during and since the revolution.[2]

An historic turning point

The singularity of the revolutionary experience of 1983–1987 can only be fully appreciated by keeping in mind the country's social and political conditions at the time. In the colonial era, Upper Volta, 'Haute-Volta' as it was named by the French authorities, was regarded as little more than a remote backwater, with few resources deemed worthy of exploitation, except as a labour reserve of young, able-bodied men. As a result, Upper Volta experienced far less investment, infrastructure development, market penetration or class stratification than did many African colonies in the coastal regions. Nor did the different peoples of the colony, or their elites, have much opportunity to develop an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1993) beyond their particular ethnic groups, since the colonial state scarcely reached outside a few main towns.

Upper Volta exhibited only limited opposition to colonial rule following the crushing of the last armed resistance to French conquest in 1916. The handful of nationalist or leftist figures who emerged were outmanoeuvred by more conservative forces. When France finally ceded sovereignty in 1960, it handed the reins to a politician, Maurice Yaméogo, who had actually opposed independence a year earlier. The trade unions and student movements were well organised and militant, however, and led an insurrection against Yaméogo in January 1966 (Guirma 1991). However, they were too weak to install a more popular government, and instead welcomed the army commander's seizure of power. It was the first of a succession of military takeovers, and trade union agitation played a role in undermining a couple of the subsequent regimes as well.

Since notable independence-era 'national heroes' were scarce, it is likely that the emergence of even a moderately progressive or nationalist leader would have left a prominent

mark in the history books. Yet Sankara was anything but moderate. Early on, the young army captain maintained secret contacts with several Marxist-inspired groupings and was especially close to a childhood friend, Soumane Touré, who was the leader of the most militant union federation. Sankara and other leftist officers gradually gained popularity among the military's junior ranks (Andriamirado 1987; Jaffré 2007).

In late 1981 a fragile military regime seeking to shore up its credibility brought Sankara in as minister of information. That move backfired. Sankara supported the local media in exposing high-level corruption, and when the regime turned more repressive, he resigned and publicly denounced it (using the famous phrase 'Woe to those who stifle their people'). Detention and house arrest followed. Yet another coup, this time partly reflecting the growing strength of younger left-leaning officers, brought Sankara back in January 1983 as prime minister. Again he used state office to agitate for change, including by supporting labour mobilisations, denouncing corruption, criticising the conservative sway of traditional chiefs and espousing anti-imperialist foreign policy positions. Alarm bells sounded in Paris, and the conservative senior officers in the regime were encouraged to mount an internal coup in May 1983 to depose and arrest Sankara and his closest colleagues.

That coup did not go as planned. Large demonstrations hit Ouagadougou, involving high school students, youths from the poor neighbourhoods and some trade unionists. Protesters cried 'Free Sankara!' and chanted slogans against France. Clandestine committees of civilians formed to oppose the coup and anti-government tracts circulated in the barracks. Most seriously, the paratrooper garrison in Pô remained under the control of Captain Compaoré, then a Sankara loyalist. A fragile stalemate set in between the two competing centres of military authority, Ouagadougou and Pô. Finally, on 4 August 1983, Compaoré led some 250 paratroopers to Ouagadougou to seize major installations, in coordination with Sankara, other military personnel and units of civilian supporters. By that evening Sankara was on the air to proclaim the overthrow of the government and the creation of a new National Council of the Revolution (CNR).

Some in the media and political detractors saw the uniforms of Sankara and his fellow officers and quickly labelled the takeover a 'coup' and the government a 'military regime'. Unlike the country's previous military interventions, however, the 1983 takeover was conducted with the direct collaboration of several leftist civilian groups, whose leaders also filled prominent government posts. The CNR and cabinet were hybrid military–civilian formations, although the greatest influence was wielded by Sankara, Compaoré, Captain Henri Zongo and Commander Jean-Baptiste Lingani, the four 'historic' leaders of the August 1983 seizure of power.[3]

Whether the experience led by Sankara's CNR could be characterised as a 'revolution' is debatable. By definitions that focus on turnovers in a political system (Tilly 1978, 1995), it was. Yet it clearly did not entail the kind of deep-going economic and social transformations that marked the 'great revolutions' of France, Russia or China, or even those that resulted from Africa's anti-colonial insurrections (Algeria, Guinea-Bissau, Angola, Mozambique) or the overthrow of the feudal monarchy in Ethiopia. And while Sankara and his colleagues drew on the country's traditions of popular agitation and often sought to spur popular mobilisation, the latter had serious limits, so that much of the initiative for change came largely from the the CNR, thus to some extent resembling a 'revolution from above' (Trimberger 1978). Yet whatever label one might apply, it was evident to many contemporary observers that the CNR brought more political, economic, social and cultural changes in its four short years to the country than had occurred in the previous quarter century.

Ideology

For many outside observers – and citizens of the country itself – it was not easy to pin down the outlook of the leadership. Sankara and his colleagues called theirs a 'democratic and popular revolution'. This led some academic analysts to apply the label 'populist' (Beinen 1985; Martin 1987). They sometimes did so by pairing Sankara with Ghana's Jerry Rawlings, another young officer who in his early years in power did seem to fit the populist characterisation. Some media commentators also tagged Sankara as a follower of Muammar el-Qaddafi. During one visit to Libya, Qaddafi apparently did press Sankara to adopt his 'Green Book' approach, but Sankara replied: 'We are not exactly political virgins. Your experience interests us, but we want to live our own' (Andriamirado 1987, 58).

Sankara readily identified himself as Marxist, although he took care not to impose that label on the revolutionary process itself. The influence of Marxist ideas is evident throughout his speeches, especially the famous 'Political orientation speech' of October 1983, which provided a detailed analysis of class forces and the strategy for allying with some while opposing others (Prairie 2007, 76–109).[4] In his address to the UN General Assembly he cited the inspiration of the French Revolution, Paris Commune and Russian Revolution (Prairie 2007, 165). For the editors of *Thomas Sankara speaks*, the most extensive collection of his works, this ideological orientation is the defining element of his political legacy: 'Sankara stood out among the leaders of struggles for national liberation in Africa in the last half of the twentieth century because he was a communist' (Prairie 2007, 11).

Much has changed since Sankara's death. The Berlin Wall has fallen, the Soviet Union has disappeared and many self-professed communists around the world have either jettisoned their former beliefs or been thrown onto the defensive. In Burkina Faso, those of Sankara's former colleagues who sided with Compaoré's coup soon moved rightward; if they still identify with the left at all, they tend to call themselves 'social democrats'. More tellingly, hardly any of the Sankarist leaders in Burkina Faso today draw attention to their hero's communist beliefs. The largest of the Sankarist groups, the *Union pour la renaissance/Parti sankariste* (UNIR/PS), often speaks in general terms about the need to struggle for democracy and justice and against 'exploitation in all its forms' (UNIR/PS 2009, 2012). Norbert Tiendrébéogo, leader of the *Front des forces sociales*, another Sankarist party, has gone so far as to deny that Sankara was ever a Marxist (*Sidwaya*, 17 October 2007) and has argued that 'Sankarism defines itself as a political current born of democratic socialism', with an endogenous and pragmatic character (*Sidwaya*, 9 March 2012).

Other facets of Sankara's ideological outlook have retained somewhat greater favour, both within Burkina Faso and among radical activists elsewhere. His pronouncements against imperialism and in support of liberation movements – from Southern Africa to the Western Sahara, from Central America to New Caledonia – are frequently remembered. So is his staunch stand against Africa's growing foreign debt and his (unsuccessful) call on other African leaders to collectively refuse to pay. Most famously, many recall, Sankara transgressed diplomatic niceties by criticising some of France's foreign policy positions directly to a visiting President François Mitterrand, provoking the latter's half-joking rebuke: 'This is a somewhat troublesome man, President Sankara' (Sankara and Mitterrand 1986). By earning the enmity of various Western powers and their local allies, Sankara's determination to speak out against imperialist domination simultaneously elicited cheers from many champions of genuine independence for Africa. Sankara's frequent calls for building pan-African unity, not simply at the top, but especially among the continent's peoples, also left a lasting impression. Commented Burundian activist David Gakunzi in

his preface to the first French-language collection of Sankara's speeches, 'Profoundly Burkinabè, Sankara was also profoundly pan-Africanist, internationalist and attached to the struggles of the Third World' (Gakunzi 1991, 14).

Sankara's strong stance against corruption and high living by government officials reflected another side of his outlook. In such a poor country, frugality and integrity were the new watchwords. Public trials sent scores of dignitaries to jail for corruption or fraud. Sitting government ministers had to drive small and inexpensive Renaults or Peugeots. Sankara kept his own children in public schools and rebuffed relatives who sought state jobs. Twenty-five years after Sankara's death, Maxime Nikièma, a leading figure in the Réseau national de lutte anti-corruption (Ren-lac), the main civil anti-corruption organisation, noted that under the CNR – unlike today – there was a 'strong political will' to combat corruption (*Sidwaya*, 15 October 2012). With corruption, theft and nepotism so prevalent across Africa, Sankara's anti-corruption campaigns and personal example have drawn wide attention. In South Africa, for example, a Black Consciousness-inspired group has drawn explicitly on Sankara's ideas to demand that President Jacob Zuma and other leaders of the ruling African National Congress give up their mansions and live by the same standards as the majority of the people (September National Imbizo 2012).

Pan-Africanist, anti-imperialist, communist, anti-corruption crusader, the labels all appeared to fit Sankara to varying degrees and at various times. Those who cite him today tend to highlight whatever facet seems most appropriate for the occasion.

Nation building

Sankara from time to time talked about the need for 'patriotism' to defend, build and modernise his country. Yet he generally avoided calls to nationalism in the narrow sense of the term. There was little in the old, 'neo-colonial' state of Upper Volta worth rallying around. The revolutionary effort certainly was unfolding within particular borders, but Sankara repeatedly insisted that it also was part of a wider regional, continental and global struggle.

Still, the process of change unleashed under Sankara saw more efforts at nation building than were ever before attempted, or even projected. This was a core element of the revolutionary agenda: trying to forge a semblance of nationhood from among the disparate peoples of the territory once known as Upper Volta, while simultaneously seeking to challenge the narrow parameters of external domination bequeathed by the colonial past. As someone grounded in the methods of Marxist analysis, Sankara understood well that the character and possibilities of the revolution were largely determined by existing realities, the 'objective conditions'. The revolution, Sankara acknowledged, was occurring 'in a backward, agricultural country where the weight of tradition and ideology emanating from a feudal-type social organisation weighs very heavily on the popular masses', and where there was not yet 'an organized working class, conscious of its historic mission' (Prairie 2007, 40). Building socialism, while seen as a desirable future, was clearly not on the immediate agenda. Given Upper Volta's extreme state of underdevelopment, more basic tasks took precedence.

On the first anniversary of the 1983 takeover Sankara's CNR renamed their state 'Burkina Faso', which roughly translates as 'land of the upright people'. By drawing the name from two different indigenous languages (and taking the 'bè' suffix in 'Burkinabè' from yet a third), the government affirmed the African identity of the new state it was trying to fashion, a state that sought to draw its legitimacy not from a colonial geographical designation but from the diverse peoples who live in it. This effort to tap indigenous culture was consciously pan-territorial. Historically, the Mossi had tended to dominate, given their

numbers (about half the population), their geographical concentration (in the centre, around the capital) and the weight of the Mossi kingdom within the colonial state. Sankara's government followed a more inclusive approach. The CNR had numerous Mossi in it, but also Bobo, Gourounsi, Peulh and others. Sankara himself was from a marginal and low-status sub-group known as the Silmi–Mossi (of mixed Mossi and Peulh ancestry).

Television news was no longer delivered only in French, but also in Mooré and occasionally other languages. Because very few Burkinabè had access to television, radio remained the main means of communication, and it used 11 indigenous languages. An adult literacy campaign launched in 1986 was conducted in nine. Major rallies and conferences frequently featured dance and musical performances by troupes from different ethnic groups. A declaration of a prize jury at one cultural festival affirmed that while individual works might be in competition, the cultures themselves would not be, since 'each culture has its own value. . .This festival is an occasion for our different nationalities to discover themselves, to make themselves known, and to mutually enrich themselves, for the birth of a genuinely national culture' (*Carrefour africain*, 29 December 1984).

During the revolutionary era, many citizens acquired a strong sense of pride in their African identity and in the cultural richness of their country. Years after the CNR's demise, significant sectors of the population, including leading figures who were politically hostile to the Sankara government, seem to readily accept their identification as citizens of Burkina Faso, as Burkinabè.

Economic and social reorientation

In seeking to build a national economy based more on domestic markets and interests, the Sankara government faced a paradoxical situation. Since much of the economy was still dominated by subsistence agriculture and there was very little industry of any kind, Burkina Faso was not as deeply enmeshed in external market relations as some of its neighbours, thus posing fewer impediments to major policy reorientations. Yet because the productive forces were so rudimentary, the country had few resources of its own to draw on.

In rather sweeping terms, the government's five-year plan proclaimed the ultimate goal to be nothing less than an 'independent, self-sufficient and planned national economy at the service of a democratic and popular society' (Ministère de la planification 1985, i). The state was to play the central role, since no other force, including the minuscule private sector, could mobilise the capital required for building essential infrastructure and stimulating productive activities. True, the government still drew on foreign aid. Yet while overall aid levels stayed steady in real terms between 1984 and 1987, much of it was tied to specific projects that were already under way. France, the largest donor, halted all general budgetary support after 1983, as did the World Bank after 1984 (Zagré 1994, 164, 176).

New state investments therefore could be financed only by seriously economising on existing operations. Civil service salaries were frozen and government ministers had to give up allowances. Successive budgets spent much more on health, education and other social programmes and allotted significantly greater investment to infrastructure and productive projects.

Most striking was an overall shift away from the cities and towards the countryside. The government provided poor farmers and livestock herders with more extensive public services, productive inputs, price incentives, marketing assistance, irrigation, environmental protection and other support. In the five-year plan, 71% of investments in the productive sectors was allocated to agriculture, livestock, fisheries, wildlife and forests (Ministère de la planification 1985, 269).

Villagers also benefited from greater access to health and education. By January 1986 more than 7460 primary health posts had been established, roughly one for each village. Some 2 million children had been vaccinated against the major childhood diseases, and about 36,000 villagers were taught basic literacy (Novicki 1986; *Sidwaya*, 27 January 1986). These initiatives were part of a broader drive to expand social services. Between 1983 and 1987, public health spending increased by 27% and education expenditures by 42% (Savadogo and Wetta 1992, 60). Important new initiatives were also taken in other areas vital to social welfare, including housing, transport, child assistance, job-creation, water and family planning (Jaffré 1989, 79–98).

The government welcomed whatever external aid it could get. However, Planning Minister Youssouf Ouédraogo insisted that such aid would no longer be the 'determining factor' in the government's priorities (author's interview, Ouagadougou, 15 March 1985). The CNR also explicitly rejected the programmes of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, largely because of their neoliberal policy prescriptions. Reflecting a view of Sankara as a committed opponent of neoliberalism, academics and activists argued at an international symposium in Ouagadougou on the twentieth anniversary of his death that Sankara could be considered a precursor of 'altermondialisation', that is, of those who today champion alternatives to capitalist globalisation (*Le Pays*, 15 October 2007; *Sidwaya*, 15 October 2007). Others focused on Sankara's various initiatives to integrate environmental protection into economic development strategies (*Sidwaya*, 16 October 2007), years before the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio popularised such a linkage.

Popular mobilisation

A particularly notable feature of the Sankara government's approach to development was its reliance on social mobilisations and local self-help projects. The basic concept of community self-help had deep social roots. Even though customary ties and obligations had weakened, notions of social solidarity, communal work, reciprocity and the general welfare still had some vitality. The country had various village assemblies, farmers' groups, cooperatives, youth associations and other civil organisations. The largest peasants' association, the *Union de fédérations des groupements naam* (UFGN), relied heavily on the tradition of *naam* collective work groups, in which young men and women mobilised for community and cooperative agricultural activities (Ouédraogo 1990). While not formally linking to such groups, the Sankara government saw the utility of drawing on their ideas and practices.

Its main vehicles were the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs). In response to a call by Sankara in his first radio broadcast, people in Ouagadougou's poorer neighbourhoods began setting up the first CDRs on an ad hoc basis, with leaders chosen by direct, open election. The CDRs spread within several months from the main urban centres throughout the country, to most of the approximately 7000 villages.

The CDRs' first collective labour mobilisations involved cleaning school and hospital courtyards, graveling roads, building mini-dams and even starting construction on schools, community centres, theatres and other facilities. They elicited a ready and sometimes enthusiastic response from villagers and urban poor, since the projects were of immediate benefit to local communities and there was at least an element of consultation in their selection, with proposals often raised during public general assemblies.

There were some tensions between the CDRs and civil groups independent of the state, especially the trade unions concentrated in the main cities. However, relations between the committees and civil associations were generally less conflictual in rural areas. Contrary to analyses that portrayed Sankara's CNR as bent on stamping out all centres of independent

activity and establishing totalitarian control of most social and political life (Otayek 1989, 4; Banégas 1993; Englebert 1996, 58), the mobilisations of the defence committees coincided with an overall expansion in associational life. The UFGN, for example, was able to spread beyond its original base in Yatenga to 15 provinces, with a spectacular rise in total membership from 5120 to 151,910 between 1983 and 1987 (*Carrefour africain*, 15 May 1987; Koumba 1990, 6). Overall, 166 new civil associations were established in that same period, comparable to the number created during the previous five years (Diawara 1996, 239).

The CDRs themselves had a popular character. They involved many people, especially among the poor, who previously had never taken part in any political or associational activity. With few other means of expression available to them – in societies where traditional power relations accorded formal authority to elders and family patriarchs and denied younger age-sets any real say over basic life decisions – youths especially flocked to the CDRs. Lower castes or those of other subordinate status also found in the CDRs new opportunities to assert themselves. For example, among the semi-nomadic Peulh of the Liptaako region, the lower-ranking Rimaybe (a category originally descended from non-Peulh war captives, slaves and vassals) were 'very satisfied with the revolution of Sankara', in part because they saw a chance to advance their standing against the aristocratic Rimbe (Bovin 1990, 35). Such inclusiveness often alarmed socially conservative Burkinabè – especially traditional chiefs and elders in the countryside – but it also infused the committees with the vitally that made many of their mobilisational activities so effective.

Women's advancement

To a lesser extent, women also found avenues for advancement through the CDRs. They tended to be most active in community self-help mobilisations, and rarely in other activities, although a quota system for elections to the CDR bureaus ensured that at least a few women rose to leadership positions.

From the outset, Sankara emphasised the emancipation of women as one of his central social and political goals – a rarity for any president in Africa at the time. In his political orientation speech, women's advancement featured second in a list of national priorities, after reform of the army but before economic reconstruction. This was more than just rhetoric. Specific 'pro-women' measures were built into many programmes, from literacy classes targeted toward women, to the establishment of primary health units in each village, to support for women's cooperatives and market associations. A new family code set a minimum age for marriage, established divorce by mutual consent, recognised a widow's right to inherit and prohibited the bride-price. Vigorous public campaigns were launched against female genital mutilation, forced marriage and polygamy. Progress in such areas was painfully slow, however, and remains a serious challenge for women in Burkina Faso today.

At a time when hardly any women reached high political positions in Africa, Sankara named several to cabinet posts, including as ministers of the budget, family affairs, culture and health. Though more of a gesture than a genuine shift between the genders, such appointments nonetheless sent a strong signal of encouragement to women at all levels. In September 1985 the *Union des femmes du Burkina* (UFB) was set up by the CDR national secretariat. Local UFB bureaus were elected by general assemblies of women, but the chairperson, initially, was the female CDR bureau member responsible for women's mobilisation (*Sidwaya*, 23 September 1985). The UFB was not independent,

and members sometimes were relegated to stereotypical female roles such as preparing meals for CDR conferences. Gradually, however, the women's union acquired a more distinct profile – only to disappear a couple of years after the 1987 coup.

Democratising power?

When Sankara and his fellow revolutionaries seized power in 1983, one of their first acts was to ban the established political parties, seen as instruments of the old elites. Although a variety of small, leftist groups were permitted to operate openly – so long as they supported the CNR – no plans for representative elections to a national legislature or similar body were ever contemplated. Instead, the Sankara government advanced notions akin to those of participatory democracy. As with the social mobilisations, the CDRs were regarded as the main vehicles for introducing elements of popular participation.

According to Sankara, one of the CDRs' main goals was to 'democratize power', so that they could act as 'representatives of revolutionary power in the villages, the urban neighbourhoods, and the workplaces' (Prairie 2007, 94, 96). At the local level – and only there – the CDRs were relatively democratic structures, with bureau members directly elected in open general assemblies. Above these local committees, however, was a hierarchy of command capped by an appointed National General Secretariat, headed by two military officers. The secretariat, according to the CDR statutes, had the authority to dismiss 'faltering' CDR bureaus, within a framework that subordinated lower bodies to higher ones (CNR 1984, 10–27). The CDR general secretary, Capt. Pierre Ouédraogo, justified this subordination on the grounds that it could be 'extremely dangerous to give all the power to the masses right away, when some of them do not even understand what the revolution is' (author's interview, Ouagadougou, 15 March 1985). So decision-making remained essentially top-down.

It was projected, however, that the more representative aspects of the CDRs would gradually be scaled up through a pyramid-type structure. After a 1984–1985 territorial reorganisation, each of the 300 departments was managed by a council selected by the village and town CDRs within that department, but headed by a government-appointed prefect. The mayors of 29 urban communes were similarly chosen by the CDRs in those towns, although Ouagadougou's mayor was named by the government. In early 1987 the authorities began laying the groundwork for representative councils for the 30 provinces, with members chosen by lower-ranking CDRs, although the provincial high commissioners would remain government appointees (*Sidwaya*, 17 and 20 February 1987). Would these developments have provided opportunities for transmitting ideas and grievances from the local level upwards, rather than simply making implementation of government initiatives more effective? The limited nature of initiatives from below and the central authorities' tendency to dismiss ideas that did not fit their revolutionary schema suggested that expressions of genuine democratic participation would have been constrained. In any case, before such opportunities could even be tested, the process was ended by the 1987 military coup.

Subsequently, the Compaoré regime – under pressure from both its citizenry and new donor preferences for liberal democratic trappings – drafted a new constitution in 1991 that shifted the country towards a multi-party electoral system. Although the new language of rights and liberal democracy tended to mask the perpetuation of a de facto party-state that repeatedly re-elected the same ruling elite (Loada, 1996, 2010), the political opposition, moderate and radical alike, has adopted the same language of electoral democracy, rights and rule of law. For their part, the Sankarist parties from time to time recall elements of participatory democracy from the Sankara era, but they also affirm their support for the

country's current constitutional order. However badly that system may function in practice in Burkina Faso, these parties accept it as the guiding model for democratic engagement today.

Abuses and repression

Although the CDRs could be credited with some accomplishments, their image, in historical memory, is largely sullied. What people tend to remember most were the many and repeated abuses carried out by young – and sometimes armed – CDR militants. In reminiscences of the revolutionary era, even people who are generally favourable to Sankara's initiatives often see the CDRs as a sad and sorry exception.

Some CDR leaders operated in a commandist fashion, relying more on directives than persuasion. Armed patrols by undisciplined youths in the defence committees' vigilance brigades engaged in shakedowns, extortion and armed robbery. Although charged with unmasking corrupt state functionaries, some activists themselves embezzled funds and broke into homes to collect 'taxes' and 'contributions'. A few were hauled before the People's Revolutionary Courts, which opened special dockets devoted to 'gangster CDRs' (*Sidwaya*, 3 December 1985).

The first national CDR conference in March–April 1986 featured many frank and sharp criticisms. CDR cadres were warned not to engage in 'vendettas and vandalism'. 'Inexcusable and revolting' actions by some CDRs had given a poor image to the revolution and contributed to 'the demobilisation of the masses' (Secrétariat général national des CDR 1986, 62, 93). Sankara, in the closing address, was especially scathing. Some CDR leaders

> set themselves up as veritable despots in the local districts, in the villages, and in the provinces... Reigning and holding sway like warlords... The CDR office must not be a locale of torturers but the complete opposite: an office where you find people who lead, who organize, who mobilize, who educate, and who struggle as revolutionaries. (Prairie 2007, 281–285)

There were subsequent campaigns to clean up the CDRs, and their security functions were downgraded. However, the basic problem lay not just with some inexperienced and uncontrolled local activists; it came from higher up. While the CNR's various initiatives elicited some support, they also stirred resentment, passive insubordination and at times outright resistance (Banégas 1993). This led the authorities to place greater emphasis on coercion and to react in excessively repressive ways to overt challenges.

As often happens with governments that come in through armed force, key officials of the overthrown regime – and several of its predecessors – were immediately detained. Scores were tried before People's Revolutionary Courts on charges of corruption, embezzlement, misuse of public funds and other economic infractions, and sentenced to prison terms and monetary penalties. There was solid evidence that many probably were guilty of the charges, but the trials nevertheless had strong political connotations.[5] Many other public employees were summarily dismissed from their jobs because of their previous political affiliations.

Very early, relations between the CNR and a number of the trade unions soured, in part because of the political leanings of some union leaders. In fact, on the very day of the 4 August 1983 revolution, the CNR was repudiated by a congress of the main primary school teachers' union, which had backed a previous military regime. In March 1984 security forces arrested several of the union's leaders, prompting a three-day strike that was observed by many teachers around the country. The CNR retaliated by firing about 1300

strikers (Kabeya-Muase 1989, 198–201; Sandwidi 1996). The action was shocking to many Burkinabè. Decades later, Issa Tiendrébéogo, a minister of higher education under Sankara, still considered the teachers' firing to have been a 'serious error' (*L'Observateur Paalga*, 9 October 2007).

The government's conflict with the unions deepened in 1984 after one of the CNR's key civilian components, the *Ligue patriotique pour le développement* (Lipad) – affiliated with the Soviet-inclined *Parti africaine pour l'indépendance* (PAI) – was evicted from both the CNR and the cabinet. One of Lipad's best-known leaders, Soumane Touré, also headed a sizeable union federation and the following year it joined with another bloc of dissident unions. Touré and other unionists were repeatedly detained.

The next two years, 1986 and 1987, brought some shifts in the Sankara government's approach. On both the political and social fronts, there was an evident effort to ease tensions. Several imprisoned officials of previous governments were freed. Several hundred of the teachers fired after the 1984 strike were reinstated. In August 1987, Sankara sent a memorandum to all cabinet ministers asking them to examine ways to reintegrate more dismissed teachers, as well as civil servants who had been fired for political reasons (Jaffré 2007, 246).

Leadership rifts

While such efforts were under way to ease up on lower-level civil servants, Sankara simultaneously escalated the fight against corruption at the top. By 1987, many officials of previous regimes had already been tried, but now attention turned towards *current* officeholders. A new People's Commission for the Prevention of Corruption began public hearings at which Sankara and other high officials were obliged to publicly declare their own and their families' assets and incomes (the Sankara family's assets were quite modest). At the last cabinet meeting the day before the coup, Sankara pushed for adoption of a code of conduct for everyone holding high state office (Somé 1990, 65–68). Ernest Nongma Ouédraogo, a cousin of Sankara who was then interior minister, later recalled that Compaoré, already 'not very enthusiastic about the struggle against corruption', was additionally unhappy that he had to publicly declare his assets. According to Ouédraogo, Compaoré was subsequently 'reproached for having hidden certain properties of his wife, such as a massive gold clock given to her by President Houphouët-Boigny' of Côte d'Ivoire, in whose family she was raised (author's interview, Ouagadougou, 4 March 1999).

Besides the unease of Compaoré and others over the anti-corruption drive, serious divergences emerged over leadership issues, including on the use of repression. A few of those differences were expressed publicly at the time, but many came out only after the 1987 coup as several former members of the CNR and others provided accounts of the leadership rifts that contributed to it. With the exception of Martens' (1989) apologia for the coup, most accounts (Andriamirado 1989; Jaffré 1989; Somé 1990) contradict the justifications put forward by Compaoré's supporters. Those supporters sought to portray Sankara as an autocrat who wanted to rule alone and was against unification of the revolutionary political organisations.

From his public statements, Sankara clearly did have misgivings about a simple merger of the existing groups. The latter for the most part were very small, with a base only in the student movement, among academics and within sectors of the officer corps. Most of their members, moreover, had been politically educated through the writings of Mao or Enver Hoxha of Albania. With Joseph Stalin also featuring among their pantheon of heroes, many exhibited a very dogmatic, intolerant approach and had a 'forced march' view of

revolutionary change. The military officers among them (most notably within the *Union communiste burkinabè*) brought an additional measure of commandism into the mix.

While not free of commandist inclinations himself, Sankara seemed to push in a somewhat different direction during his last year or so, sometimes in explicitly anti-Stalinist language. He remarked to one journalist that Stalin had 'killed Leninism' by suppressing the soviets and elevating the secret police (Andriamirado 1989, 115). In a 1986 speech, he warned against creating a political vanguard through a simple amalgamation of existing organisations, which could lead to a 'nomenklatura of untouchable dignitaries' (*Sidwaya*, 7 August 1986), using the Russian word for a Soviet-style list of state positions reserved for party appointees. And in a major address in August 1987, he sharply rejected any form of organisation that would be monolithic and politically paralysing. What Burkina Faso needed instead was a unity that would be 'a manifold, varied, and enriching expression of many different ideas and diverse activities, ideas and activities that are rich with a thousand nuances'. While the revolution, he said, 'means repression of the exploiters, of our enemies, it must mean only persuasion for the masses – persuasion to take on a conscious and determined commitment' (Prairie 2007, 397).

Sankara's ideas about widening the CNR's political base were closely connected to his moves to ease political tensions more broadly. Besides suggesting that the CNR reach out to the many activists who were not affiliated with any of the organised left groups, Sankara hinted at a rapprochement with Lipad. However, any direct overtures to the latter were short-circuited in May 1987 when members of a CDR in Ouagadougou arrested several prominent unionists, including Soumane Touré, on accusations of planning anti-government demonstrations. That CDR openly called for their execution. Leaders of all but one of the leftist groups in the CNR backed the call for Touré to be put to death, but Sankara's 'intervention was decisive in saving Soumane Touré's life' (Somé 1990, 89–90). Presidential aide Frédéric Kiemdé, who was to die with Sankara in the coup, said the day before that Sankara was against the unionists' detention because it had 'done damage to the revolution' (private conversation, 14 October 1987, Ouagadougou). Sankara pressed for their release, and although Touré himself remained in detention, several were let go. At a CNR meeting in early October, Sankara announced that nearly 90 political detainees would soon be freed (Andriamirado 1989, 88). Because of his conciliatory stance, Sankara told a group of foreign journalists a week later, 'There's now a campaign against me. I'm accused of being a sentimentalist' (author's notes, 10 October 1987, Ouagadougou).

That campaign culminated in the coup and Sankara's assassination. While the immediate initiative appears to have come from senior Burkinabè military officers, many suspect they had direct encouragement and support from France, Côte d'Ivoire and other foreign powers alarmed by the Sankara regime's anti-imperialist policies.[6]

On domestic issues, those within the CNR and officer corps who favoured a harder, more repressive course, won out. To justify their action, they then blamed many of the shortcomings of the previous four years on Sankara alone. They simultaneously sought to take credit for the revolution's achievements – although it was not long before they abandoned even the pretence of continuing the revolution.

'Dare to invent the future'

In the immediate wake of the coup, there was a frequent reproach levelled against Sankara: that he was a hopeless utopian who failed to heed his country's objective limitations and thereby overreached. Some saw this as a trait typical of charismatic leaders (Skinner 1988). They may be great visionaries, but they often have difficulty grasping the routine,

bureaucratic procedures deemed necessary for consolidation. A number of Sankara's own supporters complained that he tended to announce sweeping initiatives without fully considering how they might be implemented.

Sankara's declarations certainly were full of far-reaching goals and grand visions. This was, after all, a revolutionary endeavour, not an attempt at incremental reform. Sankara also expressed great impatience with those who insisted that a poor country – or people who are poor – should not set their sights too high. He was fond of saying: 'That which man can imagine, he can achieve' (*Sidwaya*, 27 August 1986). Or as he told a Swiss journalist:

> You cannot carry out fundamental change without a certain amount of madness. . .[I]t comes from nonconformity, the courage to turn your back on the old formulas, the courage to invent the future. . . We must dare to invent the future. (Prairie 2007, 232)

Yet Sankara's quest was not utopian. In the four years he was president, he demonstrated repeatedly that initiatives that once were unimaginable could at least be set into motion. He did so by convincing many ordinary people that *they* had the capacity to act. He had exceptional skills as an orator and was able to reach audiences with colourful and inventive turns of phrase, sharp wit and clear intelligence. His words were reinforced by a personal demeanour that projected sincerity, openness and humility, often conveyed through gestures as simple as riding a bicycle through the streets, playing football in shorts and jersey or mingling with villagers in a relaxed manner.

Sankara also communicated his messages through symbolic, even theatrical measures. To demystify high state functions, central government budgets were formulated in mass public assemblies and executives of state enterprises were subjected to public grillings. Civil servants were often required to wear traditionally designed and woven Faso dan Fani outfits instead of Western-style suits, both to boost indigenous culture and create a domestic market for clothes made from local cotton. On International Women's Day men were encouraged to go to market in place of their wives or to plant trees in their honour. Such measures could not always be enforced – and sometimes elicited derision – but many conveyed basic ideas that were long remembered.

Some of the outcomes of popular inspiration could be quite remarkable. In September 1984 the Sankara government announced that it would mount a commando-style campaign to vaccinate most children against the key childhood killers (measles, meningitis and yellow fever) within just two weeks. External donors warned that it could not be done, and urged a more cautious pace. Yet the government persisted, using the state media to publicise the campaign and the CDRs to mobilise local health workers and village activists to carry it out. By the end of the two weeks, some two million children had been vaccinated, raising the rate of immunisation against the three diseases from just 11–19% of all children to 60–75%. As a result, the usual epidemics of measles and meningitis did not take place the following year, preventing anywhere between 18,000 and 50,000 child deaths (Harrison 1987, 169–170).

As such examples illustrate, Sankara was not only able to convince others to share his dream, but also to realise that their own hard work and commitment could transform the dream into reality. Concluded Boureima Ouédraogo, editor of the Burkinabè fortnightly *Le Reporter*: 'Sankara certainly was not an angel or saint. He was a man, with his faults and qualities.' If Sankara continues to stir emulation, 'it is above all because he succeeded in getting an entire generation of Africans to dream' (Ouédraogo 2010).

Note on contributor

Ernest Harsch, who has researched and written on Africa since the 1970s, holds a PhD in Sociology from the New School for Social Research in New York and is currently a senior researcher affiliated with the Institute of African Studies at Columbia University, New York.

Notes

1. Arba Diallo, who came in second in 2010 with 8.2% of the vote (against Bénéwendé Sankara's 6.3%), did not style himself a Sankarist, although he had been the foreign minister in Sankara's first cabinet (1983–1984) and then served the Sankara government in several ambassadorial postings.
2. As a journalist and academic, the author has studied Burkina Faso since the mid 1980s, visiting the country three times during the revolution and twice since then. He met with Sankara on a half-dozen occasions, the last time four days before his death, and conducted an interview that appears in the collection *Thomas Sankara speaks*. Most recently he wrote a biographical sketch of Sankara for the *Dictionary of African biography* (Harsch 2012).
3. Neither Zongo nor Lingani appear to have actively participated in Compaoré's 1987 coup, although they did acquiesce to it. Both were executed in late 1989 on charges of plotting against Compaoré.
4. Extracts were also published in the *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 32, April 1985, pp. 48–55.
5. The revolutionary courts were abolished within a couple years after the coup. A number of their judgments were subsequently reversed, in some cases because the rulings were faulty, but certainly also for political reasons, to gain support for the Compaoré government among elements of the old political elites.
6. To this day, many of the details of the coup remain unclear, including whether Compaoré personally ordered Sankara's death and to what extent France or other foreign powers were implicated. Andriamirado (1989) provides a detailed examination of the forces involved in the coup, while Jaffré (2009) gives a reasoned overview of what is known so far about the coup and Sankara's assassination, including the possible involvement of external forces.

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Cultural interfaces of self-determination and the rise of the neo-Biafran movement in Nigeria

Godwin Onuoha*

Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, South Africa

This article examines the 'cultural repertoires' of neo-Biafran separatist Igbo groups in south-eastern Nigeria, pointing to the ways in which cultural repertoires, narratives and emblems are deployed to forge a separatist ethno-political project in a multi-ethnic state. The neo-Biafran movement reveals the robustness of political resistance and the existence of multiple frameworks through which ethno-nationalist groups resist and challenge extant power structures of the state in the quest for self-determination. The article argues that ethnic groups have the capacity to initiate their own 'cultural repertoires' in order to construct group identity, identify forms of external identity (the 'other') and shore up the boundaries of their own collective group identity. Myths of origin, narratives of the past, images and symbols are rooted in certain cultural repertoires, and are elaborated, interpreted, invented and reinvented to produce political identities that are complex and fluid in the struggle for political power.

Keywords: culture; politics; self-determination; ethnic identity; Igbo; Nigeria

[Interfaces culturelles d'autodétermination et montée du mouvement néo-biafrais au Nigeria.] Cet article examine les « répertoires culturels » des groupes igbo séparatistes du néo-Biafra au sud-est du Nigeria, désignant les façons dont les répertoires culturels, récits et symboles sont développés pour forger un projet séparatiste ethno-politique dans un État multiethnique. Le mouvement néo-biafrais prouve la robustesse de la résistance politique et l'existence de multiples cadres au travers desquels les groupes ethno-nationalistes résistent et défient les structures de pouvoir existantes en quête d'auto-détermination. L'article affirme que les groupes ethniques ont la capacité d'initier leurs propres « répertoires culturels » afin de construire une identité de groupe, identifier des formes d'identité extérieure (« l'autre ») et construire les frontières de leur propre identité collective. Mythe des origines, récits du passé, images et symboles sont ancrés dans des répertoires culturels propres et sont élaborés, interprétés, inventés et réinventés pour produire des identités politiques qui sont complexes et fluides dans la lutte pour le pouvoir politique.

Mots-clés : culture ; politique ; auto-détermination ; identité ethnique ; Igbo ; Nigeria

Introduction

On 22 May 2000, the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) symbolically hoisted the green–red–black flag of the defunct 'Republic of Biafra' at the popular Ariaria International Market in the town of Aba, a major commercial hub in the Igbo heartland of south-eastern Nigeria. In a statement, titled: *Declaration of Our*

*Email: godwin.onuoha@scm.uni-halle.de

Demand for a Sovereign State of New Biafra from the People and Government of Nigeria, the movement premised its emergence on a prior notion of Igbo statehood which existed briefly between 1967 and 1970. Among other things, the statement noted that:

> MASSOB has therefore packaged about 25 stages for the actualization of the sovereignty of the new Biafra State through Non-violence and Non Exodus... It also admits of non co-operation and passive resistance to oppressive and obnoxious laws of the authorities. Having hoisted the flag of our new Biafra today, we wish to declare our resolve to demand and pursue the realization of our sovereignty from the Federal Republic of Nigeria. (Biafraland 2004)

This declaration occurred within the context of Nigeria's return to civil rule and the opening up of the public space which unleashed a host of hitherto suppressed and dormant forces in the country, leading to a noticeable upsurge in the outbreak of ethnic, communal and religious conflicts after decades of prolonged military rule (Adebanwi 2004; Agbu 2004). This had dire implications for national security due to the fact that it precipitated the emergence of ethno-nationalist groups and ethnic militias within the expanded 'democratic' space, with each group staking its claims and seeking to reassert its identity in the struggle against perceived exclusion from access to power and resources (Akinyele 2001, 264–265; Nolte 2004, 61). These ethno-nationalist platforms invariably mobilised extensive support from their different ethnic enclaves in their struggle against the state, and in the quest for the resolution of the national question, the crisis of state legitimacy and citizenship in Nigeria.

This provides context for the advent of MASSOB and other variegated neo-Biafran groups as direct responses to the perceived failure of the Nigerian state and consecutive governments to address the 'Igbo predicament' since the end of the civil war in 1970. MASSOB was established in Lagos on 13 September 1999 to promote the interests of Igbo-speaking Nigerians (or those perceived to be 'Biafrans') who constitute one of the three main ethnic groups in the country. The Igbo, who are mainly concentrated in the south-east and some parts of the south-south, had earlier engaged the Nigerian state in a bitter war of secession between 1967 and 1970. Between 1970 when the civil war ended, and 1999 when the ghost of Biafra was publicly resuscitated with the founding of MASSOB, there were sociocultural Igbo groups like Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo, Aka Ikenga, Mkpoko Igbo, Eastern Mandate Union (EMU), Odenigbo Forum, South East Movement (SEM), Igbo National Assembly (INA), Ndi Igbo Liberation Forum, Igbo Salvation Front (ISF), Igbo Redemption Council (IRC), Igbo Peoples Congress (IPC) and the Igbo Question Movement (IQM),[1] but none of these espoused a radical or confrontational tendency. The Igbo were perceived as 'defeated' and 'vanquished', and post-civil war Igbo nationalism was largely dormant, compromising and seeking a reintegration into mainstream Nigerian politics. The emergence of the second wave of Igbo groups coincided with the advent of a civilian dispensation in Nigeria. These were basically youth groups (but not exclusively made up of youths), like the Igbo Youth Council (IYC), Igbo Youth Movement (IYM), the Bakassi Boys and the Federated Council of Igbo Youths (FCIY), which were not explicitly separatist, but displayed a more vibrant form of Igbo ethnic nationalism in their approach for equity and justice in Nigeria. The third group comprises what has become known as the 'neo-Biafran' movement. It includes MASSOB, the Biafra Youth Congress (BYC), MASSOB International, Biafran Liberation Council (BLC), and the Coalition of Biafra Liberation Groups (COBLIG), which claims to be an umbrella body comprising seven Igbo liberation groups in Nigeria and two among diaspora,[2] which all emerged concurrently with MASSOB and other splinter factions of MASSOB. Similar to MASSOB, these groups have also rejected a state-led process and are explicitly

radical in their quest for self-determination, and disengagement from the Nigerian project into an alternative administrative and political arrangement.

Based on extant analysis of various forms of political struggles, ethno-nationalist claims and separatist agitations embedded in collective efforts at self-determination, the activities of MASSOB and other neo-Biafran groups have been broadly placed within three analytical frames. Similar to the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) and other ethno-nationalist movements in Nigeria, the activities of the neo-Biafran movements have been located within the civil society literature that categorises these movements 'as overtly militant and non-mainstream groups that [exemplify] radical civil society par excellence' (Adekson 2004, 87). This is based on their expression of certain radical features, use of inflammatory rhetoric, quest to disengage from the Nigerian state project, and inevitable clash with State Security Services. The second analytical frame portrays these movements as ethnic militias that emerged within the framework of the country's return to civil rule, which also constitutes a dangerous development and a trend that could impact negatively on the stability of the country and its nascent democratic project (Adejumobi 2003; Agbu 2004; Sesay, Ukeje, Aina & Odebiyi 2003). The third dimension in this frame is a methodological one that draws largely on the sensationalist or delinquent treatment of the activities of the neo-Biafran groups in the day-to-day debate among Nigerians, in national newspaper coverages, policy and security-related statements by politicians, government and other stakeholders. This becomes obvious when attention focuses on news-making protest activities, demonstrations, or sit-at-home orders occasionally issued by the movement, while the character of their struggle is hardly made the focus of scholarly enquiry.

From the foregoing, it is pertinent to nuance the analysis of the neo-Biafran movement and stress the salient character of their struggle for self-determination. First, unlike other ethno-nationalist projects in contemporary Nigeria, the advent of MASSOB and other neo-Biafran groups marks a radical departure from recent literatures on self-determination in Nigeria which has largely been associated with minority ethnic nationalities in the Niger Delta (Obi 1997, 2001; Osaghae 1995, 2001; Ukeje 2001), or the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) of the Yoruba ethnic extraction (Adebanwi 2005; Ukeje and Adebanwi 2008). Second, owing to the beleaguered experience of the Igbo and the specific nature of the 'Igbo question' in post-independence Nigeria, especially since the 1970, the neo-Biafran movement does not only seek a radical and fundamental restructuring of the Nigerian federation, it also seeks the exit of the Igbo nation from the Nigerian project. Third, the manner in which these groups contest the sovereignty of the Nigerian state over their Igbo homeland in the south-east, by evoking counter-claims of sovereignty, enacting specific regimes of security and seeking to create alternative spaces of power and influence, calls into question mainstream assumptions about sovereignty, political authority and social spaces. These movements reject state-centric approaches to governance and empirically unveil alternative forms of social regulation and governance as a form of resistance against formal state control and sovereignty.

The central aim of this paper is to evaluate the neo-Biafran quest for political disengagement by adequately focusing on the dynamics and diversities of cultural repertoires (both material and immaterial) employed in the quest for self-determination and exit from the Nigerian state. As a movement locked in a struggle with the Nigerian state, the forces and interests behind MASSOB and other neo-Biafran movements mobilise cultural repertoires, images, symbols, narratives of the Igbo past and a particular version of Igbo historiography and deploy them in a wider struggle for political power and as vehicles for entrenching their claim to self-determination. These have been empirically demonstrated

in the use of commemorations, anniversaries, Biafran flags and artefacts to articulate alternative versions of Igbo identity, to claim a unique place and demonstrate the salience of their quest for political disengagement. The analysis is premised on the notion that political contentions necessarily involve struggles over ideas, identities, symbols and strategies in any given context, and the inextricability and convergence of the 'culture of politics' and the 'politics of culture' in mobilisation processes. The introduction sets out the parameters of the main arguments. This is followed by an examination of the twin concepts of 'cultural' and 'political' nationalism. The third section critiques the role of culture in political action and political community in Africa. The fourth focuses attention on the role of culture in the making of Igbo identity. This is followed by an account of the emergence of the neo-Biafran movements and the mobilisation of cultural repertoires and emblems in the quest for self-determination, and the conclusion sums up the argument and its implications for the future of the Nigerian state.

The merging of 'cultural' and 'political' nationalism

This study engages 'culture' and 'politics' not as bounded or stable manifestations of neo-Biafran nationalism, but as shifting and fluid determinants in the context of Nigeria's multi-ethnic federation. Culture and politics are often intertwined and deployed as agencies in pursuance of the right to self-determination and struggle for power. Drawing on certain aspects of the work of Gellner (1983), Hobsbawm (1990) and Anderson (1991) as points of departure in the articulation of a political agenda on the platform of a cultural ideal, the study aims to ground the analysis concretely in the surrounding social and political realities which will serve as a backdrop in exploring the 'construction' and 'deconstruction' of the activities of the neo-Biafran movement.

Gellner's (1983) influential thesis on nationalism comprehends culture as a pretentious tool in the pursuit of a nationalist agenda, and argues that the academic study of nationalism must be detached from the corpus of nationalist dogmas and tenets, especially that which presumes the knowledge of nationality outside experience or history. Hobsbawm (1990) also follows this thread by arguing that culture is simply a fallout of broader societal development and a tool designed for a political motive. This 'modernist' view of culture is rejected by Armstrong (1982) and Hastings (1997), who present an 'anti-modernist' approach that displaces earlier nineteenth century views on culture and brings back the contested issue of the cultural reality of the nation. While the modernists reflect on the cultural leanings of nationalist movements as a legal pretence or extra-political consequence, the anti-modernists perceive culture as a constant evidence of a pre-existing reality (Leerssen 2006, 561). In Gellnerian terms, societal modernisation models drives nationalism, and 'nationalism invents nations' and cultures, while the anti-modernists perceive culture as a manifestation of the nation, and not merely as a preoccupation of nationalism. While these perspectives place 'culture' outside the nationalist ideology as something externally articulated or invoked, it is apposite to structure and systematise the relationship between cultural and political nationalism owing to the constant interaction between politics and culture in nationalist movements, and the intrinsic character of cultural narratives to nationalist projects. Through filtering, selecting, realigning and reconfiguring processes, which sometimes leads to the point of transmutation or reinvention, (political) nationalism emerges by harnessing competing cultural patterns (Leerssen 2006, 564). Material cultural artefacts (e.g., paintings, sculpture, antiquities, monuments, architecture and symbols such as flags and public buildings) and immaterial cultural repertoires (such as folktales/folk-dances, history, myths, legends, proverbs, customs and music) all experience significant

transformations by taking them beyond their context of origin, recontextualising and instrumentalising them for specific political purposes (Leerssen 2004). The complexities and intermingling of these processes transform culture into a site of political conflict, and this compels an 'analytic' rather than a 'descriptive' relationship between culture and politics in the process of nationalism.

The relationship between culture and politics was largely reflective of the post-colonial nation-building project in Africa. Post-independence nationalist leaders were committed to giving content to a new national culture and legitimising particular national cultural narratives as a means of fostering social cohesion and national unity. The role of state-sponsored cultural institutions in the process of giving content to an official national culture is aptly captured in Anderson's (1991, 5–7) definition of the nation, as a specific form of cultural artefact forging together groups of unrelated people who imagine themselves into a coherent community. The erection of a 'nationalistic, patriotic culture of the whole' employed colonialism as the counterpoint and backdrop against which the politics of national cultural recovery and rebirth were to occur (Arnoldi 2006, 55–56), and 'promotes a nationalistic, patriotic culture of the whole that mediates an assortment of vernacular interests' (Bodner 1992, 13–14). Yet, the bid to merge culture and politics to promote national unity was severely undercut in the first two decades after independence due to several challenges which confronted the state in Africa. These challenges include the dynamics, antecedents and contradictions of the development process on the continent, and the failure of democracy which is perceived to be a facilitator of development to produce positive outcomes and deliver on the post-independence social contract. These challenges brought national issues related to the unresolved crisis of state ownership, citizenship and power-sharing to the fore. Latent ethnic identities and competing patterns of self-identification were reproduced and the post-independence cultural vision became severely threatened by inter-ethnic rivalries among ethnic constituencies in different African states, and these assumed a much broader appeal, degenerating into a zero-sum contest and ushering in a host of other related crises.

Rethinking culture, political action and political community

The uniqueness of Africa's post-independence challenges has subjected it to interpretations that render its political, social and economic system as crisis-ridden. This understanding emanates from an excessively rigid framework for political action and political community in Africa, and it renders the cultural agencies associated with these developments as either 'trivial' or 'under-theorised'. It is overtly hinged on a structural understanding of African political, social and economic processes as immutable, and it forecloses the robustness and resilience of structures, and the possibilities that they can be reinforced or subverted by agency. Harrison (2002, 12) points out that the enduring structure–agency debate in the social sciences has produced a string of arguments that reject the rigidity or permanence of structures, but which emphasise the capacity of agencies and social relations to initiate slow, rapid or radical changes in the structure of a society. This tendency has inspired perceptions like 'structuration' (Giddens 1995), and the 'transformation of structure by agency' (Gill 1993), but, most importantly, points to an understanding of the nature of resistance by virtue of the fact that structures harbour certain cultural tendencies which are deployed in social contest and resistance.

While the notion of the African continent as one of repression, crisis and authoritarianism is fairly established, it does not tell the entire story, but frames the discourse in a manner that amounts to robbing Africans of individual and collective agencies. Even

when individual or collective agencies do not necessarily appear to challenge the status quo, processes of repression and oppression on the continent have produced their own strain of struggle, resistance and political contention which are rooted in culture (Harrison 2002, 13). Bearing in mind the peculiar context of their emergence, what may be critical in this regard is not the cultural forces and factors that are mobilised, but a consideration of the cultural grounding against which resistance, struggle and political contention are premised. The cultural images produced by Western analysis are captured in Edward Said's (1978) concept of 'Orientalism'. Said's Orientalism resonates with developments in Africa by virtue of the fact that Western culture frames itself in relation to the 'other', and constructions of Orientalism are based on 'exoticism' and 'barbarity'. While aspects of imperial ideology, like liberalism, Christianity, 'civilising missions', modernisation, and *Lusotropicalismo* (in the Portuguese context) have been identified as significant and 'positive' cultural components of imperialism (Harrison 2002, 12), Africa has been subjected to a broad range of cultural biases and prejudices born of savagery, primitivism, anarchy and dramatic tales of rituals. The extent to which these perceptions trivialise cultural agents not only invites us to ignore the broader impact of culture, it also ignores the possibility for cultural tendencies to undergo a historical transformation at specific historical junctures, and overlooks how culture can be harnessed in positioning various aspects of political, economic and social developments by its cultivation.

Following this development, most analysis on African culture rests on the logic of a civilising mission which defined European incursions on the continent. Murunga (2006, 28) points out that these studies were mostly grounded in anthropological studies of African institutions and cultures, which questioned the humanity of Africans, justified the colonial enterprise and advanced their domination as an engine of modernising the natives. In the research boom associated with anthropological readings of African society and polity, explanations of the role of culture in African politics have focused largely on the 'uncivil' character of African societies (Fatton 1995, 1999). African cultures have often been linked with the proliferation of different forms of violence (Boas 2002; Gore and Pratten 2003; Harnischfeger 2003; Paciotti and Mulder 2004; Smith 2004). Others have embedded African culture in the 're-traditionalisation' thesis which essentially amounts to a reversion to 'archaic' traditional institutions and culture for the maintenance of law and order, or an effort to 're-traditionalise' governance in an essentially modern space (Kagwanja 2003, 2006). Another tendency in literature concerns the overarching reliance on interpretations that validate a 'local/culturalist' rendition of African politics and society in a manner that gives primacy to religion, cultural symbols, witchcraft, ritual murders and traffic in heads (Ellis 2008; White 1997).

Grounded in a Eurocentric perspective, culture is portrayed as a peculiarly pre-colonial tendency perpetuating into the modern, and African culture is depicted as separate from the universal norm in a manner that notions of 're-traditionalisation' portray the movement of African society backwards from modernity (Murunga 2006, 29). The juxtaposing of 'tradition' and 'modernity', and the placing of African culture in the realm of the former, flags critical methodological and epistemological issues which are replete in recent studies of African society and polity. In describing the African society and polity, 'culturalist' explanations have spawned epithets, such as, the 'economy of affection' (Hyden 1980), 'prebendalism' (Joseph 1987), the 'politics of the belly' (Bayart 1993), 'patrimonialism' (Bratton and van de Walle 1994), the 'instrumentalisation of informal politics' (Chabal and Daloz 1999), and the 'disorientations of civil society'. These epithets seek to depict and explain the pathologies of state and politics in Africa by alluding to their

internal cultural dynamics, and in a sense promote a perpetual 'deadlock' in the study of politics, society and economy in Africa.

Culture and the making of Igbo identity

Early sources on Igbo culture only began to account for the Igbo as a monolithic group from the second decade of the twentieth century (Buchanan and Pugh 1962; Forde and Jones 1950; Green 1947; Ottenberg 1965, 1959) and the bulk of the literature in history and social anthropology describes pre-colonial Igbo society as mostly 'stateless', 'acephalous', 'segmentary' and 'individualistic' (Green 1947; Meek 1937; Uchendu 1965). Comprising autonomous villages and village groups ruled by dispersed authority void of formalised, permanent or hereditary leadership positions, the monolithic kingdoms, hierarchical administrative systems and centralised political structures that existed in the Hausa Emirates of northern Nigeria and the Yoruba constitutional monarchies of western Nigeria were not prevalent in Igbo societies. Chinua Achebe's trilogy of novels, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and *Arrow of God* (1964), provides the most prominent account of Igbo culture over a spectrum of time. In terms of the mobilisation of values and in the transformation of society, Achebe considerably explored the Igbo culture, and provided a head start and a depth of history with which to articulate the Igbo culture, society and identity. The first in these series (*Things Fall Apart*, 1958) has been considered a classic which symbolises a crystallisation of Igbo culture and identity. The significance of the book for the emerging Igbo culture and identity lies in its critical presentation of a particular Igbo community, symbolic of a broader age-old culture, at the eve of the colonial project. The narrative fuses together the changes and challenges which the traditional Igbo community had to contend with when it came in to contact with Christianity, Western education and colonial culture.

While being cognisant of the fact that a collective Igbo consciousness emerged only recently, Achebe (1958) demonstrates that Igbo culture is indeed much older and traditional. Drawing on extensive ethnographic detail, Achebe engages with important aspects of Igbo culture relating to what they 'say' or 'do', traditional rituals of hospitality, festivals, music, family, clan and village organisation, and the entire Igbo worldview. Achebe's account of Igbo village life and its inherent worldview resonates deeply as a description of authentic Igbo culture which has since been ravaged by the colonial enterprise. Achebe's approach amounts to a portrayal of the Igbo or 'Igboness' in strictly essentialist terms, an approach referred to as the 'culture approach to ethnicity' (van den Bersselaar 1998, 19). The outcome of this approach infers primordial and culturally unique formations (Geertz 1963; Koepping 1995), and this approach has significantly influenced the understanding of Igbo identity and that of people who share a common culture. It contrasts with the 'social relations perspective to ethnicity', which advocates that rather than placing ethnicity on shared cultural elements, it should be based on the recognition of the people who share that specific cultural feature which is central to their ethnic identity (Barth 1969).

However, what emerges from the preceding position is a sense in which culture is imbued with emblems and repertoires which provide links between individuals and the ethnic group to which they belong. Ethnic emblems and repertoires are capable of providing a shared identity to individuals in different contexts and with different interests. Even in cases where people harbour diverse ideas about what constitutes their ethnic identity, they often have concrete ideas about the emblems that represent their identity. Common and shared experiences can invariably acquire meaning, and can be evocative and potent

through a process of reduction and interpretation of emblems (Nora 1984, 30), and in shared signs and symbols (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, 59; Tonkin 1992, 126–127). The emblems and repertoires of an ethnic group include territory, name, dance, art, a shared history, past heroes and martyrs, and customs and ceremonies, and these collectively constitute durable aspects of an ethnic group's identity which are visible and distinct from others (Smith 1991, 77). Ethnic emblems are subject to the process of production and reproduction, and through these processes the content and value of these emblems take their shape and recognition, with obvious consequences for identity formation, just as Achebe's (1958) description of Igbo culture implies an effort to identify the role and relevance of emblems in the making of Igbo culture.

Culture, ethnic nationalism and the rise of the neo-Biafran movement

Regarded by the Igbo as a struggle for national liberation and an independent Igbo state on the one hand, and as an Igbo ethnic rebellion by official sources on the other hand, the Nigerian–Biafran War marked a turning point in Igbo history and Nigerian history alike. The war still constitutes a point of reference upon which subsequent issues related to Igbo identity are understood and articulated, and some are of the view that the injustices and conditions that made Biafra possible are still very much present in the Nigerian state (Duruji 2009; Ikpeze 2000; Ojukwu 2009). Not only was the war perceived in ethnic terms, but ethnic identity provided the context in which Igbo loyalties were mobilised, and the short-lived 'Republic of Biafra' represented the climax of Igbo nationalism and had a lasting impact on the Igbo ethnic identity. Recollections of Biafra resonate either heroically among the Igbo when they remember 'typical' Igbo traits of resilience, solidarity and resourcefulness that were displayed during the war, or bitterly when they recollect the loss experienced in human and material terms.[3] The re-emergence of neo-Biafran movements can be located within the context of recent developments in the Nigerian political process since the return to civil rule in 1999. Taking the discourse on Igbo culture, society and identity as it existed during the short-lived 'Republic of Biafra' as points of departure, two fundamental processes are examined: the 'production' of Igbo ethnic emblems and repertoires; and their 'deployment in contemporary struggles for self-determination in Nigeria'. The discourse represents not just the production and transmission of culture, but as Johnson (1987) and Strelitz (2000) both argue, more importantly, it reflects the merging of culture and political economy, and links meanings and symbols central to cultural identity to political economy concerns like ownership, structure and agenda setting.

The current neo-Biafran resurgence is championed by an assorted collection of diaspora Igbo organisations based in the United States, such as Igbo USA, Ekwe Nche, Biafra Nigeria World (BNW), Biafra Foundation (BF) and Biafra Actualisation Forum (BAF), most of which emerged in the last decade or so (BAF 2003; BNW 2002). Led by Chief Ralph Uwazuruike, an Indian-trained lawyer, MASSOB is at the forefront of the struggle at home and is often been perceived as embodying a platform capable of launching the broad ideological discourses of the neo-Biafran movement into practical action. MASSOB taps effectively into a transnational network of Igbo groups and identifies with the goals and aspirations of MASSOB in Europe and in the United States (Omeje 2005). The movement has an organisational structure which places the leader of the movement at the apex. It also has its national representatives, national co-ordinators, ambassadors, secretaries, regional administrators, chief area administrators, area administrators, provincial officers, district officers and ordinary members of the movement. MASSOB has widespread influence in the south-east, which it refers to as the 30 regions of Biafra,

and has declared 25 stages in the struggle for the actualisation of Biafra, with each stage featuring a different strategy as the struggle intensifies.

MASSOB represents a post-civil-war, second-generation, nationalist movement that contests the marginalisation of the Igbo since the end of the civil war and intends to resuscitate Igbo ambitions for self-determination. The movement is largely composed of Igbo youths below the age of 40, most of whom were born after the Nigerian Civil War in 1970 and young Igbo adults who are above 40 or middle-aged. Most of them did not experience the war, and those born shortly before the war or during the war were either too young, or were incapable of accurately recollecting the events of that period, but their attitude towards the effects of the war has been directly influenced by memories of the war (Onuoha 2012). As MASSOB's Area Administrator in Lagos, Morris Ogwu, observes:

> The Igbo suffers in present day Nigeria because they fought a war and were defeated... if the issue of addressing past wrongs and injustice is not dealt with, the memory of the defeat in the civil war will remain with most Igbo. (Personal communication, Lagos, 15 December 2009, cited in Onuoha 2011a, 113)

The connection between the present and the past, a past which most of them were not necessarily a part of, is forged through 'collective memory' and belonging to a community.

Apart from references to geographical or territorial identity, the neo-Biafran political project has been buttressed by a resort to memory politics and repertoires. While the Nigerian state is intent on shaping the official history, memories and narratives of the war to suit its own vision, interests and politics, the neo-Biafran movement still connects to the war as a war of Igbo national liberation and rejects the official views as the sole and legitimate framework for remembering and interpreting the war. The dual narratives generated by the Nigerian–Biafran War provide the context in which claims and counter-claims are enacted and the war's association with political violence in contemporary Nigeria. This aptly captures Gramsci's (1971) notion of 'hegemony' and the 'manufacture of consent', and how this is deployed by the ruling class through official culture to create consent. The deployment of Nigerian–Biafran War memory is functional to the extent that it reinforces both the quest and legitimacy of Igbo nationalism, while the aborted secessionist attempt of the Igbo-dominated eastern region from the main federation in the late 1960s and the violence which followed the war are used to shore up memories of Igbo liberation effort.

While it is constantly locked in a struggle with the Nigerian state, at another level and within the context of contemporary Igbo politics, the neo-Biafran movement represents a grassroots-based movement that provides a timely philosophical anchorage and inspiration for disgruntled Igbo youths. The neo-Biafran movement presents itself viable alternative to elite-led Igbo groups like *Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo* and *Aka Ikenga*,[4] and the Igbo political establishment who tend to be more moderate, less focused and ideological, and who propagate an elitist agenda of ethnic nationalism which the Igbo at the grassroots level consider to be too woolly, malleable, uninspiring and unattractive to produce any change. Given its separatist stance, the entire Igbo elite (prominent Igbo politicians, legislators, governors in the south-eastern states and sociocultural organisations) have been unanimous in distancing themselves from the neo-Biafran movement (Akinyele 2001, 633). The neo-Biafran movement has accused these elite groups of complicity in the subversion of the Igbo agenda, describing them as a group of 'elderly cowards' who have aided the marginalisation of the Igbo (Akinyele 2001, 634). These opposing views have sometimes led to open threats of attack on prominent Igbo leader elites by the neo-Biafran movement, and with

the tacit and open support of these political elites in the south-east there have been several raids on the hideouts of the neo-Biafran movement across the region.[5]

The dynamics of MASSOB's struggle for self-determination began to assume local salience when the movement made headlines in several newspapers in early 2000 as it commenced the campaign to usher in what it referred to as the 'The Birth of a New Biafra' in many Nigerian cities and Igbo towns in the south-east (Uwazurike 2000). MASSOB latched on to ethnicity as a critical reference point, and its primordial and cultural inclinations turned out to be the only channel to ventilate group aspirations and make claims which were hitherto submerged. The relationship between 'exclusivist' ideologies in the Nigerian public space is dialectical and mutually reinforcing, and explains the fractured character of the state and citizenship, and the enduring problems of national cohesion. It is within the context of this development that MASSOB and other neo-Biafran movements began to exhibit separatist claims through the revival of concrete Igbo ethnic emblems and repertoires which constitute critical instruments in the 'construction' and 'deconstruction' of the social order. It is within the purview of this study to flag some of these developments.

Territory, identity and nationhood

The notion of territory is central to the legitimacy of the state and its ability to satisfy the imperatives of statehood, including the assertion of its authority over its entire territory. But ethno-nationalist movements tend to see territory as part of something greater, encompassing the concepts of homeland, culture, religion, spiritual sites, ancestors, sovereignty and security. The distinctive character of the neo-Biafran struggle exists in the unique pre-existing myth or ideal of independent 'territory' or 'statehood' which the movement draws upon, and which revives tendencies of state contestation (Onuoha 2011b). With the earnest commencement of its activities, MASSOB embarked on various forms of civil disobedience in a bid to dismantle all infrastructure that supports the Nigerian government in the south-east region. The movement established the Biafran Security Agency (BSA) to take on board security-related issues in major cities in the region, and to engage in civic and communal functions like enforcement of rules on residence of states considered to be Igbo states or Biafra territories and to peg rents where they are exorbitant; to enforce sanitation laws in urban cities in the region with punitive measures for defaulters; to vend and enforce the official price of petroleum products in filling stations in Igbo states and the forceful seizure of fuel tankers moving from any part of the south-east to the north as a sign of protest against the non-supply of adequate products to the region (*The Guardian*, 30 November 2000). In 2003, the movement floated the idea of a 'Biafran income tax' which would be non-voluntary and used in the provision of social welfare, sanitation and amenities (*Vanguard*, 24 November 2003). The movement also mobilised for the boycott of the National Identity Card Scheme, and the last census exercise (in 2006) in Igbo states of the south-east on the grounds that these states are not part of Nigeria, but Biafran territory, and therefore, harassed and intimidated those who participated (*Saturday Champion*, 7 July 2007, 14; *Daily Sun*, 1 December 2008, 19). In the last elections in 2007, MASSOB mobilised the Igbo of the south-east, Igbo political aspirants and office-holders through the use of handbills, posters and newspapers to boycott the elections, since it perceives the region as a separate entity and not as a part of Nigeria.[6]

MASSOB's claim is to achieve the self-determination of the Igbo by peaceful and non-violent means, but its activities, including stay-at-home strikes, rallies and intermittent civil disobedience pose a threat and a challenge to the sovereignty of the Nigerian state over Igboland. The movement evokes counter-claims of 'sovereignty' and 'security' and

seeks to create alternative spaces and parallel structures of power and influence in their Igbo homeland. These developments negate the absolutist view of the Nigerian state as the sole founder and main guarantor of law and order, the main source of social rules, norms and values guiding the day-to-day existence of the people in the region. It calls into question the state-centric approaches to governance and empirically unveils alternative forms of social regulation and governance as a form of resistance against formal state control and sovereignty. It brings to fore the conflicting notions of 'sovereignty' and 'security' as being played out in south-eastern Nigeria. While the Nigerian state depicts sovereignty and security from 'above', based on its territorial legitimacy and formal control of state apparatus, MASSOB evokes popular conceptions of sovereignty and security from 'below', which are couched in terms of preserving ethnic identity and achieving territorial independence.

Commemoration of the nation

Commemoration concerns 'who' or 'what' is to be preserved. The commemoration of the 'Biafra Day' by MASSOB demonstrates how the significance of a historical event is transformed from one generation to the next according to the changing context of the social order. The commemoration of the declaration of the 'Republic of Biafra' produces two motifs: cultural and political. Since the emergence of MASSOB in 1999, the movement has rejected outright official commemorations relating to the civil war, such as, the Armed Forces Remembrance Day and the other monuments relating to the war, but commemorates every 30 May to mark the anniversary of the founding of the Biafran nation on 30 May 1967. Commemoration, memory and identity fuse together in a manner that reinforces contemporary Igbo nationalism in Nigeria. This produces an agenda that recognises the creation of 'Biafra' as the height of collective Igbo culture, ideal and consciousness.

MASSOB draws on memories of violence perpetrated against the Igbo after the eastern region seceded from the Nigerian federation on 30 May 1967. Since this violence was carried out on a people (the Igbo) with one identity, MASSOB recalls this memory and ties it into Igbo identity. These commemorations are carried out in observable ceremonies and are always disrupted by State Security Services and the Nigerian Police Force, but more importantly, these ceremonies have become rituals characterised by a rule-governed activity of a symbolic character that draws the attention of its participants to objects of thought and feeling they hold to be of special significance (Lukes 1975). These practices have engendered political goals, like organisational integration, legitimation, construction of solidarity and inculcation of political beliefs (Kertzer 1991, 87), and the movement invariably 'channels emotions, guides cognition, organises social groups, and by providing a sense of continuity, links the past with the present and the present with the future' (Kertzer 1988, 9–10). Of crucial importance is the understanding that groups are not just followers or partakers in rituals, but that they also create these rituals, which makes ritual a powerful tool for political action (Kertzer 1988, 12). MASSOB seeks to give voice to some major transformations in Igbo history with a view to emphasising the structural, symbolic and narrative aspects of its identity in its struggle with the Nigerian state.

The Biafran anthem, flags and emblems

Flags and emblems are critical memory repertoires which nations draw on to mark significant events in their past. The flag is a potent symbol for all nations, and the use of flags

conjures up notions of ultimate statehood and unity. On the contrary, the choice of an alternative flag by MASSOB reflects the crisis of nationhood and Igbo citizenship in Nigeria. Since May 2000, when MASSOB symbolically hoisted the Biafran flag and officially presented the Declaration of Demand for a Sovereign State of Biafra from the People and Government of Nigeria, the flag has remained critical to its activities. The green–red– black Biafran flag has come to be a powerful symbol and reminder of Biafran nation and Igbo nationalism. There have been various successful and unsuccessful attempts to hoist the green–red–black Biafran flag in major roads, streets, billboards and strategic places in the south-eastern states of Nigeria. At all MASSOB rallies, most members of the movement carry the Biafran flag to show their allegiance and patriotism to the quest for self-determination, and these events are always marked by clashes between the movement and the State Security Services. Representations of Biafra, one of the most important being the emblem of the 'Land of the Rising Sun', serve as a crucial reminder of self-determination. The 'Rising Sun' has 11 sunrays, representing the 11 tribes of Israel. The Igbo regard themselves as one of the lost tribes of Israel and the twelfth one missing somewhere in Africa.[7] Within MASSOB premises, it is common to find members chanting Christian songs of deliverance and rendering the 'Biafran Anthem'. The 'Biafran Anthem' generates an apposite patriotic response and comes across as an instrument of unity, a symbol of statehood and aspirational machinery for a desired, but yet to be manifested, independent political entity. For members of the movement, the use of Biafran flags and anthem in the activities of the movement renews the Igbo nationalist spirit, and inspires members of the movement to aspire to a re-enactment of the freedom that was experienced with the creation of Biafra, but which they were forcefully deprived of by the Nigerian state.[8]

Biafran images, objects and literatures

MASSOB also employs the use of powerful images and objects to give meaning to the quest for self-determination. In several raids on the movement's hideouts across the south-east, Biafran military uniforms, belts, umbrellas, currencies, stickers, pictures of Biafran soldiers in military uniforms in training camps, Biafran documents, sewing machines and an almanac of Biafran hierarchy have been discovered. These images and objects are critical in the sense that they are consumed, manipulated and displayed in such a way that forces their consumption to create an environment of political awareness. MASSOB activists are not only intent on making the quest for Igbo self-determination visible within Nigeria, but they also intend to be reckoned with globally and in the international community. Hence, in addition to political protests and civil disobedience, images and objects are appropriated as effective ways of getting their message across to the domestic and global audience.

The use of Biafran T-shirts, mufflers and face-caps have constituted contemporary items of resistance against the Nigerian state. Biafran T-shirts, cardigans, mufflers and face caps have been worn by MASSOB activists who engage in protests and demonstrations in streets, town halls and in other public arenas. Like other neo-Biafran materials, the T-shirts, mufflers and face caps are portrayed against the overall background of the Biafran colour (green–red–black), and the strong preference for this attire is evident among the young men in the movement who are more confrontational in their attitude and stance on self-determination. The preference for this relatively confrontational strategy is indicative of the rebellious stance of the movement against the state, a tendency that resonates with other youth-dominated nationalist groups globally. The wearing of this attire indicates not only a social choice of consumption, but also a political choice based on

their interpretation and reaction to certain developments within the Nigeria state, and the need to locate their sense of identity and place within such contexts. In a sense, these items of clothing have become a popular national symbol of protest and remembrance in the public spaces across the entire region.

The proliferation of poorly produced literature, pamphlets, newspapers, handbills, posters and banners, among other materials, serves as a means of claiming the south-eastern urban space for their cause. The depiction of these materials with forthright political messages transforms the public space, changing streets and major roads in the region into a political space. This brings to the fore the manipulation of the public spaces to reflect the aims and objectives of the neo-Biafran cause in the region. The dotting of several strategic spaces with these materials means that the public spaces are taken over by political messages, and the public is forced to consume them on account of the fact that they cannot be avoided. This makes the public both a 'willing' and an 'unwilling' consumer of neo-Biafran politics. While the willing consumers are those who advocate and support the movement's quest for self-determination, the unwilling consumers are those who are forced to encounter these materials even when they see them as objects of political propaganda.

The Igbo – Jewish connection and processes of conscientisation

Perhaps, the most striking and exploited aspect of the neo-Biafran struggle for self-determination is the Igbo identification with the Jews, who are perceived to have suffered the same fate as the Igbo nation in the face of genocide. The neo-Biafran movement emphasises narratives that link the Igbo to oriental traditions of origin. These narratives stem from Nri, popularly described as the cradle of Igbo culture and home to the famous kingdom of Eri. The myth of Eri describes him as the founding father of the Igbo civilisation, the fifth son of the Gad, one of the original 12 sons of Jacob, and the lost tribe of Israel (Alaezi 1999, 94). Based on this, it is commonplace to assume that the Jews and Igbo are linked by virtue of their historical experiences and cultural practices such as purity taboos, circumcision, and animal sacrifices. While claims of Igbo 'Jewishness' remain fictitious, their importance in the discourse of Igbo nationalism lies in the reference to a real world-historic case of a people who have been victims of persecution, marginalisation and deprivation.

The neo-Biafran movement invokes biblical stories of the deliverance of the 'children of Israel' from Egyptian bondage, 'David and the Goliath' and 'Samson and the Philistines', and equates these with their struggle for self-determination from an oppressive and authoritarian Nigerian state.[9] The mobilisation of Christian virtues is one of the core strategies of the movement. At various times, apart from embarking on peaceful demonstrations and conscientising the Igbo populace to embark on civil disobedience, the movement has called for prayer and fasting sessions and has urged all churches (particularly in the east) to conduct special prayers for Biafra (*Daily Champion*, 26 August 2008; *Daily Champion*, 13 May 2008). The movement engages in lectures to emphasise and conscientise its members in the pro-Gandhian and non-violence philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, and the peaceful resistance movement of the African American civil rights leader, Martin Luther King, Jr.

Biafran currency and international passport

Closely linked to the revival of Biafran statehood is the issue of currency. In 2005, the Biafran pound was reintroduced in the south-eastern part of Nigeria and in some Igbo-dominated markets across the West African sub-region. One of the ways in which regional Igbo diaspora nationalism has materialised has been through the mobilisation and use of the

Biafran pound for business transactions by Igbo traders who are active in the busy frontier markets in neighbouring countries like Benin, Togo and Ghana. This speaks to the symbolic and historical meaning attached to the currency, thereby producing a legacy that hinges on historical significance, network-embedded trust and future aspirations of a homeland (Owen 2009, 588–589). MASSOB's currency gambit is predicated on a historical past and an ethnic-nationalist mythology that draws on the notion of an idealised 'Republic of Biafra' whose liberating potential was tragically truncated before it could run its course. For MASSOB and other neo-Biafran groups, the Biafran project is usually portrayed in terms of realising the inherent economic potentials of a 'downtrodden' and 'marginalised' industrious Igbo nation, and the Biafran pound serves as a symbol of this moral project which intends to ward off a 'decadent, illegal and unholy union' called Nigeria (*Vanguard*, 24 November 2003). Apart from contesting the sovereignty of the Nigerian state through currency, on 1 July 2009, as part of events to celebrate its 10th anniversary, the movement purportedly launched the 'Biafran international passport' at the Freedom House in Okwe, Onuimo Local Government Area of Imo State. While these items are mainly symbolic in their value, they challenge the 'absolutist' posture of the Nigerian state as the main source of social rules guiding the day-to-day existence of the people in the region, and also point to a notable extent to how the 'currency' and 'passport' tie into the identity, politics and cultural repertoires of the Igbo.

Neo-Biafran websites

Like most ethno-nationalist movements, MASSOB draws on a collective sense of Igbo heroics and achievements in the past, and the present experience of deprivation, marginalisation and injustice against the Igbo within the context of the Nigerian nation-state. MASSOB and other neo-Biafran groups espouse and romanticise a brand of Igbo nationalism that delves into ethnic chauvinism. The websites of these groups are also inundated with clips, images and chants that eulogise the Igbo nation, history, heroes, achievements and folklores.[10] This manner of heroising narrative is grounded in the reconstruction of national past, which permeates temporality and evokes 'triumph', 'resilience' or 'victory' for the group based on enduring characteristics (Malkki 1995, 1, 55). It is not uncommon to find denigrations and indictments of other groups making them culpable for the perceived marginalisation of the Igbo (Ndi–Igbo) in Nigeria. Through the evocation of 'the exploitation and persecution of the Igbo by the Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba oligarchs', and their portrayal with highly subjective stereotypes, the pro-Biafran groups have been able to appeal to the senses and sensibilities of the Igbo people (Biafra Foundation 2004). Progressively, many diaspora pro-Biafran groups in the United States and Europe commemorate the annual Biafra Day with activities marked by the display of Biafran flag and artefacts, peaceful demonstrations and public symposia in support of the quest for self-determination.

Conclusion: culture and the politics of self-determination in Nigeria

This paper has focused on the hybrid of 'culture' (material and immaterial cultural repertoires) and 'politics' (rights, social justice and self-determination) in the making of ethno-nationalist projects. It unveils the manner in which cultural repertoires and political discourses influence nationalist ideals, and how they find expression in the dynamics of struggle and resistance. The fusion of culture and politics have become a veritable means of reclaiming the public space for the actualisation of ethno-nationalist projects, and they also play a critical role in reinforcing a sense of group identity and shape the practice

and ideology of self-determination movements. This analysis emphasises the relationship between identity on the one hand, and objects, images and ideas on the other hand, and the actual role of these objects, images and ideas in framing a notion of cultural authenticity in the politics of self-determination. The expressive function of this tendency is aptly captured by Appadurai (1996) as the conscious 'invention' and 'reinvention' of cultural identities in the context of self-determination movements targeted against nation-states.

The activities of the neo-Biafran movement can thus be seen as providing the contexts and extenuating circumstances under which 'cultural' and 'political' nationalism are intertwined as salient features of the Nigerian public space. The orientation of the neo-Biafran movement is shaped by the specific framework of cultural practices, ethnic identity and political contestation within which it emerged. The neo-Biafran movement inserts cultural repertoires into a particular version of Igbo history and Igbo encounter with the Nigerian state. The cultural clout which underpins the neo-Biafran struggle is loaded with symbolism and political utility, and marked by transformational, populist, and sometimes, ambiguous outcomes. For those who lived through the experience, Biafran artefacts and emblems are physical memorials to the short-lived existence of the republic; and for second-generation ethnonationalist-minded Igbo youths who did not experience the war, it is a poignant connection between the past and the present. The present has successfully tapped into the past to fuel a timely opposition based on a perceived sense of marginalisation and exclusion of the Igbo nation from the benefits of citizenship and socioeconomic rights within the Nigerian polity.

Critical political economy approaches to culture recognise the fact that it is produced and consumed in a context laden with power relations, imbued with inequalities of power, prestige and profit. The extent to which culture is deployed to serve the interest of the powerful invites us to examine and rethink it in its relationship to social power. Clearly, MASSOB and other neo-Biafran movements present a novel challenge to the unresolved crisis of state legitimacy, citizenship and national question in Nigeria. Apart from its emphasis on cultural nationalism, the reinvention of the Biafran project throws light on the political underpinning and defining character of the movement, and how it is vested in fresh and innovative symbolism and status. As Leerssen (2006, 568) points out, the complexities of these processes still point to the need 'to address the agenda of cultural nationalism in analytic rather than merely descriptive terms'. What is more, the demands of cultural nationalism are much more enduring than other kinds of demands by virtue of its appropriation in addressing a critical issue in the Nigerian context. The Nigerian–Biafran War was not just any other event in Nigerian history; it occupies a critical place in the historical continuum of the Nigerian state and its memory-making project, one which transcends the state itself to include its different ethnic constituencies. Particularly interesting in the MASSOB and neo-Biafran context is the manner in which the notion of culture is appropriated not just in bridging the idea of 'tradition' and 'modernity', but in how it is deployed in the realisation of a critical political project. Adebanwi (2005, 363) alerts us to the conception of 'culture as a process, a space, as well as an institutionalised instrument of defining oneself in relation to others, individuals, group members and the world in general'. The 'cultural repertoires' of the neo-Biafran movement construct group identity, identify forms of external identities (the 'other') and shore up the boundaries of its own collective group identity, and are ultimately immersed in the social construction of power relations in a multi-ethnic Nigerian state.

Note on contributor

Godwin Onuoha is an African Research Fellow at the Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa. His research interest is in nationalism, identity politics, and the interface between state,

resources and development. He is the author of *Challenging the state in Africa: MASSOB and the crisis of self-determination in Nigeria* (2011), and his articles have appeared in *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics, African Studies*, and *Ethnic and Racial Studies*.

Notes

1. Some of these groups emerged in the early and mid 1990s, and their existence and activities are gleaned from Nigerian newspapers, author's fieldwork and interviews. However, some of these groups have ceased to exist (or are dormant), while others still remain active.
2. See <http://www.biafraland.com/NewsAnalysis2009/newsanalysis050809.htm>.
3. The latter category refers to those who experienced the horrors of the war. Personal communications (both formally and informally) with a cross-section of Igbo people above the age of 50 reveal that most are not favourably disposed to the idea of another war or a secessionist attempt. This difference is also reflected in the aggregation of individual expectations within MASSOB itself. For Emmanuel Onyeme, one of MASSOB's Area Administrators in Lagos, 'the realization of the Biafran dream may not be achieved immediately, but my present engagement with the struggle is meant to ensure that my children will enjoy the fruits of emancipation' (Personal Communication, Lagos, 26 January 2009, cited in Onuoha 2011). This view contrasts sharply with that of Chuks, a younger member of the MASSOB in Lagos, who asserts that 'all we want is Biafra and total independence now' (Personal Communication, Lagos, 19 January 2009, cited in Onuoha 2011).
4. Chief Goddy Uwazuruike maintained in an interview that the idea of succession resonates with younger generation of Igbo because they did not witness the war (Personal Communication, Lagos, 15 January 2009, cited in Onuoha 2011, 104).
5. *The Nation*, 30 September 2008; *Daily Punch*, 22 September 2008. This can also be gleaned from different narratives of members of the neo-Biafran movement in newspapers and personal interviews.
6. See the report on the election boycott at: <http://www.biafra.cwis.org/pdf/REPORT%20ON%20ELECTION.pdf>, accessed on 27 February 2009.
7. Some claim that the 11 rays of sun represents the former 11 provinces of the defunct 'Republic of Biafra'.
8. The use of these symbols and items of clothing was observed during my fieldwork, and on various occasions when I met formally and informally with different members of the neo-Biafran movement. For Morris Ogwu, the Area Administrator of MASSOB, who also operates the means of commercial transport in Lagos popularly known as *Okada,* the significance of always wearing MASSOB clothing is to affirm the existence of Biafra (Personal Communication, Lagos, 15 January 2009).
9. Depictions of the Igbo as the 'Jews of Africa' are amplified by a school of Hamitic historiography which claims that the Igbo are descendants of a migrant Israeli tribe.
10. These websites include: <www.biafraland.com>; <www.biafranet.com>; <http://magazine.biafranigeriaworld.com>; <www.umuigbousa.org>; <www.kwenu.com>; <http://ekwenche.org>; <http://biafraforum.biafranet.com>; <http://www.bianu.net>; <http://igboforum.igbonet.com>; and <http://wazobia.biafranigeria.com>.

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EDITORIAL

Issue 137 of the journal starts with a very timely 'exercise in contemporary history' that pieces together recent (2012) events in Mali, prior to the military intervention of France in January 2013. This account is particularly informative since it brings together the insights of eight authors: Baz Lecocq, Gregory Mann, Bruce Whitehouse, Dida Badi, Lotte Pelckmans, Nadia Belalimat, Bruce Hall and Wolfram Lacher. Their unique collaboration demonstrates that the Malian crisis must be understood first and foremost as rooted in domestic and regional politics, and second, by the ways in which Mali and the wider Sahara are themselves shaped by regional and international political factors.

Ernest Harsch's paper goes further back in time, to reflect on the legacies of the late Thomas Sankara who became a revolutionary leader of the West African state of Upper Volta, renamed Burkina Faso in 1984. Indeed this piece is published on the thirtieth anniversary of the Sankara regime's coming to power and for this reason invites further reflection. The Burkinabè revolution was proclaimed by Sankara after a successful coup on 4 August 1983. At the age of 34, Sankara set about transforming the small and rural economy of Burkina Faso. Soon Sankara's image was seen on the walls of student radicals around the world, his name a watchword for a new revolution. Sankara raged against the injustices of global power and sought to transform the lives of the poor through programmes of mass immunisation, extending primary education and health care. Derided by his opponents, who saw him as a stooge of Cuba and the Soviet Union, Sankara still divides international opinion. Sankara's assassination in 1987 remains divisive in Burkina Faso. For a generation Sankara became the leading proponent of a renewed independence, which would refuse the old relationships with the ex-colonial power. He was determined to become a model of incorruptibility. Refusing any of the trappings of power, accepting neither the ministerial limousines nor air conditioning, when he was murdered he left a car, four bicycles and a fridge. But the world's poorest president was caught in the vice of global power and by his own top-down approach to the 'revolution'. Thirty years after the August coup in 1983, the Burkinabè revolution remains elusive, expressing the complex nature of the relationship between the West and Africa, and the crucial agency of the Burkinabè elite.

Patricia Daley's contribution offers a new perspective on the legitimation of foreign intervention for readers of *ROAPE*. Focusing on celebrity activism, Daley provides a cogent critique of the role of celebrities in the commodification of humanitarian intervention. The article draws on recent high-profile celebrity campaigns that include Bono (Product RED), George Clooney (Save Darfur Campaign/United to End Genocide and the Satellite Sentinel Project), 50 Cent (Street King energy drink), Ben Affleck (Eastern Congo Initiative) and Invisible Children (Kony2012). Daley uses these cases to argue that celebrity activists are part of new and significant networks that promote consumer capitalism, commodify humanitarianism and depoliticise humanitarian crises.

Paris Yeros' paper on Zimbabwe's labour movement is the second of a two-part contribution (Part I, published in 136, was concerned with the period 1990–1995). In this second part, Yeros continues his re-evaluation of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), focusing on the period 1995–2000. His analysis raises important questions about the ZCTU's trajectory during this turbulent period for Zimbabwe, and of course for its future.

Joseph Yaro's contribution provides rare insight into the contemporary changes taking place in northern Ghana's traditional institutions. Based on primary research in six traditional authorities, Yaro documents the ways in which local elites – mostly chiefs and elders – are accelerating processes of accumulation and dispossession through the selling of subjects' land.

Godwin Onuoha's paper takes us to Nigeria, and an examination of the 'cultural repertoires' practised by neo-Biafran separatist Igbo groups. His analysis of the everyday ways in which these groups remake 'Biafra' through the circulation of memories and symbols such as the Biafran flag and anthem on everyday consumer goods demonstrates the intertwining of the 'culture of politics' and the 'politics of culture' in the making of ethno-nationalist projects.

The final paper by Daniel Agbiboa turns to questions of oil, environmental security and popular resistance in the Niger Delta. Agbiboa's contribution is to evaluate the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme, a contentious project aiming to exchange arms for financial inducement. He concludes that in practice the amnesty has served to secure oil and gas production in the Delta rather than to address the militants' grievances.

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

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BRIEFING

Do African cities have markets for plastics or plastics for markets?

Franklin Obeng-Odoom[*]

University of Technology, Sydney, Australia

Introduction

We live in the 'plastic age' (Moore 2008). Unlike the 1940s when, after the Second World War, plastics were for the first time becoming a part of human society, the human environment is now characterised by plastics (Griffith 2010). The amount of plastic waste generated has also increased considerably. In turn, plastic waste has gained considerable attention among academics, policy-makers and civil society organisations. According to Astrup (2011), the advent of climate change has further increased the interest in plastic waste. Yet, there are huge gaps in the state of knowledge about causes of the explosion in plastic waste. The existing research focuses on how best it can be managed (e.g., Chan, Sinha and Wang 2011), and tends to take for granted causes, especially those linked to underlying economic systems. The provision of technical solutions and analysis (e.g., Tsuchida *et al.* 2011) by scientists dominate discussions of plastic waste and the tendency is to leave political economic concerns aside. In the words of Navia and Heipieper (2011, 564):

> Waste Management & Research serves as a forum for exchanging research expertise and scientific ideas supporting the development and application of novel biotechnological processes used in industrial waste management. In doing so, Waste Management & Research will particularly focus on biotechnological processes with lower energy demand, increased performance and shorter processing times with simultaneous achievement of the quality standards needed for final waste management.

Concentrating on management is important, but because of the importance of diagnosis to every effective treatment programme, the drivers of the plastic waste pandemic cannot be shoved aside. This study revisits the research on the causes of and solutions to the problem of plastic waste. It extends the literature by putting 'politics' and 'economics' back into plastic waste management research, and adds to the limited number of studies using this approach mainly in the context of the so-called 'disposable cities' (Myers 2005) in Eastern and Southern Africa (see, for example, Nchito and Myers 2004; Njeru 2006).

The study transcends this geographical focus to consider the situation in West Africa. The particular country that is examined is Ghana, where the plastic waste problem has become a prominent national concern.[1]

The Briefing first looks at causes, before presenting a political economic analysis of existing posited solutions. It argues that the plastic waste pandemic is driven primarily by systemic forces and

*Email: franklin.obeng-odoom@uts.edu.au

finds that, while several recommendations have been made to ameliorate the situation, none is likely to be successful without directly confronting the structural contradictions in neoliberal programmes for governing the cities in the country.

Nature of the problem: causes and effects

It is estimated that 250 tonnes of plastic waste is produced on a daily basis in Ghana (*Oil City Magazine* 2012). Most of this is generated in the cities, prompting the national *Daily Graphic* newspaper to note in its editorial that cities in Ghana are engulfed in plastics (*Daily Graphic* 2013). In the Greater Accra Metropolis, plastic waste constituted about 20% of waste in the 1990s (Oteng-Ababio 2010). In the Kumasi Metropolis, plastic constituted 3.5% of total waste in 2009 (Maolidi 2010). While a comparable figure for Sekondi-Takoradi is not readily available, one private collector/agent is able to gather more than four to five tonnes of plastics per week.[2]

The plastic waste pandemic is closely related to the general sanitation crisis in the cities. The national newspapers are awash with the issue of waste, with headlines such as 'heaps of refuse litter K'si [Kumasi] metropolis' (*Daily Graphic* 2013, 20) and 'Ghanaians urged to change approach to waste disposal' (Akpalu and Kyei 2013, 3). Media articles and commentaries from city governments themselves aside, scholarly papers have also identified the problem as a major threat to the environment (see, for example, Stoler 2012a, 2012b; Stoler, Weeks and Fink 2012).

There is a huge body of literature on the negative environmental and social problems related to poor plastic waste management in Ghana. Most studies argue that it constitutes grounds for public health concerns (e.g., Boadi and Kuitunen 2003; Anomanyo 2004; Weinaah 2007), such as polluting river bodies and other sources of

drinking water (e.g., Tsiboe and Marbell 2004). The plastic containers – made from ethylene gas by distilling crude oil to produce high or low density polythene (Okioga 2007, 38) – may produce dioxin, a highly poisonous cancer causing chemical (especially when items are subjected to heat; see Buekens and Huang 1998), may be washed into the ocean and endanger marine life, and may cause aesthetic problems (Moore 2008). The plastic containers of water, be they bottles or sachets, are typically non-biodegradable, so they stay in the environment for a long time, and, inter alia, serve as breeding places for malarial mosquitoes and contribute to the cholera menace in the country. Indeed, it has recently been reported that the Disease Surveillance Unit of the Ghana Health Service (GHS) found that, in March 2011 only, there were a total of 1396 cholera cases in the Greater Accra, Eastern and Central regions of Ghana (Anaman 2011). The diseases that accompany poor waste management cost the country over US$500 million dollars to treat, according to the director of the Institute of Waste and Sanitation at the University of Ghana (Akpalu and Kyei 2013, 3). Some raise concerns about the conditions under which low-income employees of waste management companies work (e.g., Post and Obirih-Opareh 2003), while others still (e.g., Addo-Yobo and Ali 2003; Agyei-Mensah and Owusu 2009) show that the environmental and social problems arising from poor waste management are disproportionately distributed across different income groups.

For all these reasons, earlier studies have tried to ascertain the causes of the problem. To date, most studies blame urbanisation, weak institutional capacity of the city authorities (e.g., Boadi and Kuitunen 2003; Weinaah 2007; Amoah 2010) and inefficiencies in the operation of waste management contractors (e.g., Post and Obirih-Opareh 2003; Osumanu 2008). Those claims feed into a general perception

that cities are the problem. 'More people, more cities, more problems' seems to be an enticing framing of the causes of the plastic waste problem, as is blaming the attitude of urban residents for the problem. A recognised expert, the director of the Institute of Environment and Sanitation, has noted that 'until Ghanaians change their attitude towards the indiscriminate disposal of waste, the fight against the canker will remain a mirage' (Akpalu and Kyei 2013, 3). According to the Mayor of Accra, 'culture' – or a set of attitudes – is at the root of the problem (*Daily Graphic* 2013). Recently, the chief director of the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development is reported to have said, 'solving the problem of poor sanitary conditions begins with us. It is highly an attitudinal issue' (*The Ghanaian Times* 2013, online).

This way of framing the plastic explosion problematic ignores systemic dynamics of capitalism as a mode of production, and places total emphasis on form rather than substance, or, to use Alonso's (1971) famous distinction, emphasises problems of cities, not problems in cities. Yet, Yeboah (2000) has shown how urban form in Ghana co-evolves with the underlying economic system. Yeboah used the notion of deregulation and the processes of structural adjustment to demonstrate these structural links, but stopped short of exploring the plastic explosion problem.

It is worth extending the work of Yeboah (2000) in this direction. The privatisation of water in Ghana is a useful case study because of its roots in the neoliberal economic paradigm. There is empirical evidence (Obeng-Odoom 2011, 2012a) that it led to the expansion of the plastic waste industry because poor people, who need to supplement their inadequate and sometimes contaminated supplies of water, have become dependent on packaged water. In turn, more economically comfortable people have cashed

in on the situation by going into the business of producing sachet water. According to the Ghana Food and Drugs Board (2011), which is mandated to license packaged water producers, there are over 380 licensed packaged water producers in Ghana, and a further 300 unlicensed producers in the country (Addo *et al.* 2009).

One survey in Tamale (Okioga 2007) revealed that private packaged water producers sold an average of 15,000 packaged water sachets per day. Between 2003 and 2008, there was an increase of more than 439% in the number of residents in Accra depending on sachet water (Stoler 2012b). Merely becoming dependent on packaged water does not imply littering, of course. However, there is a tendency to do so. Twenty per cent of people who purchased packaged water in the Tamale survey *always* littered the environment with the empty sachets, while another 20% *sometimes* littered.

An easy target for criticism has been city authorities, particularly because they do not make sufficient numbers of refuse bins available. Note, however, that the inability of city authorities to perform optimally also has structural roots. Neoliberalism dictated that central governments should offload their responsibilities to urban authorities which were often ill equipped to do this job (Yeboah and Obeng-Odoom 2010). Yet pressure from the world development bodies, inter alia, has been expressed in the form of tied aid, and in the zeal of compliant public officers enchanted by the neoliberal case for economic efficiency. The presence of opportunistic politicians, seeking to bureaucratically control local populations, also led to the decentralisation of the public health and sanitation role to the local/urban state, which was not ready for the job (Crook 1994; Oquaye 1995). In turn, even the provision of basic refuse bins was a major challenge for the city authorities.

Solutions

The three key recommendations often offered as a panacea to the plastic waste problematic are the subcontracting of municipal functions to plastic waste management companies; the introduction of a plastic bag tax; and the strengthening of regulation. These solutions are discussed in turn.

Successive governments have passed on their responsibility for managing urban waste to private waste management companies, which have consistently widened their scope. Between 1998 and 2008, the private sector increased its share of the total waste it collects in Accra from 20% to 40% (Tsiboe and Marbell 2004; Anton 2008; Owusu 2010).

The private sector has been widely touted as being more efficient than the public sector (Hutchful 1995). Indeed, there is evidence of a massive contribution by the private sector to economic expansion (Obeng-Odoom 2012b). Furthermore, plastic producers in Ghana, for example, provide employment to 147,410 people and generate a tax revenue of 59.57 million new Ghana cedis (GH¢) (Ghana News Agency 2010). It is likely that the contribution of the private waste management sector to job creation has increased over time. For example, a new entity in Accra, Trashy Bags, uses plastic waste to make bags for sale, recycles some 180,000 sachets per month, and employs some 60 people in just one office in Accra (*Oil City Magazine* 2012). In addition to employing in-house, recycling companies create jobs for collectors, who are paid around GH¢6.00 for every 1000 empty sachets collected.[3] Collectors can make about GH¢30.00 a day (Sambou 2013). So, it may be argued that the private sector is actually 'helping'.

However, the environmental practices of the private companies in charge of waste collection, particularly regarding how they transport and dispose of collected waste, raise several questions. For example, the 17 waste companies in Accra, including Zoomlion Co. Ltd, Meskworld, Stanley Owusu and Asadu Royal Waste, rarely sort waste into different categories. Thus, glass, rubber and batteries are all lumped together. Further, the waste is simply buried in the ground and not specifically subject to special treatment (Owusu 2010). In turn, people living close to landfills are put at great health risks and inconvenience such as the psychosocial stress involved in living close to a landfill, and waste dropped from the trucks before reaching the landfill, leading to many demonstrations against the city authorities (Owusu, Oteng-Ababio, and Afutu-Kotey 2011). For the majority of low-income areas, the activities of the private sector present a 'double whammy', because, in addition to noxious gases and infestation with flies from the dumpsite, the waste in local residents' own homes is not usually collected (Post and Obirih-Opareh 2003).

Finally, most private waste management companies in Ghana do not provide regular health checks for their workers; they supply little or no protective clothing, and use vehicles which cause further damage to the environment (Amoah 2010; Oteng-Ababio 2010). Both big recycling companies and intermediary plastics-purchasing agents do not seem to care a hoot about their pickers, most of whom are as old as 54 to 65, and who work without gloves, masks or other forms of protection. In fairness, some of the intermediaries do have gloves, but not usually masks – and they do not always wear their gloves (Sambou 2013; interview with purchasing agent, 24 January 2013).

Therefore, on balance, this solution to the plastic menace is not as effective as claimed. Indeed, it creates further complications. Thus, it is questionable whether the recyclers who purchase plastic sachets from collectors are, on the whole, supporting labour and job creation or encouraging a dangerous

lifestyle. Thus, the claim that the private sector is efficient is not entirely accurate, as the so-called economic gains are obtained at great social and environmental cost.

Some environmentalists (see, for example, *Ghananation* 2010; cf. Ankrah and Osei 2010) and media outlets (e.g., *Daily Graphic* 2013) have instead proposed or suggested the use of taxation to internalise so-called externalities in the production of packaged water. Placing a tax on water would increase the cost of production, which, in turn, would be passed on to consumers. The dislike for higher prices would force consumers to purchase less packaged water and hence reduce the amount of plastic waste. With a reduction in demand, private producers are expected to dramatically reduce the quantity of sachet water produced.

While this 'Pigovian logic' can be said to be fair because it forces people who pollute to pay for the cost they impose on others (Twomey 2010), a tax on water may mean that water production is the business of only the very rich companies. Given that water faces inelastic demand, taxing it would only mean that consumers would buy nearly the same or similar quantities. In turn, a monopoly market might be created where only few companies produce water on a for-profit basis. As argued in a different context by Stilwell (2010), advocates may contend that, in the Ghanaian case, the proposal is to have an *ad valorem* tax, which implies that the incidence of tax may differ between the rich and the poor, such that the rich who buy more expensive bottled water (see Stoler, Weeks, and Fink 2012) would pay more money in taxes. However, imposing a tax on water packages leaves the root cause of the problem intact. Why is packaged water being produced in large quantities? Neoliberalism is a major driver, but policy-makers continue to hold it in high esteem, although it has fallen short of the expectations of citizens, the public regulator, and even some members of private entities (Obeng-Odoom 2011).

Finally, others contend that the solution to the plastic explosion problem is enacting more laws and enforcing existing ones. Indeed, it has been reported (Bokpe 2013; Darko 2013) that the city authorities in Accra have enacted a by-law[4] that makes it a crime for pedestrians to buy from people hawking goods, including water, in areas not designated for such activities. Also, three sanitation courts have been set up in Ablekuma Central, Okaikoi North and La Dadekotopon. A fourth will soon be stabled at Osu Klotey. Sanitation courts help in expediting the implementation of existing by-laws that govern urban life in the Accra Metropolitan Assembly. For instance, as of the end of June 2011, the courts were seeking to enforce by-laws in 2190 cases (Darko 2013).

Cast in terms of neoclassical economic theories, the state has failed to correct a market failure, and more regulation will solve the problem. However, this view is rejected by the regulation school of political economy. It argues that it is misleading to separate the state from the economy and claim that the former can guide or 'regulate' the latter to achieve predetermined ends. It is more appropriate, regulationists argue, that the state be regarded as regulator and regulated, simultaneously a subject and an object of regulation (Jessop 1997). The neoclassical view of the state ignores the crisis inherent in regulation and fails to capture the dynamic that 'too much' regulation – including insisting that the private sector conduct its business in strict compliance with existing laws and reducing the demand for sachet water by prosecuting buyers – is anathema for private sector growth, and inconsistent with the much-touted vision of making the private sector the engine of economic expansion in Ghana. Thus, neither the establishment of waste management firms, nor the implementation of tax, nor the ever more rigid application of law can sufficiently address the plastic explosion problem.

It is fundamentally difficult to reconcile the contradictory attempt to use packaged water for profit, life and sustainable development.

A more progressive approach is needed to reduce, reuse and recycle plastic waste (Griffith 2010). State provision of water can reduce the tendency to create so much waste, as people may not need to supplement their daily water needs with bottled or sachet water. In addition, the state can intervene in waste collection, sorting and recycling. Finally, the state might go into the construction and management of recycling plants.

It can be argued that the state is unwilling to play this role, given that it would want to please so-called 'development partners' whose stock-in-trade is to dispense more and more neoliberal pills as part of their effort to promote 'good urban governance'. However, were the state so minded, it would derive considerable benefit. According to the Centre for Scientific and Industry Research, the Ghanaian state may obtain GH¢1,200,000[5] per month from recycling plastic waste (Markwei 2010). There is also some evidence that the state may be able to derive energy from plastic waste. Wikner (2009) finds that, in Kumasi alone, there is the potential to generate between 24,800 and 191,000 MWh/year. In the light of frequent power outages and growth in electricity demand vis-à-vis low supply (Wolf, Fuest, and Asante 2007), reclaiming water and waste services is an option whose feasibility is worth exploring.

Minutes of the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) on 13 July 2009 give a glimmer of hope. The AMA mayor seems to be persuaded of the feasibility of projects to convert waste to energy. He said that such a project would 'make Accra a clean city with healthy environmental [*sic*]', provide 'job opportunity to the people', and generate a substantial amount of energy: '60,000 tonnes of Solid Waste delivered annually would generate 50 MW of electricity for sale and delivering to the national grid.' Finally, he noted that 'Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) would derive substantial revenue from the venture' (AMA 2009, sections 5.0 and 5.1).[6]

Conclusion

This Briefing shows how misleading is the claim that urbanisation, attitudes, institutional lapses and culture per se are to blame for the plastic waste pandemic. It demonstrates that, while these factors may be important in showing the form in which the problem of plastic explosion is experienced, it is the inherent contradictions in neoliberal policies that lie at the root of the problem. On the one hand, the private sector seems to solve the specific problem with which it is tasked. On the other hand, it generates other costs that the market is ill suited to resolve. Dependent on private sector activity for a vibrant economy, the state is caught between doing the bidding of capital or risking a downturn in the economy. So, the plastic waste problem is a case of both markets for plastics and plastics for markets.

The solution does not lie with state intervention, for it was through that medium that the privatisation of water and waste management came about. Rather, the remedy lies with the *direction* of state intervention. A willing state, seeking to end the environmental hazard plaguing cities, would need to discontinue its dependence on private capital and take charge of the provision of water, waste and, hence, the environment. That change in track entails monumental risks, including the possibility of state and government failure. However, the prospects – adequate water supply, clean environment and energy – are good enough to give this option a try. This is what Gramsci meant when he talked about 'pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will' (cited in Bello 2008, 15).

Acknowledgements

Note on contributor

Franklin Obeng-Odoom is the Chancellor's Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the School of the Built Environment, University of Technology, Sydney in Australia. He is the author of *Governance for Pro-Poor Urban Development: Lessons from Ghana* (Routledge 2013) and a recipient of the maiden World Social Science Fellowship awarded by the International Social Science Council. His research interests and other information can be found on his personal website at http://obeng-odoom.com

Notes

1. For instance the recent 64th Annual New Year School – a national forum during which accomplished people in the country are given the opportunity to comment on pressing issues of national development – focused on questions of sanitation, hygiene and water, with plastic waste as a key subtopic.
2. Interview with CEO of Davnak Ventures, Takoradi (24 January 2013).
3. An alternative means of assessing how much money is due to collectors or pickers is by weighing the bags of sachets they collect. By this means, some 9 kg of sachets is worth GH₵1.80 (interview with a plastics purchasing agent).
4. This by-law took effect on 1 April 2011 (see Bokpe 2013).
5. New Ghana cedis (1,000,000 old Ghana = 100 New Ghana cedis [GH₵]; 1 GH₵ is approximately US$0.7).
6. Note, though, that in the same minutes, the Accra mayor seems to count private management of the 'waste to energy project' as a 'benefit'.

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BRIEFING

The Ghanaian elections of 2012

Bob Kelly[a]* and R.B. Bening[b]

[a]*Open University, Milton Keynes, UK;*
[b]*Department of Political Science, University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana*

The December 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections were again conducted under the terms of the 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution and as in 2008 were held on the same day – this time, Friday 7 December. The main contenders were the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) with John Dramani Mahama as its presidential candidate and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) with Nana Akuffo Addo as its flag-bearer. The list of eight candidates was completed by Kwesi Nduom of the Progressive Peoples Party (PPP), Abu Sakara for the Convention Peoples Party (CPP), Hassan Ayariga for the Peoples National Convention (PNC), Henry Lartey for the Great Consolidated Popular Party (GCPP), Kwesi Addai for the United Front Party (UFP) and Osei Yeboah, an Independent candidate. However, in the election build-up, only three of the minor parties' presidential candidates seemed to be capable of having some impact on the overall results – Paa Kwesi Nduom was using his riches and effervescent personality to give publicity to the newly formed PPP, Abu Sakara of the CPP in televised presentations was displaying extensive knowledge and understanding of the issues facing Ghana, and the PNC had a national poster campaign and was now led by the younger and apparently more dynamic Hassan Ayariga in place of the four times loser Dr Edward Mahama.

The political background to the election was that the NDC had been elected for two terms in the 1990s in rather controversial circumstances following the transfer from military rule in 1992 (what the NPP termed 'the Stolen Election' and 'the Bought Election') with the NPP winning in 2000 and 2004. In 2008 the NDC very narrowly won both the parliamentary and presidential elections, the latter after a second ballot and a further vote in one constituency (Tain in Brong Ahafo Region) which had failed to hold a second ballot and which had an electorate larger than the majority of the leading candidate. In the event Professor John Evans Atta Mills was declared the winner with John Mahama as the Vice President. This victory fulfilled Samuel Huntington's requirement for a consolidated democratic polity – a second turnover of power, which indicates the recognition by both the political elite and public that when things go wrong it is the rulers and not the regime which need to be changed (Huntington 1993, 267).

The build-up to the election

Predicting election results in Ghana is a very hazardous exercise as the electorate is so varied between a highly educated elite and growing middle class, urban dwellers facing the economic and social difficulties of living in a low-wage economy, and rural people who to varying extents live on the

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*Corresponding author. Email: r.kelly65@hotmail.co.uk

margins of national society and who may be much more concerned with traditional family and village rivalries than the prospects of the national economy. However, the indications in the early part of 2012 were that the NDC would find it difficult to retain power. The 2008 election had essentially been won on the success of the NDC maintaining its support base in the Volta, Northern and two Upper Regions and by extending its appeal in the Greater Accra Region by exploiting the discontent of urban workers at the state of the economy and land issues, and in the Central Region by garnering support more effectively than in 2004 for their own son Professor Mills. By 2012, however, there was an atmosphere of disappointment that the oil production off the coast of the Western Region was not apparently providing tangible benefits for workers, living costs were continuing to rise with predictions of double-digit inflation by the end of 2012 (*Daily Guide*, 27 August 2012), allegations of government corruption were rife, and President Mills was largely invisible and believed to be ineffective because of ill-health. This situation suddenly changed with the death of 68-year-old President Mills in July 2012 and his replacement by the generally well-liked and more dynamic John Mahama. Two opinion polls prior to the election indicated just how uncertain the presidential election was:

Candidate	Research International	Daily Dispatch
Mahama	47%	52.2%
Akufo-Addo	52%	44.7%
The Six Others	1%	3.1%

Source: *The Daily Dispatch*, 11 December 2012

The 'big questions' of the election

1. *A Northern president?* The death of President Mills and the succession of his deputy John Mahama to the

presidency meant that, for the first time since the short-lived Third Republic regime (1979–1981) of President Limann from Gwollu in the present Upper West Region, a Northerner was interim President with a real possibility of being elected for a full term. In early November he appealed to the chiefs and people of Nakpanduri in the Northern Region to end the sequence of Northern Vice-Presidents and enable him to 'make them proud' (www.Dagbon.net, accessed 3 November 2012). There had been one earlier attempt to break this syndrome in 2008 when Alhaji Mahama Iddrissu from Wa in the Upper West Region had unsuccessfully contested to be the NDC flag-bearer. To many educated Northerners this was a pleasing prospect, although the issue was rather confused by the fact that the CPP and PNC presidential candidates were also Northerners (Abu Sakara a fellow Gonja from Damongo and Hassan Ayariga from Bawku with a Mamprusi mother and Kusasi father). Moreover, any undue emphasis placed on this could alienate Southerners who are far more numerous and therefore prove counter-productive. Additionally the North is full of its own internal divisions, one of which is between the so-called 'dominant' tribes (the Gonja, Dagomba, Mamprusi and Nanumba) who had their own kingdoms in the pre-colonial period and were bolstered by the British when they tried to strengthen chiefly power in the era of 'indirect rule' and the 'minority' tribes (in terms of power rather than numbers), such as the Konkomba, Lobi and Nawuri who were dominated and sometimes exploited by the dominant tribes. The fact that Mahama

is a Gonja should have garnered support from his fellow tribesmen but could possibly have the opposite effect among the latter groups, with a history of disputes between them and Gonja chiefs. Mahama explicitly addressed this in a rally in Saboba when he referred to a rumour that he as a Gonja head of state would 'oppress Konkombas who had fought Gonjas in the past' (http://ghanareview.com, accessed 15 October 2012).

2. *The death of President Mills*. In 2008 the NDC had successfully gained the support of the Central Region from which Mills hailed. The succession of Mahama to the presidency was followed by the selection of another Central Region candidate to the post of Vice President and later as Vice-Presidential candidate for the election – Kwesi Amissah-Arthur – who had been Governor of the Central Bank of Ghana. Would this be sufficient to maintain Central Region support for the NDC? Also Mills' death did create a great deal of both national sympathy and criticism of him and his regime was temporarily muted, so it was felt by many that prospects for the NDC's electoral victory were actually enhanced by his death.

3. *The Ya Naa affair*. Divisions among the Dagomba of the Northern Region date back well over a century to disputes between the Abudu and Andani branches of the ruling family over succession to the paramountcy, and in recent elections this had been reflected in Andani support for the NDC and Abudu support for the NPP. The paramount chief of the Dagomba (Ya Naa Yakubu Andani II) was brutally murdered and beheaded in March 2002 when members of a

rival family (the Abudu) attacked his palace in Yendi and set it ablaze. The NDC had gained a great deal of support in that region because of alleged links of leading NPP figures to his murder and the NDC's pledge to bring his murderers to account. This the government had failed to do, with the acquittal of a group of suspects in September 2010. The CPP had some long-standing support in the Dagomba area and there was a threat that they or some other party could capitalise on this failure, with a CPP rally in Tamale in early November making a strong appeal for support (www.dagbon.net, accessed 7 November 2012). Tensions between the Andani and Abudu families remained very strong throughout 2012 with one headline suggesting that 'Yendi sits on a time bomb' (www.dagbon.net, accessed 25 April 2012), so the potential for electoral impact remained strong.

4. *Other traditional rivalries*. While there are numerous traditional disputes over chieftaincy, ethnicity and land in other parts of the country, the most violent, long-lasting and potentially the most politically significant lie in the Northern, Upper East and Upper West Regions of the country (for detailed explanations and discussions of this, see Awedoba 2011; Kelly and Bening 2007). In Bawku in the Upper East Region the chieftaincy dispute between the Mamprusi and Kusasi dates back to at least the beginnings of colonial rule. In 2008 the NPP with particular support from the Mamprusi community had won the constituency of Bawku Central, with the successful candidate later being arrested and finally jailed over questions of dual

nationality. As in the past violent incidents occurred in election year with a local NPP Assemblyman from the nearby village of Badoor being shot in February 2012 when returning home from Bawku (www.dagbon.net, accessed 25 February 2012). In Nakpanduri in the Northern Region, land disputes between the Bimoba and Konkomba led to several gun battles and the burning of houses in June 2012 (www.dagbon.net, accessed 6 June 2012. In Bimbilla, also in the Northern Region, tensions between the Nanumba and Konkomba threatened a repeat of the devastating 1994 tribal war (www.dagbon.net, accessed 29 September 2012). In Wa in the Upper West Region a long-standing dispute over succession to the paramountcy had finally resulted in the selection of a member of the Pelpuo family to be Wa Naa. However this was not readily accepted by other contestants, with particular resentment that the chief's brother was the sitting MP, therefore further consolidating the power of that family over its rivals (see www.dagbon.net, accessed 3 January 2012). All of these disputes had the potential to influence both parliamentary and presidential election results in their particular areas, with the significance being enhanced by the candidature of a fellow Northerner as President.

5. *Economic matters.* Appreciation of development projects is to some extent in the eyes of the beholder in Ghana. Whenever opposition supporters are consulted, even the most visible projects are denied to have taken place, while government supporters hail massive developments that are not readily apparent. In reality, the four years of NDC rule had seen a concerted attempt to improve the road network and new school buildings and electricity supplies were evident in all regions of the country. Public sector workers had seen significant increases in their salaries. However, for many people costs were rising faster than incomes, unemployment and under-employment remained as significant problems and there were few discernible benefits from oil production. This could prove very significant, particularly in the Greater Accra Region where the election could be won and lost.

6. *The Rawlings factor.* Jerry Rawlings founded the NDC as his party of transformation from military to civilian rule for the elections of 1992, having led the PNDC from the overthrow of the Third Republic under President Limann in 1981. Having served as President from 1992 until 2000 he stood down and was replaced as presidential candidate by his former Vice President Professor Mills. Relations between them were strained from the outset but became noticeably so after Mills' election to the presidency in 2004. Although Mills originally promised to consult Rawlings on a daily basis, the NDC was divided between those who saw Rawlings as their role model and others who feared he was an electoral liability in some parts of the country. Rawlings became increasingly critical of the alleged inactivity and corruption of the regime, culminating in the candidature of his wife, Nana Konadu Rawlings in the presidential primary of the NDC. In the event she secured a humiliating 3.1% of the votes of party delegates, leading to her estrangement from the party and her establishment of the National

Democratic Party (NDP) as a rival. She submitted nomination papers for the presidential elections but these were rejected by the Electoral Commission as incomplete (http://ghanareview.com, accessed 19 October 2012). Nevertheless the NDP was registered for the parliamentary elections with candidates in over half the constituencies throughout the country. Rawlings himself remained in the public limelight making speeches urging peaceful elections but not explicitly endorsing either the NDC or NDP. Although the NDP was given little chance of winning, the fear for the NDC was that votes for them could be split to the benefit of the NPP.

The mood of the election

Although there were some incidents of violence in particular 'hotspots' of Ghana in 2012 and during the election period that could at least in part be attributed to local political rivalries, such as the shooting near Bawku referred to above, these were relatively few compared to previous elections (see Kelly 2004, 2008). Both main parties realised this would be a close struggle and smaller parties expressed some optimism of their chances of making an impact. Declarations were made on all sides to maintain the peace and to eschew violence. The mood was significantly lightened in the televised presidential debates by the performance of the PNC candidate Hassan Ayariga whose perceived lack of knowledge and gravitas led to a member of the audience in the first debate suggesting he should use his option to 'ask the audience' or 'phone a friend' (http://ghanareview, accessed 7 November 2012). In a subsequent debate he joked and coughed his way through it much to the apparent delight of those present and the television audience.

During the debates the candidates of the NDC, NPP and CPP were all in their own ways impressive. Abu Sakara showed he was on top of his brief, Akuffo Addo answered questions with confidence which to some bordered on arrogance, while John Mahama appeared knowledgeable, calm and perhaps presidential. However, to many voters in the rural areas such discussions were of marginal relevance, with local concerns and personalities being of much greater significance.

All however remained calm until Saturday 8 December, when contrary to regulations the NPP staged a press conference to claim victory. This was followed by a ban on any party holding such briefings until the evening of Sunday 9 December, when the Chair of the Electoral Commission announced the election on the first ballot of President John Mahama, followed by the declaration of the NPP that there had been serious electoral fraud with the connivance of senior officials of the Electoral Commission to ensure a Mahama victory (see for example *Daily Guide*, 11 December 2012).

The declared results

The presidential election

John Mahama	NDC	5,574,761	50.70%
Nana Akufo-Addo	NPP	5,248,898	47.74%
Kwesi Nduom	PPP	64,223	0.59%
Henry Lartey	GCPP	38,223	0.35%
Hassan Ayariga	PNC	24,617	0.22%
Abu Sakara	CPP	20,323	0.18%
Osei Yeboah	IND	15,201	0.14%
Kwesi Addai	UFP	8877	0.08%

Source: Adapted from http:ghanaelections.peacefmonline.com

As the requirement for winning presidential elections in Ghana's Fourth Republic is obtaining 50% plus one of total valid votes cast, the Chairman of the Electoral Commission, Dr Afari Djan, formally declared John Mahama to be the President-Elect on the evening of Sunday 9 December after consultation with the parties and various civic groups. The NPP leadership immediately declared their intention to take the matter to the Supreme Court in line with their constitutional rights.

The parliamentary election

Despite a number of individual complaints about electoral malpractices in a number of constituencies (including a personal one to one of the authors of this article from the defeated NPP candidate Kofi Adda in Navrongo Central in the Upper East Region), much less attention was paid by either the political parties or the press to these results. These provided a clear victory for the NDC with the NPP only gaining a majority of seats in Ashanti and the Eastern Region, the home of Akufo Addo its presidential candidate. The PNC retained just one seat – Builsa South in the Upper East, and the other parties gained no seats (the CPP lost Jomoro in the Western Region and the PNC Sissala West in the Upper West Region). However, the CPP did win an early by-election victory in Kumbungu in the Dagomba area when the sitting NDP MP Alhaji Mohammed Mumuni was appointed to be the Secretary General of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of states, and so the party regained a presence in Parliament. The three Independents elected were all former NDC members disgruntled at the outcome of the party's primary elections held earlier in the year.

Region	No of Seats	NDC	NPP	PNC	IND
Ashanti	47	4	43	0	0
Brong Ahafo	29	16	13	0	0
Central	23	16	7	0	0
Eastern	33	7	26	0	0
Greater Accra	34	21	13	0	0
Northern	31	20	10	0	1
Upper East	15	12	2	1	0
Upper West	11	10	0	0	1
Volta	26	25	0	0	1
Total	**275**	**150**	**121**	**1**	**3**

Source: *Ibid*.

The NPP's argument

For the 2012 election all counts took place at the individual polling stations. Candidates or their representatives were given copies of the results and were asked to sign their agreement to them. Once this was done the results were then passed on pink sheets to the constituency for collation before being sent to the Electoral Commission in Accra for the formal announcement of the presidential poll to be made. The NPP alleged that the figures for the presidential election were distorted at the constituency level before being sent on to Accra. Ten constituencies were initially named with distortions totalling 51,325 votes (*Daily Dispatch*, 12 December 2012). The NPP submitted its electoral petition to the Supreme Court on Tuesday 16 April 2013, and as the case progressed three key elements were spelt out in it: over-voting, pink sheets with the same identification numbers, and voting without biometric verification. More than 11,000 polling stations were cited and the demand was that three million votes should be declared invalid. The NPP argued that if the court were to find in favour of its petition, its candidate – Akufo Addo – would be declared the victor.

At the time of writing no court decision on these claims had been reached, although the NDC had counter-alleged over-voting in NPP areas such as Asokwa in the Ashanti Region. Moreover all the international observers and civil society groups who had monitored the elections had declared themselves satisfied that the elections had been freely and fairly conducted (see for example *Daily Graphic*, 10 December 2012).

The significance of the results

The state of Ghanaian democracy. The 2012 elections certainly revealed some flaws in the reputation of Ghana's democratic system. The authors of this article were informed of a number of instances of payment for votes in various rural areas. Even before the elections had taken place there was a view among NPP supporters that the NDC and Electoral

Commission were manipulating the system through the introduction of the biometric system and the creation of an additional 50 constituencies in the run-up to the elections. Unquestionably the difficulties some voters had in having their identities accepted by the electronic machines, allegations made by some candidates that their particular supporters were being discriminated against, and the refusal of several of the opposition parties to accept the legitimacy of the declared results do indicate that there are flaws in the system and its operation. This is evidenced by the number of rejected ballots largely resulting from the use of the biometric system, reaching over 250,000 or 2.24% of those cast (*Daily Graphic*, 11 December 2012), and this is a major source of concern to all.

Nonetheless, the peaceful conduct of the campaign and the comments by all the groups of international observers indicate that Ghana has progressed a long way towards the establishment of free and fair elections. Furthermore, the very fact that the NPP was able to challenge the fairness of the results by gathering written evidence from polling stations is indicative that the basic system is intact, enabling careful scrutiny to be undertaken. The financial resources at the disposal of the governing party inevitably provide an advantage, but the fact that governments could be overturned in 2000 and 2008 and that the presidential election at least in 2012 proved to be so close do indicate that Ghana remains a beacon of democracy in Africa.

The continued development of a two-party system. The NDC and NPP between them won 271 of the 275 parliamentary seats and their presidential candidates similarly won in every constituency. The resources at the disposal of the two parties dwarfed anything that could be mustered by the alternative parties and candidates. In mainly rural constituencies where local factors played a significant role, it was possible for the party machine to be beaten, although in most cases this was by the other party machine. The derisory votes obtained by the CPP, PNC and PPP presidential candidates (each receiving less than 1%) demonstrates that in the eyes of voters this was certainly a two-party race.

The end of the Nkrumah, Limann and Rawlings traditions? Abu Sakara of the CPP obtained 0.18% of the presidential votes despite appearing as a serious presidential contender in the televised debates. This placed him in fifth place behind Kwesi Nduom (PPP), Henry Lartey (GCPP) and Hassan Ayariga (PNC). While Nduom conducted a national poster campaign, Ayariga had essentially been regarded as a joke candidate after his performances in the presidential debates, and Lartey had been essentially invisible. In the only seat formerly held by the CPP (Jomoro in Nkrumah's home area in the Western Region), Nkrumah's daughter Samia Yaba Nkrumah was clearly defeated by the NDC's Francis Anaman by over 3500 votes. The PNC also claims to be part of the Nkrumah tradition but its success has in the past been mainly in the Upper Regions where Hilla Limann, President between 1979 and 1981 hailed from (Gwollu in the Sissala area of the Upper West). However the party lost its Sissala West seat and failed to regain Sissala East (lost in 2008), with its candidates actually coming third in both.

Less definite but nonetheless sign-posted is the possible end of the Rawlings tradition. His failure to explicitly support the NDC in the election followed by that party's success, and the lack of impact of his wife's NDP in the parliamentary elections may prove to be very significant. The party came last in over half the seats it contested and only managed one second place – Agotime Ziope in the Volta Region, with just 10.53% of the votes cast (http:ghanaelections.peacefmonline.com, accessed 13 January 2013). Sections of the

NDC still hold Rawlings in great esteem and many people in the Volta and Upper/ Northern Regions recognise the contributions to development his regime made. However, the NDC has shown that it can prosper without his support and it may prove very difficult for him to rebuild his influence within the party.

The continued importance of 'traditional' disputes and rivalries: The solid support given by the Volta Region to the NDC presidential candidate (85.4%) and by Ashanti to the NPP candidate (70.86%) indicates the maintenance of the Ewe/Ashanti rivalry which has characterised Ghanaian politics. In the Dagomba area the NPP was victorious in the two solidly Dagomba constituencies in which support for the Abudu family has been particularly strong (Yendi and Tolon) while the NDC won in the rest of the Dagomba heartland. The message conveyed by

numerous respondents to the authors of this article was that any choice between the party of the murderers of the Ya Naa and that of those who had failed to bring the murderers to justice could only result in support for the latter. The Konkomba/ Bimoba dispute in Nakpanduri contributed to the defeat of the NDC candidate in Bunkpurugu and Kusasi/Mamprusi rivalry still dominated the Bawku Central election. However, the NDC candidate in Wa Central confounded predictions that the chieftaincy dispute would cost him his seat, retaining it with a majority of almost 6000 and 49.31% of the poll. Rivalry between the 'dominant' and 'minority' tribes undoubtedly contributed to the success of NPP candidates in Bimbilla, Kpandai, Tatale/Sanguli and Zabzugu, although the personalities and family relationships of particular candidates were also important (for details of the

Constituency	Region	Presidential %	Parliamentary %
Agona West	Central	NPP 49.83 v 48.69	NDC 52.29 v 44.86
Ahafo North	Ashanti	NPP 50.66 v 48.44	NDC 50.37 v 49.24
Ahanta West	Western	NPP 53.88 v 42.86	NDC 45.74 v 43.49
Akan	Volta	NDC 73.27 v 23.60	IND 30.81 v 28.31
Akwatia	Eastern	NPP 51.61 v 47.72	NDC 50.44 v 49.07
Amenfi East	Western	NPP 49.55 v 49.25	NDC 59.42 v 40.18
Asuagyman	Eastern	NDC 54.19 v 45.16	NPP 51.79 v 46.55
Ayawaso West	Greater Accra	NDC 49.86 v 49.05	NPP 50.36 v 47.63
Builsa South	Upper East	NDC 59.13 v 19.40 (NPP)	PNC 46.96 v 36.19
Bunkpurugu	Northern	NDC 64.01 v 48.87	NPP 38.85 v 36.41
Effutu	Central	NDC 49.26 v 48.87	NPP 55.68 v 44.86
Ejura Sekyedume	Ashanti	NDC 55.79 v 43.24	NPP 49.78 v 49.10
Hemang Lr Denkyira	Central	NPP 49.27 v 48.82	NDC 50.06 v 49.94
Jaman North	Brong Ahafo	NDC 57.46 v 40.81	NPP 50.34 v 49.66
Jirapa	Upper West	NDC 78.25 v 12.82 (NPP)	IND 48.39 v 41.90
KEEA	Central	NDC 55.57 v 34.45	NPP 38.17 v 26.80(IND)
Kpandai	Northern	NDC 58.43 v 37.93	NPP 42.48 v 36.12
Nkoranza North	Brong Ahafo	NDC 49.69 v 48.94	NPP 50.00 v 46.49
Offinso North	Ashanti	NDC 49.57 v 49.42	NPP 50.36 v 48.56
Talensi	Upper East	NDC 63.35 v 26.36	NPP 41.46 v 33.22
Tamale North	Northern	NDC 75.36 v 22.69 (NPP)	IND 38.67 v 36.35
Tano South	Brong Ahafo	NPP 51.62 v 47.44	NDC 51.49 v 47.79
Tatale	Northern	NDC 49.02 v 43.33	NPP 33.10 v 32.93 (IND)
Tema East	Greater Accra	NDC 50.73 v 48.43	NPP 47.69 v 47.68
Wenchi	Brong Ahafo	NDC 50.11 v 48.37	NPP 50.90 v 45.49

Source: Adapted from http:ghanaelections.peacefmonline.com

results, see http:ghanaelections. peacefmonline.com).

'*Skirt and blouse*'. This is the term used in Ghana in reference to voters supporting the presidential candidate of one party and the parliamentary candidate of another. Excluding the three Independent and one PNC MPs (whose four constituencies all supported the NDC presidential candidate) seven constituencies voted for Akufo Addo and an NDC parliamentarian while 15 voted for Mahama and an NPP parliamentarian.

These results are very significant for Ghanaian democracy in that electors in all regions of the country indicated an awareness to vote for the local candidate of their choice while selecting a president on the basis of party affiliation and perceived suitability. The party machines might be powerful but local issues and opinions can clearly resist them. The above table shows that in some constituencies there was a significant rejection of the particular candidate chosen by the party. In Kpandai, Nabdam and Talensi there was a particular rejection of long-standing NDC MPs who had 'chopped for too long' (a phrase repeated in numerous interviews to the authors, meaning they had enjoyed the financial rewards of high office for many years and it was time for someone else to do so), while support for the presidential candidate remained strong.

The future

The significance of the failure to gain consensus on the Electoral Commission's declared results should not be underestimated and the continued gulf between the ethnic heartlands of the two main parties remains disturbing and a threat to political stability. The outcome of the Supreme Court's deliberations which are being televised has the potential to ignite intense conflict. 'President' Mahama and many other political leaders have indicated a willingness to accept whatever verdict is reached,

but the rewards of links to the government are immense for many in society and a contrary court decision can be dire for many individuals and groups. Even if the court rules in the NDC's favour the NPP's petition has stimulated intense rivalry and resentment, and a precedent has been set for reaction to future election results.

However, the peaceful nature of the campaign, the resort to the courts rather than the streets, and the moderating influence of civil society organisations are certainly positive signs. The electoral system has shown itself to be robust and the electorate has in many places displayed a willingness to dispense with traditional voting patterns and resist the powerful party machines. Given events in elections under the Fourth Republic, any perceived failure of the NDC President and government to deliver may well be punished by the 'two-term model' that has been present since 1992.

Notes on contributors

Bob Kelly is now retired as a senior lecturer in Social Science at the Open University.

R.B. Bening is Professor of Political Geography at the University of Ghana, Legon.

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BRIEFING

Are public–private partnerships (PPPs) the answer to Africa's infrastructure needs?[†]

John Loxley*

Department of Economics, University of Manitoba, Canada

Introduction

There is a large and growing infrastructure gap in Africa which has, inevitably, led to the exploration of alternative ways of financing infrastructural development. Public–private partnerships (PPPs) have been proposed as a possible major solution. Multilateral bodies within Africa, such as the African Union (AU), the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the African Development Bank (AfDB) have all endorsed their use, prompted by financial and technical support from the World Bank, the OCED (2012), and by endorsement, albeit a cautious one, by the IMF (IMF, 2004). This paper explores the nature of PPPs, the extent of their use and their location by sector in Africa. It also examines the arguments advanced for the promotion of PPPs and looks critically at them. It concludes that great caution should be exercised in the use of PPPs.

The infrastructure gap in Africa

Annual infrastructure needs in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) have been estimated to be US$93 billion (Foster and Briceño-Garmendia 2010, 6–9, 65–86). Table 1 below shows that US$33.0 billion or about one-third of annual infrastructure spending needs is on operations and maintenance while US$60 billion is required for capital expenditure. The biggest need is in power, followed by water and sanitation and then transport.

Table 2 gives an indication of the infrastructure deficiency in low-income and middle-income African countries compared with countries at similar income levels elsewhere. It can be seen that Africa lags in all areas of need except unpaved roads. The deficiency is particularly glaring with regard to paved roads, landline phones, the Internet and power availability.

Of the annual infrastructure needs of US$93 billion, only US$45 billion is available through existing sources (Table 3) leaving an 'infrastructure gap' of US$48 billion equivalent to 4.2% of GDP. Furthermore, it is widely accepted that the infrastructure needs of African countries are growing.

The largest source of funding for infrastructure is the public sector, which provides almost US$30 billion, or two-thirds of all funding. Foreign aid provides about US$6 billion or 13% (with China significantly increasing its contribution in recent years) and the private sector US$9.4 billion or 21%. There is widespread

Table 1.   Overall infrastructure spending needs for sub-Saharan Africa; US$ billions annually

Infrastructure sector	Capital expenditure	Operations and maintenance	Total spending
ICT	7.0	2.0	9.0
Irrigation	2.9	0.6	3.4
Power	26.7	14.1	40.8
Transport	8.8	9.4	18.2
WSS	14.9	7.0	21.9
Total	60.4	33.0	93.3

Note: ICT = Information and communication technology.
WSS = Water supply and sanitation.
Source: Foster and Briceño-Garmendia (2010, 7).

Table 2.   International perspectives on Africa's infrastructure deficit

Normalised Units	African low-income countries	Other low-income countries	African middle-income countries	Other middle-income countries
Paved road density	34	134	284	461
Total road density	150	29	381	106
Main-line density	9	38	142	252
Mobile density	48	55	277	557
Internet density	2	29	8.2	235
Generation capacity	39	326	293	648
Electricity coverage	14	41	37	88
Improved water	61	72	82	91
improved sanitation	34	53	53	82

Source: Yepes, Pierce and Foster (2008).
Note: Road density is measured in kilometres per 100 square kilometres of arable land; telephone density in lines per thousand population; generation capacity in megawatts per million population; electricity, water and sanitation coverage in percentage of population.

Table 3.   Infrastructure spending on addressing sub-Saharan Africa's infrastructure needs; US$ billions annually

Infrastructure Sector	Operations and maintenance Public sector	Capital expenditure					Total spending
		Public sector	ODA	Non-OECD financiers	Private sector	Total	
ICT	2.0	1.3	0.0	0.0	5.7	7.0	9.0
Power	7.0	2.4	0.7	1.1	0.5	4.6	11.6
Transport	7.8	4.5	1.8	1.1	1.1	8.4	16.2
WSS	3.1	1.1	1.2	0.2	2.1	4.6	7.6
irrigation	0.6	0.3	–	–	–	0.3	0.9
Total	20.4	9.4	3.6	2.5	9.4	24.9	45.3

scepticism about the ability of the public sector to meet the infrastructure deficit, even with foreign aid. This, together with the current preoccupation of many governments and international organisations with neoliberal approaches to the provision of public services, has led to the promotion of PPPs as a possible solution to financing the infrastructure shortfall.

Public–private partnerships (PPPs): what are they?

In conventional procurement private sector contractors almost always build the project while the public sector owns, arranges design, financing, operations and maintenance. In PPPs, there is usually a long-term contract between a private party and a government agency for some combination of construction, ownership, design, financing, operation and/or maintenance of public infrastructure. In other words, the private sector becomes more involved in public projects, taking over functions traditionally retained by the public sector. For this reason, PPPs have been described by their detractors as privatisation by stealth (CUPE 1998). Proponents, however, see them in a more benevolent light as being cooperative arrangements 'between the public and private sectors, built on the expertise of each partner, to develop or improve facilities, infrastructure and/or operating services on behalf of the public, through the appropriate and fair allocation of resources, risk, rewards and responsibilities' (City of Winnipeg 1999, 6)

Figure 1 indicates the range of arrangements that qualify as PPPs, from the least private sector involvement at the top to almost complete privatisation at the bottom. In the least invasive forms of PPP, the operations and maintenance functions can be handed over to the private sector while all other aspects of infrastructure projects remain in public hands. Greater private involvement might then involve the private sector providing the

finance directly, through loans and private equity. At the top end, before complete privatisation, public infrastructure can be run as a long-term concession in which the private sector designs, builds, finances, owns, operates maintains and possibly charges the public for the use of infrastructure. In the last 20 years, many developing countries have also increasingly involved the private sector in rehabilitating public infrastructure.
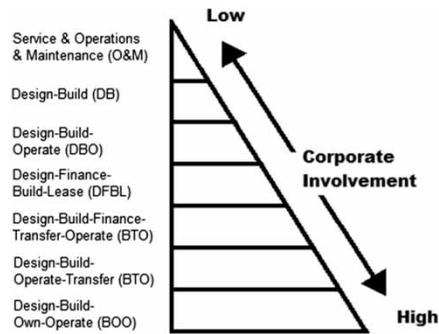

Figure 1. The PPP spectrum.
Source: Loxley and Loxley (2010).

In a survey of PPPs in developing countries between 1990 and 2003, Hammami, Ruhashyankiko, and Yehoue1 (2006, 12) found that three types of PPP accounted for 70% of all projects: build-own-operate PPPs (BOO) accounted for 38.9%, build-own-transfer (BOT) for 17.9% and build-rehabilitate-operate-transfer (BROT) for 13.2%.

The attraction for the private sector is that the public sector pays it an annual lease for using infrastructure, which is then used to repay borrowing, cover costs and make profits. PPPs, in effect, enable greater commodification of public services by extending the involvement of private capital in the sphere of public service. Contracts are often very long-term, from 25 to 40 years, and direct ownership of infrastructure is more common in Africa than in developed economies. The private companies involved earn large returns on their

equity investments. Governments replace direct servicing of loans with the payment of annual leases.

Extent of private involvement in African infrastructure

Accurate figures of PPP activity in Africa are impossible to come by. Some indication is given by the World Bank's Private Participation in Infrastructure Database (World Bank 2013a). This shows that between 1990 and 2011, there was US$121 billion of private funding of infrastructure in SSA, just over 10% of the total such involvement in developing countries as a whole. US$95 billion or 78% was in the telecom sector, US$14 billion in transport and US$12.5 billion in energy. Only US$0.3 was invested in water and sanitation, as this sector does not appear to be attractive to private investment in Africa.[1] Not all of this investment, however, was in PPPs, for US$24 billion was the outcome of divestment where the public facility was simply privatised. The weaknesses of the data are, however, many. To begin with they cover only large projects, but more importantly they exclude projects in health, education, prisons and simple government buildings. In South Africa, for instance, investments in PPPs in such sectors amounted to at least Rand 1.4 billion in 27 projects by 2011 (South Africa 2013). There were only four PPPs in sectors covered by the World Bank data though admittedly, at Rand 3.8 billion, they were much larger projects. The World Bank database is, therefore, likely to underestimate the number of PPPs in Africa and the scope of investment in them.

Nonetheless, still using that data, it appears that South Africa and Nigeria account for 87 projects out of an estimated 436 in SSA, or about 20%, and at US$63 billion, for over a half of total investments. There are 11 other SSA countries each with

US$2 billion or more in PPPs, accounting for 184 projects. In North Africa, there were 75 identified projects costing US$65 billion.

Trends in PPPs in Africa

The years 2000 to 2005 saw a steady growth in both the number and value of PPP projects, from 29 projects costing US$3.5 billion to 42 projects costing US$8.9 billion. There was a sharp drop in the number of projects from 2005 and especially after the 2007–2008 financial crisis. The number of projects in recent years has hovered between 16 and 18, and total investment, which peaked at US$13.6 billion in 2008, has fallen to around US$11.4 billion (World Bank 2013a). This means that the average size of project has increased sharply, from US$212 million in 2005 to US$633 million in 2011.

The legal and infrastructural provision for PPPs in Africa

The World Bank lists only 16 African countries as having legislation dealing with PPPs.[2] The coverage of the legislation varies greatly from country to country, with South Africa having perhaps the most sophisticated legal and institutional structure. Interest in PPPs in South Africa dates back to 1997. A strategic plan for them was endorsed in 1999, a dedicated PPP unit was established in the Treasury in 2000 and legislation was enacted in 2004 for the national and provincial governments and in 2005 for municipalities engaging in PPPs[3] (Burger 2006). A PPP manual was issued in 2004 with modules on issues such as procurement practice, negotiating contracts, establishing a public sector comparator against which to evaluate bids, accounting treatment and Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) (South Africa 2004). Recent legislation in Tanzania likewise provides a detailed organisational structure, procedures and requirements for PPPs to be considered as viable options,

through value-for-money and other assessments (Tanzania 2010). It is similar in content to that in Zambia (Zambia 2009). Other acts are less detailed and prescriptive, laying out principles of partnership, including tendering, but leaving the organisational framework ambiguous (e.g., Tunisia 2008, cited in EBRD 2011, and Cameroon 2006). In the case of Tunisia, for instance, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD 2011) has concluded that the legislation is too restrictive to allow PPPs to enter the 'merchant sector', meaning, health, education, prisons and public buildings. The EBRD also found the policy framework, institutional framework and PPP law enforcement to be quite deficient.

There are, apparently, even fewer countries with specialised PPP units than countries with PPP legislation; in fact, only a total of 10, Angola, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa and Tanzania, appear to exist.[4] Some, such as those in Nigeria, Kenya, Rwanda and Tanzania, are quite recent creations, after many years of implementing PPPs.

While having legislation and a specialised PPP technical unit are no guarantee that PPPs will be properly conceived, evaluated and governed, it is unlikely that success will be achieved without them and the majority of African countries pursuing PPPs do not have them. For example, neither the DRC, which has seven PPP projects costing US$2.0 billion, nor Côte d'Ivoire, which has 17 projects costing US$3.3 billion, appears to have a legal or institutional framework for PPPs.

What are the claims made for PPPs?

Proponents argue that there are both macro-economic and microeconomic benefits of promoting PPPs. On the macro side, they claim that by allowing the private sector to finance projects directly, PPPs help governments to relieve the shortage of domestic funds and reduce their debt

obligations. PPPs enable them to reduce their own direct spending or debt, shifting the immediate burden onto the private sector and off the books of the government. When PPPs levy user charges, as they often do with toll roads and the provision of water or electricity, this is said to reduce the pressure on taxation. Reducing the effective size of government through PPPs is consistent with neoliberal emphases on deregulation and economic restructuring and with the priorities, wishes and conditions of aid donors who might offer financial support for PPPs. It is also claimed that PPPs reduce corruption by requiring greater transparency in infrastructure spending decisions.

More important than these arguments in recent years has been a series of microeconomic claims for PPPs. The first is that the private sector is more efficient than the public sector and that it brings projects to completion more cheaply and on time. Involving the private sector in the direct provision of financing introduces a new dimension of capital market discipline in the building and operating of projects, putting added pressure on contractors to deliver promptly and on-budget. Furthermore, private sector involvement can lead to more efficient operations and maintenance relative to conventional approaches. These factors are said to lead to lower life-time costs of projects, from the design stage to the end of the useful life of projects (World Bank 2012, 16).

In short, PPPs shift financial risks from the public sector to the private sector at all stages of a project's life. Indeed, risk transfer is now said to be the most important feature of PPPs. The main risks are project or construction risk, operating risk, market or demand risk, financing risk, environmental risk, regulatory risk, legal/political risk, foreign exchange risk, public policy risk, *force majeure* and residual value risk (Loxley and Loxley 2010, 35). The biggest risks in most projects are up-front project risk and ongoing

market or demand risk. Proponents claim that PPPs shift risk onto those best positioned to handle it.

A final argument for PPPs in South Africa is that they can be important instruments for promoting BEE (Farlam 2005). The South African manual on PPPs contains a code of conduct for BEE which gives numerical weight to furtherance of BEE in PPP submissions and provides for monitoring to avoid tokenism and window dressing (South Africa 2004; Khatleli and Root 2010).

Arguments against using PPPs

In response to the extravagant macro arguments in favour of PPPs, it must be recognised that PPP leases paid to the private sector do not replace debt. They are simply debt in another form as they must be paid, by force of legal contract, over a number of years. The annual lease payments can be given a present value[5] equivalent to debt, which is exactly what bond houses do when reviewing the financial commitments of governments. Furthermore, PPP financing is almost always more expensive than direct borrowing by governments. Domestic revenue difficulties which it is claimed PPPs help address are, in fact, often self-imposed by governments themselves or externally imposed by the IMF or World Bank, the very organisations promoting PPPs. If PPP lease payments are in reality debt, and are more expensive than direct borrowing, then they really offer no release from domestic revenue and debt difficulties in principle and PPPs must be justified, if at all, on micro grounds. Certainly, PPP funds are not 'free' funds and may not even be 'additional' funds unless donors insist on their funding being used to promote PPPs.

User fees do not necessarily reduce taxation pressures and may in themselves generate conflict and resistance and revolt, as they have in other parts of the developing world (Marin 2009).

Contrary to the received wisdom of their proponents, PPPs may actually facilitate corruption, as they have done in the energy sector of Tanzania. In this case, a 20-year deal was struck with a PPP to provide electricity that was both not needed and highly overpriced. This was negotiated without a tender and the deal was denounced by the Tanzanian government itself as reeking of corruption (World Bank 2012, 207; Farlam 2005, 28–29). Transparency International called it 'public–private partnership at its worst' (Cooksey 2003, quoted in Farlam, 2005, 27). PPPs are clearly not a panacea for corruption and may, in fact, open up new opportunities for it. Indeed, Moeletsi Mbeki has claimed that BEE, being promoted through PPPs in South Africa, 'is legalised corruption' serving to 'co-opt and bribe the controllers of political power, with the elite using taxation and corruption to enrich itself' (quoted in Taylor 2012).

If there is a case for using PPPs in Africa, then it will have to be based on the micro arguments, but these too are suspect. PPPs are complex, long-term arrangements. They necessarily involve complicated legal documentation and lengthy contract negotiations, which means large up-front costs and delays, often ignored when examining the on-time and on-budget claims for PPPs. Because they transfer control and possibly ownership of public infrastructure to the private sector, PPPs involve large transaction costs and large, ongoing costs of monitoring, relative to conventional projects. Weak institutions and poor governance, characteristic of most African countries, may make PPP arrangements 'more ineffective in practice than in theory' (Pessoa 2010, 1) and 'market solutions may be more expensive and overall economic efficiency may not improve with the use of PPPs' (Ho and Tsui 2009, 10).

While PPPs usually involve fixed price construction projects, this is no guarantee against cost overruns or project delays, which may be covered in generous bid

prices or in the renegotiation of contracts, which is quite common in developing countries. Furthermore, PPP contracts are not always subject to competitive bidding, which is considered to be vital for best practice. This seems to have been the case in the AES-SONEL electricity PPP in Cameroon, with Demuijnck and Ngnodjom (2011) admitting that 'We have no idea of how the initial negotiations between AES and the Cameroonian government have come about, i.e., of whether or not there has been corruption in this deal' (259). In reality, for very large projects, there are often only a small number of qualified bidders accompanied by a small coterie of international consultant firms. Once a contract is negotiated, the government is at a competitive disadvantage if the private partner needs or insists on contract renegotiation as this is completely outside the competitive process.

Even when competitive processes are followed, PPPs are often subject to severe information asymmetry, with the private partner having much more knowledge and experience than the public partner, which makes for very uneven bargaining power. One can expect that asymmetry to be large in Africa.

PPPs might even reduce the transparency around the provision of public services in the dozen or so African countries currently having freedom of information provisions in their laws or constitutions (http://www.freedominfo.org/regions/africa), because what were previously public sector activities, possibly open to information requests, now become subject to commercial secrecy. Even in countries with fairly developed information systems, it is very difficult to follow PPP activities and once the high risk construction phase is past, ownership of PPPs is often 'flipped' to others, sometimes to off-shore tax havens, with almost no publicity (Loxley 2012). For the most part, however, access to information is a general problem in Africa regardless of PPPs.

The very long-term nature of many PPPs introduces new forms of inflexibility into public infrastructure. Thus, while the demand for public services offered by PPPs may change, the contracts do not, committing the government to continue paying for a facility or service which is no longer needed or at least, not in the form it was previously negotiated. For example, in the UK, PPP schools have remained a financial burden on the public sector long after the need for them has disappeared with demographic changes (Loxley 2012).

The greater efficiency and reduced costs that are claimed for PPPs may simply be at the expense of labour. Replacing unionised workers with non-unionised workers or reducing the wages, benefits and terms of service of workers previously hired by government can often be a major attraction of PPPs, but not one that endears itself to workers.

Finally, while the assumption of risk transfer from the public to the private sector is crucial to the micro arguments in favour of PPPs, this is not an established fact in practice. Project delays and cost overruns, perhaps the biggest sources of risk, are common problems in Africa and are well documented. They can be traced back to 'problems in finance and payment arrangements, poor contract management, material shortages, changes in site conditions, design changes, mistakes and discrepancies in contract documents, mistakes during constructions, price fluctuations, inaccurate estimating, delays, additional work, shortening of contract periods, and fraudulent practices and kickbacks' (Mansfield, Ugwu, and Doran 1994). They may be due to 'increase in the cost of construction materials, poor planning and coordination, change orders due to enhancement required by clients, excess quantity during construction (Nega 2008, vi) and possibly to changes in exchange rates, inappropriate contractors and *force majeure* (Nega 2008, 50). It is not clear what PPPs might have to offer to

address the problems identified if African governments are corrupt, face soft budget constraints or allow contract renegotiations. As for demand risk, private partners often negotiate revenue guarantees from government, as has happened with toll road PPPs in South Africa. Thus, the N4 toll road from Witbank South Africa to Maputo, Mozambique, a 30-year PPP costing Rand 3 billion, would not have happened without guarantees from both governments of both debt and possibly equity (Farlam 2005). Demand or revenue guarantees were also necessary for both the Chapman's Peak toll road in Cape Town (ZAR0.45 million) and the much larger Gautrain in Johannesburg (ZAR23 billion). Indeed, it has been suggested that without government guarantees, PPPs are unlikely to be successful in Africa (Farlam 2005, 35). What this means is that substantial risk continues to be faced by the public sector rather than being transferred to the private sector.

One may conclude, therefore, that despite claims to the contrary, PPPs are not necessarily more efficient than traditional procurement and one must be careful in assessing these claims.

A brief survey of PPP performance in Africa

The problem with evaluating performance of PPPs in Africa is that so little is known about the details of individual projects. Without access to contracts and detailed value-for-money calculations, it is impossible to properly evaluate projects. Even the most sophisticated PPP unit in Africa, that of South Africa, does not publish such details. All that can be found on its website is a list of pending projects with very little information such as sector, ministry and status. There is more information for signed projects by sector, sponsor, financing structure, type, duration, private partner, BEE arrangement, project advisors and net present value to government of

benefits and costs. There is, however, no detailed information on how net present value was arrived at or the risk assumptions underlying it, and no details of contracts, financial agreements and schedules. Project reviews go no further than general observations or issues that might hit the newspaper (e.g. Farlam 2005 or The Trade Beat 2012). It is, therefore, impossible to say how well PPPs perform in Africa beyond very general observations.

In that spirit, it can be said that PPPs in the telecoms sector appear to be the most successful. The main reason for this is that new technologies promoted by the private sector produced large productivity gains in the broader context of deregulation. These were generally so high that the private sector earned significant profits, consumers obtained much better service and at lower rates and governments benefited from increases in taxation, an unusual win–win situation all round (Auriol and Blanc 2007, 6). In countries such as Rwanda, Uganda, Ghana and Nigeria, PPP arrangements were used to subsidise expansion of telecom systems into more remote areas (Williams and Falch 2012). Little wonder that this is the most prominent sector for PPPs in Africa, though the scope for further growth of PPPs is probably now quite limited.

PPPs in the water and electricity sectors have been much more problematic. Part of the reason is that providing services to the poor can be very difficult. The poor often live in areas which are difficult to access and costly to service, have ambiguous or no title to the land they live on, may not be able to afford services at full cost, and sometimes have a payment culture which might pose a high risk to the private partner. Because electricity and water, in particular, were heavily subsidised by governments in the 1990s, by 40% and 70% respectively (Harris 2003, 9), the introduction of PPPs as part of a broader neoliberal political agenda was often associated with large increases in the cost of service and

this sometimes led to dramatic public protests. This was certainly the case in South Africa where thousands of protests took place over rising costs of water,[6] sewage and electricity, accompanied by falling consumption, rising non-payment of bills and rising rates of disconnection of services (Bond 2010). In some cases where the rates were actually reduced by the introduction of PPPs, this was only possible because the public sector had deliberately raised tariffs significantly (excessively?) prior to the PPP being formed (e.g. this occurred in Gabon and Côte d'Ivoire, see Marin 2009, 109–112).

It seems that PPPs have been successful in raising 'efficiency' in the water service area, largely by reducing water losses, by raising collection rates and by laying off workers, (Marin 2009, 116). PPPs have also had some success in providing water to rich communities in Africa, but have been less successful in providing water services to the poor (Farlam 2005). It seems that provision of water to the poor requires a high degree of subsidisation, especially on the connectivity side, as has been the case in Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Cameroon and Morocco, (Marin 2009, 136) and is clearly politically very sensitive. Little wonder then, that private investment in water PPPs in Africa has virtually dried up!

Road PPPs can also be politically sensitive, though less so if alternate routes are available. In Nigeria, there were protests over the opening of the Lekki Toll Road Concession on the Lekki-Epe Expressway. The concession is a (PPP) scheme between the Lagos State government and the Lekki Concessioning Company and involved the rebuilding of a previously federal road. In the process, transport fares rose by 50%. The protests turned violent when police attacked protesters. (News Agency of Nigeria 2011).

There have been major protests in South Africa over road tolls on the Gauteng Freeway Improvement Project but this is not a PPP. There are three road concessions in South Africa, each funded by tolling, but these do not appear to have generated protests. Given that South Africa seems to be quite capable of building roads through the state-owned South African National Roads Agency Limited (SANRAL) with or without tolling arrangements, one has to wonder why PPP road concessions are granted at all in that country.

There are several hospital PPPs in South Africa, but they are too recent to review their performance record and there is insufficient information available to assess how they compare with publicly delivered hospital services. The record elsewhere of hospital PPPs, including Canada and the UK, leaves much to be desired in terms of cost effectiveness, quality and value for money (Loxley and Loxley 2010, 106–111).

The World Bank estimates that 48 projects in SSA, accounting for 11% of total PPPs and 5% of the total investment in PPPs, have either been cancelled or are in distress (World Bank 2013a). What is needed is a careful evaluation of the rest.

Conclusion

We would conclude that African governments should be cautious in the use of PPPs, for while they are being promoted as being self-evidently beneficial, the case for using them is far from convincing. There is a need for governments to have clear policies in place as well as a legal framework and technical capacity to evaluate the value for money of PPPs relative to traditional procurement methods. This might at least enable them to avoid egregious mistakes, the full cost of which is likely to be apparent only after many years. Likewise, governments should be cautious of international institutions, such as the AfDB, AU, UNECA etc., which uncritically promote PPPs. Governments that share this scepticism of PPPs would be better placed to resist further

encroachment of private capital on public sector activities if they focused first on improving public sector efficiency and on raising local tax capacity.

Note on contributor

John Loxley is a Professor of Economics at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada. He has advised a number of governments in both Africa and Canada on issues of public finance.

Notes

1. This could be because of public opposition to the even partial privatisation of these services, or because the risk of non-payment of user fees is high in developing countries. Certainly, the provision of water and sanitation facilities through PPPs is common in developed countries, such as Canada, but nonetheless, very controversial. See Loxley and Loxley, 2010, Chapter 6.
2. This list is incomplete as it ignores, for instance, the Infrastructure Concession Regulatory Commission – ICRC- (Establishment, etc.) Act 2005 which governs PPPs in Nigeria (ICRC, 2011).
3. Through the 2004 Treasury Regulation 16 of the Public Finance Management Act (1999) for national and provincial PPPs and through the 2005 Municipal Public Private Partnership regulations of the Municipal Finance Management Act of 2003 (Burger 2006).
4. The World Bank, 2013b, lists only six of these.
5. The present value of a series of future payments in today's money is arrived at by discounting them by an interest rate each year. The higher the discount rate and the longer one has to wait for payment, the lower is the present value. See Loxley and Loxley, 2010, Appendix B, pp. 189ff. Net present value is the difference between the present value of revenue minus the present value of costs.
6. Real costs of water in Durban doubled between 1998 and 2004 (Bond 2010).

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BOOK REVIEW

Domesticating vigilantism in Africa, edited by Thomas G. Kirsch and Tilo Grätz, Oxford, James Currey, 2010, 190 pp., £40.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781847010285

This edited collection is a useful addition to the growing and increasingly sophisticated literature on vigilantism in Africa. Starting from the observation that the question of who is entitled to formulate legal principles, enact justice, police morality and sanction wrongdoings has become the subject of violent contestation on the continent, the book takes a broad approach to the phenomenon of vigilantism. Avoiding easy definitions that situate vigilantism in opposition to the state and the law, the book approaches vigilantism as an ever-evolving and contested social practice, enacted by diverse actors and taking diverse social forms. The result is an empirically rich collection, containing a wealth of information on the various and shifting forms of vigilante groups in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and South Africa. As with so many edited volumes, however, there is little to tie the various contributions together into a coherent whole, and the chapters do not speak to the same theoretical concerns or address the same problematics. While this is not necessarily a weakness, it does mean that the volume's overall contribution to the study of vigilantism is left somewhat unarticulated.

Consisting of six case study chapters, an introduction by the editors, as well as a foreword by Ray Abrahams, the 'doyen' of vigilantism studies in Africa, the book provides for engaging reading. The introduction discusses many of the key

theoretical issues that confront the study of vigilantism, including the challenge of defining the object of study. The introduction does a fine job of situating vigilantes not in opposition, but in relation to the state, and as such the book complements recent analyses that question the strict distinction between the public and the private and instead focus on the various practices and actors that bring the state into being.

The question of how vigilantes relate to the state is also a central theme in many of the case studies. For example, Lars Buur discusses the historically changing relationship between state agencies and South African vigilantes, concluding that vigilantism does not exist separately from political order and engagement with the state. The chapter is complemented by Thomas Kirch's analysis of community policing forums in South Africa, which illustrates the complex and sometimes paradoxical relationship between democracy and vigilantism. Johannes Harnischfeger's account of two very different vigilante formations in Nigeria, the Oodua People's Congress in the south-west and the Islamic Hisba in the north, shows how these groups challenge the authority of the state while simultaneously being linked to various public actors and agencies.

Another key theme that emerges from the volume is the changing form of vigilante groups and their responsiveness to broader sociopolitical conditions. Tilo Grätz tells the story of a vigilante group in Benin that emerged in response to rising crime, and initially acquired popular legitimacy from its ability to deliver security, but as the group's violence escalated it took on the characteristics of a regional

militia and was ultimately declared illegal. The shifting form of vigilantes is also illustrated by Sten Hagberg and Syna Outtara's contribution. Focusing on hunters in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, their chapter shows how traditional associations evolved to become vigilantes and later rebels or mercenaries in the Ivorian civil war. Part of the explanation for this organisational shape shifting is the various economic opportunities afforded by the war. But vigilante groups also offer means of self-expression and identity formation, both for individuals and for the communities over which they claim moral authority. Applied to the Burkinabe and Ivorian hunters, this means that their reinvention of themselves in the context of the civil war can also be seen as way of reinventing and reasserting their subjectivity and agency in rapidly changing conditions.

This productive aspect of vigilantism is the focus of David Pratten's analysis of Annang vigilantes in southeast Nigeria. Vigilante activities, Pratten suggests, should be analysed not only with reference to external discourses such as rights, law or popular mobilisation, but also in terms of the 'inside story' of how vigilantes themselves understand their actions, identities and power relations. In this more messy world of local realities and personal biographies, vigilantism emerges both as a powerful mode of subject formation and as part of establishing the boundaries between community insiders and outsiders.

Rita Abrahamsen
University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada
Email: rita.abrahamsen@uottawa.ca

BOOK REVIEW

War and the crisis of youth in Sierra Leone, by Krijn Peters, Cambridge, International African Institute, London and Cambridge University Press, 2011, xv + 274 pp., £55 (hardback), ISBN 9781107004191

The decade long civil war in Sierra Leone was remarkable not just for the brutality of the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and its ally, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), the widespread use of child combatants and the way the civilian population was targeted by the RUF, but also by its complexity, thus attracting a variety of causal explanations. One of the most prominent is Paul Collier's mantra of 'doing well out of war' with its attendant notion of 'blood diamonds': 'conflicts are far more likely to be caused by economic opportunities than by grievance' (Collier 2000, 91). This overlooks the fact that it was much later in the conflict that illegal diamond mining in exchange for arms and ammunition became a feature of the war. In this respect, 'greed' and 'blood diamonds' were not causal factors as Gberie (2005) and others have shown; indeed the trade in 'blood diamonds' only prolonged the war. Similar criticism can be levelled against Robert Kaplan's xenophobic shriek of a 'coming anarchy' (Kaplan 1994), or 'Malthus-with-guns' as Richards (1996*)* has rightly described Kaplan's explanation of the Sierra Leone conflict. The premise underlying Kaplan's account – demographic pressure – is nothing more than a fictional representation in Kaplan's travelogue, as this part of West Africa has not been associated with demographic pressure on land.

So why did young people in Sierra Leone seek to ensure, in the words of Frantz Fanon, that 'The first shall be the last and the last first' (Fanon 1967, 28)? This is where Peters' book becomes instructive; and like Richards and Abdullah (2004) he focused his research on social actors who sought to challenge the governing class of this 'fragile state'. Thus, unlike the World Bank howlers ('greed not grievance') and the recyclers of xenophobic shrieks (New Barbarism), who seek to devalue the agency of young people in that unfortunate country, Peters seeks to valorise their agency and to give them a voice in the voiceless environment of gerontocratic rule and patrimonialism. Quoting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Peters observes: 'it was years of bad governance, endemic corruption and the denial of basic human rights that created the deplorable conditions that made conflict inevitable' (9). Furthermore, he draws attention to the role of state-driven marginalisation of young people and of important regions of the country, as the sources of the patrimonial mode of accumulation continued to shrink, thus accelerating state collapse, as basic necessities could not be delivered.

Whilst Abdullah (2004) privileges the urban déclassé (Rarray Boys) for raising class consciousness and increasing 'revolutionary pressure', for Peters it was the rural underclass, the veritable *damnés de la terre*, which demonstrated its preparedness for the revolutionary struggle. As he observes, 'the war was in the main fought by the rural poor' (32); 'a semi-vagrant underclass of descendants of former slaves, now found living as

"strangers" attached to land- and planta-tion-owning patrons' (109). He points to 'a rural crisis created by unresolved tensions between landholding elites and dislocated peasants or strangers' (16), which renders them as subjects rather than citizens. He notes that in place of the decaying and disenfranchising gerontocratic/patrimonial rule, which deprived them of their education and jobs, the country's youth sided with the RUF with the intention of building a new society with greater opportunities. The 'old order' led by a coalition of traditional chiefs and kleptocratic politicians stifled the aspirations of young people in the country through archaic practices, like forced labour and fines in the traditional courts, which forced many young people to run away from their villages to work in the outer limits of the diamond fields as '*san san boys*' (tributors). When asked why they took up arms, common responses were: 'no jobs', 'lack of education', 'bad government', 'political corruption', 'maltreatment and injustice by elders', 'desire for democratic system', 'failure of the elders to look after the young people'.

Regarding the nature of the society that the RUF sought to construct, contrary to the popular belief of a nihilistic and anarchistic rebel force, Peters points out that in territories under its control the RUF organised farming along compulsory 'socialist' or 'communal' forms, though individual farms were also allowed. He draws attention to the fact that life under the RUF was more meritocratic than life in the wider society which was riddled by partiality and nepotism. However, given the manner in which hostilities ended (including the humiliation of Foday Sankoh, the rebel leader) and the fact that British aid was geared towards rehabilitating the chieftaincy system, an institution that has been instrumental in alienating young people in Sierra Leone, the 'liberal peace' brought to an abrupt end a brief period of youth empowerment.

Peters pleads for a new perspective on the RUF:

> To portray the RUF as 'greedy criminals' or 'terrorists without an ideology' is directly linked to the assumption that the movement was somehow uniquely unscrupulous and extremely exploitative in its mining activities. This hides the fact that similar practices preceded the RUF, and continue today. (119)

For Peters, the RUF was distracted from its socialist ideals as a consequence of its brief collaboration with the AFRC, which saw the movement being contaminated by the corrupting AFRC mentality.

Peters has presented us with an invaluable insight into the causal factors that impelled young people to join a social movement to challenge for state hegemony. Indeed, it is difficult to fathom the fact that the cadres from this 'idealistic movement' were the perpetrators of such widespread violence against the civilian population. Whilst Peters blames this on the contaminating influences of the AFRC, others such as Abdullah have put it down to the 'lumpen' nature of the RUF leadership. No doubt, these are important questions for any radical social and political transformation, and an equally important question is what would have been the fate of the RUF and its followers under a more astute leadership, in a country where young people were looking for change.

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Tunde Zack-Williams
*University of Central Lancashire,
Preston, UK*
Email: tzack-williams@uclan.ac.uk

BOOK REVIEW

The political economy of pharmaceutical patents: sectional interests and the African group at the WTO, by Sherry S. Marcellin, Farnham, Ashgate, 2010, 226 pp., £55.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781409412144

This is an outstanding book which makes an important contribution to a subject that remains underexamined: the role of power, dominance, influence and control in international institutions. The book essentially addresses two linked themes: institutional capture by private interests, and the losses suffered by African countries, and developing countries in general, in international bargaining and negotiations. The theatre of negotiations that Marcellin focuses on is the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) in particular. The book is well structured with a cogent, persuasive and clear argument, thoroughly supported with necessary details and a lot of data. Drawing on Robert Cox's Braudelian historical structures framework, Marcellin employs a theoretical framework that approaches decision-making in international trade as a function of the dominant political–economic framework. The power of this approach is that it does not take for granted the economists' rationalist assumption of institutions as value-free, neutral and somehow necessary for the efficient function of global capitalism.

For all its pretensions that all member countries of the WTO are equal before the organisation's laws, some are more equal than others. The historical record of almost five decades of trade negotiations – which I detailed in my own doctoral research – demonstrates quite clearly that the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the legal and institutional basis of the global trade regime embodied in the WTO, was dominated by the Western world. Marcellin takes this argument further and convincingly demonstrates the way in which *private corporate interests*, especially the pharmaceutical industry, have secured their demands for an international patent code under what has become a cornerstone agreement of the global trade regime, the TRIPS agreement. The book thus presents an outstanding case study of 'institutional capture' by the transnational pharmaceutical industry, dominated as it is by the United States.

In some sense Marcellin's book is a continuation of the work of Robert Cox and Harold Jacobson in their *Anatomy of Influence*, first published 40 years ago, in 1973. Their main argument was that institutions like the WTO were not autonomous creations that emerged, value-free, from nowhere, nor were they merely outcomes of rational human endeavour; rather, international institutions are products of hegemonic powers and subject to prevailing environmental forces. The WTO, then, is a creation of its time, a time of liberal capitalist hegemony dominated by the US and its allies, who have consistently shored up their power in key institutions that preside over the global political economy. With specific reference to institutional capture and shoring up the transnational pharmaceutical industry's power, dominance and influence in the WTO, Marcellin demonstrates very effectively how conflict and power relations in TRIPS negotiations left

developing countries, especially African countries, without any measurable gains and effectively forced them into compliance with industry demands for a patent regime. The outcome of this bargaining process was a TRIPS regime stripped of human welfare considerations. The main reasons for these losses on the part of developing countries (DCs) are captured in the following passage:

> One of the most fundamental drawbacks faced by DCs [in the global political economy] is their inability to bargain on a level playing field with their industrialised counterparts. An important structural issue putting many such countries at a disadvantage is the lack of resources, capacity and/or expertise for effective deliberation... Most small delegations do not have the appropriate resources either in Geneva or in their capitals to service the negotiating process and thereby participate meaningfully in what could be a meeting of primary importance for their national interests. (144)

Here we find a distinct echo of a broader body of research that illustrates the disadvantages that poor countries, especially African countries, have in international bargaining. While scholars and policy-makers across a spectrum of disciplinary approaches have recorded such disadvantages, they have rarely, if ever, focused on particular private corporate gains over developing countries. Marcellin places this issue at the centre of her work, and thereby provides an important counterweight to the rising literature of nostalgia for neoliberalism. The neoliberal orthodoxy that dominated economic policy-making from the time of the Reagan–Thatcher era started to come under increased internal pressure from the mid 1990s, especially in the wake of the East Asian Crisis. Among orthodox economists there emerged a general, if fairly thinly spread consensus that the state did, after all, have a role in political economic expansion (e.g., World Bank 1997). By the time that banking and financial institutions started imploding in

2007, the general unease with neoliberal orthodoxy spread more rapidly. In the midst of all this, however, there remained a stubborn loyalty, and more recently a type of nostalgia, for neoliberal orthodoxy. Part of this persistent loyalty was a belief, especially among the transnational elite perched at the top of Robert Cox's global class structure, that 'problems' such as poverty, inequality, and conflict, among others, could be 'solved' if only poor states would create the right institutions (e.g., Acemoğlu and Robinson 2012; Banerjee and Duflo 2011).

Marcellin's book makes a significant contribution to a debate that has remained obscured by dominant discourses on global political economy. The one big concern – through no fault of the author – is that it may be lost in the maelstrom of discussions and obsessions over global banking, financial and economic crises, due to its focus on the global trade regime and intellectual property rights. These concerns appear to have dissolved into the background of 'international' affairs, and remain, at least for now, relatively unchallenged.

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Ismail Lagardien
University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa
Email: ilagardien@gmail.com
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BOOK REVIEW

Biopolitics, militarism and development: Eritrea in the twenty-first century, edited by David O'Kane and Tricia Redeker Hepner, New York & Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2009, xxxvii +197 pp., £50.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781845455675

During its brief post-independence history, Eritrea has become an increasingly repressive state. The process of state formation and the post-2001 political crisis in Eritrea have been analysed by scholars using different theoretical formulations but few, if any, have employed the framework of biopolitics. The current volume is essentially about the phenomenon of biopolitics in the Eritrean context, thus introducing a new concept into the Eritrean academic discourse which, the editors explain, needs 'new analytical tools and a recontextualisation of the roots of' the political crisis in Eritrea (xxxii). The introduction of this approach to the literature on Eritrea is perhaps the most important strength of the book.

Building on the seminal work of Agamben (1998), the editors define biopolitics as the violent penetration of state power into 'the most intimate spaces of human life and consciousness in the name of development, national security and sovereignty', the end result being excessive perversions of governance and power (ix–xxxi, 161–162). The practices ensuing from the exercise of a particular abusive type of power – brute force – over human life itself have rendered the Eritrean person a mere subject reduced to 'bare life' (121). This is well captured throughout the book but most importantly in the introduction and conclusion, which establish a cogent relationship between the theoretical formulation of biopolitics and its relevance to the current political crisis in Eritrea. Most of the chapters are ethnographically nuanced, written by experts who have experience on Eritrea either as former university lecturers or field researchers.

In the introduction, the editors assert that the core of the political problem in Eritrea is the 'valorisation of military life above all other potential ways of contributing to the nation' (xxviii). The main conceptual framework of the book is further expounded in the first chapter, Woldemikael's 'Pitfalls of nationalism in Eritrea'. Woldemikael also uses the concept of banality of power, borrowed from Mbembe (1992), in discussing the pervasive absolute state power under the hegemony of the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), the sole ruling party in Eritrea. Woldemikael's chapter discusses how major national events, festivities and celebrations, most notably the Independence Day of May 24, are manipulated with the objective of perpetuating a single national narrative, which in turn is aimed at bolstering the hegemony of the ruling party and its leader. The state and the ruling party, which are inseparable from each other, legitimise their access to power through a continuous and amplified reproduction of the liberation struggle experience. Any other voice that contradicts the official narrative is crushed ruthlessly, creating high levels of veneration and 'fetishization' of the Eritrean state (15).

Using spatiotemporal analysis, the chapter by Mahrt unravels two divergent perceptions of the liberation struggle: one that is aggressively propagated by the

PFDJ, and another which is widely shared by the grassroots, particularly the farmers of the highlands. Mahrt's analysis hits hard the hegemonic *hade libi hade hizbi* (one heart one people) mantra of the PFDJ, thereby exposing apparent shortcomings in the PFDJ's political narrative which propagates the existence of uncontested national consensus on the understanding of the liberation struggle. Müller also touches on this same issue in the context of an epic failure in Eritrea's educational policy, by recognising the problem of a hegemonic narrative that portrays the state and the nation as one (55).

The way that militarisation has affected every aspect of Eritrean life is reflected in Poole's chapter, which discusses the challenges of refugee settlement and agrarian development in the lowland village of Hagaz. Education is the sector where the effect of excessive militarisation is more visible than in any other 'civilian' sector. The chapters by Müller and Riggan analyse this problem based on nuanced ethnographic data collected from Eritrean students and teachers. Riggan makes one of the most poignant observations in the book, when she says that in Eritrea the inevitable outcome for a student is becoming a soldier, simply because the conventional purpose of schooling has been transformed into that of preparing final year high school students for military conscription via compulsory enrolment at the Sawa Military Training Centre (73, 90). As noted by Hepner, the current unprecedented abuses in Eritrea are the outcomes of the government's obsessive impulse to homogeneity (123). The chapter by Treiber discusses this further by showing how the aspirations of ordinary citizens, as lived in ordinary experiences of local pubs and churches, are considerably at odds with those of the ruling elite. Excessive utilisation of militarised discipline and schemes of forced labour are to blame for this. Treiber's account has remarkable

resonance with what Hirt and Mohammad (2013) call 'anomie' in another contribution.

Hepner's chapter provides a lucid continuation of her long-time research on Eritrea as one of the best examples of a transnational nation-state. Hepner is perhaps the principal authority on the phenomenon of transnationalism in the Eritrean context. Her chapter has aptly intertwined the contours of transnationalism and biopolitics by unravelling the challenges of a new wave of Eritrean asylum seekers in the United States. For many Eritreans, including this writer, asylum seeking is indeed a process of re-humanisation in which many Eritreans 'think of themselves as rights-bearing individuals, often for the first time' (128).[1] Finally, Cameron examines the Eritrean state through a comparative prism, and concludes that the country has many similarities with other extremely repressive countries such as North Korea and Zimbabwe (153–154).

While many edited volumes suffer from lack of coherency and disjointedness, such problems are overcome here through the construction of a unifying theme and tight intellectual purpose clearly defined in the introduction, and neatly recaptured in the conclusion. Thus the reader finds that the core theme is comprehensively covered throughout the volume, albeit with a varying degree of depth in each chapter. Most of the contributors establish a very clear link with the main conceptual framework of the volume, biopolitics.

In a few instances, authors used expressions that are not culturally widespread in the Eritrean context. For example, *Wazungu* is a typical Swahili word for 'white people', sometimes used pejoratively, as Cameron notes. Cameron discusses 'reference in the government press to bilateral donors as being "neocolonialists" and "*Wazungu*"' (145). Since Swahili is not a language spoken in Eritrea, the use of *Wazungu* in any context

is not common in the country. In reference to a 'white person', Tigrinya speaking Eritreans would rather generically say *tsaeda* (literally meaning white). In another example, Cameron uses *teff* in reference to the most common staple food in the highlands of Eritrea and Ethiopia (144). *Teff* is Amharic; the most appropriate Tigrinya equivalent, albeit very similar to the Amharic version, is *taff*. Problems of transliteration, misspelling and incorrect usage are also detected in other parts of the book, which could have been avoided by consulting vernacular experts.

Some figures on the level of militarisation cited in the book seem rather conservative estimates. For example, Treiber puts the proportion of military conscription only at 10% (99), while Woldemikael cites the total number of Eritrean soldiers as being 200,000 (10). The impossibility of obtaining accurate military data from Eritrea is undeniable. However, at the time when the book was published (2009), there were publicly available higher estimates based on dependable sources. Moreover, the editors' observation that Isaias Afwerki's visit to South Africa in July 2002 was organised in response to the formation of the Eritrean Movement for Democracy and Human Rights (EMDHR) is incorrect, as the president's visit took place before the establishment of the EMDHR. On balance, however, the book is undoubtedly one of the most enthralling contributions I have read recently. At the very end of the book, the editors rightly note that the likelihood of Eritrea being seen as another 'failed state' is not far-fetched. There is overwhelming evidence to support this. The failed *coup d'état* of 21 January 2013 is just one such example.

Note

1. Eritrean by origin, I was once an asylum seeker in South Africa. As such, I have experienced similar tribulations common to newly arriving Eritrean asylum seekers as discussed by Hepner.

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Daniel R. Mekonnen
Queen's University Belfast, Belfast, Northern Ireland
Email: d.mekonnen@qub.ac.uk
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